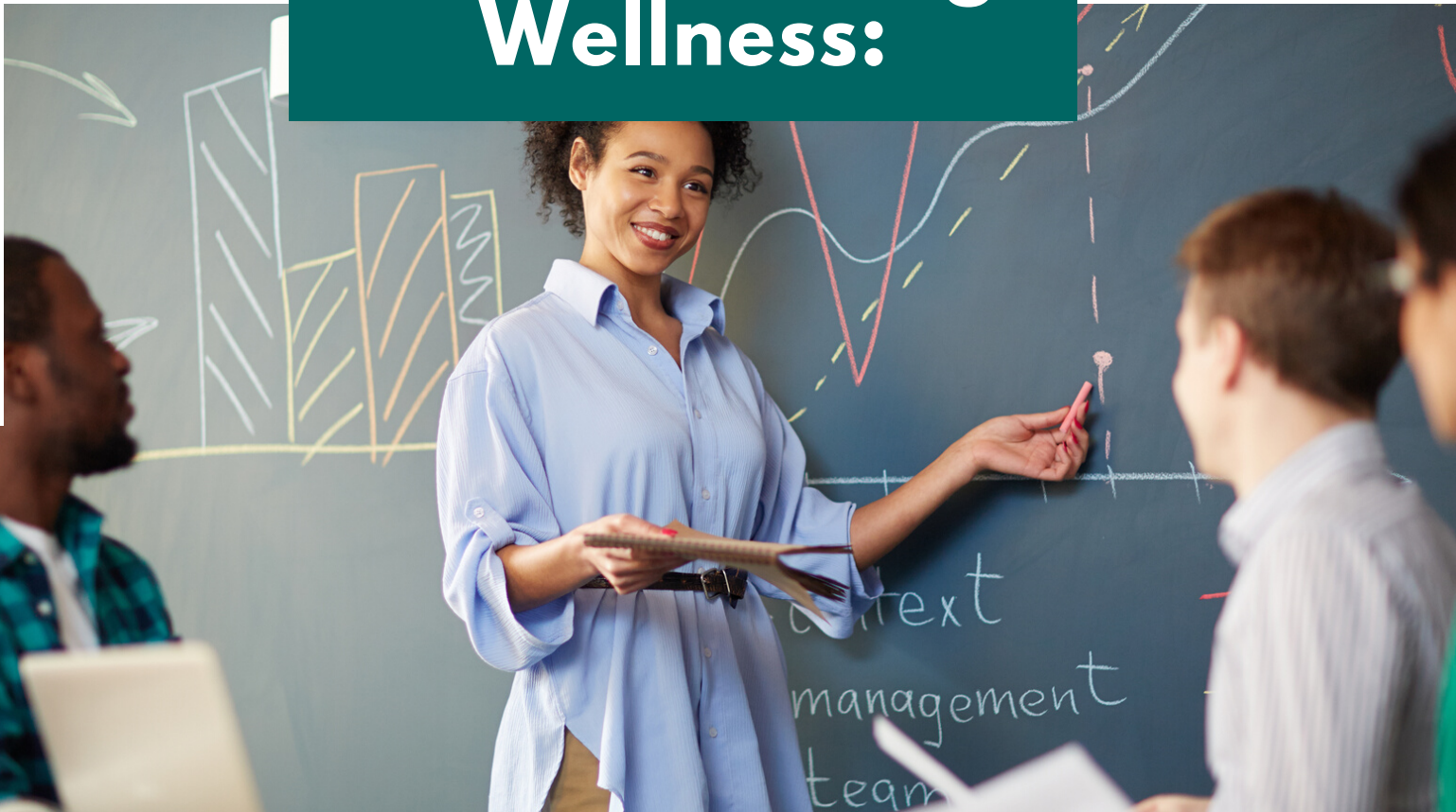


HOW TO NAVIGATE

Success Through Wellness:



An Internship of Collective Experience

By Doreen Ner, Shannon Piazza, Regina Guzzo, Jane Lee & Gina Vassallo,
2021-22 Navigating Success Through Wellness MSW Interns

Developed and directed by Jill Pantaleo, LCSW, owner of Bergen County Therapy, and supervised by Victoria Coppolecchia, LCSW, the Navigating Success Through Wellness (NSTW) initiative is a research-based mental health and wellness program currently enjoying success in a number of New Jersey school districts. Rooted in the belief that “success without wellness is not success,” NSTW provides preventative and psycho-educationally based support and services for students, parents and teachers focused on biological, psychological, social, emotional and physical well-being, including mental health support, nutritional counseling, yoga, mindfulness and more. Launched in 2019 in the prestigious Bergen County Technical Schools under the direction of Superintendent Dr. Howard Lerner and Assistant Superintendent Andrea Sheridan, Navigating Success Through Wellness has since expanded into several other New Jersey districts including the Ridgely Schools and the Morris County Vocational School District.

Jill Pantaleo, LCSW, a professor in the MSW program

at The Ramapo College of New Jersey, designed NSTW to also serve as a robust learning experience for future social workers. At the core of the program is an ambitious team of MSW interns delivering services including wellness assessments, resilience training, restorative groups for HIB offenders, freshmen and senior transition groups, coping and social skills training, test anxiety reduction groups, individual counseling, and parent support. Additionally, NSTW interns play a critical role in the planning of districtwide initiatives like Mental Health Awareness Day, facilitating a Wellness Ambassador program for student involvement in the social-emotional climate of their school, and in designing and implementing new services within the program.

Perhaps the most unique characteristic of the NSTW internship experience is the significance of the relationships that the interns have formed with each other. Collaborating on clinical tasks as a team, supporting each other in new and challenging commitments such as public speaking or co-teaching,

and creating an academic support system for each other, the interns have developed into a collaborative, unified force. The interns have also formed a meaningful relationship with the newest Student Assistance Counselor at The Bergen County Technical Schools, Sydney Zulli, LSW, who had been a NSTW intern for two years prior to gaining her employment in the district. It is through her personal experience as an intern that she can guide and support the NSTW intern cohort.

The NSTW interns recognize the importance of having programs such as Navigating Success Through Wellness in schools—especially in the age of COVID-19 and its resulting developmental challenges faced by children and adolescents. The services provided on the four campuses of the Bergen County Technical Schools are indeed in high demand, and the interns fulfill a plethora of daily expectations. According to Assistant Superintendent Andrea Sheridan, the NSTW program and MSW interns provide students with “a safe place to share...and process how their actions have a direct effect on their community.” This is not only essential for student’s mental health and well-being, but is, additionally, beneficial to staff, parents, and the communities at large. Simultaneously, the interns are presented with a once in a lifetime learning experience in the provision of valuable clinical services, building friendships, evolving as social workers, and being part of an effective team of clinicians who embody and epitomize the values of their profession.

At the start of the 2021-2022 academic year, the NSTW interns embarked on their internship journey, some interning for the first time, and others for their second, more advanced field placement. Many of the interns felt insecure and afraid of the unknown, not entirely aware of what to expect from the NSTW placement. It was soon apparent, however, that they would be provided with the support necessary in order to step outside of their comfort zones. Encouraged to learn by doing, it has been through this experience that these five MSW candidates gained the confidence they needed to embark on each of their personal social work journeys. Not only has each intern grown personally since the beginning of this internship experience, but each has developed her own therapeutic style and discovered a niche to further explore for their professional aspirations.

The Navigating Success Through Wellness internship has given these interns the freedom and support to not only explore their skills, strengths, weaknesses, and goals, but has allowed for mistakes, as well, which paved the way for them to learn, grow, and demonstrate the same resilience they teach to the students they serve daily. Each intern will soon advance from this internship as a more confident and capable social worker, armed with a toolbox filled with the experiences and skills to successfully enter the profession as Licensed Social Workers.

Learn more about NSTW at <https://navigatingsuccessthroughwellness.com>

Pictured Below (from left to right): Jill Pantaleo, LCSW, Jane Lee, Doreen Ner, Shannon Piazza, Regina Guzzo, Gina Vassallo, Victoria Coppolecchia, LCSW

