

During an overnight shift at the hospital, my mother and her coworkers thought it would be humorous if they all entered the national raffle. Everyone pulled out a pen and filled out the applications. Several weeks later, they all forgot about it; that was true until the mailman came running to the door of our home in Choroszcz, Poland. “*Pani Sawicka! Pani ma pocztę ze Stanów Zjednoczonych!*” (‘Mrs. Sawicka! You have mail from the United States!’) he yelled. My family won The Diversity Immigrant Visa Lottery. In the blink of an eye, my life would never be the same again.

With a loss of personal identity and without language, I started the path that would become my educational career. The beginnings were difficult, and I shed tears over homework assignments literally written in another language. However, even at a young age, I had a thirst for knowledge; I learned quickly and knew I had an obligation to utilize the opportunities given to me through immigration.

During my undergraduate career, I did not lose sight of the advantages I was presented in life and sought to pay it forward by learning about avenues to help disadvantaged populations. Through the Cannon Leadership Program, I mentored an adolescent characterized “at-risk” by her school. At Phoenix Children’s Hospital, I sought community resources for patients’ families. I learned about resilience within the Arizona Health and Aging Lab where I interviewed victims of trauma. I toured Maricopa County’s jail system to gain contextual understanding of many participants’ stories. My experiences illuminated the cycles of mental illness, recidivism, homelessness, and abuse. In hopes of intervening, I became a mental health clinician after graduation.

As a clinician, I helped a 20-year-old man diagnosed with Schizophrenia navigate the college admissions process, sought legal resources for a mother recovering from Substance Abuse Disorder striving to get her children back, and mourned after the suicide of a once successful nurse. I saw hope and despair. The available resources were limited and failing. I yearned to find an effective method of helping those facing the same challenges that faced my clients. With this goal in mind, I pursued a Master of Science degree at King’s College London and a position with the Arizona Twin Project to learn about creating new remediation pathways through research.

My research career has taught me invaluable analytical and critical thinking skills. Along the way, I have been privy to exciting advances that may one day change the landscape of preventative healthcare. However, because it takes roughly 10 years for scientific findings to leave the laboratory and enter practical application in society, I have become disillusioned with the classic framework of research. It has always been my nature to take prompt action, to provide immediate help. My winding path through the field of psychology has led me to law, an area of intervention where timely change is possible through policy, advocacy, and the implementation of justice.

I once thought mental health was the unifying theme of my story; I was wrong. Immigration law brought me to this country. Education law provided me with the opportunity to access higher education. Disability law granted me the privilege of working with and learning from individuals with various mental health struggles. Health law allowed me to research primary causes of disorders and novel areas for treatment. It turns out, law has been the common thread woven through the tapestry of my personal history. It is with great zeal that I am commencing legal studies to gain the knowledge and skills to advocate for and assist those of lesser means, to pull the thread further.

The intersection of law and medicine is filled with jargon often incomprehensible to the average citizen. Practitioners, often expected to serve as interpreters between jargon and patient, are notoriously poor at the task, which is exacerbated when serving populations with mental illness. Furthermore, insurance companies complicate the process of obtaining coverage. Combined, we have a system that is broken; those using it are met with obstacles and those wishing to help don't have the tools and infrastructure to do so. I hope to use my law degree in conjunction with my mental health background to change the current communication norms found at the junction of law and health care, especially mental health care which touches not only health law, but criminal law, disability law, civil law, and many others.

First, I want to represent clients having difficulty within our complicated system and make it understandable. I once had a schizophrenia-diagnosed client who spent months in the hospital after signing a plea agreement that wasn't fully explained to him. He lost his housing as a result. While I cannot say

whether he would have opted to go to trial if his plea was thoroughly explained, it was his right to understand the fine print of his options and he did not. Unfortunately, this is just one example of many that illustrates the shortcomings of communication between lawyers and patients. I want to become the lawyer who spends the time to explain the options, consequences, and long-term effects of decisions to clients.

Further, I want to create deeper change. I want to connect health professionals and lawyers to collaboratively brainstorm methods aimed at successfully achieving client understanding. I then aspire to bring this protocol into the classroom so that law students are taught adaptive communication methods during their studies rather than unlearning bad habits later. In essence, I hope to increase effective communication between the law community and mentally ill clients.

However, none of this will be possible if I don't amass legal skills to buttress my existing expertise. Successful lawyers need to not only learn the law, but how to adapt alongside systemic changes. Law school provides plentiful opportunities to learn "lawyering" such as moot court, law review, legal clinics, and externships. In order to change the system of communication, I need to first glean insightful understanding of the current system and the language within it; participation in extracurricular activities is crucial for the development of this new knowledge. Financial support will allow me to take advantage of additional learning opportunities rather than working during my studies and focus on achieving my goals rather than on how to pay off massive student debt.

My passion for helping has led me to public service and health law, intervention areas capable of creating timely change for underserved populations. The Terry Bryant Law School Scholarship would allow me to continue my journey to a career devoted to serving underserved populations through the practice of law.