

Elk River College Scholarship Essay 2020

Claire Kollhoff, Boston University

My dream is to provide counseling services to adolescents who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as poverty, homelessness, or involvement with the law. A key experience that ignited this passion is when I was first able to spend time on the General Adolescent and Adolescent Bipolar units of an inpatient psychiatric hospital. As an intern in the Patient Relations department at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, I worked with a team to design a few hours of therapeutic fun for the child and adolescent patients on Halloween. I was in charge of pumpkin painting and face painting. As I sat down with the adolescent patients to paint and talk with them, I was quite unaware of what I was stepping into. I had experienced close family and friends struggling with mental illness, but this experience was particularly eye-opening due to the diversity of the stories shared. The adolescents painted their emotions, their life experiences, and things that were important to them. I will never forget connecting with one particular patient who had been to the hospital multiple times. As she painted a small house surrounded by faces that expressed different emotions, she referred to the hospital as a sort of home for her. She had celebrated a birthday here. She described her actual home as financially unstable and not supportive to her recovery due to its unstable nature. I did not know her before that day, but her story has stuck with me ever since. That day, my passion for working with disadvantaged youth began.

I am currently finishing up my first year in the Mental Health Counseling and Behavioral Medicine program at the Boston University School of Medicine. Once graduated from this program I will have my M.A., which will prepare me to become a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC), after I complete the required post-graduate supervised hours. Before I graduate, I will complete a clinical practicum, which is a short introduction to the field, as well as a clinical internship, during which I will dive deeper into the area of the field that interests me the most. I am excited to see where my clinical placements lead me, as well as how I grow as both a counselor and a person through these experiences.

I plan to commit to working with adolescents for my clinical internship. I will be completing my internship at Community Academy High School in Boston, which is a public alternative, therapeutic high school for adolescents who do not thrive in traditional school environments. Many of the adolescents at Community Academy have experienced trauma, poverty, homelessness, or other hardships. I will be leading Dialectical Behavior Therapy groups, as well as working with the adolescents in times of crisis in the "mindful moments" room, which the school has set up for the students to utilize when they need a moment to regulate. This opportunity will be one filled with exceptional amounts of personal and professional growth on my end, which I am eager to begin.

As a future counselor, I have formed my professional identity around the idea that it is a counselor's duty to ensure that even the most disadvantaged populations are lifted up by the work that we do. By reaching underserved groups and communities, I believe that the general well-being of society as a whole will increase as well. This means that I see advocacy as a top priority. As a counselor, I will especially need to advocate for my clients who lack the resources to advocate effectively for themselves. My dream is to be able to guide disadvantaged youth to stability, and to promote awareness of the importance of mental health in adolescence.

Adolescence is a time that is critical in the trajectory of one's life, and a quite vulnerable period for one's mental health. I want to be part of the effort to educate parents and guardians on mental health and how to engage in healthy dialogue about it with their children. This would hopefully help adolescents gain access to treatment earlier, and prevent some of the potential tragic outcomes.

After graduation, my goal is to work in an outpatient setting with youth, particularly with underserved populations here in Boston. I am interested in continuing the work I will be doing in my clinical internship, working with youth who have experienced trauma, poverty, homelessness, or involvement with the law. One example of a placement that fits this interest is a non-profit called Bridge Over Troubled Waters, which provides a variety of services to runaway, homeless, and high-risk youth. Being a counselor at Bridge would be an amazing learning experience as I work toward the number of required supervised hours for licensure. I would be able to provide counseling to a population that is one of the most underserved, and help youth get back on track to living healthy lives, in order to fulfill their potential.

I have known that I wanted to pursue a career in the mental and behavioral health field since high school, when I witnessed my best friend struggle with a severe eating disorder. Her parents were not well educated about mental health, which caused a delay for them to recognize the signs and get her into treatment. Observing her progress as she worked with a therapist inspired me to strive to be that change in others' lives. Working toward spreading awareness about adolescent mental health, and counseling adolescents who do not have a supportive home to facilitate their recovery, are deep passions of mine. Receiving the Elk River College Scholarship will help me to pursue the education that I need in order to make this passion into a reality.