

### **Significant factors influencing your decision to pursue a Master of Social Work degree.**

I am a Hispanic and Native-American female. From an early age, I can recall not seeing women that looked like me at school, the doctor's office, on tv, etc. As a result, and in addition to unrelated traumas, I began to question my sense of purpose or belonging. Finally, as a Senior in college, I am seeing some Hispanic representation at my Practicum site – Positive Tomorrows. However, I have yet to see Indigenous representation to this date. From personal experience, I know that it is hard to open up to a white mental health professional when you feel there is no cultural related empathy. My motivation to pursue a master's in social work lies in wanting to be a trusted adult for little girls and women who need someone that looks like them.

I want to earn a master's in social work to make my past, present, and future self proud. I also want to be a leading example for as well as other Indigenous and Hispanic women.

### **Relevant leadership experiences that will contribute to your overall success as a graduate student and in the social work profession.**

My significant experiences in the field of Social Work lie in my volunteerism both as an adolescent and an adult, as well as my employment. Every experience I have had has shaped into the person I am, and has made a lasting impact on the type of social work I hope to be active in.

During my teenage years, I was an avid member of Shawnee Youth Coalition, which is now known as Youth ACCT (Achieve community change together). Youth ACCT is a youth-led organization striving to make a positive impact on Pottawatomie County. I spent a great deal of my adolescence devoting myself to Youth ACCT. Albeit, I didn't know it at the time, but I was being exposed to all kinds of social work paths. Youth ACCT organizes and hosts several different events for their community – Sports and Arts Camp (a non-profit, completely free summer camp for low-income families), Youth Speak Out (a forum for youth to address their concerns with community officials), the Reality Party (a fake party play put on my teens to raise awareness of underage alcohol and substance abuse), and more.

As a young adult, I have had the opportunity to be gain social work experience at two internships, through volunteerism, and employment opportunities. During the summer of 2021, I was a Johnson O'Malley (JOM) intern at Citizen Potawatomi Nation's Workforce and Social Service agency. This opportunity allowed me to work with Indigenous youth – both for summer recreational activities and back to school preparation. Once the summer concluded, I was fortunate enough to be offered a position as an assistant counselor for the adult vocational services. My second internship opportunity was at Positive Tomorrows – a private school geared towards breaking down barriers and providing educational and social service needs to families experiencing homelessness. My experience at Positive Tomorrows has exposed me to a population I had implicit biases towards and provided the space to address and correct my misconceptions. In that space, I work directly with the children on a socio-emotional level, as well as mentoring, advocate for policy change with representatives at the Oklahoma State Capitol, and shadow experienced social workers which allows me to reflect on who I am as a social worker. While at Positive Tomorrows, I was balancing a full-time job at the J.D McCarty

Center for children with developmental disabilities. My position at JDMC was a Direct Care Specialist and my role was to implement interventions that followed behavior plans specifically designed for each child by a BCBA. On top of my internships and employment experiences, I volunteered at United Way of Pottawatomie County as an administrative assistant under their Executive Director. Although I did not have direct client interaction, I observed the “behind the scenes” of a non-profit organization.

I am grateful and fortunate to have so many opportunities that have exposed to many different areas of social work. The opportunity I am most grateful for is my role as a Direct Care Specialist at JDMC and my internship at Positive Tomorrows. JDMC opened my eyes to a field of social work I hope to develop a strong career in – behavioral health in adolescents, and Positive Tomorrows helped me re-find my motivation when I had been questioning it.

### **Career goals and commitment to social change.**

My commitment to social change is rooted in my own personal experience(s) and goals, as well as seeing how close family and friends have been neglected across multiple social service systems. My personal experiences include mental health struggles, racial discrimination, and gender prejudice – all of which (and more) have also been experienced by close family and friends. Because of my experience and exposure to various social injustices, I have been devoted to pursuing an education in Social Work to ensure I am accurately and effectively advocating for social change within my chosen career path.

Upon completion of my MSW, I hope to begin a career in behavioral health. I hope to one day hold the position of Behavioral Health Coordinator. A position as such will allow me to indulge in both the administrative responsibilities with a hand in policy work in addition to direct practice with clients experiencing behavioral health issues.