

I finished my undergraduate degree in 2010 with a general degree in sociology and a 2.89 GPA as the worst of the 2008 recession was cooling. I spent 5 months unemployed living on the remnants of my pell grants before I learned that the gap between being great and being my best was self-imposed. It's a lesson I could have learned earlier but one I still welcomed when it arrived. It instilled in me the courage to start down different paths and the humility to course correct when I had gone astray. This guiding intuition has brought me on my five year journey in the social impact sector and to the MPA program at Evergreen State College.

I come from a three-generation family of civil servants beginning with my grandfather who worked for the Washington State Highway Department. My mother was a state social worker and my father was a state employment specialist. My brother is a state social worker and I am a state employment specialist. However, my guiding principles are not just adopted from my family but developed through the turns in my working career.

I started towards public service as a survey collector for the Employment Security Department (ESD) and Department of Labor (DOL). I persuaded distrusting farmers to provide labor data for prevailing wages by reframing their participation as a way of equalizing the access to labor and its costs for all farmers, and not a means of raising wages. This approach allowed me to get to know many of the 300+ stone fruit farmers on a first name basis. I could have stayed in public service but I decided to travel to teach English in South Korea, thinking I would return to the same cause.

Since my start, I have explored a lot to arrive at this point in my career. I have gathered data, taught abroad, worked at a financial institution, and navigated the insurance industry. Each stepping stone was a necessity for me to provide for myself, but I also used each opportunity to find out what I truly valued. Access to knowledge is a value I have always held. Financial

security has been important to me because of my upbringing. I even viewed an aggressively managed insurance pool, for both medical and liability, as a way of reducing costs of publicly shared risk. However, the more I tried to refine my views in finance and insurance to fit into those environments, the harder it was for me to remember the purpose I felt when I was in school. So I retraced my steps to look for that same purpose.

Public service on its own does not require a political cause and it is not a means of enforcing my personal truths. However, having worked with populations experiencing SSI/SSDI subsistence, home energy insecurity, stigmatized mental health, and houselessness, I cannot see this work as anything less. I know my impact can be greater if I can support others who see the same things I do. I have heard coworkers offer amazing solutions, only to dismiss them in the same breath. With the tools gained in this program, I know I can remove their barriers and shield their path to becoming their best at helping others.

The last 4 years of my career have been spent in employment services at Metropolitan Development Council (MDC). I began helping Tacoma residents diagnosed with a mental health or substance use disorder diagnosis. This brought me face to face with many of the barriers I have known of, but never experienced on my own. It was a tough but rewarding job. It also illuminated the critical debate regarding prioritizing housing or employment. I met many of my clients at shelters, transitional housing, or managing precarious living arrangements. It made me realize that I had the same decision others in my family had in choosing my career - do I address a person's housing or employment needs. I chose to focus on employment so I quickly went to work applying to jobs with ESD and I was hired within 6 months of my decision.

The work I do at WorkSource is similar in nature, with the biggest difference being the authorizing environment. At MDC, funding came from discretionary Medicaid funds distributed

by the Health Care Authority through their Foundational Community Support. At WorkSource, funding primarily comes from the DOL as laid out in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The work I have mainly done falls under Title III which are services available to all of the public with no eligibility requirements needed. However, my recent relocation has me engaging with customers enrolled in the job search component of the WorkFirst program funded by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families through the Department of Social and Health Services. Earning my MPA will allow me to engage in the same meaningful work at a higher level. Right now I engage with policy and guidelines but with the knowledge gained in this program, I would have the dual perspective of both developing and implementing policies.

Evergreen's interdisciplinary learning model has always interested me, but I didn't feel like I had enough discipline or direction to make the best use of it for my bachelors degree. I have since developed the resoluteness and direction needed to succeed in my work, and I am now ready to apply it in post graduate education. I have sought out the advice of family, mentors, and supervisors, including a supervisor who attended this same program. Each person has confirmed my decision in the field I have chosen, and in applying to Evergreen. The opportunity to collaborate with other professionals on the same educational path and the same dedication to the public will provide with the tools and knowledge to continue developing the workforce system in Washington through the Employment Security Department.