

Personal Statement by Nicole George (Trinity '18)

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I saw Mya holding her little face in her hands as she sat in the reading corner of the pre-kindergarten classroom, wisps of her hair covered her tearful eyes. I directed her energetic classmates to their math worksheets so I could run to her aid as they settled. I cautiously walked over to her and whispered as to not draw a crowd, "What's wrong Mya? You don't look happy today."

Mya looked up at me, her look was familiar- it was painful, I saw shame. I intuitively felt that she needed me and I asked the Assistant Teacher to cover now that the other students seemed enthralled in their math and were unaware of Mya's plight.

Mya confided in me stories about "the mean one" meaning her father. Mya's tearful accounts about how her father hits her and her siblings; often reverting to "He hates me" in between sobs and choking on her words, "It's his turn to take us this weekend". What was just as troubling as her sobs was the blockage in my own mind as to what I needed to say to bring this child comfort; to help restore her dignity in this moment. To make her feel safe in her vulnerability. What I learned about care in that moment is that my passion to want to know how to intervene was ignited by wanting to restore her dignity and worth; my two core values. I learned that we will not always have the clinical words but we do nonetheless stand between chaos and healing; a role I will never take for granted and thanks to Mya I will always understand its full weight.

There are countless children like Mya that I worked with that reinforce my values system. Though I did not have the clinical competency to forge those dark waters with Mya I have encountered problems that range from abuse, depression, unemployment, disabilities, mental health and the general suffering that diminishes self-esteem and one's goals. Within social work, there are a wide range of work ethics and values that accompany the profession. They include the timely, limitless, and accurate service social workers provide, the strengthening of relationships between the social worker and their client, and keeping their integrity with their clients. Social Workers are in the business of promoting change and implementing hope. This is particularly challenging in the face of our political climate; an overall reflection of this nation's values and how our communities are impacted.

Many children are faced with abusive situations, but what made Mya's worse was the current social injustice of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program (DACA) and how social problems can exacerbate already strained family systems. Her own mother, *Maria, has been impacted by the DACA reform. Although she does not qualify for the program, she is affected by the increase of recent deportations that have occurred due to this controversial issue. DACA provides a level of amnesty to certain undocumented immigrant children who entered the United States illegally with their parents. Although Mya's mother, Maria, does not qualify, the recent uproar of this program has brought first hand attention to immigrants and their legal status within the United States. With the new administration in place, DACA may end. If terminated, affected immigrants will face deportation regardless of their occupation, education, or family status. Being forced into deportation and deportation in mass amounts will lead to a decrease in diversity within the United States, which is a social injustice. Unfortunately, this is a form of unequal government regulation. When faced with fear,

anxiety, and trauma, social workers are heavily called upon. As to the social injustice of DACA, part of a solution would be to allow immigrant families affected by the termination of DACA to be provided with benefits that will ensure that their children are safe, have housing and care. My personal background and experiences allow me to understand most of the emotions that immigrants face during this era. In the case of Mya and the fear she faced with her father, I was not prepared to handle that situation to help her feel at ease, or knew how to create a solution to relieve her anxiety and fear. This is why my acceptance to the Masters of Social Work program at Virginia Commonwealth University will help build on my skills to work with children like Mya and her mother, Maria.

As someone who came to the United States as a child, I can empathize with the difficult decisions many immigrants have to make to better futures. My academic career throughout my four years at Trinity College has prepared me for the various aspects within social work. I am a Psychology and Education major. I have taken multiple courses that focus on mental disabilities, clinical psychology, human biology, and evaluation and treatment courses. Other courses such as advanced sociology and intergroup relations, focus on diversity and different cultures, which have allowed me to study cases on discrimination. These courses analyze dynamics between groups of people in society, alongside various forms of discrimination. My professional experiences such as working with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Hartford for four years as a Youth Development Professional, a Lead Program Coordinator, and an Academic specialist, and as a Department of Children and Families mandated reporter have prepared me for this program. During my time at this organization, which serves predominantly low-income families in urban areas, I have interacted and served as a mentor to youth whose families suffer from drug addiction, incarceration, and youth who have experienced sexual assault. I listen to youth express difficulties within their homes and the stereotypes they face that discourage them from wanting to pursue higher education. I have written reports about these students and worked with social workers within our program and schools to help implement programs to help these disadvantaged youth.

Studying Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University will allow me to study and participate in Professor Wagaman's research interests in social service approaches that focus on young adults and adolescents who are identified as members faced with oppression within various communities. Similarly, Professor Elizabeth P. Cramer research focus and the grants she's received to do research with community partners has captured my attention. Her funded research with the Department of Criminal Justice Services, focusing on Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Victims where community partners can have discussions about abuse and the various resources available to staff. Also, the "I-CAN!" programs that will be made more accessible to peoples with disabilities sparks my interest.

Ultimately, I would like to open a non-profit organization with fellow social workers, helping all persons regardless of age, ethnicity, and race. One of my concentrations is to focus on helping persons from foreign countries who enter the United States and plagued by discrimination. My diverse background and being from a different culture plays a part in my preparedness for this program. I can relate to persons who are considered "different" and establish programs to help them cope with discrimination as well as transitioning to the current society. While maintaining a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 throughout my undergraduate career as a full-time student while working multiple jobs

concurrently and being one of the two main income providers in my household, proves that I can handle the rigor of working while completing my Master's for the Social Work program at Virginia Commonwealth University.

While earning a M.S.W at VCU, a goal of mine is to receive the Child Welfare Stipend Program scholarship. Receiving extensive training and working at one of the local department of social services within the Commonwealth of Virginia, will prepare me to help children who undergo various difficulties and traumas, and experiencing how these departments function will help me with the planning of my own non-profit organization in social work. Based on how I plan to handle the rigor of the program, I believe that the M.S.W student association as well as the Peer Mentor Program will be beneficial resources during my time at Virginia Commonwealth University. Being an African American student, I also believe that the Association of Black Social Workers will provide a strong support system and will keep me up to date on the social concerns of the black community. My support systems with current psychologist and social workers can help me better understand situations that I will be exposed too and possibly guide me through any difficulties that I may face. I will utilize my professors at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work because they are highly trained and skilled and are teaching me with their utmost capabilities, while providing immense insight into the realities of society. Virginia Commonwealth University has over 500 community partners and my attention has been drawn to their partnership with the United Methodist Family Services community. The focus of their service with children, providing in- home services, intensive treatment, and multiple support services for at-risk children as well as their families deeply grasps my attention.