

Tournament of Friendship - MSU

When I started my education at Michigan State University, I remember sitting in the Financial Aid office. The poster on the wall showed that typically, a student who came from a home with my mother's annual income, was unlikely to go to college. My mother struggled financially as a divorced survivor of domestic violence, but never for a moment did she let me think that I would not be able to attend the university of my choice. Michigan State University was my school of choice.

The year that I received the Tournament of Friendship Scholarship Award, I was a senior at MSU. I was proud of myself for being awarded the scholarship money, and documented it on every job and graduate school application I completed. I graduated from MSU in 2011 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Criminal Justice, a Minor in Sociology, and Specializations in Peace and Justice Studies and International Development.

The following year I was able to obtain a full academic scholarship award from the University of Cincinnati, where I obtained my Masters of Science Degree in Criminal Justice Administration, focusing in Juvenile Justice. My first job out of college, was working with youth who had been court-ordered into residential treatment for behavioral modification. I was able to obtain a position as a Probation Officer in Clarkston, MI in 2014. I worked there part-time in the court, and part-time at the residential facility, until I found a full-time position as a Probation Officer in Howell, MI. With both court positions, I have had the opportunity to work with specialty courts, such as Drug Court, Mental Health Court, Veteran's Court, as well as standard caseloads.

At present, in addition to my probation caseload, I also help coordinate a county-funded drug education program. I help coordinate community education and awareness events, and I am invited into the local schools to speak about substance use, and abuse. I work closely with the local Sheriff's office and jail staff, and I am able to bring inmates who are seeking recovery to these events to tell their story.

When I received the Tournament of Friendship Scholarship in 2010, I had no idea what that award meant. The scholarship has been a topic of conversation in job interviews, and has helped significantly reduce the amount of student loans that I currently pay back. As a token of my gratitude, I take off a day of work each summer, and volunteer at the golf outing that funds these important scholarships. I spend the day serving burgers and hotdogs to golfers who support the scholarships, and continue to let them know how much I appreciate their generous donations. I am lucky to be a Tournament of Friendship Scholarship recipient, and I am proud to be a Spartan.

Shera M. Novak
Probation Officer with the 53rd District Court