

Sara Marie Thane

Personal Essay

My experience working for the federal government is what prompted me to pursue a career in geriatric social work. Prior to beginning my social work education at the University of Michigan, I served as a field representative and congressional caseworker for United States Senator Jon Tester. In this role it was my responsibility to help individuals resolve issues with federal government agencies, primarily the Department of Veterans Affairs. In the process, I realized that often the most vulnerable constituents I encountered were older adults. I learned that some seniors in my home state are struggling to support themselves on a fixed income as they cope with the challenges of aging without family or close friends available to support them.

I thoroughly enjoyed working with aging Montana veterans as a congressional caseworker, and I intend to continue this work as a professional social worker. I recently began my first field placement at the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System's Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center, which is helping to prepare me for this future career. In this placement I have the opportunity to learn from an interdisciplinary team that handles the most complex geriatric cases within the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System. These cases often involve managing dementia and caregiver stress.

After graduation I plan to return to Montana to practice. My goal is to become a social worker for VA Montana and leverage tele-mental health to reach rural veterans who may not be able to travel to their nearest VA facility for care. Both physical and social isolation create challenges for seniors in Montana, but I believe that modern technology and my motivation to travel across the state to meet with clients in their communities can serve to bridge the rural-urban divide.