

Paige Taylor
12th Grade
Widefield High
Colorado

What drives you?

Giving hope to those battling with mental health drives me. In high school, I struggled with severe anxiety to the point of getting physically sick and unable to attend school. I sought out help to manage my anxiety. My experience with my school social worker was incredible. She provided me with tools to manage my anxiety and gave me a voice- I finally felt heard. This has driven me to want to help others overcome their mental health and personal struggles.

Getting up and going to school is simple for some but was a big obstacle for me. The idea of going to school made me anxious. Every morning my stomach was in knots. I got to the point where I couldn't go to school. This was when I met Mrs. Witt, my school social worker. Mrs. Witt taught me the tools to help manage my anxiety. Before school, I would use these tools to help me relax. She would provide options and I could decide what I was comfortable with. She never pushed me to do anything I wasn't ready to do. I always felt heard. I was no longer battling this alone. She gave me hope. I was able to move forward as my anxiety decreased and successfully attended classes as well as lead groups that help others.

As a result of my personal experience with anxiety, I became passionate about helping others. I had the opportunity to co-lead 180 Club and lead the JOI Club Life Skills Group. By leading these groups I have been able to help others by providing them with basic necessities and tools to relieve stress. Every year at Widefield High School the 180 club organizes a food drive. This food drive is for families that cannot afford enough food for winter break. I organized fundraisers, promoted the food drive, and we raised about \$20,000 in two years. This resulted in families not having to worry about providing food for their family while school was on break. This past summer as leader of the JOI club, I developed and taught curriculum to women and children that came from different backgrounds and identities. When developing and teaching these plans, I focused on making the curriculum inclusive and accessible. These activities included socially distanced lessons on the importance of family, building community, working together, and communication. One of the activities that I led focused on documenting and reflecting on their pandemic experience through journaling or art. This experience gave them an outlet and an opportunity to express themselves.

I look forward to pursuing a degree in Social Work. With a degree in Social Work I will obtain skills and acquire tools to help me successfully help others. I look forward to developing interpersonal skills which will enable me to cross barriers, engage with people who come from various backgrounds, and successfully help people resolve issues. Overall, I will provide others with the hope I was given.