

Isabella “Hope” Strayer

Year 12

Teach-NW Public Charter School

Oregon

Each interaction with children with disabilities (my foster siblings, children at the adaptive riding barn where I volunteer, or on a mission trip) drives me to continue serving them and the broader disability community. Engaging daily with these amazing members of my community, I hear stories of health challenges, lack of trauma-informed care, and necessary care, and am reminded of all the passion, determination, and hope I have to share. As I enter freshman year at university, I will further my knowledge and training to become a licensed therapist for children with disabilities, particularly those with autism. As I learn more about why we are who we are and respond how we do, then I can pursue ways of making therapy accessible to those who experience this world differently. By exploring past brain research and methods of treatment and building upon it to conduct my own research, I believe the therapeutic field can enact positive change and find better ways of including valuable members of our society.

Both research and therapeutic work drive and excite me with direct opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others. My parents instilled in me a lifelong love of learning, which will accompany me into my undergraduate and graduate studies. I anticipate conducting research alongside my professors and learning how neurons interface with the sensory system and cerebral communication networks. With this foundation, in graduate school I hope to work with a team to discover causes of disabilities, how they impact life, how to minimize the adverse effects

on their lives, how to better communicate, and how our society can grow to work with individuals with disabilities in equitable, informed, and welcoming ways.

Historically, research has been a detriment to the disability community due to negligent or intentionally damaging experimentation, and I aspire to change it into something that brings insight without intrusion or harm. Despite the hard work ahead and the financial challenges of higher education, I remain motivated because I know the urgent need for informed care in this marginalized community. I have seen both caution and hope in the eyes of parents as they tell of new opportunities that may help their child's health and happiness, and I endeavor to affirm the hope they feel into tangible healthcare transformation that will truly aid these children. My long-term goal is to create replicable pathways for other therapists, communities, and global populations to engage therapy with people with disabilities.

What drives me? The laughter and joy of children who are free to experience this world in their multifaceted ways and thrive in it. Once I successfully complete my education, I look forward to engaging with children of all abilities in unique ways, finding opportunities to share healing however works best for them and their families.