

Alison Liu – Martin Luther King Scholarship Finalist

Ms. L was the first client to work with the Patient Navigator Program (PNP) for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness. She and her children had been living in the shelter for years, due to reasons that were largely—and heartbreakingly—systemic. For 15 weeks, our team worked with Ms. L to address six long-term goals. One example: she had applied for financial assistance to cover her family’s health care costs twice in the past, without success. Seven weeks passed before we finally accomplished this goal together—calling the financial office to be put on hold for hours, sending emails and reaching out to contacts, advocating on her behalf to the administration at the hospital. This experience truly opened our eyes to the many systemic and logistical barriers preventing this population from receiving care. When Ms. L finally received approval for the program, she told us that she would be receiving primary care services for the first time in three years.

For the past eleven months, I have been working on developing and implementing PNP as part of my Albert Schweitzer Fellowship. The program started as a mere idea, discussed over lunch between four medical students and Patti Pagels, the clinical director at UGM shelters. Since then, we’ve grown to engage over 90 health professions and medical students dedicated to advocating for and improving the health of individuals experiencing homelessness. This semester, we implemented the first year of our elective, training 43 future navigators, with a total of 71 students joining in on some sessions. I meet with these students every other week—witnessing their hope and commitment—and cannot help but feel confident in the sustainable impact that these students will achieve.

In addition to working with PNP, I am lucky to serve as Vice President of SPARC. My work in voter engagement was unofficial during the primaries, printing off voter registration forms for classmates, messaging my class about deadlines, answering voting questions in passing. SPARC allowed me a structured medium to organize voter engagement. The other officers and I organized for 12 students to receive training from Dallas County on their volunteer deputy registrar program, organized a socially-distanced voter registration drive for the UT Southwestern student body, and worked with IM residents at Parkland to organize and assist with registering patients and their families. I personally registered about 50 individuals, with my peers registering quite a bit more. This November, the United States saw the greatest voter turnout in modern history, and I find myself so proud to have played a small role in this.

Looking back on my time here, the one word I would use to describe my experience is gratitude. I am grateful for the inspiration afforded me by my mentors and peers, for the opportunity to serve my community in so many ways—and I am so excited for two more years of dedicated service at UT Southwestern.