

## Personal Statement

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My childhood was in an era before computers became mainstream and free time was spent climbing trees; collecting bugs, frogs, and reptiles; and making mudpies with other children. It didn't matter what challenges we faced at home, we could go outside and instantly be removed from the perils of poverty, caregivers struggling with their own difficulties, or abuses bestowed upon us by a society toiling with the fear of growth and change. Our mental health was better outside. We found restoration in nature. We didn't have to think about our problems; nature healed, if even only for a moment.

In adulthood, I have been supporting my spouse through the hurdles accompanying his stimulant and alcohol use disorders. After years in and out of recovery centers, various therapies, and medication treatments, he remained disconnected from the version of himself he wanted to be. It wasn't until we began embracing the restorativeness of nature that he truly began to heal. Our shared recovery commenced with desert, prairie, and forested hikes breathing air cleansed by trees with tall tales and short grasses with loud voices. It progressed to regular community conservation work, urban nature walks, planting trees, and developing gardens. It advanced to completing a Climate Stewards academic course with our daughter where we presented our capstone project to increase water bottle filling stations in our community to our city council. While spending time in our natural environment was not the sole answer for my spouse's path to true recovery, it has proved extraordinarily healing.

Proximity to nature became so essential to daily life for our family that we chose to uproot our lives and moved to be within the depths of a spectacular forest. Seeing how my spouse and daughter thrive here makes me want to be even more connected to nature through my daily work.

Nature has many answers. It supplies food, medicine, shelter, and pleasure. It knows how to adapt and heal. It speaks. It provides solutions to many issues for which we often look elsewhere. Yet even though nature is all around us, it remains inaccessible to so many, either because of society's emphasis on other demands for

attention or physical and financial barriers. However, through my professional career in mental health and substance use research, I know that incremental changes can eventually shift societal attitudes towards a topic. And with one as pressing as our environment we have no time to waste.

I am an experienced clinical administrator and research professional with a demonstrated history of working in health care and academia in both the public and private sectors. I've spent over sixteen years in clinical and research administration and coordination, over eight of them working in substance use and behavioral health. I am skilled in leadership; project management; large and complex budgeting; contracts and grants composition, submission, and management; clinical research in industry, cooperative group, private, state, and federally supported trials from both a clinical coordinator and a research administrator perspective. My research experience includes primary and secondary data collection, management, and analysis of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies. My current position as the Director of Community Responsive and Engaged Equity Research (CREER) in Mental Health Center is to find ways to support youth and adults faced with mental health and/or substance use challenges, to provide better life circumstances and outcomes. Our focus is primarily on vulnerable populations. Some may be unhoused, justice involved, and/or from minoritized racial and ethnic backgrounds. Most all, however, are experiencing the various ways social determinants impact their physical and mental health. Many of our research projects propose interventions and implement programs that aim to support people facing these struggles by using medications, digital applications, and therapies held individually indoors. While group therapies and interventions are utilized, they often focus on the individual within the group setting instead of a collective system.

My primary goal is to increase physical and mental health and reduce substance use and its negative impact by re-introducing to people suffering from health challenges and traumas the environment and its power of restoration, re-engage them in positive social practices, and by applying indigenous traditions and practices that have provided healing for many since ancient times. Secondly, my aim is that with healthier people who have begun to understand nature's wealth, that they will be engaged to better care for it, protect it, and restore it. I am excited to learn enhanced ways to teach others about how they can be more involved in

their natural and built environments, regardless of their societal status. I hope to take advantage of a program that teaches environmental and ecological sustainability with a social justice lens. I plan to take full advantage of courses that teach environmental conservation, restoration and response to climate change while also learning how to navigate non-profit administration, Geographic Information Systems, tribal governance, and how to provide opportunities for and work with people who are justice involved to inform my goal of creating a non-profit, step-down program for formerly incarcerated, substance using, and/or people who are unhoused find wellness and positive relationships with themselves, society, community, family, and friends using environmental, social, and indigenous practices.

I believe that Evergreen State College's Master's in Environmental Science is the key to giving me the tools to develop research opportunities and implement programs to attain my goals. Furthermore, I look forward to contributing to Evergreen's community of likeminded people to uplift our shared goal of a lasting and healthy world. While I don't believe life's problems will miraculously disappear by making mud cakes, playing with frogs, and singing camp songs in the forest with friends and community, perhaps those practices will get us closer to a healthier, more supported place where we are a part of our natural environment rather than a force against it.