



LSA CELEBRATES FOSTER CARE MONTH

Lutheran Social Services of Michigan

JOSEPH SEDLAK'S STORY

Joseph Sedlak is the second former foster child in a decade under Lutheran Social Services of Michigan's care to attend Harvard University. (The first one was featured in *People* magazine.) It's a fact we're proud to promote – evidence of what is possible when love and compassion prevail.

Joseph recently graduated from the University of Michigan with a nearly perfect grade point average (3.97) and went on to Harvard Medical School this year. He was in foster care twice as a child in the Genesee County/Flint area, though his family resides in Warren, on the outskirts of Detroit.

Born into a big family, the eighth of 10 children, Joseph was taken into care due to incidents of abuse and neglect. His mother suffers from mental illness, which drove her aggression, he says. The kindnesses he was shown throughout his life, even when there were turbulent times, has led him to want to devote his life to doing that for others.

Joseph thanks his older siblings for helping him stay the course and succeed. That, and LSSM's focus on family preservation.

When he began college, Joseph knew he wanted to eventually become a doctor. He was inspired by an EMT course he did in high school. "I found it so rewarding that I could take care of people when they were sick," he reflects. "When I was doing clinical hours in the hospital, I found it incredible that I could make someone's day better. I saw how physicians interacted with their patients and how they could use all their skills and knowledge to make them better, and that's what I wanted to do."

Joseph is a recipient of LSSM's ETV program, which provides funding for former foster children for the "extras" of college. In Joseph's case, he used the scholarship money to study for the MCAT, the medical school application exam. "I didn't have a way of affording MCAT materials or a prep course or setting out a chunk of time over the summer to study by living on my own and having a quiet space to study."

He scored above the 99th percentile on the exam. ETV funding then helped Joseph apply to medical school - application fees totaling approximately \$2,000 plus the cost of interviewing in person at each school that invited him.

"I thought it was extremely generous, and I felt like there were more people who cared about foster youth," he says. "It was another layer of support that I was so thankful for."

Joseph hopes to use his medical career "to help narrow the gap in disparities." He plans to practice oncology and is excited to participate in clinical trials and treatments to lead to breakthroughs and discoveries that help cure cancer. "It's a field where people are really sick and the compassion and energy that you have really helps," he says.

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Lutheran Social Services of Michigan

Lutheran Social Services of Michigan has been providing services for children and families since 1934. LSSM is Michigan's largest private foster care organization, helping more than 800 children daily. Their experienced staff are passionate about their desire to help foster families create a better life for the children in their care.

For more information about LSS of Michigan, visit www.lssm.org.

LSS of Michigan is a member of the LSA Network, an LSA 20-500 Fund supporter and it's part of the Annie E. Casey-Provider Exchange LSA cohort.