

“You can’t give up here. You have to get involved.” My grief counselor’s words after my parents’ deaths kept me going when my world shatter. I lost my parents, my home, my friends, and my safety due to the pandemic.

I poured my heart into Sam Houston State University.

I began by working in a community-oriented job, where every single day I could aid Sam Houston State University students, faculty, staff, and Huntsville community members. Many were quick to give explanations for their suffering—as if it were a personal failing somehow—which was heartbreaking. Even though I said they don’t need to explain, the only thing that soothed them was giving them the support they sought.

While I worked, I volunteered for Sam Houston State University’s Helpline, trained to support mental health and provide on-campus referrals for five hours, two to three times a month. Much like my job, callers felt guilt, reluctance, and fear when reaching out. I held space for the callers, for just a moment, while their lives were too overwhelming alone. Just as my grief counselor had done so for me.

I started looking into more ways to serve others as a psychology major. When my world shattered, astronomy comforted me. The beautiful mysteries of the universe awoke my numb body. Could astronomy bring humanity together as it had done through folklore, art, and research for centuries? Could astronomy be another skill a person can use to better their own mental health? Due to gaps in the existing literature, I made a research study to gauge the effects of solar eclipses on human connectedness. With this study, I could share the discovery of a blossoming area of research by presenting at the Undergraduate Research Symposium conference.

Finally, due to the recent DEI laws, LGBTQ Bearkats could no longer celebrate graduating in a safe, accepting environment called Lavender Graduation. Before, over 100

attendees had a place to be themselves. To be honored. Respected. December 2023 was the last time the Counseling Center hosted the celebration. I created a student organization to continue the legacy of honoring Bearkats with the Lavender Graduation celebration—by students for students. From promoting, to fundraising, event-planning, and even gathering speakers, my organization will allow spring and summer 2024 Bearkats to graduate in a safe space.

Because of my efforts, healing from grief become a journey full of love and support through the people I met while serving Sam Houston State University—including the lives I was able to impact. My journey of grief gave me the opportunity to help other struggling Bearkats when I spoke at the annual TedxSHSU event. Before my eyes, my story and my lessons resonated with the crowd in real time. Were it not for my grief counselor here at Sam Houston State University, I would never have had the strength to serve my university.