

Overcoming Anxiety

While I have faced challenges, I have found opportunities amidst the struggles to support those who need help as well. My name is Nicholas Alvarez, I am 17 years old, and for as long as I can remember, anxiety has been present in my life. However, over quarantine, my condition worsened to the point that I was admitted into the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Stabilization Unit (CAPSU). A significant factor of this was the absence of the most meaningful activity to me: sports.

Sports, mainly basketball and soccer, among several others, have been a significant component of my life throughout my life. The role that these athletic activities played helped me through many tough times. When I think of sports leadership, I think of the coaches and other leaders I've had over the years. I reflect on how they have helped me progress my athletic skills and confidence in a particular sport and how they've done the same for my life. These individuals were vulnerable, supportive, and ultimately, they helped me become a better and more well-rounded person. And to put it frankly, without the coaches I've had and currently have, I would not still be here to write this essay; And if I were, I would not be half the person I have become today without this immense support.

Growing up, I would struggle at social events and school activities because of my overwhelming anxiety. The soccer field, basketball court and hockey rink became my safe spaces. And it was due to the mentors that my coaches became for me who inspired me so much. As a result of these influences, I learned to cope better with my mental health. I was also encouraged to take on leadership roles. Namely, I started volunteering as a student leader in September 2018 for my church's senior high youth group, leading a group of boys in grades 10-12. In this capacity, I plan lessons, mentor this group, and demonstrate that there is meaning and hope in life. My coaches were never compensated for all the time and effort they poured into us not only as athletes but as people. It was so pivotal and essential in my life. And through my own leadership experiences, I hope to do the same for others who might need it.

And the leadership I received from the influential people in my life growing up transcended the soccer field and impacted my perspective on the other communities I am part of. Since I was in Kindergarten, I have regularly volunteered at the Surrey Food Bank (SFB) with my family. I attend school in Surrey, and it is a high value to help out my neighbours in greater need than myself. And while quarantine was a particularly tough time for me, opportunities arose to support my SFB community came about it as well. I became aware that donations and financial resources were significantly down during the COVID-19 pandemic, so I set myself to make a difference in this community I am part of.

In early 2021 I decided to make face masks and sell them as a fundraiser initiative for the Surrey Food Bank. I made connections with suppliers, organized distribution logistics, and contacted people in the different teams and communities I am part of to spread the word. These efforts resulted in hundreds of dollars raised towards the Surrey Food Bank. I was also able to provide the workers at the SFB facility with masks, which is essential to front-line workers who interact with so many community members during the pandemic on a daily basis.

Through my different experiences, I have been inspired by dedicated mentors and my ability to help others. I have realized that I want to dedicate my life to helping those who have gone through what I've gone through concerning mental illness. My personal challenge with mental health is the main reason I would like to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology for my post-secondary education, starting September 2022.

After my time at CAPSU, I saw immense improvement in coping with my illness on a day-to-day basis. And importantly, I was also able to reflect on the tremendous need around me, as I met dozens of children every day with challenges like mine. We were all on a spectrum, but I felt uniquely supported and respected as a person. This experience solidified my desire to become a Neuropsychologist and study the human brain and behaviour.

Recently, I started an internship with a psychologist. I have been assisting in research-related tasks, putting together resources, and advising on projects to help people like myself who need a little help and support. I am constantly learning and hope to continue learning in my university studies to continue helping others effectively in the future. And I hope your investment in my future through this scholarship will enable me to do that.

I appreciate your consideration.

Thank You,

Nicholas Alvarez