

## Erika Sethi- MSW '18



In 2012, I was living in a transitional homeless program with my husband and one child. They knew I was in college and allowed me to stay in college. As a first-generation student, I came to APU because it is a good school, but did not consider the debt I was accruing. Just before my junior year, Dr. Mary Rawlings and a new case manager gave me the encouragement and courage I needed to leave for the financial stability of my family. I was devastated because I knew I would not return to APU. I loved it there. I ended up receiving full financial aid at Cal State Los Angeles. Throughout the three years I was there, I worked at a restaurant and, upon graduation, took a management position. I was still homeless, living in a pregnancy shelter, and now a single mother of two. I worked hard at the restaurant and was promoted into management, so it was easier for me to stay there than to start looking for a social work position. I was able to provide stability and housing for my children, buy a car, and get my kids into school and all of us off government assistance.

In January 2016, I started attending church, and praying that God would give me a new job in the social work field I so desperately wanted and knew He had called me to. I started applying for jobs and received no calls for interviews. I kept asking God where He wanted me. My mother told me a friend of hers told her about the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) scholarship for disadvantaged students at APU that she thought was a fit for me. My mother sent me the application link and I thought, “no way, I can’t go to school. I have kids.” She was rather relentless in telling me I could do it. My pastor, Bonnie, told me, “You’ve been praying for a year, honey, it’s time to apply and give God a chance to answer.” I started to pray a different prayer. “God if this is what you want me to do, open all of the doors for me to go.”

I knew I was called to this profession, and knew I would have to receive a full scholarship to be able to return to APU. I was called for an interview, and weeks later called by Dr. Mary. “I am calling to tell you that we are offering you the HRSA scholarship. I feel like Santa. We couldn’t make a way for you to stay for your undergraduate program, but now we are able to offer this opportunity to you.” To be given this opportunity has changed my life and my kids’ lives. I was able to quit the restaurant job. I would never have been able to come back to school especially APU. I think that is the beauty of social work. You give someone assistance and empower them to make the changes to better their life. I have gone from accessing Wi-Fi in the McDonald’s parking lot to complete my undergraduate course work, to being back here at APU. This is my calling. This is my happiness.

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