

## Graduate student's winding path to music therapy

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Brittanie Harrow is leaving Tulane with graduate degrees in social work and public health. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

Having grown up in a musical family, Brittanie Harrow always knew she would pursue a music-related career. She even auditioned for “The Voice” and sang on stage.

But she soon realized that she could have more of an impact using her vocal and guitar-playing talents to help those in need. In 2022, Harrow earned a bachelor’s degree in music therapy from William Carey University in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and became a board-certified music therapist.

But she knew that to realize her dream of using music to heal, she would have to further her education, preferably in social work. The Tulane University School of Social Work (TSSW) was the obvious choice.

“I knew I needed to do something that would allow me to reach vulnerable populations, to broaden my horizons and serve communities with more than just the one avenue of music but through resources, counseling and advocacy,” said Harrow, who grew up in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. “I visited Tulane, and I just knew then that I was ready to take the next step, that it would set me up for something really great.”

Harrow received a master’s degree in social work in December and now works as a hospice music therapist, mostly with older adults who have just a few weeks or months to live. In May, she will add a master’s in public health to her resumé, graduating as part of TSSW’s dual degree program in social work and public health.

That she ended up in the dual-degree program is somewhat of a fluke, Harrow said, but one for which she is eternally grateful. Although she initially considered the dual program and began the application, she ultimately decided that it wasn’t for her.

“I started the application but didn’t finish the public health part of it,” she said. “But then I got a letter saying I was accepted (to the dual program.)” She inquired to see if it was a mistake but found out it wasn’t.

Harrow, who describes herself as spiritual, said she viewed the acceptance as a sign from God. “I said, ‘OK, God, you’re telling me this is the direction I should take.’ And here I am.”

Through academic, research and field education components, the dual degree program has enabled Harrow to understand social and behavioral factors and

disparities as well as community-based interventions and public health programming, all under the guidance of a supportive faculty.

“The faculty and staff have been amazing,” she said. “They genuinely care about you as a student and a person. You’re not just a number. They know your name. They know when you’re having an off day and will say, ‘Hey are you OK?’”

As busy as she is with school and work, Harrow has found time to serve as a worship leader at One Hope Church in Belle Chasse, hold a part-time job at TU Fit and participate in multiple extracurricular activities, including chairing TSSW’s recent book festival.

She recently passed her social work exam and is now a Licensed Master Social Worker. Harrow plans to stay in New Orleans and continue her work at an adult day facility in Metairie, where she will be able to combine advocacy work, engagement and administrative tasks with music therapy.

She says she is amazed at the impact music can have on even the sickest of patients and enjoys telling the story of one elderly client who, like herself, grew up singing in the church.

“I walked into her room with my guitar, and said, ‘Can I play some music for you?’ At first, she didn’t respond. But I started playing a familiar hymn, “Amazing Grace.” She not only made eye contact with me but then she started singing and then leading the song. And then we started having conversations.”

Harrow hopes to have that same impact with all of her patients. “At the end of the day, I just want to be a light in the world, to spread kindness and spread love, to meet people where they are, to the best of my ability.”

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Brittanie Harrow, Tulane graduate student