

Kylie Glendenning

I am the daughter of a Mexican immigrant, a niece to four aunts. Every single one of my aunts have been sexually abused, both in America and in Mexico. Growing up, I never experienced anything traumatic like that, and I didn't know how to help others who were going through tragic adversities.

As I got older, I learned about all the refugees that needed help, human trafficking victims that needed rehabilitation and legal help services, homeless who needed help attaining basic needs that I took for granted, foster and adoption systems that needed reform, and single mothers who needed access to affordable primary care and government help programs. It all felt so overwhelming and I struggled to feel like I could make a difference in any of these areas.

After taking a political science class, I learned that good citizenship means that you fight for those around you who need help, in any way you can, even if you don't fully understand their pain and experiences. I wanted to join the military when I was younger but I learned that there are other ways to defend your country, and although these battles look different, they are still worth fighting for.

My civic duty began by researching child sex-trafficking in Cambodia for a school project. When I learned that these horrific organizations happen here, in my local community, I started to research local anti-trafficking organizations and how I could volunteer to help these survivors.

At the time I had been made aware of what sex-trafficking was through volunteering at a local pregnancy clinic for unexpected mothers. The staff informed me of signs of trafficking in patients and how to report suspected trafficking. I wanted to become a clinical mental health counselor and I was being trained on how to perform advocate counseling with high risk patients.

Then I started emailing. At the time, I had no idea what a "lobbyist" was, but all I knew was that I wanted to reach out to my local representatives, Patty Murray, Dan Newhouse, and Maria Cantwell, to ask them for policies that would mandate local hotel employees take trainings that helped them identify, access, and reduce the risk of child sex-trafficking in our community. I frequently emailed them, then transitioned to emailing higher representatives such as Vice President Harris and President Joe Biden.

I knew that homeless men and women were at higher risks for becoming victims to traffickers, so I got in touch with my local homeless shelter, the Tri-Cities Union Gospel

Mission, and began putting together a team of other local high schoolers who would help serve lunch in the kitchen and talk with residents in the dining hall afterwards.

I learned that good citizenship doesn't mean that I have to be the most eloquent speaker, or know every piece of information out there. I just have to have a heart that cares and a passion for making the world a safer place for the men, women, and children living in it.