

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation
Vital Voices — Season 3, Episode 4
Interview with Sara Arter

Holly J. Humphrey, MD, MACP:

Welcome back to [Vital Voices](#), a podcast from the [Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation](#). I am Dr. Holly Humphrey, the president of the Foundation. Our third season of Vital Voices focuses on the [2023 cohort of Macy Faculty Scholars](#), six individuals chosen to participate in our two-year Macy Faculty Scholars career development program because of their demonstrated potential as future leaders in medical and nursing education. I am delighted to have the opportunity to share our Scholars' stories with you, as I think you will find their work to advance health professions education, and their own personal experiences and perspectives to be inspiring. Today's interview is with [Dr. Sara Arter](#), an Assistant Professor of Nursing at Miami University in Ohio. Dr. Arter is also a critical care nurse caring for pediatric and adult patients. Dr. Arter applied to the Macy Faculty Scholars Program with an extensive history of teaching and curriculum development.

Our National Advisory Committee was impressed by her dedication to teaching her students about the discrimination and challenges that accompany the opioid epidemic as they affect maternal and fetal health, which is the focus of her project. As a Macy Faculty Scholar, Dr. Arter will create and test a novel educational intervention to support nursing students' ability to examine the influence of personal values and development of ethical decision making, while caring for mothers with substance abuse disorder and their children.

In addition to her work as a Scholar, Dr. Arter is also chair of the Ohio Registered Nurses Association Public Policy Committee, and is a principal investigator on a study funded by the Ohio Attorney General to use machine learning on a linked dataset to explore interactions between social determinants and the health of children with prenatal opioid exposure. Dr. Arter completed a master's degree in nursing education at Xavier University, and a PhD in nursing research at the University of Cincinnati. And now here is my conversation with Dr. Sara Arter.

Holly J. Humphrey, MD, MACP (HJH):

Sara, thank you so much for being with us today. I'd like to begin by asking you to share some details about your path into nursing and nursing education.

Sara Arter, PhD, RN (SA):

Sure. I've always been interested in the human body and how it works, particularly when it comes to human development, and also human resilience to adversity. This interest influenced me to pursue pediatric nursing specifically. Most of my pediatric clinical experience took place at Cincinnati Children's Hospital in the cardiac intensive care unit as a registered nurse, before I transitioned into a PhD program and into my academic career. My path into nursing education was a little bit more of a fortunate stroke of serendipity.

One of my colleagues in the cardiac intensive care unit was accepted into a nurse anesthesia program, and was no longer able to adjunct at a local university. So out of the blue during a night shift one night, he asked if I would like to take the position, to which I agreed. And through that role as an adjunct clinical professor, I fell in love with nursing education. I found it to be extremely rewarding being the one that could facilitate those light bulb moments for students where they make a connection from their didactic or classroom knowledge in the clinical setting. And just watching them grow, I just felt like it was a really rewarding experience, and so ever since then I've been in nursing education.

HJH:

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation
Vital Voices — Season 3, Episode 4
Interview with Sara Arter

Wonderful. So let's move on to your actual application to our Macy Faculty Scholars Program. And in that application, you shared some aspects of your life that inform your scholarly work, and your Macy Faculty Scholars project. If you're willing, Sara, I'm wondering if you might talk a little bit about how the idea for your project emerged, and why it's one that really matters to you on a personal level.

SA:

Sure. So this project is personal for a number of reasons. First, the nursing program in which I teach right now is located in an area of the country that has been hard hit by the opioid epidemic. And specifically in the county in which I live and work, about 4.5% of all births from 2015 to 2022 were exposed to opioids in utero. So it's a big problem, and that's just opioids, and that doesn't encompass the entire drug epidemic, there's other substance abuse as well. But this project is also personal, because it aims to improve the care of mothers and children through health professional education, which really connects my two professional passions, which are education and maternal child health. My passion for improving maternal child health is largely driven by my own personal experience of having three siblings with special needs, and also through my own individual experience of being a mom as a teenager.

So regarding my siblings, growing up with siblings that had special needs led to my conviction that exposure to those that are different from us definitely leads to a greater appreciation of how life experiences shape each individual. It also opened my eyes to the pervasiveness of discrimination in our society, in which individuals with a disability are largely written off as incapable of being productive members of society, which couldn't be further from the truth.

In terms of my experience of being a teen mom, that was also very influential for my motivation to pursue this specific project. I became a mom when I was 17, and to say that the experience of teen pregnancy was a humbling one is an understatement. There were a lot of feelings of shame, especially while I was pregnant, I couldn't hide that. And the perception of judgment in my early years of mothering were really difficult to deal with. But ultimately, I think they did fuel my resilience to overcome society's stigmatizing attitudes and low expectations for teen moms. So both of these lived experiences—from having special needs siblings as well as being a teen mom – were definitely the biggest driving forces behind my goal to improve healthcare delivery and outcomes for other mothers and their children that happened to find themselves in stigmatizing situations.

HJH:

Sara, thank you for sharing those deeply personal experiences. I know we all have a lot to learn from you and through you, so thank you for that. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but I think you are the very first applicant in the history of the Macy Faculty Scholars Program who has applied from Miami University. And so I'm really interested to know what led you to apply to our program.

SA:

That is correct. I am the first applicant from Miami University of Ohio, which is not to be confused with University of Miami in Florida. So the cool thing was in my very first year of being an Assistant Professor on the tenure track, I was looking for grant funding to start my research trajectory. And I stumbled across this opportunity in particular in that first year. Unfortunately, at that time, I did not meet the qualifications; I was too green as an educator. But it really just resonated with me because the focus was on health professional education, and I really felt like the strategic plan of the Macy Faculty Scholars Program aligned with my aspirations to train the next generation of healthcare professionals to lead or support transformational change that would then result in better health outcomes. So how that applies

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation
Vital Voices — Season 3, Episode 4
Interview with Sara Arter

to my project specifically, is that I'm sure a lot of people that are listening are well aware of the fact that the maternal and child outcomes in this country are pretty abysmal compared to the rest of the developed world.

And through my research, I've learned of a lot of ethical dilemmas that are commonly encountered while caring for mothers with substance use disorder and their children. And if healthcare providers don't know how to navigate these ethical dilemmas properly, it can ultimately lead to negative impacts on the health outcomes of the mothers and the children. And so through training of these students to navigate these ethical dilemmas, I'm hoping it will better prepare them to provide unbiased, evidence-based care, with the potential to improve the health outcomes. I do believe that we can shape a more discerning healthcare workforce through exposure specifically to the personal stories of the moms, and by also viewing those stories through the lens of ethics and best evidence.

HJH:

Interesting. So tell me, I know you're still in your first few months of the Scholars Program, but based on what you've experienced so far, how would you characterize the mentorship and community aspect of the program?

SA:

The mentorship and community that the Macy Faculty family offers is phenomenal. I feel like I'm set up for impact. It's multilayered; there's formal and informal mentoring that goes on. The formal mentorship approach provides a wealth of information, not only related to my specific project, but also for my broader career goals. It seems like there's always somebody that's plugged in and has the knowledge and expertise that I need to make my project an improved and more impactful project, and also has been in my shoes before and knows the things that I need to do in my career to reach my career goals as well.

So even though we are only a few months in, I have felt extremely supported on all levels, formally and informally. I have a near-peer mentor who helps me, and has opened a lot of doors, and introduced me to a lot of opportunities and conferences that I was not aware of before. The mentorship and the bonding that goes on within our cohort is wonderful as well. We stay in contact even between professional development opportunities through WhatsApp. Sometimes it's for professional advice, we can bounce ideas off of each other, and sometimes it's just for humor just to keep everybody grounded. But overall, it's been great and I'm very appreciative of the opportunity.

HJH:

Sara, I'm glad that you feel that level of support from your peers, and from your peer mentor and your National Advisory Committee member, because you have a very big, broad project. And you have already referenced earlier in our conversation that the opioid crisis is a national problem. So in your particular motivation for developing this project, you have been focused on the devastating impact of the opioid epidemic in your local community and your surrounding rural area. You've also clearly shared with us in your application, as well as on this podcast earlier in your comments, about how you wish to impact your community and grow your influence nationally. So I applaud your desire to have such a direct impact on education and clinical care. Can you share a little bit about what drives this commitment to your community?

SA:

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation
Vital Voices — Season 3, Episode 4
Interview with Sara Arter

Absolutely. I feel like the commitment to my local community is really a practical approach, similar to the idea that healthcare providers should heal themselves before attempting to heal others. The community in which I live, work, and play is exactly that, it's where I live, work, and play. So you get to know the people that you live, work, and play with in your community through various activities, and you start to recognize the influence of social determinants of health more easily, at least in my perspective.

So it really feels like a moral imperative to use my resources and the knowledge that I'm discovering for the good of my own community first. And my community, as I mentioned earlier in the podcast, also happens to be one that's been particularly hard hit in the current drug crises. And so since that's my area in which I do my research, it again feels like a moral imperative to start my work there. It just makes sense to aim high, to expand my reach nationally after I can affect my own community in a positive way. I think you can do both, especially with having so many layers of mentoring within the Macy family, having a near-peer that works in the same area content-wise, but then we also have that national level of mentoring that can help me expand my reach and the impact of my project nationally, while also not losing sight of my own community.

HJH:

Sara, thank you for sharing those experiences. You and your learners are clearly having an impact, not just in your local community, but all around the world. And I am amazed at the way in which you are working together to co-create those kinds of experiences, because I think you know that co-creation is a significant focus of the Macy Foundation as we try to engage our next generation of healthcare professionals. So thank you so much for leading the way.

And now let's go in a different direction, because there's one more set of issues that I'd like to ask you about. I understand that in addition to your Macy Faculty Scholars project, you have also been involved with some other innovative educational initiatives that include the input of health professions learners. Could you speak a little bit about some of those initiatives and the ways in which students have been involved in their co-creation?

SA:

Yeah, absolutely. The two other big initiatives that I would like to share with you today are the Nursing Policy Hackathon that I created and implemented in November, and also a study abroad class that I just finished up.

So specifically about the Nursing Policy Hackathon, this was a joint initiative between Miami University, which is my place of employment, and the American Nursing Association Ohio Chapter, which I'm currently the chair of the public policy committee for that professional organization. So about that one, the idea to do a Nursing Policy Hackathon really developed out of the current nursing workforce shortage. Traditionally speaking, the way that nursing organizations, especially thinking of a policy solution, the way that we have traditionally dealt with the nursing workforce shortage, is that we try to introduce and pass legislation related to staffing ratios. And that's great, but it's really not enough. It doesn't really attack all of the root problems that are causing the nursing workforce shortage. And so I thought this would be a great opportunity to do something a little bit more innovatively and collaboratively. So what we did was, we did work collaboratively and interdisciplinarily, to develop this Nursing Policy Hackathon.

The goal of this event was to innovate policy solutions to the nursing workforce shortage, and I had graduate and undergraduate students who were involved in this initiative, in the planning, in the implementation phase. It was really exciting, because ultimately what happened was over the course of

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation
Vital Voices — Season 3, Episode 4
Interview with Sara Arter

the weekend, we had healthcare professional students, graduate and undergraduate, that were working on teams alongside healthcare administrators. And we had some state legislators, and we had other healthcare professionals, and professionals outside of healthcare as well, that all made up teams to work together to develop these innovative policy solutions.

Once they started to get some of their ideas on their teams with something they could all support, they were able to go up to a current state legislator and pitch their idea, and receive feedback early on, and then go back and further develop the idea. On the last day of the event, the students then had the opportunity to very succinctly pitch their idea in a way that would catch the interests of the state legislators and the healthcare leaders that made up our panel. So altogether for the students and for the professionals that were a part of this weekend, it was a great learning opportunity. And we also ended up developing just about 20 new policy solutions to help solve the nursing workforce problem, at least in the state of Ohio. So that was really exciting to see that come together.

The other thing that I've been involved with, with students in education, is I teach a study abroad class that largely revolves around humanitarian aid. This past January, I was able to take a group which did have some healthcare professional students, largely pre-medical students, undergrads, but we also had some students that were not healthcare professional students. Instead of just focusing on the role of the healthcare provider within humanitarian aid crises settings, I really kind of expanded it so that they could look at those types of situations through the lens of servant leadership.

As a part of this class, these undergraduate students ended up working on a project with the State Department that looked at developing innovative solutions using the steps of design thinking, similar to what we did with the Policy Hackathon, to develop innovative solutions to mitigating the effects of climate change in Ethiopia. And it was really cool watching them work side by side with the State Department to develop these solutions. So really cool real-life learning.

HJH:

Sara, many of us experience inflection points in our lives and careers, where we need to make changes or adjustments in our plans. You certainly have experienced this. What tips or advice would you give to learners if they are considering moving toward a career as an educator in the health professions?

SA:

It's always exciting to run across somebody who has that same passion, so I do love these types of conversations. But my first question to this person is usually I ask for their rationale for this choice, just because I want to make sure that my advice that I'm about to give them aligns with their professional goals. So for example, are they even aware that when you become a professor or you pursue a career where you're an educator, that generally speaking, if you're educating health professional students, you're doing it within a university setting. And there's more to the job than just the teaching responsibilities.

And so a lot of us, if we're working as educators full-time, end up being on a tenure track, which means that in addition to your teacher responsibilities, you also have research and service obligations. Once there's a little bit of education that goes on about that, then trying to figure out where their priorities are, in terms of, are they most interested in teaching, or are they most interested in research? And based on those answers, trying to help them figure out the best way forward, and the best type of university, which would be the best fit.

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation
Vital Voices — Season 3, Episode 4
Interview with Sara Arter

I also talk openly about my own experiences, the pros and the cons of the job, because I do think that it helps give a realistic picture of what it's like to be a professor. I think a big draw sometimes, or maybe a marketing technique that we use in nursing education, is that we tell people that you do have a lot of flexibility and autonomy in the job, which is really nice and it's true. But unless you have a great deal of discipline, the requirements of the job can very easily spill over into your personal life. So in order to stay in it for the long run, you really need to do a good job of creating boundaries between your professional and personal life. But I always try to end these conversations by emphasizing how rewarding this career has been for me, including all of the awesome experiences, including being a part of the Macy family and the mentoring that I'm receiving through this project, and then also doing things like the study abroad. There's a lot of really cool experiences that have resulted from my own career trajectory.

HJH:

Sara, thank you so much for sharing your experiences and scholarly passions with your characteristic candor and enthusiasm. It is always such a treat to talk with you. I imagine that many of our educator listeners are going to feel a renewed sense of energy as they go back to their learners and to their teaching activities. You remind all of us of the joy that can be found in teaching, as well as the powerful transformation that we are each capable of achieving when we employ the type of persistence and dedication that you do. I am looking forward to learning more about the progress of your work, and your many projects in your second year as a Macy Faculty Scholar.

SA:

Thank you so much for your time today, I really appreciate the opportunity to share a little bit about my work.

HJH:

Thank you for listening, and we hope you'll share this conversation with others. You can find this and all episodes of the Vital Voices Podcast on the [Macy Foundation website](#). We hope you will subscribe to the series so that you won't miss other conversations with the 2023 Scholars.

We are now accepting applications for the [2025 cohort of Macy Faculty Scholars](#). You can learn more, and apply, via our website, www.macyfoundation.org. The application portal will close on September 15th, 2024.