

Narrator: Laura Lopez Camacho

Interviewer: Jiachen Han

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JH: My name is Jiachen Han, and today is May 7th 2024. I will have the honor of interviewing Laura though Zoom, this interview is for the Race and Oral History Project at UCSD. Can you Please state your full name?

LLC: Yeah. My name is Laura Lopez Camacho.

JH: Thank you. And let's start like the first question is, could you please like start by introducing yourself like I would love to hear about your like background, like, what are you studying at SDSU(San Diego State University) and which year you will graduate.

LLC: So okay, so my name is Laura. I am studying at SDSU getting my master's in social work and specialization in Macro, which is community development and administration. I am 24 years old, and I also graduated from San Diego State University for my undergraduate with criminal justice in Spanish. And then I'm going to graduate my master's in next year in May of 2025. It's a 2 year program. And then I also work outside of those things. My part time job is with San Ysidro health as a social worker as well. Some of the interest I have is helping communities is learning how to create programs that will, you know, advocate for those who are underserved. So that's what a lot of my job does. I also volunteer with the nonprofit organizations, more and more in like the youth style. Will youth programs that focus on youth development. What motivated me to join SDSU is their social work program. So I think one of the best ones. And it is in San Diego. It's local to where I grew up, and it also allows me to go to school and like-go to school and go to work as well. So that's why I joined SDSU.

JH: That's great. And the second question will be, how did you first learn about the Barrio Logan College Institution? Like what specifically attracted you to volunteer with this organization? Was there like a particular event, or like individual or story, that inspire you to join this organization?

LLC: Yeah. So I first learned about BLCI, or BLCI through San Diego State University. I never knew what it was. I knew about the community in Barrio Logan, but I never knew about BLCI. So when I applied for my master program, one year you have to do an internship, and then next year you have to do another internship at another site. So you still may like the interest of populations you wanna work with, like one to five. We can-I remember, I put I wanted to work with the child-like youth population first, and then like

other populations, etc, like you can rate them. And so you give that to San Diego State University, and then when they're doing their assigning students or practicums or their internships, then they just pair you once they pair you. You do an interview with the agency, and then, if everything works out, you can enter that agency, or you can request another one. You have a max of 2 agencies that you can interview with. So I got paired or matched with BLCI through that program, and then I met with Irma Castro, who is the person who supervises all the interns here at BLCI, and I had my interview with her, and I really liked it. I saw where, like I saw—I really had agreements with where she was going. And that's how I got pair to BLCI. And then I started like volunteering here more like doing my internship here for a whole year. So it was like a one year commitment. From August 2023 to August 2024 weeks. Well, July 2024. What Specifically attracted you to volunteer with this organization was? I didn't know about the organization at first, but what first matched us was that they have the youth, youth development and the academic. So all of that really was in accordance with what I wanted to do with my career, or like, be with this population. And then I just, you know, the more I was here, the more I liked it. Bairro Logan really the college to really has like grades. Third grade to 12, so it really gives you a diversity of ages to work with. Not only that, but the parents. So that's why I really—what attracted me to that. And I like doing the service here. And furthermore, the staff. Right? So you get to interact with all the staff and learn from their own experiences. And it was just a really good environment to work in. So that's what I really like about the BLCI.

JH: Awesome. Could you describe, like the activities and the program you participate in—at the BLCI? What are your primary responsibility doing the like typical day of volunteering?

LLC: Yeah. So my—because of SDSU curriculum, I have to do at least the majority has to be working in direct practice with the students. So for a masters of social work program, this can be kind of almost basically offering therapy services to the students or counseling service to the students. And you would—I usually get referred students who for lack of motivation, have really low grades, have any disturbances at home or school. So what one will call those students who are going through very challenging situations. So I would meet with them throughout the year, I would say, had a steady caseload of about 5 students, more or less. More in terms of like, sometimes I will see the parents once in a while to also for services or other students who needed services, but those was—those were like 1 or 2 meetings, but 5 students. We would be with them weekly, consecutively until the end of the year. The students like I mentioned, they would like motivation for school. They had problems or challenges, I rather say, outside of school in terms of like their behavior, stuff like that or their mental health. Those students could have undergone bullying or stuff like that have also met with parents who have had a history of intimate partner violence and other things and struggles that I help them connect with resources. Depending on their age group and where they live and their health home. Then I will help them connect to those resources. And then the other part of my program here, which was like about 25% of it would be based on a macro level and that macro level with the social work would be policies or community development and the administration aspect of it. So for that my field instructor, which Irma, who is the person who supervises the interns here for SDSU. Came up with the project of

doing a community service fair. A community service fair for Barrio Logan college students. Here at this Barrio Logan site. And basically, I had to get a bunch of agencies from the community mainstream and just local agencies that can provide community service to the students, especially juniors and high school—well high school students and seniors. And like a few middle school students, and basically the goal is to get them to walk around like a tabling event, to find places where they can do their community service for college applications within the community. And then it's also a chance for the agencies that were inside the Community Service fair to interact with Barrio Logan colleges to build networks. Right? So that was another part of that I focused on the first semester was like getting those things set up and the logistics of it, and the invitation. And—and it focused on more of a macro level type of thing. And then likewise this all makes like what it could look like for a career fair or something like that for the students of BLCI. If they go out into the, you know, when they grow older and they go into career fairs. Type of questions they can ask the benefits they can get and stuff like that. So that's kind of like what I did during masters for that whole year.

JH: Yeah, that's awesome. Thank you for the sharing. And could you reflect on like a memorable moment or event from volunteering at BLCI, and like what made this moment special? And what impact did they have on you and those like who's involved?

LLC: So, a very memorable moment would be—I think working with the students and realizing that the job that you're doing here is impactful. Right? So like, I say I met with about 5 students through a regular basis for the whole year. And it wasn't until—like mostly the end of the year, where you would see that the the progress they've made so even the parents would come up and tell me, Hey, I've really seen a change in my kids. Lifestyle, or like the way he comes about certain things. So, having that reassurance that the work you're doing here and the services you're providing, those actually have an impact on the individual. And hopefully, that individual can have an impact back on the community. So I think that's a very memorable experience or moment is when you do realize that the impact you make does have a difference. And it does—It does involves everything around very system wise in terms of like everything—tying it together. And then, like I said, the staff also made everything the experience very memorable, because without them you really don't have that communication of the student, the like the staff or the teacher, and then the intern. Right? or the social worker. So that interactions or communications really do help a lot too. But yeah.

JH: Okay, cool. So next question will be like, can you discuss a challenging experience you have encoded like voluntary at BLCI. What was the situation? How did you manage it? And what key lesson did you like—Learn from it?

LLC: I would say it's a challenging experience is not having control of—of certain things. So, for example. Sometimes the students will be able to show to their lessons or sections because of external factors. You know the parents would—the parent was sick. The kid was sick. The trans—transportation wasn't there like the parents had an emergency or something that is beyond our heads or beyond our controls, and that that will cost the student to fall behind in certain places, right? Not even like, well yeah, with sections with me, but also with their

specialist here in their workshops and stuff like that. So that was—that was a challenging experience having to be able to coordinate and adapt what lessons I had going on, or the curriculum or things I wanted to work with them. And being able to just adapt different things to those external factors that we can't control same thing right? If I believe a student or a parent needs therapy like more than we can offer here, BLCI, something more official through their clinical homes like through a clinical social worker or a license marriage. And what is[?][unclear]--A license marriage. And I can't remember—license marriage and family therapy. If[?][unclear] Right? So somebody whose licenses can provide more services. But they either don't have the time. They don't have the health insurance or something. Those also bring up a lot of external challenges and factors that we can't fix. Something that one of my mentors told me was like, you can't force somebody to take therapy right? So then, if I really believe that they would benefit from it, I can't force them to go, or like I can't force them to get help for themselves. So that's also very another thing that was like challenging to encounter, but also trying to accept that I will provide other resources that could be, you know—could be there if they—if they do want to access it. But we can't force anybody to like—do certain things that we may believe it's good for them, or we can't control certain factors. That limits them for—for them to come here for the benefit.

JH: Yeah, I agree with that. So like, how have you? Like the volunteering experience that the BLCI influence your academic pursuit and a career aspiration. Are there like, specific insights or motivation that have emerged from your involvement?

LLC: So, the volunteer experiences or the internship experience at the BLCI influence within my academic pursuits and career as precious is that—it's reinforce the already known idea that there is a lot of gaps between school systems after school programs and mental health, even when it comes to any age, their grades 12 grades with students and parents alike. And so, it's help reinforce that that there is a gap. And there is a need for like programs like this, after programs to have somebody who's available after hours to provide services like we can. And then it has also motive—Not motivated, but gave me an insight that I can work with—with those ages, with younger—with the younger population. But it's, I feel based on my own experience to working at San Ysidro Health to help with older adults or adults population. That children between the 8—between third grade and middle school might not be my forte. I think I can work a lot better with older—older, younger adults, like high school and adults in general. Next year I will be also intern—internship—doing an internship with more of the gerontology population. So it will be really interesting to see 2 aspects right once you have really young children, and then you have very old population. So, BLCI has helping me see that, although I can do it work with the younger population. It seems it's give me an insight of like how much I can handle, and like the experiences I need to understand, to be able to help them move to—towards those challenges that they face at that age range.  
But yeah.

JH: Awesome. Could you share an experience where—where you feel your efforts impact children at BLCI, and what changes did you observe as a result of your engagement?

LLC: Yeah, so—and I had experience where I felt my effort significantly impacted each child or group within BLCI was like—let's see, an experience where you fill your [?] [unclear]. So I had a student that I met with constantly during the second semester of school, didn't give me a lot to work with, because I wasn't there the whole year. But this student was very, kind of for refusing to go actually and see a—a clinical social worker or a license therapist because his idea or the student's idea. Sorry, was that there were just so many tests like, Yes, we—you know, as therapists or as social workers, you have to do assessments. Assessments is why you base things, evidence based practices and all those things. But when it comes to working with children. The children don't understand that you have to do all these things, to be able to help them and meet them where they are. So, it was an experience that I had was that I had to explain to this student like, you know, we do these things because these are things are gonna help in the long run. So kind of explain the back part of what we do help them understand that. Okay, maybe they have some reason to their madness, or something like that. And once this student understood that the things we do, or the assessments that we—we make them do like the mental status, for example. Other things that how they will undergo the Phq-9 [Patient Health Questionnaire]. For depression scales like stuff like that. The social determinants of health, etc. All these assessments we—we have—if that helps us see where they are. And for them to understand that was able to let them see that they can still go get services. They will still go through those tests. But at the end of the day everything's gonna be worth it, because from there on we can keep on going. And you know, you will see the impact of evidence based, practices being used and modalities to be for—for your mental health to be better. And then, when I explained that to the student, he, you know, he realized that okay, different people have different modalities in different ways of doing things. So he was more open to the idea of seeing an actual license social worker or a therapist with their help. And they were more open to data of like, I will—I will do this test. I will receive the help, and I will work with them to be better rather than just like I don't wanna go because there's so many tests. And then, after that, the sooner was like, I'll just fill the test. And I'm like, Well, who are you really helping here, you know. So, that experience really significantly impacted—I think the student. And because it may—it allows them to see that they there's more to the picture than just like going in talking about certain challenges and like leaving the office. But it's actually a progressive journey towards your mental health that you're focusing on.

JH: And—like—In your view, what are the most effective ways volunteers can make a positive contribution to BLCI? How can this contribution create a long term—like impact?

LLC: Yeah. So, some of the most effective ways volunteers can make a positive contribution to BLCI, I think is, being committed and open minded to working with the population. So this is a nonprofit agency. So a lot of things, you know our funding comes from a lot of grants or federal things that are outside of our control. So sometimes we might not be—be a capacity in terms of like staff. So really, your job or your role might—might indicate you do one thing. But then, the next time you're doing another thing right. So, having that open minded mindfulness and ability to just be able to act on any tasks that's given within. Obviously your scope. It's—it's a fair game and be committed. It's not like I can show up here 3 weeks and

then leave. Right? Because now the students I see have built, report and have built trace. And then for me, just to leave them would be kind of, you know, that lack of commitment would really show, and I think that would really affect the students in the—in a negative way. So commitment and being open minded to contributing to the—to like the development of the mission statement for BLCI. Right? Breaking the cycle of poverty through academic success. So one day I could be, you know, doing direct practice. One day I could be doing a volun—community Service fair. And then another day I could be helping the specialists paint something. So, right? So it's really about like be committed to the mission of the agency. If it's a nonprofit, even being more open minded to like many different hats you're gonna have to wear. So, I think that—that's some ways that volunteers can be more effective to making a positive contribution to BLCI and then creating a long term impact too.

JH: Yeah, awesome. So the last question will be like, based on your experience. Like, what advice would you like offer to other SDSU students? Consider volunteering at BLCI. Or, like other similar programs, what should they expect? And what kind of mindset is beneficial for this kind of voluntary work?

LLC: So what advice would I offer to SDSU students that consider volunteer BLCI or similar after school nonprofit programs would be almost the same thing. Right? Have an open mind and be committed to the mission statement. Obviously, not all agencies like BLCI are gonna have the same mission statement, but a lot of them will focus on the greater good in terms of bringing in community values that they're in and having a goal and a reachable objective. So, being able to commit to that in terms of like. I'm willing to, you know—learn from the community where the agency is at and develop practices that will help the population. There is something very important, because me—coming here to BLCI and Barrio Logan, which is an underserved, usually marginalized community, you know, have to understand the struggles that the students go through and their parents go through. And it may be very different the students here from students in the place in Orange County, right? So, having also the you know—the ability to distinguish those things very important, and I think internship as SDSU students in terms should be able to do those things and be committed to that, and having that open—open mindset and some things that they would expect or that is beneficial to the kind of volunteer work that they would do is that agencies like BLCI once again, an nonprofit agencies usually bring a very interesting way of knowing that they kind of make you feel like you're not progressive. But at the end of the day you're doing an impact like you feel like your job here is very minimal, like you might come in, do tutoring to some kids and then leave right? But you don't feel like you're doing that much of a thing because you're helping a third grader do division or adding or multiplication. But you also have to understand that you giving that your time and your expertise to those students—are also—they're also seeing you as a role model in some ways. So, you're—you're doing what a lot more impact than you actually think you are. So it is very important that when you come to volunteer to certain places like BLCI, you carry yourself in a way that you—another kid might be looking at you, and you might be their role model, or they might be looking at you for some advice and stuff like that. So you might, you know it's good to be mindful of the environment you are in, and to be

pro—as professional as you can, but also to understand the population you're working with is very important. Yeah.

JH: Awesome, congratulations on—on your amazing work. And thank you so much for sharing your story today. I really appreciate you taking the time to share this with us, and this is the conclusion of my interview at the Barrier Logan College institution with Laura, and so thank you again.