

U Student Shares Her Story At The White House:



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The last day of Fall Semester was an exciting time for students at the U, but especially for graduate student Arielle Spanvill.

A project manager for Utah Support Advocates for Recovery Awareness, Spanvill educates the greater Salt Lake recovery community on the benefits within the Affordable Care Act they could use. One day she received a phone call from a fellow USARA associate.

“My co-worker asked if I had received my insurance through the exchange and if I had used it to help me

maintain my recovery,” Spanvill said. “I told her yes, and when I asked why, my co-worker said, ‘Because the White House wants to know.’ It was an amazing moment.”

Shortly after, Spanvill began gathering information for her bio to send to the White House. At the age of 12, Spanvill became involved in substance abuse. The addiction would follow her until age 24, when Spanvill decided to take back control of her life. Jan. 26 of this year will mark six years during which Spanvill has remained free of any mind-altering substances.

Last spring, Spanvill participated as a Hinckley Institute intern at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in Washington DC. The Tuesday before Christmas, Spanvill did a phone interview with SAMHSA, who loved her personal story of recovery. The interview prompted an invite to the White House, and on Jan. 21 Spanvill addressed the nation with her story of recovery as well as her gratitude for the Affordable Care Act.

“I feel like Cinderella at the ball,” Spanvill said. “This is nothing short of a dream come true for me. I am truly honored to represent the Salt Lake recovery community.”

According to RyLee Curtis, a Senior Health Policy Analyst in Utah, a total of 135,450 adult Utahns are in need of treatment services for substance use disorders. Only 14,726 of them are able to receive treatments through county-funded services, which leaves over 120,000 Utahns in need of substance use disorder services. The Healthy Utah Plan closes the coverage gap by offering private health insurance.

Curtis encouraged the younger generation to speak up to legislators to make a change.

“Utah can do better than leaving over 120,000 Utahns in need of treatment services,” Curtis said.

“Recovery is good for Utah’s economy because when Utahns get sober, they are working, they are paying taxes and they go back to school — much like Arielle — and become great successes.”

Spanvill’s outlook remains grateful for the opportunities she has been given and hopeful that others who are currently fighting the battle of substance abuse will find access to the help they need.

“The Alcohol and Drug Abuse Clinic in the U’s hospital has saved my life,” Spanvill said. “Recovery from drugs and alcohol is possible. Don’t count out the “junkies” — they will surprise you. Find a passion. When I discuss health care I can feel passion streaming through my veins, it gets me going. That is how I know I have made the right choice with my life.”

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