I arrived at the University of Vermont, ready to begin my undergraduate studies, with the certainty that psychology would be the most meaningful and effective way for me to make a strong, positive impact on society. At first I believed I wanted to go into private practice after attaining my Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology because I wanted to have a positive impact on people’s lives. After my experiences as a research assistant, I have developed a passion for research, and have come to understand the far-reaching and long-lasting impact one can have through research. While I still wish to pursue an education rooted in clinical psychology, my career goals have moved beyond and broadened from clinical practice to clinical science and research.

As an undergraduate, I was highly motivated to pursue a variety of experiences within psychology to give me a deeper understanding of the field. During my undergraduate education I was involved in Dr. Rex Forehand’s Children and Families Laboratory for three semesters as a research assistant. In this role, I learned skills such as coding parent child interactions using an observational coding system, entering data using SPSS, and conducting comprehensive literature reviews to assist with publications. While working in Dr. Forehand’s research laboratory, I was afforded the opportunity to pursue my own research project, which ultimately was published after graduating. During this time, I also volunteered as an undergraduate teaching assistant for the Child Development class, taught by Dr. Dianna Murray-Close. Through this experience I was exposed to the academic side of a career in psychology, further broadening my understanding and interest in the field. As a result of my hard work and dedication I graduated with a 3.94 major GPA, as well as with a departmental award given each year to a student who demonstrates high achievements in independent research while maintaining high standards in academics overall.

After graduating, I wanted to gain further experience in clinical science and research, so I accepted a volunteer research assistant position in Dr. Alice Schermerhorn’s developmental psychopathology research laboratory. My responsibilities included learning protocols for the numerous experimenter roles, recruiting participants, scheduling family visits, collecting data on participating families, and data entry and verification. Soon after my start, Dr. Schermerhorn offered me a part-time paid position in the lab, which came with the opportunity to coordinate the fMRI portion of the study and design the stimulus presentation packages in SuperLab. I was trained to administer the mock scanner and fMRI portions of the study to participants through the fMRI center at Fletcher Allen, the hospital associated with UVM. I was also trained to administer the EEG portion of our study. At the end of this summer the Research Coordinator position in the lab became available, and I was fortunate enough to be offered the full-time position. I now oversee the work of the undergraduate and graduate research assistants, manage their schedules for lab availability, oversee training all of the incoming RAs, manage purchasing and finances for the lab, and handle the daily organizational tasks of the lab, while continuing with all of my previous responsibilities. The evolution of my role from a volunteer RA to a full-time Research Coordinator has given me continued insight into the research process, and a deeper understanding of what is involved in conducting research. This experience has prepared me for a broad range of responsibilities I might be faced with in graduate school, while solidifying my interest in psychological research as well as my dedication to pursing a research career in clinical psychology.

Through my psychology courses I developed a broad interest in family systems and child development. After a volunteer experience following my second year of college, though, I developed deeper, more refined research interests. I have always had a love of traveling, as well as a sense of responsibility to make a positive change in the world. In the summer of 2011 I chose to travel to Ghana to volunteer in a small orphanage. This was the beginning of a strong bond, which has continued to grow in the years since. During my time there I provided daily care for 30 children who were living at the orphanage. Volunteers, like myself, spent the days preparing and serving meals, washing clothes, caring for the smaller children, as well as finding ways to entertain all of the children and keep them safe and happy. In addition we were offered the chance to help teach classes in the school at the orphanage. I was amazed at how well the children performed in school, interacted with their peers, and navigated the stream of transient teachers. As volunteers, we were also told why each child was currently living at the orphanage, and a bit of their history, so we had a better sense of the problems facing the local residents. I couldn’t believe the adversity these children had faced; everything from abandonment, to the loss of all immediate family members, to being sold into slavery. Yet somehow they were developing into bright, happy children who maintained focus in school, shared the little amounts of food they had, and appreciated all they were given. I saw first-hand that a tough childhood doesn’t automatically prescribe a child to a life of mental or behavioral problems; it is possible for some kids to overcome extreme challenges and develop with what seem to be few outwardly apparent differences from other children.

After my trip I reflected on my experiences and realized that child resilience and positive outcomes, despite adversity, was the area of psychology I am the most intrigued by and passionate about. I have since traveled back to Ghana for a second visit, and maintain frequent contact with the orphanage owner as well as with a number of the kids. Through the continued development of my relationship with the orphanage, my interest and intrigue in the development of resilience in children continues to grow. Based on this experience I gained specificity in my clinical and research interests. My goal now is to focus my education and research on children who have experienced extreme adversity early on, such as the loss of one or both parents, or the transition into institutional care. I hope to not only look at factors leading to both maladaptive *and* adaptive outcomes, but also prevention and intervention methods to foster positive outcomes in children facing adverse situations and environments.

Through dedicated research of numerous Ph.D. programs in Clinical Psychology, I have concluded that the program at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, working with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ will be the best fit to achieve my educational goals. \_\_\_\_\_\_’s work in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ ties directly into my research interests by examining \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. My academic records, as well as my extensive experience in research demonstrate my capability, as well as my strong dedication to the field of psychology. I have a clear sense of the direction with which I would like to focus my research, and I believe this will make the transition into a Ph.D. program a smooth and successful one.