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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

George O'Donnell

The Melanie Foundation

347-463-4304

[george@themelaniefoundation.com](mailto:george@themelaniefoundation.com)

245 Washington St. #4666

Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

## **The Melanie Foundation Announces 2018 Scholarship Recipients**

**SARATOGA SPRINGS, NY, August 29, 2018** – The Melanie Foundation is proud to announce that Ellie Adelman of Denver, CO, Devon Little of Seattle, WA, Kelsey Mora of Highland Park, IL, Brandon Nichter of San Diego, CA and Veronica Ozog of New York, NY, are the 2018 recipients of the Foundation's annual scholarship, honoring the life and work of Melanie Merola O'Donnell. The scholarship is awarded to graduate-level students in the mental health field that demonstrate commitment to helping others through the exercise of empathy and wisdom. Recipients are awarded based on who best exhibits their devotion to their fields of study. The recipients convey their commitment to their studies both inside and outside the classroom through research, volunteering, and work experience. Those awarded are recognized for serving communities in a manner consistent with Melanie Merola O'Donnell's values of compassion, generosity, respect and commitment to others. George O'Donnell, president of The Melanie Foundation states, "We're always honored to support those who, like Melanie, are committed to providing mental health services as part of their personal missions. This year is no different, and it's incredibly exciting to us to provide this modest measure of encouragement to Ellie, Devon, Kelsey, Brandon and Veronica."

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**Ellie Adelman** is currently pursuing her Masters of Social Work with a focus on mental health service provision in immigrant and refugee communities from the University of Denver. Ms. Adelman's passion for this work was sparked while doing work and research for six months in Northern Uganda.

Ms. Adelman reflects on the honor of the award, "I am so incredibly grateful to the Melanie Foundation for selecting me for this scholarship in Melanie's memory. Knowing what mental health access meant to her, I am honored to continue that work through my Social Work education and career. This scholarship helps me afford the cost of my MSW at University of Denver, where I have focused my work and research on trauma healing in refugee populations. Many thanks to the Merola family for creating this opportunity as a way of carrying out Melanie's beautiful legacy."



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**Devon Little** is currently pursuing her Masters of Social Work from the University of Washington. Additionally, she holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Colorado College and a Graduate Certificate in Restorative Justice from Eastern Mennonite University. Prior to pursuing her Masters degree, Ms. Little spent more than 10 years as a facilitator and program manager in the non-profit sector, dedicated to improving mental health amongst clients dealing with poverty, illness, abuses and other adverse experiences.

Upon receiving notification of the award, Ms. Little said, “I am touched and deeply grateful to receive this scholarship. Support from groups like the Melanie Foundation is what allows people like myself to do our part creating a world whose bottom-line is human dignity. I aim to uphold the values of the scholarship as I work to cultivate health and wellbeing in both individuals and the community at large.”

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**Kelsey Mora** is a Master of Counseling Psychology student at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. In addition to pursuing her Masters Degree, Ms. Mora works as a Certified Child Life Specialist in the pediatric intensive care unit at Advocate Children’s Hospital.

Ms. Mora said, “I am honored and grateful to be selected as a recipient of the Melanie Foundation scholarship. The awarded money will go toward my Masters in Counseling Psychology with a concentration in child and adolescence. As a Certified Child Life Specialist who helps children impacted by illness, injury, and loss, I intend to use my advanced degree to integrate mental health into the medical model and to expand my work beyond the hospital setting. When I was an adolescent, I lost my friend to Leukemia and was very close to his dying experience. I am dedicated to making a difference in the memory of both my friend and Ms. Melanie O'Donnell who both died too soon.”

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**Brandon Nichter** is a PhD candidate in the clinical psychology program at Arizona State University. Mr. Nichter earned his bachelor's degree in Psychology with distinction from Lewis & Clark College and his M.A. in Clinical Psychology from Arizona State University. As a graduate student, Brandon worked for the International Rescue Committee where he provided individual and group psychotherapy to refugees and asylum-seekers displaced by war, persecution, and gender-based violence. He also completed an externship with the Department of Veterans Affairs, delivering evidence-based treatments for mood, anxiety, and trauma-related disorders to veterans and their families.

Upon receiving news of the award Mr. Nichter said, “I feel extremely honored to receive a scholarship from the Melanie Foundation. As a Melanie Scholar, I plan to use my scholarship to pursue advanced clinical and cultural training focused on the treatment of psychological trauma. Ultimately, my long-term career goal is to work for an international organization that assists at-risk populations to recover from the mental health sequelae of trauma.”

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**Veronica Ozog** is currently a PhD candidate in Clinical Psychology at the Derner Institute of Advanced Psychological Studies at Adelphi University. Additionally Ms. Ozog holds a Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology from Teachers College, Columbia University. She has worked with marginalized populations including those diagnosed with schizophrenia and



experiencing psychosis, incarcerated males and asylum seekers and is currently working with children and adolescents within the foster care system.

In reflecting on the award she stated: “I am sincerely honored to have been selected as a recipient of the Melanie Foundation Scholarship, and am humbled to extend Melanie Merola O’Donnell’s impactful and inspiring legacy. Melanie’s passion is undoubtedly reflected through the foundation’s commitment to respect, compassion, kindness, and regard for the human condition - sentiments I myself strive to keep at the forefront of my work. I thank the Melanie Foundation for their great generosity, which will allow me to continue my work in helping those experiencing psychic distress, in hopes of providing safe spaces of healing and growth.”

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### **About Melanie Merola O’Donnell**

Melanie Merola O’Donnell lived an inspirational life, and though it was cut short, it was extremely full. Throughout her life, Melanie worked to help people in need. She volunteered with, and later became a staff member of, the National Organization for Victim Assistance, and she was a board member of the Capital Area Crisis Response Team for 8 years. She trained crisis responders for both organizations until 2004. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Melanie coordinated and managed 28 crisis response teams in New York City and 8 teams in Washington. She also aided crisis responders in Somerset County, PA, following the attacks. She spent several weeks in New York City, helping grieving families who were visiting the site of the attacks and coping with the aftermath. She provided care to individuals affected by natural disasters, plane crashes, school violence, the civil war in Sierra Leone, workplace violence, and homicide. In June 2004, she was honored by CACRT as the first recipient of the Melanie Merola O’Donnell Award for Excellence. At the time of her death, she was enrolled in a doctoral program in clinical psychology at Antioch University New England, in Keene, NH. Amidst Melanie’s professional responsibilities and accomplishments, her devotion to her husband, son, mother, father, sister, family, and friends was never compromised.

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### **About The Melanie Foundation**

The Melanie Foundation was created with the principal purpose of extending Melanie Merola O’Donnell’s legacy of helping others through caring and compassionate mental healthcare, with a particular focus on enhancing a sense of community. O’Donnell’s family and friends have joined together to celebrate her life with this cause, hoping to identify others who share O’Donnell’s commitment to helping those in need, and providing those individuals financial assistance for the pursuit of graduate degrees in a mental health field. The Melanie Foundation’s mission is to foster support for mental health. The Foundation contributes to this mission in two ways – scholarships to students pursuing graduate education in a mental health field, and direct contributions to local organizations that address mental health concerns.

**For more information about The Melanie Foundation or to register for The Saratoga Palio: Melanie Merola O’Donnell Memorial Race on September 16, 2018 visit [www.themelaniefoundation.com](http://www.themelaniefoundation.com)**