

Alex Aide: Building a Kinder, Braver World

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WVU Law graduate Alex Aide works for Born This Way Foundation, overseeing global initiatives that empower youth to thrive and drive positive change in their communities and beyond.



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Alex Aide, WVU Law '13, is the director of programs for Born This Way Foundation, co-founded by pop singer Lady Gaga and her mother Cynthia Germanotta, a native West Virginian and a WVU graduate. The Foundation supports young people's mental health and works with them to build a kinder, braver world.

How did you end up working a "J.D. Advantage" job? Was this your plan when you graduated from WVU Law?

I decided when I was graduating from WVU Law that my top goal when it came to job-hunting was to work with an organization that was helping the world in some way, rather than adding to its problems. My first job after law school was as a Fellow at Proper Daley in Los Angeles, where I helped their team guide clients like Disney and Viacom toward making sound charitable and social impact strategies.

From there, I moved to the WME talent agency, where I worked on a team that provided philanthropic consulting to the agency's clients, including Charlize Theron, Matt Damon, and Lady Gaga. That is how I met Born This Way Foundation's team, and after learning more about the mission they set out to achieve along with the wonderful people helping to build it, I knew that's where I eventually wanted to be one day.

In 2016, I ended up moving to New York City when I started working for Arianna Huffington to support her during the launch of her "Sleep Revolution" book and tour. Then, about a year later, I heard from Born This Way Foundation's team that they were looking to hire someone to lead their programs. I knew that was my job, and I, of course, went for it. I'm very grateful they hired me and have trusted me in this role ever since.

This work is also personal to me as I'm someone who has struggled with depression and anxiety. I know how lifesaving kindness can be when it's included in the mix of mental healthcare. It's not just my job; it's also my personal mission to share that with the world and encourage a kinder society — period.

I've met so many people across the country through Foundation events and tours. I'll always carry all of their stories, their tragedies, their triumphs in my heart. And all of that informs and drives what I do every day, which is to make the best possible programming to support their mental health, wherever they are now – and for anyone I'll meet in the future.

How does Born This Way Foundation help change the world?

I go to events as a speaker, and the second I say the words "mental health" on a microphone, I can see the shoulders of every adult in the room tense up to the point where they're almost touching their ears. Meanwhile, the young people in the room are leaning forward so they can hear more. They want to talk about these issues. They want to be heard. They want to support their loved ones. This younger generation is so incredible and ready to learn; Born This Way Foundation is here to meet those needs.

Our organization is important because young people deserve resources, tools, and education to support their mental health. Not only that, but they also deserve to be equipped with the know-how to be supportive of their peers and loved ones when they're facing struggles, too. They deserve to be in a world where, if a friend tells them they're going through something tough, that they know what to say to help them rather than add to their anxiety or distress. They deserve to know if they are feeling suicidal that there is help readily available, and that, most of all, it's always OK to ask for help. They deserve a world where there is no stigma when it comes to talking about mental health.

How did WVU Law help prepare you for your career?

WVU Law fostered and encouraged my ambition, perseverance, and creativity to go for the exciting and game-changing opportunities that might be off the beaten path, but absolutely worth the effort to get there.

Jennifer Powell, my advisor during law school, changed the trajectory of my life. She believed in me at a time when I felt such immense self-doubt. Law school can be extremely challenging in a myriad of ways, as anyone reading this knows. I told her I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, she looked at me and said, "Uh, hello. You just won an award for running OUTlaw. I think you need to explore this further." I appreciated her kindness more than I can ever say. She truly changed my life with that conversation.

There were so many spectacular professors and leaders at WVU Law during my time. Professor Marjorie McDiarmid was my favorite professor. I never told her that, and she probably doesn't remember me because I tried to stay under the radar in all my classes so I wouldn't get called on. But the way she taught Evidence was so incredibly efficient while also going over such a vast amount of material. We learned an incredible amount while none of us were ever humiliated — a model of teaching every professor should be required to subscribe to.

What is it like to work in a large city after attending law school in West Virginia?

Living in New York City is like going to the gym: you know you're going to sweat. You know it's going to be a lot of hard work. You know there are tons of people around you who can do what you do and take your spot at any time. But, you're going to be so much better for it. You're going to meet incredible people along the way who inspire you to be better and open possibilities up that you didn't even know existed. You become very strong, but you have to take care of yourself, or you'll get injured. I could go on with this analogy!

But more seriously, I love New York with my entire heart. I grew up wanting to be here, and I truly feel so lucky to be able to call this home. Even right now, during the COVID crisis, when it has been scary at times, I'm proud of the way New Yorkers have come together to do everything we can to slow the spread of the virus. There's a real sense of community here because even though every New Yorker is totally different from each other, we all share a love for this city. We want to see it come back stronger than ever. That's the common thread running through all of us, and I hope we'll get there faster because of it.

What advice do you have for law students or young lawyers?

For anyone reading this who knows exactly what they want to do after law school and have a dream planned out for the rest of their lives, I can't tell you how happy I am to hear that — but this answer is not for you. To the rest of you: you've got the more exciting road ahead.

There is so much that this world has to offer that you're not going to believe until one day, it all comes together. I remember seeing Lady Gaga launch Born This Way Foundation live on YouTube from my apartment in Morgantown during law school. Do you think for a second I thought that I would ever end up getting the chance to be part of the team one day? Hell no!

Life has incredible ways of putting you on a path to where you're supposed to be. It all started when I asked myself, "What can I do to help better the world rather than add to its problems?" I took opportunities that let me do that, worked really hard, and kept my head up through all of it, even through deep professional and personal challenges. I'm proud of who I've become, and I'm even more excited about who I will continue to grow to be.

Anything else you'd like to say?

I just want to shout out my family and all the people I love in my life. I wouldn't be anywhere without my parents. I appreciate their love and support for me more than I could ever fully articulate. I just love them.

As a WVU Law student, Aide was president of OUTlaw, a student organization that supports and raises awareness of issues within the LGBTQ+ community. In addition to a J.D. from WVU Law, Aide holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from WVU.