

Citlally Garcia
Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholar Class of 2013
Studying biochemistry at Fairleigh Dickinson University
Interned at Rutgers University at the New Jersey Pinelands Field Station

When she was 8 years old, Citlally's stepfather took his own life. As the oldest child, Citlally began cleaning houses after school to help support her family. When she was 14, her mother sent Citlally to the U.S. to build a better life.

The transition was rough. At school, students bullied Citlally. Home wasn't any easier. She moved in with her biological father in New Jersey who, at that time, she barely knew. His wife was not happy about the arrangement. Citlally spent most of her time alone in her bedroom, studying.

One of the ESL teachers at school reached out to Citlally, gained her trust and stopped the bullies from hassling her. She also gave Citlally advice on how to cope with her problems at home.

The two remained close even after Citlally went to high school. In the summers, Citlally helped her mentor teach ESL classes to students that reminded Citlally of her younger self.

After graduating high school, Citlally intended to work. Instead, she received the Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholars award and was able to go to college. Her mother supported the idea. "If you have a career and you have a future you can help us more that way," she told Citlally.

Her father was also supportive. When he saw how determined a student Citlally was, he promised he would help her to succeed. Now, "he's like my best friend," she said.

With the support of the Alliance, for her summer internship Citlally studied tap water, looking specifically at the concentration of certain local grasses in the water in New Jersey's Pine Barren's ecosystem. She helped to test a hypothesis that pine tree and shrub growth might reduce grass seed growth and determined that the theory was likely false.

Through her internship, Citlally says she learned how to conduct an experiment, record data and analyze her results.

Citlally says she's inspired by both of her parents and by her best-friend Katherine Cabrera. "She is like a sharp pencil in my life, [in] that when I feel like giving up, there she goes and pushes me with her sharp tip, so that I get up and keep working to reach my goals," Citlally said.

Citlally plans to attend pharmacy school after college. She also wants to help find a cure for diabetes, because she has lost family members to the disease. Whatever her ultimate career, Citlally's path is now much wider thanks to support from the Alliance.