Andrea Garcia has been at the University of Georgia for less than two years, but she is already making an impact.

In the second year of her master’s degree studies at UGA’s School of Social Work, Garcia has co-authored a paper with her professor Anna Scheyett, Ph.D, to study mental health and resources for rural farmers in the South. The researchers used a survey to find sources of trust, signs of stress and other factors in the farmers to better understand their needs.

“In rural areas, you don't have a lot of resources or doctors, nurses, especially ones that focus on mental health,” Garcia said. “There is a lot of stigma behind mental health in rural areas and for men in general – the idea of farmers thinking ‘Power through it,’ being the ‘strong man of the house.’ Our goal is to assess the needs of rural areas and figure out the best ways to bring these resources without affecting or being disrespectful of their culture.”

The duo also did research with the wives of these farmers, learning their perspectives and how the wives thought their husbands could benefit from the resources.

A Focus on Helping Others
Originally from Puerto Rico, she moved to Savannah nine years ago. She completed her bachelor’s degree at Georgia Southern University, double-majoring in Philosophy and Spanish with a minor in vocal performance.

Now at UGA, Garcia dedicates around 20 hours a week to another project: La Clínica in LaK'ech. “You are my other me” in English, the mental health clinic provides free bilingual and bicultural counseling services to the Latinx community in Athens.

“It’s been really interesting for me because my goal is to be a clinical social worker,” Garcia said. “It's been really interesting getting in a clinical setting, working with clients and other clinicians. We also get to work with other departments within UGA, so we get to work with the Law clinic and get to do other presentations on how to work with the Latinx community in Athens. It’s been really fun getting to work with different organizations around the Athens community.”

She still has a few steps to climb before she reaches her goal. After completing the master’s program, Garcia has to pass a state test to become licensed in Georgia. Three years later, she’ll have to pass another state test to become a licensed clinical social worker.

A Desire to Help Children
For now, Garcia leads worship for elementary, middle and high school students at Athens Church. It’s one way she is able to connect with an age group that she’d like to work with in her future career.

“As a clinical social worker, I want to work with kids,” she said “Getting to lead and sing for them is something I really enjoy because I get to talk to them and kind of impart my wisdom and try to
help them out through what I do there and singing. That’s really important to me, and I think it connects a little bit to social work.

“If kids were to come to me, talk to me, confide in me in stuff, I guess that’s kind of a use of my social work knowledge, being able to help them.”

Garcia wants to help kids because she knows how crucial one’s early years can affect one’s life.

“I honestly think – and from taking classes and reading about it – the early years of development are the most important years in a kid’s life,” Garcia said. “The things that they go through when they’re young kind of affect them for the rest of their lives. It’s something that really interests me because if I am able to help kids when they’re in their developmental stage, then maybe that help can take them through the rest of their lives.”

With graduation coming quickly in May, Garcia said she’s thankful to have been led by a great faculty member and guide through her master’s program.

“I think really working with Dr. Scheyett and all her projects has been the most rewarding,” she said. “Just because she’s an amazing person and so smart. She knows what she’s doing, and she’s a great mentor to me. I aspire to be more like her.”