

# Hope, resilience marks Ramero Russell's path to degree

## Russell overcame difficult childhood, wrongful prison conviction to earn diploma

By Scott Bordow, ASU News  
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**Editor's note:** This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [fall 2025 graduates](#).

Ramero Russell will make a statement when he receives his Bachelor of Science in sociology at The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences' convocation ceremony on Dec. 16.

With every step on the stage, he'll tell people that they don't have to be defined by their past or feel constrained by their future.

He'll let them know that a traumatic childhood and a wrongful prison conviction for domestic abuse need not shackle a person's dreams.

He'll let them know that a 56-year-old man who had every reason to fail already has one college degree and is starting a journey to earn a second and become a family physician.

"My wife (Azuin Russell) says I'm doing more than just graduating," Russell said. "She says I'm a symbol of everything that happened to me and then showing the world that, look, I can come from the mud but now, look at me."

Russell clearly is not your typical 2025 Arizona State University college graduate. For one thing, there's his age. And then there's his story, one of perseverance and triumph.

"I always take negativity and turn it into a positive," Russell said. "I always take trauma and turn it into triumph. I've been labeled pretty much my entire life. The people who don't know my story, they see me one way, and then when they hear my story, they see me in a different light."

Russell tells his story as a motivational speaker, addressing issues such as mental health awareness, responsive care for the unsheltered and formerly incarcerated, and holistic trauma recovery. He has spoken at schools and wellness events, and he and his wife mentor a group of men at Perryville prison in Goodyear.

“I give them words of wisdom, words of affirmation to tell them that your situation doesn’t define you, that you define your situation,” Russell said.

Russell, who has worked as a fitness trainer for NBA players, in television production and is now a recreation specialist at The Phoenician in Scottsdale, isn’t just using his personal experiences to motivate and help others, though. He is the founder and president of FLAVVR (Famine Liberation Advocacy, Vital Validations and Resources), a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving food access and advancing health equity for Arizona’s underserved communities.

Through FLAVVR, Russell is working with nonprofit organizations Circle the City and the Arizona Faith Network to help clothe and feed homeless people in the Valley. FLAVVR provides food through its mobile food pantry — Russell said he relies heavily on community contributions — and the organization also hands out hygiene kits with items like razors, soap, shampoo and conditioner.

It was during the pandemic that Russell decided he needed to do something for himself as well — get a college education. The motivation: his in-laws.

“My wife and her family, they come from money,” Russell said. “I don’t think they really tried to do it, but they shoved it in my face, asking my wife, ‘Why are you marrying him?’ They saw my wife marrying somebody who was already established. ... So, I said, ‘You know what? I’m going to go back to school.’”

Although he might have been pushed by others, Russell quickly discovered that his love for human behavior — “I’m almost fascinated with why people do the things that they do,” he said — led ideally to the study of sociology. But one degree — the Bachelor of Science with a pre-med concentration — isn’t enough for Russell, the former public relations chair of the Black Medical Student Association.

At an age where most people are at least peeking at their retirement years, Russell has been accepted into the [Master of Healthcare Innovation Program](#) with the Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation.

His goal: to start or become part of a family practice, even if he’s in his 60s when it happens.

“There’s a need for family practitioners,” Russell said in explaining his decision. “And I love the communication behind family practice, meaning you can see one person their entire life.”

Becoming a doctor is another way for Russell to aid the community he already serves with his nonprofit organization.

“I just want to help more people,” he said.

People who were once like him. People who may not believe there’s a better future ahead of them.

“I know what it means to fight for your second chance,” Russell said.

A chance he now wants to give others.

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## Main image



Sociology student Ramero Russell is the founder and president of FLAVVR, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving food access and advancing health equity for Arizona's underserved communities. He has been accepted into the Master of Healthcare Innovation Program with the Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation, with an ultimate goal is to start or become part of a family practice. Photo by Emma Fitzgerald/Arizona State University