

under a culture that often discourage them from sharing their feelings, or becoming emotional. And being a first-generation Latino immigrant created the worst kind of storm for Mathias.

Marco urged anyone struggling to open up about their mental health to let their guard down and seek help. "If there was someone like my son, don't be afraid to talk to somebody. There's people that will always love you all the time, no matter how you are. And for parents, be there for your kids., Don't brush them off, Try to understand what he's going thorough, at least try. And friends, to keep an eye on each other. My son was the happiest with his friends. When somebody is like that and happy, you got to be careful, because he could be hiding something underneath."

In the United States, we lose 22 veterans and one serving member every day. Please consider donating to Operation: 23 to 0 in memory of Mathias and for all our service men and women.



operation2320@outlook.com; Operation: 23 to Zero, P.O. Box 89, Stillwater, MN 55082; facebook: www.facebook.com/op2320

For help, contact the Scott County Mobile Crisis Services at 952-818-3702.



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**Mathias Antonio
Soto-Elgueta**
1996-2020



Mathias Antonio Soto-Elgueta was born on October 1, 1996 in Santiago, Chile the son of Marco Soto and Jessica Elgueta. When he was 8 years old, he moved to the United States.

When he was a sixth grader, Mathias started volunteering by helping with an after-school activity to build stronger academic and society skills among the diverse junior high students in Shakopee. The Latino Club continued, and Mathias, in eight grade, invited one of his white friends to join. Eventually, students of all colors and ethnicities joined the club, which changed the name to Skittles, because everyone should be welcome.

When he graduated from the Shakopee High School, Mathias served in the United States Air Force, where he was deployed to Kuwait in 2018. He liked to serve, and he liked airplanes and traveling. After the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Mathias, who was spending a few days in Duluth for training, stopped in Minneapolis to help serve the community, still wearing his military backpack as he collected food near the site of Floyd's death.



Mathias Antonio Soto-Elgueta was a veteran of the United States Air Force, on left.

On right is Mathias with Mary Hernandez serving others during a food distribution event.

Mathias was also a soccer coach of the Shakopee Soccer Association.

He was working for Scott County in the Public Health department conducting Covid-19 tracing before he died at age 24.



According to Amanda McKnight, Mathias had a heart for serving others, and always pushed others to be the best version of themselves. "After becoming involved with Esperanza, a CAP Agency program that means hope in Spanish, Soto-Elgueta joined SDA (Shakopee Diversity Alliance) as treasurer early this year (2020) and volunteered at every local food distribution event that he could fit into his schedule." Marco Soto, his father, noted "For him it was a passion to help people out, and this year he wanted to help people get through this pandemic. He told me there's people out there suffering that had nothing. That was our battle every single day: He didn't think about himself. He thought what he was doing wasn't good enough. All that he did, and he thought he needed to do more."

Mary Hernandez knew Soto-Elgueta since he was a third grade kid with a lunch box. Mathias would load food boxes into people's car, praying over the deli meat and cereal boxes before shutting the trunks. He also would bring paper bags full of breakfast burritos for the other volunteers who would forget to eat on food drive days. And Mathias also paid the rent for a woman he heard could use his help.

Volunteering wasn't a once-a-week resume booster for Mathias, according to Maggie DeBlizan. He searched for volunteer opportunities like an earnest college graduate who search for jobs. Volunteering was keeping Mathias alive. Once Soto-Elgueta stopped Mary Hernandez and said to stop thanking me, because "you have no idea how much this had helped me."

Mathias's family and friends knew about his struggling with depression. They tried to comfort him and be their when he needed support. (treatment). According to friend Jacob Arellano, "You can be there as much as you want, but he'll always have a moment when he's there by himself, when he's fighting his own demons. It's impossible to fight depression because you're on your own, and it's in your head."

Mathias Antonio Soto-Elgueta died of suicide on December 4, 2020. "We've got to do more for veterans and Latinos," said his father, Marco Soto. "My son felt the last couple of months—he felt alone, We tried to talk to him, but he shut himself down, But I don't want to shut it down." Besides serving in the Air National Guard, Latino men grow up