Two CSM Alumnae Partner to Impact Community Health

OMAHA, Neb. – Two College of Saint Mary (CSM) Walking Women make a difference for each other while impacting the community health of rural Nebraska.

Weeping Water, Nebraska, a rural community of just over 1,000 people, is the classroom setting for Erin Andersen, ASN ’11, ’13 (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) as she fulfills her service-learning requirements of her Community Health Nursing class. In her practicum, Erin functions as a school nurse alongside CSM alumna, Tiffany Ferguson Kafka, ASN ’08, BSN ’09. Together, they provide health care services for 376 preschool through 12th grade children in the Weeping Water, Nebraska School District. Kafka is the current practicing registered nurse (PRN) at Lincoln Public Schools.

Andersen is one of 37 RN-BSN students in the community health class. Each student completes 55 hours of service in various community settings. At the end of the semester, students reflect on the community impact of their efforts. This class accounts for a collective 2,035 service-learning hours. Students get to choose between different practicum site possibilities that give them a hands-on experience of what they will be doing once they graduate. Andersen chose Weeping Water for her practicum because it is close to where she currently lives. Kafka, the school nurse, became Andersen’s practicum instructor. They quickly discovered they were raised in neighboring towns and both received an Associate of Science in Nursing degree from CSM, which immediately bonded the two of them.

In Andersen’s service-learning practicum, she identifies health care needs and resources for children in the rural community. As part of an organized assessment, she provides education on the importance of hand washing and regular exercise. Andersen has gained valuable insight from her work with Kafka.

“Working with Tiffany in the school setting has helped me realize that nursing is more than patient or client care. Yes, she is the school nurse and takes care of sick children, but she is also an advocate for the staff. Instead of simply showing up to take care of immunization records and caring for the children, Tiffany has taken the time to implement a health promotion program for the teachers and staff at school as well,” Andersen said.
Kafka has also benefited from Andersen’s presence. “Being a successful school nurse takes multi-tasking, and with Erin to help, the work load has not been as hard. As a school nurse, you are by yourself without any help. I have been able to discuss ideas with Erin and make changes that work better in this environment. It’s nice to have a different perspective.”

College of Saint Mary, founded in Omaha in 1923, is the region's only Catholic college for women. With approximately 1,000 students, CSM is dedicated to the education of women in an environment that calls forth potential and fosters leadership. For more information on CSM, visit CSM.edu.

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