

Partnership Supports Local Brain Injury Survivors

Students Receive Unique Opportunity

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FORMER KREMPELS CENTER INTERN ABBY NORMANDEAU '12

Each semester dozens of UNH students in the College of Health and Human Services leave campus to put their knowledge into action, interning at the Krempels Center and gaining what many of them describe as life-changing experience in their chosen field -- communication sciences and disorders, occupational therapy, social work, family studies, or therapeutic recreation.

And what may be most unique to this partnership is that the brain injury survivors and their families the students work with get just as much, if not more, from the experience.

“We’ve had a long-term synergistic relationship with the College of Health and Human Services at UNH,” said Lisa Couture, executive director of Krempels Center. “Ultimately, we could not provide the depth or breadth of services without our partnership with the university—particularly the CHHS—and we are fortunate that our program is as valuable to UNH as a center for learning as the partnership is to us as an organization.”

For recent UNH graduate Abby Normandeau the partnership led to a great job after graduation and confidence in her own ability to make a difference. She came to UNH from Bow as an undeclared major but confident she wanted to do something that involved working with people. An aversion to blood quickly took nursing out of the equation but the dynamics of a family were a continuing draw. Normandeau graduated this past spring with a degree in family studies and an emphasis in family support.

As part of her degree Normandeau was required to spend a semester working in her field. A professor encouraged her to consider Krempels Center despite her hesitation. “I had never worked with adults or anyone with a brain injury. I wondered ‘why would they listen to me?’” But from day one Normandeau knew she was in the right place.

“The students bring energy and idealism along with their classroom understandings of evidence-based best practice and quickly acclimate to this client-centered community based model in which to put their knowledge to work.”

“Every single day I was there if I talked to five people everyone had something different to teach me,” she said. “I learned more about myself, how to compose myself and lead groups, and validation that while I might be young I have a lot of knowledge. I worked with people in other disciplines who were all looking for different things in terms of goals.” For Couture and the Krempels staff the high level of student involvement is what makes the program so successful.

“The students bring energy and idealism along with their classroom understandings of evidence-based best practice and quickly acclimate to this client-centered community based model in which to put their knowledge to work,” Couture said. “Our expectation is that students quickly begin to facilitate therapeutic groups with their interdisciplinary peers, and in turn receive an equally intensive on-site supervision experience aligned with classroom learning. This leads to high student satisfaction with their overall experience, a strong sense of confidence in their skills as community-based practitioners, and, most importantly, a deeper understanding of brain injury and its impact on survivors and their families.”

Normandeau couldn’t agree more. “I learned you have to look at what people have gone through to understand how they are now. Everyone needs to have their feelings

validated.” She credits the nine months she spent at Krempels Center for many things, especially having a job at Community Partners in Dover a week before graduation. As a functional support specialist working with children who have behavioral problems or mental illness, the model is similar to Krempels Center in that she works with anyone connected to that child, including the family, schools and doctors.

That’s what Krempels Center is all about. And it’s what John Bunker, associate dean of UNH’s CHHS, says sets it apart.

“The commitment, the passion, and the dedication of David Krempels and his staff create this amazingly rich environment for UNH students to be a part of something special,” said Bunker. “Our students have an opportunity to work with an amazing group of members and staff. It’s a twofold experience. They have an opportunity to have internships that enhance their clinical skills but also our graduate students learn about how a nonprofit organization survives in a difficult environment.” Bunker and the center’s development director co-teach a class on nonprofit organizations.

“In every aspect there are high clinical skills and service delivery but the center is also a great example of how the community worked with staff to make it sustainable.”

INNOVATION



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