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Nursing student aspires to follow alumna's path

World traveling clinical nurse Ashley Ramirez '06 met sophomore Megan Krage '17 when Megan was 15 years and attending Camp Taylor, a summer camp supporting young people with congenital heart disease (CHD).

That first impression has led to a forever connection. Megan was so inspired by Ashley that she came to Dominican to major in nursing, joined the [Camp Taylor](#) staff herself and, like Ashley, is committed to volunteer medical service to help improve the quality of life for both the children and their families.

"I want to work in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, which is what Ashley did for a long time," Megan says. "I remember thinking I want to go to Dominican because I literally want to do exactly what Ashley is doing."

Basically Megan is motivated to follow in Ashley's footsteps. That is no small feat. On June 5, Ashley will receive the Donne Poe Davis Excellence in Nursing Award from Operation Smile at the annual volunteer recognition and award ceremonies at its Global Headquarters in Virginia Beach.

Ashley is in her seventh year as a volunteer for [Operation Smile](#), an international children's medical charity that performs safe, effective cleft lip and cleft palate surgery, and delivers postoperative and ongoing medical therapies to children in low and middle income countries. Ashley's work with Operation Smile has taken her to multiple regions in Africa, Asia and Central America.

In 2014 at the University of California San Francisco, Ashley was named a Global Health Clinical Scholar and earned her MS as an Acute Care Pediatric Nurse Practitioner. Since 2009, she has been a neonatal advance life support clinical nurse and educator at Alta Bates Medical Center in Berkeley and recently finished an eight-year stint in the pediatric intensive care unit at UCSF Children's Hospitals in Oakland.

In addition, since 2011, Ashley has served as volunteer medical staff and volunteer mentor at Camp Taylor. The flagship program includes free camp sessions based out of Turlock that now are supported by San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick. The camp offers medically supervised care and education with pediatric cardiology professionals and trained program leaders who volunteer their time to create a positive environment for CHD kids to "feel normal" and improve self-confidence.

Ashley's first year as a mentor at Camp Taylor was Megan's third as a camper. They immediately bonded.

"Ashley was really a good educator and I asked a lot of questions," says Megan, who was born with a congenital heart defect. "I wanted to be a nurse when I met Ashley, but I never really knew it until I really knew Ashley."

Their rapport and friendship at Camp Taylor has continued at Dominican.

"It's definitely a beginning of a sisterhood that we will always be connected and always has that bonding," says Ashley, who recently has taken over as an Advanced Practice Nurse as the Coordinator of the Fetal Medicine Program at UCSF's Children's Hospital in Oakland. "Dominican does pride you off of that sense of community, that supportive tight network."

One of Ashley's most influential experiences at Dominican was when she signed up for a colloquium study in women and gender issues led by psychology professor LeeAnn Bartolini.

"A transition and now focus in my life right now is my work with Global Health and looking at the big picture. This influence was instilled from a colloquium experience I had with LeeAnn and all of her work," Ashley says. "To see her outreach during Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and spread the awareness of Fistula clinics in Africa, it was a big awakening that we are all connected. Those were pivotal points that impacted

me and created a passion to give back to the community with my profession, not only on a local level in the San Francisco Bay Area, but on an international level.”

“I have tried to inspire students with my interest in how travel can deepen our capacity for compassion and how service expands our self-compassion and our knowledge of others,” says LeeAnn, professor of [psychology](#) in the [School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences](#). “Ashley was in my class at a time where I was very passionate about the lack of response, on many levels, to Hurricane Katrina. My trip down to Louisiana, with colleague Matt Davis, a week following the event, led to more awareness on campus about the aftermath of the human response to the disaster as Matt and I spoke at open forums and in our classes about what we witnessed.”

Megan has flourished at Dominican with its small class sizes. Upon Ashley’s recommendation and receipt of a scholarship, Megan enrolled at Dominican under the [Department of Nursing](#) in the [School of Health and Natural Sciences](#) after visiting bigger schools in Southern California.

“I like small. It took me coming to a small school to realize I didn’t like the big schools,” Megan says.

“Dominican just has that intimate personal feel,” Ashley says. “It has been amazing to see her transition from middle teenager to a young adult ... It has evolved into a really enriching friendship.”

And into a partnership. Last summer with Camp Taylor Ashley and Megan traveled to Hawaii where Ashley was a supervisor and Megan a mentor at a leadership family camp. The camp facilitated a mentorship for more than 20 children with CHD and their families with rented cabins on the north shore of Oahu.

Megan, in the meantime, is helping create a transition program – called YAP for Young Adult Program. Its mission is to reach out to young adults with congenital heart defects who have attended Camp Taylor or whom were never able to or had the chance to participate in the summer camp. Megan, like Ashley, is looking at the big picture and exploring ways to help others during and after her time at Dominican.

“I love all my classes and all my instructors,” Megan says. “They all know me and want to work with me to be successful.”

Just like Ashley.