

UP CLOSE



The "Up Close" column highlights an outstanding nursing student. Send nominee ideas to nsna@nsna.org.

By Sarah Qualls

Melissa Reddoch



Melissa Reddoch in the Pearl Lagoon clinic in Nicaragua. The ICL participants created their own pharmacy in the clinic. Here, Melissa had just finished organizing medication by function.

Melissa Reddoch is a senior nursing student at California State University in Sacramento scheduled to graduate in December 2007. She served as Fundraising Chair for her local chapter of the California Nursing Students Association (CNSA) and has also served as class representative for her local chapter of CNSA. Presently, Ms Reddoch is working as an extern at the University of California Davis Medical Center in Sacramento, CA, in the pediatric Intensive Care Unit. She has also recently returned from a trip that brought her to an inner city immigrant community in Costa Rica, and to a remote location in Nicaragua. Ms. Reddoch traveled to these areas with a group of students in other health care-fields connected with International Service Learning (ISL).

One of Ms. Reddoch's stops during her journey was Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua. After a brief training period, she and the other students began their work at a local health clinic. The clinic, sponsored jointly by UNICEF

and the Nicaraguan government had no bathroom or running water. While the clinic did have a small inpatient unit, the facility lacked equipment to support complicated cases. In the case of an emergency, it was necessary to undertake a two-hour open-air boat ride to Blue Fields, the closest hospital with an emergency room.

The ISL group quickly became a popular fixture in the small society of Pearl Lagoon. While the Nicaraguan government pays for its citizens' medical visits, the patients must pay for their own medication. When the news spread that the ISL group provided free health care as well as free medications, the clinic was overwhelmed. Ms. Reddoch remembers that experience vividly: "The second day we were in Pearl Lagoon, people came in who had walked from an hour away because they heard that the care and medications were free." Part of the ISL participation fee went toward providing free medications to impoverished areas, and Ms. Reddoch brought a suitcase of children's vitamins with her since children in some of the more poverty-stricken areas are frequently malnourished.

While in Pearl Lagoon, Ms. Reddoch was able to use her nursing education to help her. Since she was familiar with the medications, she spent a lot of time helping in the pharmacy categorizing medications. "I also did a lot of teaching with the other students," she remembers. Additionally, Ms. Reddoch helped them learn how to take the blood pressure and glucose levels of patients. She also helped the other students with their assessment skills. To help bridge the language gap, students paired up with other program participants and local doctors to translate during the trip. "I feel like I saw a part of the world that I never could have imagined - a world that I never knew existed. I was only there for a few days but I felt I was part of the community."

During another part of her trip, Ms. Reddoch went to Costa Rica where she and the other participants assisted with care at an inner city medical facility that doubled as

“The second day we were in Pearl Lagoon, people came in who had walked from an hour away because they heard that the care and medications were free.”

a church in a Nicaraguan immigrant community. The underdeveloped area had dirt roads and tin roof houses built into the sides of the hills, with cement floors and no windows. The area, inhabited by Nicaraguan immigrants looking for work, is quite poor. “A lot of Costa Rica is fairly modern with lots of services. The same kind of facilities we have at home,” recalls Ms. Reddoch. However, because the Costa Rican government only covers medical treatment if you are working, many of the immigrants in this area are without health care.

This past summer, Ms. Reddoch is traveling to South Africa with Child Family Health International located in San Francisco. This company distributes reclaimed medical supplies to needy areas of the world. Ms. Reddoch will take some of these supplies with her on her trip. This program assigns students to a facility and a preceptor depending on a participant’s interests.

After nursing school, Ms. Reddoch plans to continue her education at the University of California, San Francisco. Stemming from her current involvement as a teacher’s assistant, Ms. Reddoch believes she would like to teach once she finishes her Master’s degree in pediatrics. Additionally, Ms. Reddoch plans to

continue her involvement at California State University in Sacramento in hopes of spreading the word about international opportunities available to nursing students by giving them first hand accounts of her wonderful global experiences.

Ms. Reddoch believes that, “Most people are just like us; were all human beings. We all deserve

basic things like enough food to eat, a place to live, and health care.” She is carrying out her personal mission to “make an impact somewhere around the world and practice what I preach.”

For more information about international service-oriented trips, please visit the ISL website at www.islonline.org. ©