

Finding a niche in nursing: School nurse Kim Seidel is 'making a difference'

By Krista Gleason

For the past three years, registered nurse Kim Seidel has been a source of comfort, healing and fun for third, fourth and fifth graders at Geneva's North Street School.

Seidel graduated from Finger Lakes Health College of Nursing in 2013, at age 35.

"Being an adult learner was probably the best decision I ever made in my life," she said. "I don't know if I would have gotten it when I was younger."



Seidel's decisions have always been family-based. The College of Nursing was close to home and offered evening and weekend programs that enabled her to maintain her family commitments. She and her husband, Chris, an English teacher at Mynderse Academy in Seneca Falls, have two daughters, Ella, 13 and Marleigh, 10.

At North Street School, Seidel is responsible for the care of 460 students and 70 staff members.

"In a way, you're an extension of their family because you're the caregiver during that time," she said.

She sees an average of 50 kids per day, a workload she manages with the help of her co-worker Hilliary VanHout, a licensed nurse practitioner. During peak sick periods, they can treat up to 80 students a day. Because of the bad flu season, this was a high medical need year in the building, Seidel noted.

There is a cyclical nature to the ailments she treats. At the start of the school year, it's often nerve-induced stomach aches as students get accustomed to their new surroundings. Illnesses set in when winter arrives. In the spring, it's commonly seasonal allergies and abrasions.

In other words, the school nurse does more than check heads for lice and hand out ice packs – which Seidel said is a common perception of what a school nurse does. She acknowledged, however, that those duties are part of the job.

Occasionally, the responsibilities are less demanding.

“Sometimes we turn on music and dance, because that’s what the day requires,” she said. “Sometimes it’s putting a Band-Aid on something that doesn’t need a Band-Aid.”

Recently, it was playing dress-up with two stuffed animals a young girl dropped off to help around the nurse’s office. Seidel put a blood pressure cuff on the dog and a stethoscope on the moose. Another day, the moose’s leg was bandaged. The girl was ecstatic.

“We do have a lot of fun,” said Seidel.

School nurses foster trusted relationships with their patients, much like teachers do with their students.

Seidel recalled the day a sibling of a former patient visited her office and said, ‘Mrs. Seidel, I need something and my brother told me that if I came to you and asked you for help, you would help me figure it out.’

That was a key moment in her career.

“The fact that this child saw me as a person you could go to for help... I thought, I am making a difference for someone,” she said. “That’s why I keep coming back every single day.”

A passion for developing relationships is in part what drew Seidel to nursing.

After the birth of her first child, she held a part-time job working in a physical therapy practice.

“When you’re in that kind of facility where patients are being seen multiple times a week you get to build a relationship as they’re coming in and out,” explained Seidel. “I really enjoyed the people aspect of that.”

When her second child was born, she became a full-time stay-at-home mom. After a couple years, she thought about getting back into the workforce.

“I said to my husband, if I go back to work, it has to be something that fills me up,” she recalled. “Because if I wasn’t going to be with my kids, it needed to be something special.”

Seidel started taking prerequisite courses at Finger Lakes Community College in order to apply to nursing school. She was an eager and enthusiastic learner. “I was the annoying student in the front row who raised my hand all the time,” she said, “I was so excited to be back in school.”

After graduating nursing school, where she was president of her class, Seidel worked at the wound clinic at Clifton Springs Hospital and then became a home care nurse for Finger Lakes Visiting Nurse Service.

That clinical and home-based experience provided a natural lead-in to her job at North Street School and helped her find her calling.

“I discovered I’m really a community health nurse,” she said. “My happy place is stitching things together. When I was doing home care, it was putting in services a person needed to get themselves rehabilitated. For school nursing, it’s working in my own community with kids and their families and keeping those pieces together.”

“I was able to combine that love of kids and love of nursing into one job,” she added. “It’s a really gratifying position to be in.”

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http://www.fltimes.com/news/making_a_difference/finding-a-niche-in-nursing-school-nurse-kim-seidel-is/article_35545aaf-1dad-5c13-b358-e8acead67600.html

From the Editor’s Column: Today is National Nursing Day, which kicks off National Nursing Week. It’s just one of the reasons why you will find our special “Salute to Nurses,” a four-page pullout in the middle of today’s A section that features a terrifically uplifting story about local school nurse Kim Seidel by Krista Gleason.