

SKrewson PodCAST

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Child Life, Illinois State University, practicum placements, graduate assistantships, emotional support, career trajectory, professional development, child life lead, patient care, family dynamics, job search, internship, emotional regulation, professional growth, student advice.

SPEAKERS

Sara Krewson, Kara Snyder



Kara Snyder 00:00

Kara, hello and welcome to the podcast, a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm your host, Kara Snyder, and I serve as the assistant dean of marketing communications and constituent relations for the College. Each episode, we're sitting down with an alum of the college, and today, we have a chance to talk to Sarah Krewson. Sarah is an alum of the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences and currently serves as the Child Life lead at Karl foundation hospital. Welcome and thank you for being here. Thanks. Thanks for having me. Well, let's start at the beginning. Why don't you start by telling us? Why did you choose ISU?



Sara Krewson 00:41

Yeah, so I actually, I chose ISU for my graduate school I was and I think we'll probably get into my journey to Child Life, but in kind of finding the field and looking into training programs, I decided to finish out the bachelor's that I was working on and get the Masters in Child Life to work towards the field. And looking at the programs that were available is you really stood out, not only with what they offered with regards to having practicum placements, worked into the curriculum, graduate assistantships, but in reaching out and talking to the staff and the director at the time, they were just so warm and easy to talk to and welcoming, and it was just easy to realize that that's the place where I needed to be.

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Kara Snyder 01:32

and Child Life is a relatively small field, so I would love to hear, how were you able to figure out that that was the right path for you?

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Sara Krewson 01:40

Yeah, I so Child Life is still pretty not well known, but certainly at the time that I got into it, most people kind of tripped into it and found out about it while they were, you know, working on something else. So my whole life, I knew I wanted to work with kids in hospitals. I have two cousins who have spinal muscular atrophy, which confines them each to wheelchairs, and just had them in and out of hospitals their whole life. And I knew I wanted to help kids like them, but in a supportive way, not necessarily a medical way. And so what I had kind of figured out is that, you know what, I'm going to be a school teacher in a hospital. That's the way that I want to interact with these kids and just like, really lift them up. And so I was at Eastern Illinois University getting a degree in elementary education, and had the opportunity to job shadow the school teacher at Children's Hospital of Illinois in Peoria, and she was lovely, and she has a very interesting job. But while I was shadowing her, she put me with their child life team for, gosh, 15 to 30 minutes. And in that time, the passion and excitement and commitment that they showed to their patients, like just flipped my world. And I thought this, this is what it was. This is what I was supposed to be doing. But, and again, I think we'll get into it's a tough field. It's got, at the time, a bit of a burnout rate. So I decided I'd finish my degree in teaching so that I would have, you know, broader education and kind of cover more careers. And then wanted to start my graduate education in Child Life. So that is kind of the roundabout way that I found out and then dove into child life.

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Kara Snyder 03:23

What I love about that is it's mind blowing to think that 15 to 30 minutes change the complete trajectory of your career. I think that is such a cool story.

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Sara Krewson 03:34

Yeah, and I'll never forget it. I mean, we were in the playroom, and they were sorting through teddy bears. And I think the thing that really stuck with me is they talked about the fun side of child life, but one of them had just that week, lost a pediatric patient had died of theirs, and she's like, it is hard. It's so hard, but it's such an honor to be able to have been in that place and to do whatever I could for that family. And I just remember thinking, gosh, if on your worst day, you still have a passion for what you're doing, I want to look into that. So yeah, I'm totally indebted to those you know this, three women that helped me learn about child life.

K

Kara Snyder 04:15

Yeah, that's incredible. Thank you for sharing. Yeah. And so I'm curious, since you were here as a red bird for your graduate school, can you tell us a little bit about what that was like and how you were able to get involved on campus? You know, it's a new campus to you. It's not where you spent your undergrad. What was that experience like for you?

S

Sara Krewson 04:34

Exactly, So it's so I didn't realize how different it is to have an alma mater as a grad student versus an undergrad, but where I really I mean, I loved my classmates, the Child Life program at the time, there was five first years and five second years. We're all women at the time, and so that was really special. And the instructors we had, but my graduate assistantship was at. At the honors program, and it was just one of the best experiences. I had come from a world of teachers, and I think a lot of teachers, as people, can kind of surmise, a lot of them have the same personality. They're all happy and outgoing and excited and they want to play, and I just kind of been in that world, and so to be hired on to a team that was just very professional and very just kind of thinking forward and just different personalities was such a learning experience. They did the Myers Briggs Personality Typing so we could learn about how to engage with you, with each other in the best way possible. So I thought that was very cool. And then engaging with the undergrads, so we did a lot of support for freshmen. I was able to be an advisor for actually, for cast students in the Honors Program. And learning about the amazing things that they were doing was a really exciting side to my time at ISU because it was so disconnected from Child Life, but really developed me, personally and professionally, in ways that I could not have imagined.

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Kara Snyder 06:12

What do you miss the most about your time on campus?

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Sara Krewson 06:15

I think it is just the kind of excitement of learning, you know, specific again, because I was a grad student, I was there to learn and to develop and so, yeah, I wasn't going to every football game and doing all the amazing things that you get to do as an undergrad, but the time that we were able to have to, you know, discuss issues and topics you know, related to or adjacent to our the field that we were passionate about with instructors and professors who were also passionate about it is, it's just such a unique time and experience in your life to be able to devote kind of All of your time to that, like cognitive and psychosocial growth. It was, it definitely missed kind of having that freedom, just to learn it and grow. And it was really amazing.

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Kara Snyder 07:11

You're right, it's so unique, and it's really hard to recognize that, I think, when you're in it and it's not right, you know, and then you leave and you're like, oh, wow, that was you don't always get to spend your days with people that are that invested in the same topic as you, right? Yeah. So you've got your degree, you've got your master's, tell us about that initial job search for you, and then where you landed as your entry level job.

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Sara Krewson 07:36

Yeah, so it's all kind of interwoven with what I was doing at ISU. So part of the Child Life program at the time is we were guaranteed these practicum placements. And one of my placements was here at Kara foundation hospital. And being kind of a central Illinois girl, I had always seen Carle as the place to go if you know, you really need high level of medical care, and I really held in a high regard. And then working here as a practicum student, learned a lot about the Child Life program here and the way they were trying to develop it. So I was able to actually turn that into an independent study and come back an extra semester and work alongside the Child Life Coordinator at the time to really push for an additional position to be opened, and showed a lot of the staff what child life could do when there were more professionals in the building. So I went away for Child Life, we have to do an internship. So I actually did that out in Los Angeles. And while I was out there, they were able to get it through and open a position here at Carle. So while I was I was at my internship out on the terrace at the hospital, doing an interview to come back and hopefully get a position here at Carle. So of course, there was a process, and there was pretty stiff competition, but I was able to snag that position back in 2011 and been here ever since.

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Kara Snyder 09:02

So tell us about that evolution then, because now your title is Child Life lead. So what did that path look like for you?

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Sara Krewson 09:09

Yeah, it was a lot of just time and energy and experience. We're lucky enough here in health care, a lot of people have what's called a ladder. So nurses have one here, Child Life, specialists have one. A lot of the other disciplines that you'll meet in hospitals have one. And so you have a couple rungs of the ladder, and it's according to what your experience, your education, and then what kind of projects and processes you're a part of improving. And so I climbed the ladder as much as I could. And part of that is serving on committees. And I joined every committee I was eligible for, and even some that I don't think they wanted me at, like, I want to be there. You need me there. Let me get into this committee. And what it really did was it allowed me, I think, as an introvert, I could kind of. Sit back and observe how people interacted with the leaders of different departments and the leaders of different meetings, and really soak in how did different groups respond to different ways of being led and being supported. And so with all of that, when the opportunity came to have the child life lead position here, I, you know, talked to my manager and talked about my intention to fill it, and was able to do a couple interviews, and again, was granted the honor of holding this position here.

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Kara Snyder 10:37

And I'm always curious to talk to people in the field of child life, because I view that as such an emotionally heavy lift, and you alluded to that a little bit earlier, even on that job shadow day. So how do you take care, to regulate your own emotions, to make sure that your work does not overload your home life?

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Sara Krewson 10:57

Yeah, it's, it's such a loaded question, and it's definitely changed over the years. You know, 10 years after I started my career, I became a mom, and that's kind of changed the way I process some of this as well. I think we're really lucky in Child Life because we have a lot of education and there's a lot of push for new professionals to have supervision and support and debriefing with the difficult cases that we have. It's also very much when you're engaged with these tough cases, kind of like I said before, we have the privilege and the honor to walk with families on some of their darkest days. And I think when you look at it like that, like it is your job to make this more gentle on them. Having a job to do tends to take some of that pressure off of really feeling the emotions for the family you are there to kind of be an observer and an empathetic supporter for what they are going through, and recognizing that this is not your day to grieve or to kind of feel that, and certainly we do, and that's when we come back and we lean on our co workers and mentors to kind of process those things. But I think in the moment, there's a practice and a skill that goes into really being able to be a pillar of strength for these families. I think on the other side, like I said, now becoming a mom, what has been, I think, a struggle is, you know, every single kid that I see is ill or injured. 100% of the kids I see are sick or hurt, and that is my world. And so when it comes to my own kids, I know all of the things that can go wrong, and we kind of joke about this in pediatrics, because it's just like, add it to the list of things to be scared of. And so I really struggled becoming a mom in allowing my kids to like, to be a three year old and jump off the couch, because I know you could break your arm, or, you know, to be around other kids who are sick, because I know you might end up in the hospital on oxygen, and that's a very heavy load to carry. And so I think I really want to take this moment to normalize and to give people permission to use your resources. A lot of hospitals have employee assistance programs where you can talk to therapists for free. That is a resource I've used to really try and maybe compartmentalize and stop those invasive thoughts of, what if this was me? What if this was my kid? That can be really hard. I just really want to empower people to use the resources that you have and to get support. There's nothing wrong with having heavy feelings, but there is something wrong with not doing what you need to be healthy for yourself and for your friends and your family. And then one more thing that I think goes along with that is you can try all the things. You can debrief, you can talk to a professional, but sometimes it's okay to even get extra support from, you know, your primary care physician, if that means you know medication or whatever it is that you need to be your best, I think we need to do a better job of taking some of the stigma out of that, especially for those of us who are in a place of high stress and putting ourselves through that every day. So I thank you for giving me a couple minutes just to talk about that.

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Kara Snyder 14:23

No, I think that's so helpful and great perspective. So I really appreciate you taking the time to share so thinking about that. But I want to shift gears a little bit now and talk about what is your favorite part of your job.

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Sara Krewson 14:38

Oh, please, yes. I mean, playing with kids is great. Blowing bubbles is great. I think on a professional level, my very favorite thing to do is so we are pretty procedure based with our child life specialists here. So we're going from IV to blood draw to, you know, a tube placement, to surgery and taking these kids who are potentially fear. Or maybe don't even know what's going to happen next, educating them about what's going to happen, and building a support plan so that they can get through this with as little stress as possible. And so let's just say I'm walking in and it's a three year old getting stitches, and mom says this is not going to go well, and everyone is on board for this just to be a knock down, drag out fight, and I say, All right, let's all take a breath. Here's our plan, and building a plan together and getting that kid comfortable and being able to get whatever we need to do done. And the kid is happy and they're playing and they're blowing bubbles at the end. And everyone is just like, how, how did you do that? That's the best. It's like, that's, that's what I'm here for. I see scared kids all day, every day. I've been doing this a long time, so that's just, it's so fulfilling to see exactly what child life can do and be successful when, you know, people aren't sure if it's going to work. It's like, no, it does. I swear it does. Definitely my favorite part.

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Kara Snyder 16:09

Oh, I love that. And then you touched on it a little bit. And I think some of us could probably guess, but what is the most challenging thing about your job?

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Sara Krewson 16:18

You know, it's interesting. I think a lot of people would think this is going to sound really weird. A lot of people would think that, like, death is the worst part of my job, but there is a finality to death. It's terrible, it's tragic, but in the end, the patient is at peace. And what I think can be more challenging is the kids who we interact with here, who are going home to homes that are less than supportive or less than healthy, and there's not a whole lot you can do about it. Of course, I think we, as a society and as a state, keep kids safe from the most egregious environments, but there is kind of a fine line where kind of you're getting up to unsafe, where it's still just not a great place for that kid to be. And in the end, we do want families to stay together. I think that's really hard, is letting go of what you can't control and knowing that some kids are going to grow up without the resources that we want them to have. And especially, I think being in health care, there's only so much you can do. You know, the most we really can do is have our social worker reach out to whatever community social work and try and get things in place for the family. And so it's taken a long time for me to be able to come to a place where we do everything we can do, and then we have to say, good luck. And that's that's very difficult to kind of feel that powerlessness when you want what's best for every single child out there, and that's that realization that that's just not always going to happen is very difficult.

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Kara Snyder 18:07

I could see where that would be really hard to come to terms with. And I'm sure those families, you know, they were probably struggling before then dealing with this life changing diagnosis and that emotional lift that they're trying to carry on top of it, I'm sure is a real struggle. Thank you for that perspective. So we are going to finish with a speed round, just to get to know you a little better. So go with your first instinct on these questions. All right, Sarah, tell us about your morning routine.

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Sara Krewson 18:37

Oh my gosh. I get up a little bit after 5am and it is a mad rush to get myself ready, and my three year old ready to get out the door by a little after six, I have to drop him off at daycare and be to the hospital by 7am

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Kara Snyder 18:54

yeah, that is a tight timeframe. And I know three year olds, they can always sense when you're in a rush.

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Sara Krewson 19:00

I think, oh my gosh, yes, yeah, they love to put

K

Kara Snyder 19:03

the brakes on in those moments. When are you most productive?

S

Sara Krewson 19:08

During nap time, during my kids nap time,

K

Kara Snyder 19:11

what are you reading or listening to right now? Anything you'd like to recommend to us?

S

Sara Krewson 19:16

Yes, I just listened to the only way I can read books is to listen to them in the car. And I listen to it's called house by the Cerulean sea, and it has a sequel called somewhere beyond the sea that I listen to and you have to listen to the narrator. Is phenomenal. It is. It's, I would say, probably more like a young adult, maybe even like high school level writing. But if you just want an easy Listen, it's very like Harry Potter adjacent. It's got some fantasy in it. It's a very progressive kind of vision of non traditional families. Very cool. Highly recommend.

K

Kara Snyder 19:52

Oh, that's great to know, because that's actually been on my list, so I'll have to move it up. Describe yourself in three words.

S

Sara Krewson 20:00

Let me Think, perceptive, forward thinking and supportive.

K

Kara Snyder 20:04

Those are great words. I love that. Where did you go on your last vacation?

S

Sara Krewson 20:09

It's been a long time. I think we went on a baby Moon for our first boy to Charleston, South Carolina. That was four years ago.

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Kara Snyder 20:20

Do you recommend it?

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Sara Krewson 20:24

Yeah, yeah. It was, if you like history and kind of that Southern charm, it was very cool.

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Kara Snyder 20:27

Oh, cool. And I ask everyone who comes on the podcast Avantis gondola, or pub two cheese balls,

S

Sara Krewson 20:33

that's funny. I don't eat pork. I think there's pork on the gondola, right? I love Avantis garlic bread oh, I like that.

K

Kara Snyder 20:40

Yes, anything on Avantis' bread is not going to be bad, right? And I have one last question for you. If you could give one piece of advice to a college student, what would you say

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Sara Krewson 20:50

do everything as busy as you think you are, this is the most freedom you will have in your life. And life brings so many different like amazing, cool experiences. And you know, whatever life has in store for you later is going to be busy and amazing in its own way, but this time of your life, take advantage of every minute and every experience that comes across your desk, every go study abroad, go on a trip, have fun with your friends. Dive into go take a dance class. Whatever it is that you can fit in, fit it in, because you just have such a freedom and, gosh, you have the energy, so use it well.

K

Kara Snyder 21:39

That's great advice. So thank you for that, and thanks again for being here. Yeah, no problem. Thank you. That was Sarah Krewson Child Life lead at Karl foundation hospital. Join us next time on the podcast for more stories from our cast alumni. You.