

Bringing New Perspectives to Nursing: A Win-Win Partnership With Heritage University



The current group of Heritage University nurses will be at the hospital through Aug. 10 (left to right): Collette Flinkfelt, Julie Rodriguez, Sandra Sanchez, Stephanie Jimenez and Josephina Salazar.

A lot can happen in a month.

A patient can beat their illness. A crawling baby can take their first steps. And a nursing student can learn skills that will save lives.

The latter is certainly happening with students from [Heritage University](#), who have visited Seattle Children's in two waves this summer.

The university, which is located on the Yakama Indian Reservation in Toppenish, Washington, partnered with Children's for the first time — and everyone involved considers the pilot a success.

"It's different here than anyplace else we've been," says Claudia Padilla, one of four students who came for training in June. "The support from nurses was amazing; I felt trusted to take full care of patients and encouraged to try new things."

Claudia and her peers are going through an intensive rotation, spending four days a week at the hospital for four weeks. Not only are they the first Heritage University students to train at Children's, theirs is the inaugural cohort of the university's new Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree program.

“At Children’s, our students have been able to internalize the professionalism, clinical judgment and safe care of children learned in their BSN coursework,” says Christina Nyirati, chair of the Heritage University Department of Nursing. “With the fine clinical training they are receiving, our graduates will contribute to safe and effective nursing care of children in the lower Yakima Valley, who are some of the most vulnerable children in Washington.”

The nurses are fully immersed in the learning environment at Children’s, according to **Leslie Harder**, director of Nursing Professional Development. “They get to truly understand the continuity of nursing care by working with the same patient and the same nurse day after day, quickly building their knowledge and skills.”



Leslie Harder checks in with the Heritage University nursing students about their experience at Children’s.

Leslie adds that the Heritage students are a pleasure to work with. “They are profoundly respectful, hungry for information and totally focused and engaged when they’re here,” she says. “The students recognize the importance of this opportunity to gain pediatric and acute care experience, and they want to get the most out of it.”

But the students aren’t the only ones who gain from the experience.

This highly diverse group of future nurses brings unique perspectives to Children’s, and along the way, the nursing team hopes to discover ways to better support diverse students — as well as diverse patients.

Leslie also sees it as an opportunity to broaden diversity in the nursing profession. “More than 80% of nurses nationally are Caucasian, but our patients are not 80% Caucasian,” she says.

Through several avenues — like partnering with schools, leading nurse camps and recruiting people from different backgrounds — Children’s strives to step up and strike a better balance.

And not just for the benefit of our own hospital, since many of the Heritage University students plan to return to Central Washington and serve patients in the communities where they live.



The first group of nurses (left to right): Claudia Padilla, Glenda Torres, Beatriz Zamora and Fatma Incetas.

“We get people into this profession by opening our doors to diverse nurses, and helping them scholastically and through mentorship,” Leslie says. “This is the right thing to do — even if they don’t come back and work at Children’s.”

A number of people came together to make the partnership possible, including an anonymous donor who paid for the students’ housing at the University of Washington.

“We are extremely grateful,” Claudia says, “because this experience wouldn’t be possible without support from many people at Children’s — including the person who provided our housing.”

Claudia says she has learned a lot during her time at Children’s, and she’s clear about how she’ll use her knowledge. “One of the main things I like about the care here is that it’s holistic and family-centered,” she says. “I’m amazed to see how the nurses care for the families; I definitely want to carry that forward and make families part of the care I provide as a nurse in the future.”

—*Alice Thavis*

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