

Cromwell-Wright School alumni work side-by-side at Riverwood to care for patients

BY SARAH LIBBON

It's not particularly unusual to find graduates of local schools who stay and make their homes and professions in the area. But, it is quite remarkable to find a physician, two physician assistants, and a family nurse practitioner at one local healthcare center who all graduated from the same small school.

That is exactly the case at Riverwood Healthcare Center, where four alumni from Cromwell-Wright Public School are working side-by-side to provide quality patient care in the place they call home. While each of them has a unique story, all four said it was friends, family, lifestyle and a sense of belonging that drew them back to the area.

AARON JORDAN, M.D., Family Physician

Dr. Aaron Jordan, Cromwell-Wright '02, discovered his passion for medicine when he was in high school. His brother was in a severe car accident near Cromwell and Aaron witnessed the care he received from first responders, EMTs and healthcare providers, several of whom were friends and community members.

"I realized then that what rural healthcare workers do has an enormous impact on the lives of patients and their families," he said. "Following the accident, I later volunteered in the family room of the Neuroscience ICU where my brother was treated so I could experience caring for families in their most difficult times."

Following high school, Aaron stayed close to home and earned his bachelor's degree summa cum laude from The College of St. Scholastica, and then went on to medical school at the University of Minnesota.

When the opportunity to practice medicine at Riverwood presented itself, he said it was the combination of the country lifestyle near to family and friends and Riverwood's scope of practice and reputation for quality care that made it too good to pass up.

"I knew I wanted to live and work in a rural community and contribute in a meaningful way to those who have given me so much throughout my life," he said.

Ironically, Aaron is accomplishing that goal alongside three other providers from

Cromwell-Wright, as well as his nurse, Linnea Homstad, also from Cromwell. Dr. Jordan primarily sees patients at Riverwood's McGregor Clinic.

FAITH NYBERG, P.A., Internal Medicine

Faith Nyberg, Cromwell-Wright '99, said her path to becoming a physician assistant developed at an early age when she realized the healthcare field would be a great way to combine her interests in health and wellness with a desire to help people. But, she says her passion for caring for patients came when she was in college, working as a healthcare aide. "I often saw how dependent and vulnerable people can be and it helped me realize that every person has a story, needs an advocate, and should be valued," she said.

Faith says she learned the value of working hard to attain her goals when she was growing up in Cromwell and what drew her back to the area to practice rural medicine was the allure of country life, the people and sense of community. "This is our home," she said. "All of our family is here and we wanted our children to grow up knowing their grandparents and cousins."

Faith earned her bachelor's degrees in biology and chemistry summa cum laude from Minnesota State University, Moorhead, and her master's degree from the University of Nebraska Medical School.

"The most rewarding part of my position is building relationships with my patients," she said. "Getting to know them on a personal level is very enjoyable and gives greater meaning to what I do."

Faith oversees hospital patient care and sees internal medicine patients at Riverwood's Aitkin Clinic.

LISA THOMPSON, Family Nurse Practitioner

Lisa Thompson, Cromwell-Wright '00, chuckled when she thought about attending high school with Dr. Jordan and Faith Nyberg. "Aaron was actually my little brother's best friend growing up," she said. "It's pretty funny that we have offices across the hall from each other at Riverwood." But, she says that the culture of the community and school they grew up in may have



COMMON BONDS: Emily Hendrickson, Faith Nyberg, Aaron Jordan and Lisa Thompson all share a few common bonds. The four not only came from the same small school (Cromwell-Wright), but they all appreciate friends, family and a small-town lifestyle. The four are all now employed by Riverwood Healthcare Center.

played a role in the path they both chose. "The website for the Cromwell School proudly displays the slogan, 'Excellence is an Expectation,' she said. "This was always an unspoken undertone in the culture of the school, which certainly fosters academic success."

Like Dr. Jordan, Lisa attended The College of St. Scholastica and earned her B.S. and M.S. degrees in nursing. She practices the whole spectrum of family medicine at Riverwood's McGregor Clinic and said living in this area is perfect for her outdoor interests and spending time with family and friends.

Lisa said her advice to students who are interested in a career in healthcare is to volunteer and explore their options. "Don't just take math and science courses, but hone your communication skills, too," she said. "They will be your most valuable asset."

EMILY HENDRICKSON, Physician Assistant

This month, Emily Hendrickson will be the newest Riverwood provider with roots in Cromwell. Emily is a 2011 Cromwell-Wright graduate and also attended The College of St. Scholastica, graduating summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in biology. She completed her Master's of Physician Assistant Studies

at Rocky Mountain College in Billings, Montana.

Emily said it was actually Faith who introduced her to the physician assistant profession. "She was a role model for me when I was younger and still is today," she said. "I was lucky enough to have her as my preceptor for my Internal Medicine rotation. She is an excellent provider, who is knowledgeable and compassionate."

Emily revealed another key to why there may be so many students from Cromwell entering into the healthcare professions. "The Villa Vista Care Center is the main employer for youth in our area, so many high school students are introduced to providing care for people at a young age," she said. "This experience builds a solid foundation and establishes the desire to make an impact on an underserved, dependent population."

Emily said she started working in laundry and activities at the Villa, but became a CNA as her passion for caring

for people grew. "It was extremely rewarding when a resident would tell me how kind and compassionate I was," she recalled. "I felt I could make a difference in the lives of residents by simply putting a smile on their face."

Emily will begin her role at Riverwood later this month and said she experienced compassionate care at Riverwood during her clinical rotation last winter. "I was surrounded by friendly, compassionate and intelligent providers who collaborated well together. I knew I wanted to be part of this healthcare family because they shared the same beliefs as me."

Emily will begin seeing patients primarily at Riverwood's McGregor Clinic in mid-January. She said she's looking forward to being close to home where she can attend local sporting events and other community activities. "I grew up in this area and I couldn't imagine anything more gratifying than providing healthcare to the people in this community."



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— Dr. Aaron Jordan, McGregor Clinic