

LISA KEARNEY



I am Lisa Kearney, a dentist and Erie's Clinical Director of Oral Health, and I have been at Erie for 7 years. Let me tell you about Rosa, my Erie inspiration...

Rosa brought her 3-year-old daughter Kaylee to Erie after she noticed some brown spots on Kaylee's teeth and wanted to know what they were.

Unfortunately, those brown spots were cavities and she had a lot of them in her mouth which would require extensive treatment and dental extractions. Rosa was shocked, and very upset with herself for allowing this to happen to her daughter at such a young age. She was also very willing to do all that she could to prevent any future decay.

Kaylee's first appointment did not go so well. She was very scared and cried throughout the cleaning. Kaylee's second appointment was not much better -- she tried to escape by climbing onto the overhead light. But little by little, Kaylee started feeling more comfortable in the chair and did better at every visit.

Kaylee is now 8. She hasn't had any more cavities. Kaylee looks forward to her dental appointments now and even wants to be a dentist when she grows up.

Rosa is an inspiration to me. She came to Erie not even knowing how cavities were caused. She made a lot of changes in family's diet and home care to prevent future decay in her mouth and her children's mouths. Last year, Rosa also completed nursing school. Because of her experiences at Erie, she now discusses the importance of oral health with all of her patients. Dental decay is a completely preventable disease, and if I get more patients like Rosa truly believing in the importance of oral health and advocating to others in the prevention of disease, I am going to put myself out of a job, but it would be great for the overall oral health of our patients.

Rosa is my Erie inspiration.

MONICA ORTIZ



I am Monica Ortiz, Women's Cancer Care Coordinator, and I have been at Erie for 5 years. Let me tell you about Lydia, my Erie inspiration...

Lydia is a two-time breast cancer survivor. During her journey with cancer, she battled with the illness of her husband which left him unable to work or provide for his family and a tragic bus accident that left her teenage son permanently disabled.

It's so easy to get lost in the paperwork of grants, reports and deadlines, that sometimes we lose sight of the importance of our work. Lydia is the heartbeat of my work.

She is my inspiration not only because she got through it with her head held high, but because she allowed herself to be vulnerable.

We are expected not to dwell on the negative. I'm always going, going and going, not allowing myself to be in the moment, to cry, to be mad, even doubtful.

But Lydia did. She would come into my office so hopeless sometimes, saying how she's not strong enough to go through it a second time around, her heart is broken because her husband left her in this time of need. Throughout her journey, she has taught me it's okay to feel weak, it's okay to feel like we are not going to make it. These are all innate feelings that we sometimes deny ourselves. Somewhere, there is this unspoken culture for women, mothers, and wives, that there is too much on our plate to be weak, especially because there are others depending on us.

Lydia has made me realize that vulnerability is strength. To be vulnerable is to be fearless. Being vulnerable allowed her mind to let go of those feelings, giving room in her soul to fight the fight!

Lydia is my Erie Inspiration.

SANDRA SMALL



I am Sandra Small, a Behavioral Health Therapist at two of Erie's school-based sites, and I have been at Erie for almost 5 years. Let me tell you about a student called "Brittany", my Erie inspiration...

Brittany was known as a trouble maker -- in fights -- often suspended from school. She was the kind of student no one wanted to see coming. Brittany started to seek sexually transmitted infection testing

services in the clinic under our confidentiality policy, and once my colleague Sara became aware of her vulnerability, she began to care about her deeply. Sara asked me to take Brittany on as a client AND decided to start a girls' group for Brittany and her friends on her own time after one of her shifts.

Unfortunately, Brittany ran into more trouble and was expelled from school. However, she continued to come to our clinic -- and bring her friends. Sometimes these visits included correcting or re-directing some behavior but Brittany continued to come, and be welcomed in our clinic.

During a recent visit, one of Brittany's other providers, Jackie, became concerned that though she was showing up for her appointments, she was continuing to be treated for STIs. My colleague recognized that Brittany needed a conversation a bit outside of the standard doctor-patient interaction. She took on the role of "Big Sister", and had a heart to heart. Following this intervention, I'm proud to say that Brittany has tested negative for STIs during her recent visits. She hasn't missed one appointment. Our clinic staff have noticed an increase in her self-esteem and her ability to hear and internalize constructive feedback. She's making better health choices, and possibly, for the first time, feeling cared about.

Often when I take a family history in this community, mothers have had their first child between thirteen and fifteen with two or three following in succession. Brittany, at 17, is showing that given good information, care and concern, she can and is willing to make the informed choices to improve her circumstances. This was not the young lady I met in the social worker's office three years ago. I'm glad I got to know this one.

Brittany is my Erie inspiration.

MARK STOLTENBERG



I am Mark Stoltenberg, a second-year Family Medicine Resident at Erie Humboldt Park, and I have been at Erie for 2 years. Let me tell you about a patient I'll call "Claudia", my Erie inspiration...

Claudia is young girl that I met in my first few months at Erie. Claudia's father had emigrated from Ecuador 5 years prior—

leaving his loving wife and two young children behind in hopes of working towards a brighter future for his family. Then, just a few months before his family was planning to come join him, his 6 year-old daughter was diagnosed with type-1 diabetes. But unfortunately, the bumps in the road were not yet over. When passing through customs in Chicago, Claudia's insulin was confiscated. Unsure what to do, her father started frantically asking around his neighborhood where he might be able to take his daughter.

I met them 3 days later. Claudia's parents told me everything. The confusing interaction with the endocrinologist in Ecuador, the terrifying conversation with the customs agent at O'hare, and the fear about what this new diagnosis really meant for their daughter's future. All I could think about at the time was how difficult this must have all been for Claudia—a new illness requiring her to get stuck by a needle multiple times a day for the rest of her life. And a new home in a foreign land, away from all the friends and extended family she had ever known. But, thanks to the wonderful resources of Erie, we were able to send her home with new insulin in hand as well as an urgent referral to the diabetes clinic at Lurie Children's. And though there were still plenty of challenges ahead, Claudia was able to flash a small smile as she left the clinic that afternoon.

She came back to see me one month later. I barely recognized the happy, energetic girl I encountered as I entered the room. "Quieres ver como yo puedo hacer?" which means "Do you want to see how I can do it?" She quickly stuck her finger with the

lancet, pulled out her glucose log, and recorded the value. She then took out her perfectly prepared snack, explaining to me that her level was a little too low so she needed to eat something. Her pride and newly found confidence was absolutely bounding. I have seen Claudia every few months ever since, and I am happy to say that she is still thriving to this day.

The story of Claudia and her family is one that I will take with me for the rest of my career. But ultimately, what I love most about it is not how extraordinary it is, but rather how representative and in fact, very *ordinary* it is. Her story is the same as most of our patients at Erie—loving families facing unexpected and sometimes seemingly insurmountable challenges. Yet, they look towards the future with hope and strength—trusting that with just a little help, they might again feel in control of their bodies, their lives and their futures.

Claudia is my Erie inspiration.