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Student Profiles: Allison Kinney, Creighton University

Jamie Wewel
Operation Smile in Venezuela

By Jamie Wewel

Allison Kinney

From sports to retreats, student government to studying abroad, Allison Kinney does it all. But at the heart of this 19-year-old Creighton University sophomore is a calling to serve. It’s a calling that she fulfills by volunteering at the Omaha Boys and Girls Club after-school program, tutoring at an academy for underprivileged children, building houses for Habitat for Humanity or merely doing the “little stuff” that constitutes being a good friend.

The responsibility to serve those in need was ingrained early in the Des Moines, Iowa, native. She tells a story that when she was five years old, once or twice a week her mother asked her to go next door and read to an elderly woman who lived alone. It was just an hour out of her scheduled playtime, but it had an impact on both the aged neighbor and young Kinney, “It never seemed like a big deal, but looking back, I remember how her face lit up with excitement when I came over,” Kinney said.

While a student at Dowling Catholic High School, Kinney continued her compassionate ways, performing weekly service activities with her classmates. Though the motives at that time may have been to fulfill a graduation requirement, one particular activity — Operation Smile — would change the way Kinney would view herself, her faith and her service.

After hearing about the organization during announcements over the school’s P.A. system, Kinney decided to attend a couple of meetings. She eventually became an officer of the organization.

Operation Smile was a cause that the child-loving Kinney could pour herself into. Volunteers work in developing countries to repair childhood facial deformities while building public and private partnerships that advocate for sustainable healthcare systems.

Kinney applied and was accepted for an Operation Smile mission trip to Parins, Venezuela. Before beginning her freshman year at Creighton, she headed to South America with a diverse group of volunteers — from doctors to students. Kinney worked in the local hospital for 12 days, consoling patients and their families before and after surgery. In addition, her group of volunteers did presentations on nutrition, dehydation, and dental hygiene. She also ventured into the community, visiting an orphanage called La Casa de Hogar. “The 40 girls at Casa Hogar taught me about faith, hope and love and gave me the hope that we can make a difference,” she said.

Kinney returned to La Casa de Hogar in June of 2004 with seven others from her community to live and play with the girls of the orphanage. “It was not work,” she said, and it certainly did not seem like service. Rather, it was fun that warmed her heart and changed her life.

The volunteers paid for their own trips and even raised money to buy toys and clothes for La Casa de Hogar. They were so successful in their fund-raising efforts that they left a check for $5,000 with the nuns who ran the orphanage to pay for medicine for the children.

Kinney said her call to service comes from her faith. She tries hard each day to follow the example of Jesus Christ. “Service is seeing the dignity in every human being and treating them with that dignity. It is treating each other the way Jesus did,” she said. Kinney said Creighton University fosters an atmosphere of intertwined service and faith. She is inspired by the upperclassmen, whom she describes as “passionate about service.” And after just one year at the Jesuit institution, she noticed this Creighton students have the desire to help others because they want to change the world and create hope. Kinney notes that these people who do service without preaching about it or asking for attention are the real inspiration in this world.

When asked what she wants to accomplish in her next three years of college, Kinney responds, “I want to keep God as the most important thing in my life, to keep service as the center of who I am and to stay true to those two things.”

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