

# Love of social work leads to responsible position at St. John's

## Roberts graduate finds special joy in helping elderly

By NICOLE SHELDON

When Danielle Guillemette began her career as a social worker, she had her sights set on working with people struggling with addiction. She earned an associate's degree in addictions counseling from Monroe Community College and went on to Roberts Wesleyan College where she got a bachelor's degree in social work in 2014.

Guillemette, 28, has always been interested in social work—she says it is in her blood.

"I always thought it was amazing how multiple people could go through the same experience and view it differently. Then when I started college, they make you take a gym class and I didn't want to and I found a loophole and took a health class on drugs and behavior and that blew my mind," says Guillemette.

She knew she found her calling. After graduating she enjoyed her work as primary therapist at Unity Chemical Dependency for three years. She worked in the mild substance use disorder program running individual, family and group therapy sessions, leading a spirituality group and a stress management group. But her vision for her career took a turn after a friend introduced her to an elderly woman who changed her life.

Guillemette's friend from Roberts Wesleyan used to vacuum the house of an older woman, Lorraine, who lived near the campus. Guillemette stepped in when her friend was no longer able to help Lorraine. Initially, Guillemette says, her relationship with the older woman meant vacuuming the house, accepting \$3 in payment and then leaving.

Slowly, she and Lorraine began making small talk. Eventually the pair would talk for hours.

"Then I helped her move into a nursing home, and later I helped her move into her end-of-life transition." She said her time with Lorraine was more rewarding than anything she had done previously as a social worker. "This experience really opened my eyes to how cool the long-term care field is."

Now, Guillemette is the social work clinical coordinator at St. John's Home on Highland Avenue. St. John's Home houses 388 residents. She has been with



Danielle Guillemette

Photo by Kate Melton

the long-term care facility since March 2017.

Guillemette was recently selected to take on a dual role at St. John's to encompass both a social work and nursing type of job. She is working on her certification to become a certified nursing assistant, which will allow her to take on more responsibilities in terms of caring

for residents' physical health.

"My role as a social worker is cool because I'm very involved with both the residents and staff. I help with serving meals and I can sit with the residents and the staff and enjoy breakfast with them," explains Guillemette. "With this dual role I'm able to have a more holistic, well-rounded view of taking care of the

resident and their needs."

At St. John's, each social worker works closely with a nurse leader. Essentially, Guillemette will serve as the other half of her nurse leader partner.

"Yolanda, my nurse leader, and I are trying to lead the charge on changing the way nursing homes are viewed," says Guillemette.

As far as her role as a social worker, that aspect will remain the same. She will continue to serve as a trusted liaison between the staff, the residents and the families.

Guillemette says being promoted to this hybrid position has been her proudest career accomplishment so far. She is honored to be selected among the large social work team to take on this role.

Her dedication to the residents, their families and the overall staff at St. John's was recognized in December 2018 when out of the 984 staff members she was chosen as Employee of the Month.

"I never thought I'd work with this population, but it's interesting to learn about this generation that's coming into a nursing home and see the similarities and differences between how their generation and my generation view the world," says Guillemette. "I also love working in this environment because in the social work field, self-disclosure is typically frowned upon, but here it's very encouraged to talk about your family. I've even brought my one-year-old son in a few times to visit."

Guillemette credits her husband, Tim Guillemette, with helping to test the boundaries of her bubble of comfort, especially with her communication.

"Tim has really encouraged me to become more assertive and more of an advocate for myself and for others," says Guillemette.

Throughout her career Guillemette has learned to not pigeonhole herself because being open to opportunities, even those out of her comfort zone, can lead to worthwhile experiences. Guillemette says she hopes to get her master's degree in social work down the road, but for now she wants to continue growing in a place that she loves.

"St. John's is a very forward-thinking organization and I want to continue to be a part of that," she says.

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*#Team PXY with Whitney Young and Corey James on 98PXY is a partner with Fast Start. Listen on Monday from 5:30 to 10 a.m. for their interview with Danielle Guillemette.*

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