

GRADUATION 2022

Nonprofit experience helps senior earn early invite to med school

By Dawn Megli
dawn@theacorn.com

When Kyr Goyette was in seventh grade, their mom was diagnosed with cancer.

For a year, Kyr, who uses they/ them pronouns, helped care for their mother as she underwent surgery and 12 rounds of chemotherapy.

Ultimately, the cancer was driven into remission.

The experience inspired Kyr on a career path toward medicine.

"I couldn't see myself doing anything other than that," Kyr said.

Last month, the Thousand Oaks High School senior was one of 11 students accepted into the University of Pittsburgh's guaranteed admissions program, which guarantees Kyr a spot in Pitt medical school upon completion of a bachelor's degree.

Kyr credits the experience they received at Westminster Free Clinic in Thousand Oaks with helping them gain the admission. Kyr began volunteering with the clinic in summer 2020 during the height of the pandemic.

"It was such an incredible experience to get to have in high school," the 17-year-old said.

At Westminster, Kyr saw firsthand how cultural differences could affect the delivery of healthcare. Most of the clinic's



Courtesy photo

HIGH ACHIEVER—Kyr Goyette, a senior at Thousand Oaks High School, was recently accepted into the University of Pittsburgh's guaranteed admissions program, which promises Kyr a spot in Pitt medical school upon completion of a bachelor's degree.

patients are Spanish-speaking immigrants.

Kyr doesn't speak Spanish, but at Westminster most of the volunteer interns are bilingual, so Kyr was always paired with a fluent speaker and saw how it put patients at ease when they were greeted in their native language.

During a trip to the emergency room earlier this year, Kyr overheard some ER technicians

struggling to communicate with a Spanish-speaking family.

"There was no fluency in the conversation. I wished they had a translator like they have at Westminster. It would be so much easier," Kyr said.

For their bachelor's degree, Kyr plans to major in anthropology and minor in linguistics and neuroscience.

"It's reassuring to speak to a doctor in your native language," Kyr said. "Cross-cultural understanding has become a huge part of what I'm interested in, and I want to prioritize an approach to medicine with an understanding of other people's cultures."

When they start practicing medicine, Kyr plans to use a medical translator to meet patients where they're at and make sure a cultural disconnect doesn't compromise care.

Kyr is a self-professed foodie with a love for Ethiopian cuisine as well as comic books. In addition to volunteering at Westminster, Kyr is a varsity pole vaulter and a co-chair of the TEDx-Conejo speaker program. They will read some of their poetry at the upcoming TOHS graduation ceremony.

Conejo Valley Unified trustee Cindy Goldberg said Kyr, who gave a presentation on poetry at TEDxConejo when they were in eighth grade, was the youngest

speaker in the program's history.

"They are one of those stellar human beings. They are amazing. I've watched them grow for five years. I've been lucky enough for five years to have this conversation and watch them grow and mature and come into their own," Goldberg said. "It was truly a gift for me."

Patricia Kessler, Kyr's mom, said that growing up Kyr was a 30-year-old in an 8-year-old's body. While volunteering at Westminster during the height of the pandemic, Kyr would wear an

'It's reassuring to speak to a doctor in your native language.'

— Kyr Goyette
TOHS Class of 2022

N-95 mask, glasses, a face shield and protective clothing, coming home with marks on the side of their face, Kessler said.

She said Westminster and the public school system did an excellent job preparing her child for a career in medicine. Kyr participated in TOHS' Center for Advanced Studies and Research, a rigorous AP Capstone program that allows students to conduct original research.

When Kessler was going

through cancer, she said, Kyr never adopted a "woe-is-me" mindset.

"Instead of wallowing in it, they did something about it," Kessler said.

Kyr's mother said she is overwhelmed by Kyr's acceptance into the University of Pittsburgh and excited to see the teen help other people.

And with Kyr's spot in medical school secured, Kessler is excited that they can spend the next four years focused on exploring who they are instead of worrying about grades.

"I just see them so fulfilled as a doctor and as a researcher. I'm excited for them to get to use all of their intelligence and drive for something good," she said. "There's going to be a lot of people who benefit from their hard work."

But wherever Kyr practices medicine, Westminster will never be far from their heart.

"When Kyr is a doctor, they're going to participate in the same type of clinic, if they don't start one themselves," Kessler said.

Editor's note: To celebrate the Class of 2022, we will be publishing features on local graduates over the next month. If you know a graduate who has overcome much to earn their diploma, email a tip to tonewstip@theacorn.com. Our graduation issue is June 24. KJ