

Young life-saver among 7 from BC3 to again help kids in Honduras

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Joyce Brehm, center, of West Sunbury, is flanked by her daughters, Ashley, left, 23; and Alycia, 21, on the main campus of Butler County Community College on July 10, 2018. The Brehms, all graduates of BC3's registered nursing program, are among seven volunteers with ties to the college who this month will return to Honduras, where they will aid former street children and where Ashley in 2016 saved the life of an 18-year-old resident of Project Manuelito.

(Butler, PA) Three graduates of Butler County Community College's registered nursing program are among seven volunteers with ties to BC3 who this month will return to Honduras, where 12 weeks after receiving her degree in 2016, 21-year-old Ashley Brehm and others raced at night through dirt streets riddled with potholes and strewn with debris to save the life of an unresponsive former street child stretched across their laps.

Ashley, now 23, her sister, Alycia, 21, and mother, Joyce, are BC3 registered nursing program graduates who as volunteers with the city's First United Methodist Church will mentor 43 children displaced by their parents and who live at Project Manuelito in Talanga. The 12-acre compound is located in the mountainous heart of a Central American country in which 61 percent of its citizens live in poverty, according to worldbank.org. One in five rural Hondurans survive on less than \$2 a day, worldbank.org reports.



Dr. Randy Kruger, left, and his wife, Deborah, of Lyndora, are shown July 18, 2018, on the main campus of Butler County Community College. Randy is director of BC3's physical therapist assistant program, and Deborah, an instructor in BC3's humanities and social sciences division. They are among seven volunteers with ties to the college who this month will return to Honduras to aid former street children.

The poverty, said Joyce Brehm, who with her daughters lives in West Sunbury, "is incredible. It is so hard to even describe. When we all came back from our first trip and we sat down with my husband and son to try to describe what we experienced, you could tell they couldn't understand what we saw."

The trip to Talanga will be the fourth for Ashley; the third for Alycia, a member of BC3's Class of 2018; and second for Joyce, a 1991 BC3 graduate. They will be joined by Deborah Kruger, of Lyndora, an instructor in BC3's humanities and social sciences division, making her fifth trip; and her husband, Dr. Randy Kruger, director of BC3's physical therapist assistant program, making his fourth.

Holly Schaefer, 21, of Butler and a 2018 BC3 graduate with degrees in psychology and social work, will be making her second trip to Honduras; and Ashley Nagle, 19, of Chicora, a BC3 general studies student, making her first.

"I am going because I know that by helping one person, you are not changing the world," Nagle said, "but you are changing the world for that one person."

BC3 director: "We are immersed" with children

Each will pay approximately \$2,000 to mentor the children, a portion of which is offset by yearlong fundraising. The Brehms, graduates of Moniteau High School, work at Butler Memorial Hospital, Joyce and Ashley in the emergency department, and Alycia as a nursing assistant until she takes her National Council Licensure Examination, after which she hopes to be assigned to medical-surgery.

That seven of the 12 volunteers bound for Central America have ties to BC3 speaks volumes about the college's faculty, staff and student involvement in the community, Deborah Kruger said.

"We have students who are very outreach-oriented," Deborah said. "We promote that with the students. Every year that we go there we have multiple adults and students who went to BC3, some of them in the 1980s. I think students learn at BC3 what it means to participate in community outreach."

Components of BC3's psychology and sociology programs, Schaefer said, "are outreach-oriented."

"And I try to continue with that myself," Schaefer said.

The July 28 to Aug. 4 trip marks the sixth year in which First United Methodist Church has sent volunteers through World Gospel Mission, Marion, Ind., to Project Manuelito, where "We will do whatever is needed," Randy said. "Hanging drywall, digging, wall-building, painting, cleaning, wiring. We aren't sure what our work project will be. But whenever the kids are not in school, we are with them. We are immersed with them."

Their purpose, Joyce said, is to build relationships with children ages 5 to 18 who may encounter foreign volunteers only six weeks a year – and not necessarily to spearhead medical care for the youths.

However, the medical care provided by her daughter, Ashley, who during the 2016 trip was without her mother and sister, saved the life of Ricky, an 18-year-old asthmatic Project Manuelito resident who on the night of Aug. 9, 2016, experienced severe respiratory distress.

"Something's wrong"

More than 80 percent of asthma-related deaths occur in low, or lower middle-income countries, the World Health Organization reported in 2016, adding that nearly 400,000 people worldwide died from the chronic disease that inflames and constricts air passages to the lungs.

Ricky, whom Ashley described as being a physically fit 18-year-old in 2016, had been upset the evening of Aug. 9, and had been playing basketball within the compound.

At 9:56 on that hot night – the average high temperature in Talanga on Aug. 9 is 83 degrees, according to accuweather.com – Ashley received a text-message from the resident American missionary named Justin asking her to check on Ricky.

The text read: "Something's wrong."

“Justin knew that, other than Randy, I was the only other one with medical knowledge,” Ashley said.

Ashley sprinted across the compound – which includes boys and girls dormitories, a school and several houses, and called Randy, who has CPR training.

“Unbeknownst to us, Ricky was asthmatic and was having a bad attack,” Randy said. “I had been in bed when he was becoming unconscious.”

Those with Ricky had brought him indoors, where it was cooler, and had given him water, Ashley said, but could not get his breathing stabilized.

“He was getting more tired from breathing so heavily – about 40 times a minute, which is super-fast,” she said. “His heart rate was super-fast. We had no medications to treat him.”

Ricky did not have an inhaler.

“That was my first question,” Ashley said. “My second question was, ‘Does anybody have a bag?’”

“It was an airway issue”

Hyperventilation, Ashley said, causes the body to expel too much carbon dioxide. Placing a bag over one’s mouth helps the body to restore some of the gas.

“I held the bag for him and he was breathing into it,” Ashley said, adding that the procedure was “absolutely not” helping the teenager.

“Ricky,” she said, “was too far into an asthma attack.”

He could speak only through gasps, Ashley said. His eyes were rolling back.



Deborah Kruger, of Lyndora, second from left in back row; her husband, Dr. Randy Kruger, third from left; and Ashley Brehm, of West Sunbury, fourth from left, are pictured at 5:43 p.m. Aug. 9, 2016, during a volunteer trip to aid former street children in Talanga, Honduras. Deborah is an instructor in Butler County Community College’s humanities and social sciences division; Randy is director of BC3’s physical therapist assistant program; and Ashley had just graduated from BC3 with an associate of applied science degree in registered nursing. Four hours later, Ashley and Randy would be summoned to save the life of an 18-year-old resident of Project Manuelito.

“I knew at that point it wasn’t an anxiety issue,” she said. “It was an airway issue.”

Said Randy: “Ashley tried to keep him awake and breathing and calm as his airways were closing up.”

Despite her having “just graduated. I was a new nurse” – Ashley said she was taught by her BC3 instructors to “Go with your gut. Don’t second-guess yourself in that time. Make the decision.”

Racing “around like maniacs”

The nearest medical center, in Tegucigalpa, was 40 miles away. A clinic was closer, Ashley said. “I had to make the call that he needed to go to the clinic,” she said.

She, Randy and one of Ricky’s friends, a 17-year-old named Owen, sat in the back seat of a compact sport utility vehicle with Ricky lying across their laps. Elmer, another 17-year-old friend of Ricky’s, was in the front passenger seat while a resident American missionary sped toward the clinic.

“We had to race around like maniacs because we thought we were going to have to do CPR within a couple of minutes,” Randy said. “I didn’t think you could hit 60 miles an hour on those streets, but we did.”

Something bad was going to happen to Ricky, Ashley said she feared.

“He was getting way too tired to do what he needed to do,” she said. “He was going to stop breathing, essentially. His airway was going to close. He was going to stop breathing and possibly die.”

Her fears intensified when they found the clinic was closed.

“We were screaming for help,” Ashley said, “and beeping the horn.”

Added Randy: “We had an unconscious kid and were banging on the door and no one was there. If we had to go to a medical center in the capital, that was an hour away.”

Ashley told the resident missionary driver, “We have to go! And we don’t have much time.”

How much time? the resident missionary asked as they raced toward the next clinic.

“At that point,” Ashley said, “I looked at Randy and said, ‘He is going to die.’ And he said, ‘I know.’”

“Randy,” Ashley said, “when he stops breathing, you are going to give rescue breaths and I am going to give CPR in the back of this car.” And he said, “OK. That is what we are going to do.”

“These boys can’t lose their best friend”

Ashley also asked Elmer whether there was a ball-point pen in the glovebox.

“He had no idea why I wanted a pen,” Ashley said.

“Are you going to have to do it?” Randy asked.

“Possibly,” Ashley said of the emergency surgical airway. “Be ready for it.”

She and Randy “needed to have our options,” Ashley said. “We had our CPR planned out. We had the emergency surgical airway planned out if we needed it. But we were hoping for the best, and that was to make it to the next clinic in time.”

Again their driver zigzagged through streets flanked by one-story houses built of cardboard, cement, sticks, wood and rocks, Ashley said.

“One of the hardest things was watching Elmer and Owen just watch Ricky decompensate and get worse and then stop talking,” Ashley said. “Those kids lose so many people all the time. I looked at Randy and said, ‘We can’t lose him. These boys can’t lose their best friend.’ I kept telling Randy, ‘He can’t die. These boys can’t lose him.’”

Ricky was unresponsive by the time they reached the second clinic, which was open.

“We screamed so that one of them would come out,” Ashley said. “Ricky was breathing very heavily but wasn’t talking to us.”

Medical personnel inserted an IV into Ricky, Ashley said.

“And he kind of came back to it,” she said. “And he was OK.”

The group from BC3 and others also paid for Ricky’s treatment and medications, Ashley said.

“Ashley was down there that year without her mother and sister,” Deborah said. “It says a lot about her personality and her skills. It says a lot about the education she received at BC3. She felt confident and prepared enough to take that on.”

“Thank you to Ashley for saving my life”

Ashley credits her response to what she learned at BC3 from Julia Carney and Nichole Tiche, instructors in BC3’s nursing and allied health division.

“They always said to trust your gut, trust your instinct,” Ashley said. “Trust it.”

Said Alycia: “It all started from BC3.”

And Joyce: “That is all part of the program they put you through for the two years you are in it.”

From his bed in the clinic, Ricky looked up at a heavily perspiring Ashley, Ashley recalled, and said, “My, my, Ashley, you saved my life.”

The night before the BC3 group and others left Project Manuelito in 2016, Ricky stood before and addressed everyone at the compound, Ashley said.

“I just want to say thank you to Ashley,” he said, “for saving my life.”