

Kara Snyder 0:00

Hello, and welcome to the podcast a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm your host, Kara Snyder and I serve as the assistant dean of marketing, communications and constituent relations for the College. Each episode, we're sitting down with an alum of the College and today we have a chance to talk to Jennifer mangosteens. Jennifer is an alum of the Department of Family Consumer Sciences and currently serves as the Director of Clinical Care Education Programs at Cure SMA. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 0:33

Thank you. I'm excited to be here today.

Kara Snyder 0:35

All right, let's start at the beginning. Why did you choose ISU?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 0:40

Ah, well, I don't have a really wonderful story about that. I was a little nervous about leaving home. And it was close enough to my family, but not close enough that I couldn't get away a little bit and venture out. And we also did have quite a few of my friends from high school that were also attending. So for me, it was a good transition from being small town girl to a little bit bigger, actually a lot bigger, but still close to home.

Kara Snyder 1:07

I totally get that spread your wings a little bit, but have that support network close if you need to? Absolutely. So Child Life is a relatively small field, how did you figure out that that was the major and the path for you.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 1:22

So I went through way too many majors when I was at ISU, and in my, my junior year, I believe I switched over to Family and Consumer Sciences knowing I wanted to work with kids. Not really sure how I wanted to do that. So I thought it was a good start. I was part of student government and one of our activities was to go to a local hospital in Peoria Children's Hospital of Illinois, and we donated a hand made stuffed animals to the kids, which now that I am a child life specialist, I'm aware that that's just a little cringe worthy, but back then, you know, you just wanted to do something. So when I got there, and we were meeting with all the families, there was a child life assistant who was working with us. And I ended up sitting down and talking with her for quite some time. And I remember leaving in the parking lot calling my dad saying, I finally found out what I want to be when I grew up, I loved the work that they were doing and how they were supporting the kids. And for me, it was an opportunity to do one on one work with kids, which was what I was looking for. So I went in and I met with the department and they got me into the Child Life undergrad program, what they had at that time. And the rest is history.

Kara Snyder 2:39

I love that story. That's fantastic. And your dad was probably thrilled to get that phone call.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 2:45

He definitely was, you know, going into your senior year when your child doesn't know what they want to be just means you're gonna probably be there longer. But luckily ISU made that happen in a very easy way for me.

Kara Snyder 2:59

So you mentioned Student Government, tell us more about that experience, and maybe other ways that you were involved on campus during your time here.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 3:07

Yeah, I got involved my sophomore year with student government with the Association of residence halls, I lived in Walker Dunbarton, which sadly, is no longer there. And I did some local housing committees, I honestly can't remember what it was called. They're just the local, like monthly meetings within our residents. But after that, I got a little bit more involved. And I ended up being the vice president of association of residence halls for a couple of years. And that really entailed moving which was such an interesting and exciting thing to plan every year. But it was really great. I got to travel a lot work with other students around the country who were also involved in residence hall government, and I met some of my friends that I'm still friends with now through that. So it really was part of my favorite times at ISU being a part of those groups. You know, we had a lot of fun. But we also got to do a lot of volunteer activities, which got me into a lot of different things that I do that I didn't even though we're available. So I've always been very fortunate for that.

Kara Snyder 4:16

So what do you miss the most about your time on campus? When you think back about your time as a student what comes to mind?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 4:23

Oh my gosh, everything. My best friend now she was my randomly assigned college roommate freshman year. We still are best friends to this day and she now works for ISU social work department. So I'm so fortunate I have so many different reasons to come back to ISU with the childlife work that I still get to do within the family and consumer sciences and getting to spend time with her but it's the people that I met it was the activities that I was a part of, you know Dunbarton and Walker no longer exists they were or the amazing gym is now Guess that you guys would call it. But I just got to do so many wonderful things while I was there, I miss sorta hours of class. Of course, it was nice to have like, just a couple hours a day instead of eight, I miss a little bit of the freedom and getting to make mistakes without a lot of consequences. I think that was something we all did a lot of in college. And it's really where I found myself. So I miss, I miss that feeling of just getting to know yourself a little bit better with your friends and the activities that you participate in.

Kara Snyder 5:32

That's a great answer. And I love to hear that you won the random roommate lottery because not always happen.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 5:41

I do have a few horror stories from friends. But yeah, I was very, very fortunate with that.

Kara Snyder 5:48

That is awesome. So tell us about you finally found your passion. You have your degree in hand, what does that initial job search look like for you? What did your entry level job end up being?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 6:02

Because I didn't find out till my senior year, I ended up going back for my masters within the family and consumer sciences department where there was a child life sequence. So I was really fortunate to have ISU in that capacity, because at that time, there were so few universities that were doing the Child Life program. So I had a lot of good opportunities as a result of those two years with practicums. And my internship, which was at what was then called children's Memorial Hospital. Now, Lurie Children's, so I got to meet a lot of people, I got a lot of connections. And I will say, times are very different. Now, it wasn't as challenging to find a job straight out of college. But I went big, I don't know why I applied to one job thinking that, you know, I only need to apply once everything's gonna be fine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota for their children's hospital. And I was just really, really lucky, I got that job right away. So again, I'm always like, so grateful for my path. Because as I've worked with students throughout the course of the last 15 years trying to help guide them. I know, it's changed significantly with how that process goes, but I got it. And it was a wonderful first job, I got to experience a little bit of everything with general pediatrics, two neonatal intensive care units. And I got to find what I was really passionate about while I was doing that job. And I just had a great mentor while I worked there, who knew it was my first job. And he took me under her wing and made sure that I was learning all the things that I knew I still needed to know because you never know everything going into your first job, right? I had a really wonderful experience myself.

Kara Snyder 7:50

That is so awesome to go straight from normal all the way to the Mayo Clinic. What an opportunity. That's so exciting.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 7:58

It was definitely a change for me saying I wanted to go just a little bit far away from my family to let's just leave the states, right.

Kara Snyder 8:08

So you're in Minnesota, a little bit colder than Illinois, you know, you've made that big move and tell us what transpires give us the CliffsNotes version of, you know, your first job at Mayo to where you are now.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 8:21

I really loved the work that I did. But as you might imagine, I did not love being that far away. I also did not love Minnesota, I was on my own, I didn't have a family. And Rochester is a very family friendly town. And so there wasn't a lot of things for me to do as a single person out there. And I had a support group back home that I was missing too much. So I got to the point where I was traveling back and forth from home like every other weekend, which just wasn't ideal, right? I miss my friends, I missed the city. Because during my internship, obviously I lived in the city, I missed that aspect. I learned a lot though, I learned a lot about work relationships, and that I do enjoy creating progress projects and processes within organizations that need to be improved upon. And all of them coming back to the importance of the family focused care which we learned so much about child life. But then when you get into the hospital setting, you don't always see it as much as you wish you would. It was my first experience with not everybody loves a child life specialist. You know, there's we get to be the fun ones is what people sometimes say to us, and some of that, you know, having to be a really strong advocate for the role, but also for the child. So it was a great first job, wonderful experiences. I am so so beyond grateful for my time there. But I just knew it wasn't the best fit for me. And I remember going into one of our patients rooms in the ICU, having to talk to a family about the fact that their child was not going to live. And there were two children in the room with them that were siblings. And I remember being very, very nervous, so nervous, like pacing outside the room. But I went in, and I had just this wonderful conversation with these parents. And we came up with a plan for talking with the siblings. And I really left that room thinking, I really love this work. And I really want to find a way to do more of this work. So when I decided it was time to leave, I knew I wanted to head down that path a little bit more.

Kara Snyder 10:32

So then where did you go.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 10:37

So next, I leave Minnesota and I moved back to the city of Chicago. And I will tell you, people, those who are listening, don't do this, I left without having another job. And I started looking for anything that was in the hospice and palliative care world. And I just stumbled upon a position posted to start a Child Life program in a home based Hospice and Palliative Care Program for pediatrics. And I went and I met with them and met with the entire team, it just clicked immediately. And that's where I stayed for 10 years, I got to start that program from scratch. It was the first Child Life program and hospice and palliative care in the state of Illinois. And it was just amazing. The work I got to do with the kids being in families homes is so humbling. And you just realize that you don't get to see the same sides of families, when you're in the hospital, you see this completely different vulnerable side in their homes, but they also just welcome you so graciously, and they want your support. And I loved that time. I loved the work. I loved everything about that. As I got into it more I started to like the management aspect, I did end up becoming the manager of that program up until the time that I left and the organization that I worked for ended up becoming a for profit. And that just wasn't the path that I was interested in. And so that's part of the reason that I left. In the meantime, though, when you start your own program, and there's nobody else in the state of Illinois, who's doing what you do. You look

everywhere for resources, you look everywhere for support. In 2012, I started a Facebook group for child life specialists that work in hospice and palliative care. And that group has grown exponentially. We have over 200 members now. And we are called the childlife Hospice and Palliative network. We meet monthly we provide education to those who are in this field. And we just are a resource for each other with things as simple as resources, you know, how do you do an assessment? What do you provide families at end of life? What are your developmental tools that you use, but also a place where if you're having a tough case, there's no one else to talk to it about. Because you might be a one person program, you have a group of fellow child life specialists who know what you're experiencing, and it can offer wonderful guidance. So that group has turned into we have a listserv, we have a monthly meeting with everyone. And it excites me so much to see that where I was one person back in 2010. We're everywhere, and we are not going away. And I love that so many hospice programs have seen the benefit of child life.

Kara Snyder 13:16

One of the things I wanted to talk to you about today's I know that child life can really be an emotionally heavy lift. As far as careers go, you know, you're talking about that conversation that you're having with parents and with siblings. And I'm curious, how do you regulate your own emotions to make sure that work does not overload that part of your life? You know, I'm sure this group that you have created really helps with that to have a sounding board. But how else do you manage that?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 13:43

I will definitely say that that is always a work in progress. And I think as we grow what we need to help ourselves with self care changes. So when I was younger, I was so fortunate that even though I was the only child life specialist, I had a great team. And we worked a lot on debriefing. You know, you just pick up the phone and call them when you have a hard day because bringing that home can be very challenging. It can impact your relationships, as I'm certainly aware of, but they also don't understand it as much. So you're talking to someone who may want to support you, they just don't know how. And so back then I really use my team as my sounding board. on bad days. You know, a good workout was always helpful. A glass of wine was something done on occasion also. Now I'm a little bit more removed from the direct patient care but anytime I'm supporting another child life specialist or another student trying to find their way or I work right now as a consultant for an organization and I do a lot of education for them. A lot of times it's just coming home and taking a 15 minute mindfulness break or meditation break just something to separate my work day from my personal day because It can wear on everyone. I do not have children. But I know that people have said similarly, they just don't want that to impact their kids. I didn't want it to impact my relationship with my husband. So just taking that 15 minutes has been the world doesn't always work. Like I said, Work in Progress. Some days, you're just, you're just frustrated until you go to bed, but trying to find that time for yourself to avoid that burnout and that self care is so important.

Kara Snyder 15:26

Well, and I think that's probably a situation where awareness is half the battle, right? Being aware that it's something that you're carrying, that you need to consciously set down or set aside is probably half the battle. And then like you said, creating that time and space for that to happen is so important.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 15:44

Absolutely. And I do think that the Child Life program that I was at, at ISU, and I'm sure it's very similar elsewhere, they just did a really good job about stressing the importance of boundaries. And I think in Child Life, I would say we are really excellent with boundaries because of that training. And during that you learned that you need to focus on self care. And you need to help others when you're noticing that they are not necessarily focusing on self care and giving them some suggestions and support as well. So we were trained well, I think, which also helps us to be better prepared for when it happens.

Kara Snyder 16:20

That's a great point. Is that something that you've had to work on and stress with your team and kind of teach them those tools for success?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 16:29

Yes, so not everybody has a strong boundaries. And it's a constant education, I remember when I was managing we would do, we would bring in social workers, we would bring in people from outside the organization to talk about the importance of boundaries, not just for our own self care, but for the care of our patients and their families. Because our weight can get onto them without us realizing it when we're not taking care of ourselves. And I know it's probably a little taboo that we say like, you can't help others if you're not helping yourself, but it's true. And if you look back at situations where maybe you didn't feel like you did your best, oftentimes you can equate that with not being in your own best headspace.

Kara Snyder 17:11

Yeah, it's the whole concept of you can't pour from an empty cup, right? So you do have to put that time and energy into taking care of yourself or it's not going to work, especially with the work you do relating to others. Exactly. So tell me, what is your favorite part of your job.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 17:31

So it's interesting right now, because my new role is completely different from my child life role. In that job. I love educating people about Child Life who've never heard of it before. But I do take my consulting work, where I do education about working with kids in hospice and palliative care. And with the Child Life Network. I love seeing that moment in somebody's eyes where they get it that aha moment of like, Yes, I can work with a pedes patient, even though I'm really nervous, or, Yes, I have been in that situation. And I wish I would have experienced something different. But I know I'm not alone. We're always learning. And we're always making mistakes and learning from them. I love seeing that student who's worked really, really hard. Finally, get that interview, or finally get the job or finally get the internship, I think it's a lot of hard work. It's changed a lot over the course of the years. And that's why I became a child life specialist. I

love helping people. And in all of my jobs at this point in time, I have an opportunity to help people in different capacities, and more of a one on one situation so I can really learn what it is that they need and how to help them.

Kara Snyder 18:42

And then on the flip side, what would you say the most challenging part of your job is?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 18:47

Trying to explain to people who aren't in it, why the heck I want to do it, you get those comments like, oh, I don't know how you do it, or it must be so hard. And it's not. It's a wonderful job. I grew in my leadership and opted out of like direct patient care. But I will never ever take for granted that wonderful work. I got to do it. Sometimes you just can't explain that to the outside world. They have to really experience it for themselves. And so you, you find yourself repeating a lot. It's not hard at all. It's wonderful work. I love it. I love doing it. I don't know how you work with adults. I don't know how you work with the geriatric population because I don't like to.

Kara Snyder 19:31

That makes perfect sense. Every job has its challenges. And we are so grateful for people like you in that field that are embracing it and just doing that wonderful work. So thank you for all that you do.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 19:42

Thank you for the invite today.

Kara Snyder 19:45

Of course of course. Well we are going to finish with a speed round so go with your first instinct on these questions. What is your go to lazy dinner?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 19:55

Oh, ordering me out is my god sweet, lazy done.

Kara Snyder 19:59

That's fair. I've I've seen news lately when it talks about like, you can't call something a lazy dinner if you have to chop an onion. So I was curious where you fell on the spectrum ordering out is fair. When are you the most productive?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 20:19

Oh, at night in the evenings 10pm.

Kara Snyder 20:24

Okay, so you're a night owl. I am. What are you reading or listening to right now?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 20:29

I just finished this morning actually a Stephen King book. I only read those around Halloween time, but I'm always reading three or four books at a time. And right now I just finished that one. I'm also reading a leadership book called leveling up. And another book called trust. I'm always learning.

Kara Snyder 20:47

Oh, this sounds great. I'll have to add those to my list.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 20:51

I'll send you a big list. I got a big one. I love it. I

Kara Snyder 20:54

love it. If you had to describe yourself in three words, what words would you pack?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 21:01

Driven, timed, innovative.

Kara Snyder 21:05

Fantastic words. I love the diversity there. Where did you go on your last vacation?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 21:11

Colorado. My husband and I both turned 40 This year, so we went twice. It's our favorite place to be.

Kara Snyder 21:18

That is a fantastic excuse for an extra trip. Avante is gondola or pub to cheese balls.

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 21:27

Oh, Avanti's gondola all the way.

Kara Snyder 21:31

And one last question for you, Jennifer. If you could give one piece of advice to a college student, what would you say?

Jennifer Mangers-Dean 21:39

Have fun. Don't take it too seriously, because it's a short period of time. And it's an unforgettable time. If you do that. There's lots of other great pieces of wisdom for how to get out into the world. But don't take it too seriously because you will miss out on some fun opportunities.

Kara Snyder 21:58

Great advice. Well, thank you again for being here, Jennifer. That was Jennifer mangosteens, the director of clinical care education programs at Cure SMA join us next time on the podcast for more stories from our cast alumni.