



# Samantha Marquard

Family Nurse Practitioner, IFM Community Medicine  
Instructor, Saint Louis University School of Nursing

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Sam Marquard loves her adopted hometown of St. Louis. After graduating from Saint Louis University in 2004, the Arkansas native decided to make the Gateway City home and settle in the Shaw neighborhood with her husband Mike to raise a still growing family. “I really believe in this city. It’s amazing how willing St. Louisans are to give – across the income spectrum – and empowering to watch people working for change,” she says.



Marquard carries that spirit of optimism with eyes wide open. Working with at-risk populations across metro St. Louis on a daily basis, she sees the extreme levels of poverty, the substandard housing, the inequities in healthcare, the racial divides. “You don’t have to go to a third world country to see kids hungry,” she says. Still, Marquard says you needn’t go far to find people who care. “It never ceases to amaze me how resourceful and resilient people are and how much we all have in common. Most of us want better for our children and are doing our best to be good parents. Children are children wherever they are and will find a way to play, to laugh, to love each other.” This is the good she encourages her

students to find in the tough work they must do every day.

Tough work is what Marquard has been drawn to since deciding on a nursing career. At 16, she worked at a pediatric oncology hospital and, during college, at Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital – a period that she loved every second of, she says. After graduation, she provided home-based prenatal and post partum nursing care to low-income women and their children. In 2009, she completed a Family Nurse Practitioner program and a dual master’s degree in nursing and public health, finding her true calling, she says. “Public health, at the community level, is where I need to be,” she says simply.

Hired by IFM Community Medicine, Marquard worked at several clinics offering free healthcare to refugees and immigrants and developing two school-based clinics, including one at Nahed Chapman New American Academy. It was here that she first became familiar with The Little Bit Foundation. On orientation days for newly arrived immigrant students, Little Bit would be there with new uniforms while Marquard checked the students for medical issues.

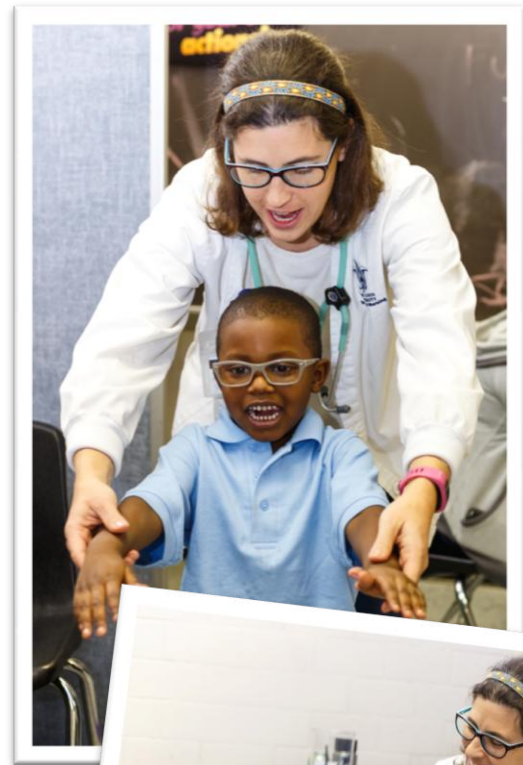
Around 2013, Dr. David Campbell, President of IFM, approached Marquard with a request. By this time, she had become a public health instructor at SLU’s School of Nursing, in addition to her role with IFM. Dr. Campbell wanted to know if she and her clinical students could work with Little Bit to fill an unmet need for health intervention in Little Bit partner schools. A meeting was scheduled at Herzog Elementary to discuss piloting a new health and wellness program. “It’s a day I’ll never forget,”

says Marquard. “Almost immediately the school nurse approached us about a student with a cockroach that had hatched in his ear. I literally saw every emotion in Rose Hanley within a matter of seconds, before she calmly stated, ‘Ok, let’s help him, where is he?’ It wasn’t at all what I was expecting from that first meeting, but I knew in that moment we would work together just fine.”

Marquard and her team saw 200 students the first year at Herzog and the dream quickly grew. Today, the “Healthy Kids, Better Learners” program is offered once a year to every Little Bit school, and in four schools, a nurse practitioner from IFM is on-site two times a week. Little Bit coordinates the medical release forms and days of service, while Marquard and the SLU students screen for undiagnosed physical or mental health conditions, food insecurity, adverse childhood events and more.

“We try to create a safe space for students and ask questions that allow them to open up,” says Marquard. “Sometimes we find that what’s troubling them isn’t physical at all and they just need someone to talk to, such as the little boy who shared with me how scared he was because his mom had not been home in three days. I found out that she’d been jailed for unpaid parking tickets.”

Understanding the home life of the students is critical, says Marquard. “This wouldn’t work without the awesome school staffs, who know each student’s story.” Follow-up also is key and Marquard will often assist the school nurses in making necessary arrangements. At one school, she personally phoned 20 parents to follow up on asthma treatments for their child. “Earning the parents’ trust is as important as the students’, and I instruct my nursing students to always find time to compliment parents on the good things they are doing. We have to remember that we are



essentially guests in their lives who happen to have medical expertise.”

Marquard says the biggest responsibility they have is to teach. Teach about nutrition, dental care, hygiene, about making good choices. In the schools, sometimes this education is provided during an assembly, sometimes through visits to individual classrooms.

“The definition of public health differs for every person,” she says. “For me, it’s about being part of the big picture of improving healthcare in our communities by working directly with our most vulnerable populations. I wouldn’t be anywhere else.”