



The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) builds healthy communities by supporting qualified health care providers dedicated to working in areas of the United States with limited access to care. More than 40,000 primary care medical, dental, and mental and behavioral health professionals have served in the NHSC since its inception. Today, there are more than 10,000 NHSC members providing culturally competent care to more than 10.5 million people. We provide this care at more than 14,000 NHSC-approved health care sites in urban, rural, and frontier areas. The following story demonstrates the impact our members are having every day.

Sarah Baker — Family Nurse Practitioner, Northland Community Health Center, McClusky, ND

HER STORY: When Sarah Baker first began working as a family nurse practitioner at the Northland Community Health Center in McClusky, North Dakota, she was met with hesitation and skepticism by some residents in the community. One local farmer even predicted, “You’ll never stay more than 6 months.” At the end of her second year, he transferred his primary care to Sarah.

Five days a week, Sarah begins the 130 mile roundtrip commute from Bismarck with a travel mug of coffee her husband prepares every morning. “It is an, ‘I love you’ cup of coffee that gets the day started right.” During the drive, she takes in North Dakota’s glorious scenery and revels in the peaceful landscape, seasonal planting and harvest, migrating birds...and yes, even the blankets of snow. Many people have heard Sarah say, “Do what you love, and love what you do.” Not a day goes by when she doesn’t acknowledge how lucky she is to be doing what she loves.

Four years and 120,000 miles later, the community has embraced her with open arms. She knows the care in this wonderful community flows both ways. When Sarah returned from a medical mission trip to Haiti, where she was helping provide care after the devastating earthquake, her first text message was from a patient who had prayed she would return safely, saying, “We need you too.”

In 2009, the Northland Community Health Center received Affordable Care Act (ACA) funding for much needed improvements, like widening doorframes so wheelchairs fit, providing handicap accessible bathrooms and wiring for electronic health records, which are now fully functional. The clinic staff brought personal items as finishing touches and as a result, the clinic has a warm, friendly atmosphere enhanced by original artwork and décor. Sarah remarked, “There is a welcoming spirit - more like a home than a clinic. We want it to be our patients’ medical home.”

The real spirit of the clinic though is her patients, whom Sarah lovingly describes as “salt of the earth, hard-working, good people.” She cares for multiple generations in the same family, providing well-baby checks for newborns, reassuring new parents, and managing the sometimes complex healthcare needs of their grandparents, or even great-grandparents. Many of her patients are 90+ , very active and living in their own homes. Sarah jokes, “You cannot claim to be ‘old’ in McClusky until you’re 90!” One of her memorable patients was a 75-year-old man who fell down an elevator shaft, was knocked unconscious and had his ear partially torn off. Rather than call the ambulance, his friends loaded him into a pick-up truck and brought him to the clinic. Even though Sarah recommended having a plastic surgeon repair his ear, he insisted she could do it and it would look, “just fine, since I won’t be entering any beauty contests!” He now brags about how good it looks and recommends Sarah’s sewing skills.

Sarah’s passion for serving others is shared by other doctors and nurses in her large family, including her brother, Tom, who was a National Health Service Corps Scholar. She continues to live and practice according to her own personal motto, “Live with Intention.” She considers it a privilege to be providing healthcare for people in McClusky and looks forward to serving her “home away from home” for many years to come.