

Middle College Graduate Profile

Katherine Reyes, Class of 2003

What I have done since Middle College:

Since Middle College (I graduated in 2003), I graduated from California State University, East Bay with a bachelor's degree in Health Science, option in Community Health Education and Training. During college, I worked mostly in restaurants, waiting tables and working catering gigs here and there. I was lucky enough to gain hands-on experience in my field with an internship for San Mateo County's Public Health Policy and Planning Division in 2009. I learned that I enjoyed working within the larger public health system to create change and work towards improving the health of local community members.

After my internship experience, I applied for and was offered a position within the health system in the San Mateo Medical Center where I remained for three years, working directly with patients, helping them apply for medical insurance and navigate the health system in order to receive needed services. It was during these three years, that I saw first-hand many of the inequities and social injustices that exist in our society today. I saw many individuals and families, who often resembled my own family, struggle to gain access to medical care and other basic necessities.



What role Middle College played in my life:

I decided to apply for middle college during the end of my sophomore year at Aragon High School. I had always done well academically but struggled a great deal socially. I found myself not fitting in with any of the social groups on campus and also found that the less I felt like I fit in, the more I wanted to isolate and rebel against school. I found out about middle college and thought to myself "Anything is better than here." It was also appealing to me to attend college because I would be the first in my family to attend.

Once at CSM, I did well in my college and high school classes, especially without the added pressures of fitting in with high school cliques. I found the small-school setting to be really supportive and I felt more like *myself* versus just a number in a sea of thousands of students. Academically, it was challenging. I struggled in a couple college classes, but felt supported by the middle staff every step of the way.

Middle College made *college* a reality for me. Growing up, college had always seemed like something that *other people do*.

The Middle College staff--Mr. Clardy, Ms. Fraser and Mr. Quigley -- all helped introduce me to and get used to the idea that college really was for me and not a far-off idea. Middle College helped me see my true potential.

What I am currently doing:

Today, I am a Program Coordinator with San Mateo County's Office of Diversity and Equity, Behavioral Health & Recovery Services (also part of the local health system). In this role, I have had the opportunity to help build awareness around behavioral health issues, share stories of hope, resiliency and strength, and promote recovery in underserved communities. This role is truly a blend of the things I feel most passionately about- access to health services and social justice. I plan to pursue a graduate degree in social work in the near future.