

'IF SHE CAN DO IT, SO CAN I'

Some young people can't wait to get out of the town where they grew up. This past summer, Kristen Dimas couldn't wait to get back.

Not everyone understands, because this medical student's hometown is not a prime tourist destination. But as the College of Medicine has learned, Immokalee has abundant charms. It wasn't until Dimas – whose grandparents were migrant farmworkers – traveled north to Tallahassee for her freshman year at Florida State that she fully appreciated the town she'd left behind.

"You hardly ever find places like this, where you've got so many people from different backgrounds and cultures in one area," she said, "and I got to grow up here. That was wonderful."

So the summer after freshman year, she came back and started to tutor younger students. She loved it. In fact, life in Immokalee is among the many career options she wants to explore.

"It started to cross my mind: 'I could become a physician and come back to this area, specifically in pediatrics,'" she said. "Kids here don't exactly have a role model. My younger cousins, my brothers, my sister, I would want to be that person – for them to say, 'If she can do it, so can I.'"

During the summer, she got to be that role model. Every summer, high-schoolers considering careers in health care get a peek into the future through the College of Medicine's Summer Institute. Usually they come to the main campus in Tallahassee, but this year, for the first time, a similar experience was offered in Immokalee – to students from there and small towns nearby.

For two sessions of two weeks apiece, second-year students Joah Aliancy and Dimas patiently led a total of 18 girls through a hands-on introduction to health-care basics – such as how to take someone's blood pressure, how heart valves work and why athletes have a lower pulse.

"Our goal for the Summer Institute is to expose students who may be interested in the health-care field to the variety of professions that make up that field," said Elena Reyes, the medical school's Southwest Florida regional director. "Additionally, we expose them to the health issues in the state's underserved communities. The message is that they can become part of the solution and that the FSU College of Medicine will be there with them along the way."

For Dimas, being one of their teachers was "amazing."

"It's nice to see how eager they are to learn," she said. "They want more for themselves. They have my phone number and my email address. I've told all of them, 'I'll be there, no matter what.'"



Kristen Dimas, center, who grew up in Immokalee, returned at the end of her first year of medical school to give Immokalee girls a glimpse of the health careers that could await them.