

ROBYN DOUGLAS SCHOLAR, MPP, RDN, SNS

Member Spotlight



With a love of public policy and varied experience as a Clinical Dietitian, Dining Services Manager and Clinical Nutrition Manager, Robyn eventually found her way to school nutrition and has never looked back.

MEET ROBYN

Robyn Douglas Scholar grew up just outside of Knoxville, Tennessee and attended the University of Tennessee in Knoxville where she majored in Nutrition. When it came time to apply for her Dietetic Internship, she decided she wanted to move outside of Tennessee for new experiences. She matched with Virginia Tech in northern Virginia right outside of the District of Columbia and has lived there ever since. She began her career in clinical long-term care and rehab but, though she enjoyed it, she knew it wasn't her long-term goal. As an active member in her alumni association, Robyn met new people and gained exposure to other industries. "I always had an interest in policy, so I ended up going to grad school and getting a Master's in Public Policy," Robyn said.

COMBINED INTERESTS

Armed with her new degree, Robyn set out to find a job she was passionate about. “I was interested in school nutrition, but never had a rotation during my internship,” Robyn recalled. “School Nutrition combined all of my interests. I find it fascinating how food is grown and processed, [how it] gets from A to Z, and the impact it has on health. After working with older adults for so long, I’d meet these people in the twilight of their life and I’d be the first dietitian they ever met.” She knew there was more she could do to prevent some of the outcomes she was seeing. “Where were these influences? I was ready to move from sick-care to well-care.”

“School Nutrition combined all of my interests.”

LEAP OF FAITH

Robyn applied for many different jobs, but nothing clicked. “What was interesting was when I got to the job interviews, they would tell me ‘you’re overqualified, but where is your management experience?’ So, I did a few internships to try to gain that exposure.” During that time, the Dining Manager at the long-term care facility she was working at left and the position became available. “I had mostly stayed away from the kitchen,” Robyn said. “But, I needed management experience so I took a leap of faith and went for it.”

In her new position, Robyn successfully reduced turnover and increased customer service scores by utilizing her policy degree to analyze and diagnose systemic issues that were happening. In the back of her mind, she knew this job was short-term so she kept applying for jobs in surrounding school districts.

After improving the dining services of her 240-bed facility and a short stint as Clinical Nutrition Manager at another hospital, a position at Alexandria City Public Schools that she previously applied for became available again. She interviewed and was offered the position as Nutrition Coordinator. “It was a lateral move, but I wanted to be in this industry and I haven’t looked back.” She says it was her experience as dining manager that took her over the finish line.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Robyn worked with Alexandria City Public Schools for 4 years. “I passed the SNS exam, met a lot of great people and had great experiences, but it was time to move on,” Robyn says. “I wanted to take my graduate degree and experiences and keep going.” She learned about the Manager of Nutrition, Compliance and Partnerships position at District of Columbia Public Schools through the dietitian network and it couldn’t have been a better fit. It combined her love of public policy and passion for school nutrition. DC Public Schools is considered to be one of the 55 agencies of the DC government so not only are they required to meet USDA regulations, but DC local laws and regulations, as well. They are a high-risk, urban district made up of 50,000 students in 118 schools, most schools being on the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). “Coming into the area of school nutrition that we primarily serve—the at-risk and under-served—where can I make a difference in the food and what they put on their plate?” Robyn oversees a variety of daily operations including menus, recipes & taste tests, customer service, verification, social media, professional development & training and so much more.



"Where can I make a difference in the food and what they put on their plate?"

In addition, the district is both self-operated and contract, split between SodexoMagic (main contract), DC Central Kitchen (local operator) and DCPS Eats (self-operator). Robyn’s team is split between self-op and a vendor management. “It’s a lot to juggle. We have menu review with three groups, compliance reviews with three groups...we have an AR this year and they want nutritional analysis for each operator...” DC Public Schools has a 30-year history of being contracted out. Initially, the district was split due to procurement laws. “DC has strong small business laws which is great, but makes things difficult. We are working with the city to understand the business of school nutrition, school food, and large scale distribution.”

Robyn and her team are working on building out the policies, menus and everything behind the scenes to reach their ultimate goal of being totally self-operated. They are starting by working on the laws. “We are lobbying for the success of a school nutrition program and building the infrastructure. We are still in infancy, really, because it was dismantled.” While achieving self-op is in the distant future, Robyn has high hopes. “There’s not many people left who remember what it was like [to be self-op]. We’re going to educate an entire city.”

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