

A STORY  
OF ILLNESS  
LEADS  
TO  
CAREER  
INTEREST



Taegan showing her matching medical bracelet on her teddy bear from the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. (Credit: All photos by Daniel Grzesik)

By Daniel Grzesik  
REPORTER

A parent’s worst nightmare is having their child diagnosed with an illness. “It started when I was seven months old,” Taegan Buechler said. In 2001, Taegan Buechler was North Dakota’s youngest diagnosed baby with Type 1 Diabetes.

“You never think it’s gonna happen to your child,” Taegan’s mother, Leigh Buechler said.

Her mom noticed Taegan began getting sick and originally they thought it was a cold.

“My parents thought I had pneumonia,” Taegan said.

Leigh said she noticed Taegan was not getting better and one day her parents said they felt something wasn’t right and took her to the emergency room.

Taegan explained the story her mom told her. Taegan was in the hospital for days, only growing worse until additional test results came back and doctors quickly flooded the room.

“No one gets diagnosed this young,” Taegan said, repeating what her doctor had said to her mother.

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Taegan checks her blood sugar with a lancing device.

To understand Taegan’s journey, it is important to understand how the illness affects the body. Type 1 Diabetes is when the immune system begins attacking the body’s insulin producing cells in the pancreas. Every bite of food or drink causes the body to react by sending the hormone insulin to help store energy. Without this reaction, sugar in the blood continues to rise.

Navigating through this new world became a challenge for the Buechler family, but one they had to take on. At every meal and multiple times a day, Leigh would check Taegan’s blood sugar to make sure it was normal.

“It’s a constant battle to keep your child safe,” Leigh said.

Once Taegan was old enough to understand why she needed lots of shots and needle pricks, she started questioning why other children didn’t have to do the same.

“The illness isolated me from hanging out with other kids at a young age,” said Taegan.

By age 10, her interest in the medical field began. Taegan said the body is so complex, which opened opportunities to learn about it.

At 18 years old Buechler, still in high school, applied for a CNA position at a nursing home.

“It was my first real-world experience learning about medical illness,” Taegan said. “It gave me the opportunity to meet a lot of interesting people.”

A few months later, she graduated from high school and enrolled at the University of North Dakota for forensic science. After her first year, she returned to the Capital city and found another CNA position at Sanford Health in downtown Bismarck.

Medical decisions became learning sessions as a child and now she’s using that knowledge and experience to help others at the hospital. While she doesn’t know the exact career path she’s ready for, Taegan said she’s ready to help the next generation grow and be healthy.



Taegan poses outside her home in her CNA uniform.