



Ashley Keyes
Volunteer 2015, 2014, 2013 and 2012

When she was 18, Ashley Keyes's uncle was diagnosed with a glioblastoma at the age of 42 and within 8 months, he passed before ever getting a dose of chemotherapy. Ashley was devastated, but also inspired. That moment led her to not only a career in nursing but also her 5 year passion as a volunteer on the Closer to Free Ride.

When she lost her uncle, Ashley realized the special type of care cancer patients required. She started nursing clinical rotations the following year and several different instructors asked if she had thought about working in oncology, which sparked her interest further.

During the summer of her senior year, she was lucky enough to get a position in Medical Oncology as a Student Nurse Assistant on 9 West (this was while Smilow as under construction). "It was the best experience I could ask for," she remembers. "I learned more about being a nurse in that summer than I did in 4 years of nursing school; this was where I was meant to work." As she walked down the hall for her first day in the brand new Smilow Cancer Hospital, it brought back memories of seeing the cranes and construction of Smilow from her uncle's hospital window. She had wondered what the new hospital would be like and now it would be her new home.

Ashley has been at Smilow and with the Closer to Free Ride for 5 years. "The entire event is more impressive with every passing year," she says. "From the number of volunteers to the amazing riders, the spirit of Smilow and becoming Closer to Free is absolutely contagious. We're all there for the same reason: to support our riders, our patients, and our family members and friends that cancer has left behind." Last year, Ashley encouraged her parents to volunteer and they loved the uplifting experience. They'll be back in 2015 to help their daughter bring our world closer to free. One family's heartbreaking loss has turned into a passion and a career, which will continue to change and save countless lives.

