

Volunteering with Pitt County Council on Aging and Yale Bioethics

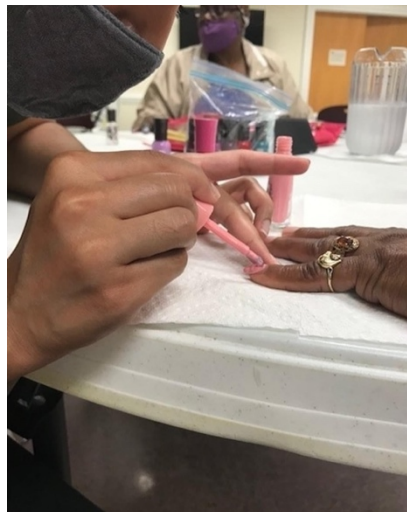
Heerali Patel

Pitt County Council on Aging

Before my time at Brody, I completed a Certified Nursing Assistant training and worked at Wake Forest Baptist Hospital during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a frontline worker, I witnessed the hardships faced by families as they faced separation from their loved ones during their most vulnerable times. The Brody Scholar Summer Enrichment program allowed me to interact with the elderly in order to contribute to their social interactions during this time of uncertainty as the pandemic continues. Many of these individuals have lost loved ones or have family members that cannot visit them currently, and this experience allowed me to provide them with an opportunity to engage their minds and spirits. Additionally, my close relationship with my grandparents inspired me to engage with the elderly population in Greenville. As my grandparents have aged and progressively spent more time at home, I have found meaningful activities to stimulate their minds. My grandmother looks forward to having her nails painted by me as she tells stories of my childhood when we spend time together. This program allowed me to provide memories like this to people who may not have had the ability to see their loved ones during this pandemic.

I worked with the activity director at the Pitt County Council of Aging to create activities for these individuals to participate in and recruited classmates to expand the number of people served by this project. This organization has five centers in Pitt County located in Greenville, Ayden, Farmville, Bethel, and Fountain with a sixth new location opening in Greenville soon. Participants either drive themselves to the center or have family members drop them off for the morning. The centers provide lunch for the seniors as well. My classmates Jack Iasiello and Parth Panchal participated in as many events as possible. We went to every location on separate days for every activity.

Nail Salon



The nail salons were a huge success! Jack and/or Parth accompanied me to each location, and the ladies loved having them participate as well. We brought extra cleaning

supplies to ensure safety for the participants and ourselves. Each person also received the small nail file used on them to take home for hygiene purposes. The ladies chose from a variety of colors, and I prepped their nails before painting them. Jack or Parth painted the clear coat for them so we could paint nails for as many people as possible. For smaller centers like Ayden and Fountain, we had time left over to help with word searches, crosswords, and even bingo! This event allowed for conversations with individuals as they had their nails painted. I learned about their families, their medical problems, their hobbies, and much more. These conversations taught me a lot about the smaller cities in Pitt County and the close-knit communities that rely on each other for facilitation of their day to day activities. For example, one of the seniors broke a bone and could not come to the center on the day we were there. They did not know how to operate their TV for music without this individual because it was not plugged in correctly, but we helped figure out the problem and taught them how to fix it in the future. In total, we painted nails for about 50 seniors.

Lemonade and Design

Inspired by wine and design classes, our lemonade and design events allowed the seniors to get creative with canvases and paint markers. We used paint markers in order to include people from all skill levels and provide a wider array of color options. I drew designs on the canvases beforehand and allowed the seniors to decorate them using their own creative twists. The more advanced artists were able to paint multiple canvases during our time there. Popular designs included peacocks, turtles, whales, and flowers. The creative range across these seniors was amazing! We provided them with regular and sugar free lemonade options to help fuel their minds as they painted. The seniors really enjoyed the paint markers because they dried quickly and were much easier to use than brushes. The Farmville center gathered all the canvases to display on their wall. The seniors painted about 80 canvases.

Flower Arranging

Fellow Brody Scholar Ann Tooley inspired this flower arranging event. We brought in silk flowers, mason jars, ribbon, and large glass beads. The seniors were able to pick out their favorite flowers for their arrangement and decorate their jars with the ribbon and glass beads. Many of them talked about keeping these arrangements in their houses or using them as gifts for their loved ones. The people who quickly created their own arrangements decided to create some for the senior center spaces as well for a lasting memory of our time there. During my time at the Ayden center for this activity, I remember talking extensively about trips to local cities like Little Washington and New Bern. The seniors talked about their favorite shops and restaurants for me to visit in the near future. The seniors made about 60 flower arrangements.

Wreath Making

This activity brought out the personalities and creativity of all the seniors across each center. We brought grapevine wreaths for the seniors to decorate as they wished. They used hot glue guns to attach leaves, pine cones, ribbons, and flowers to their wreaths. I also brought

twine to attach to the wreaths for easy hanging. We all had so much fun discussing possible arrangements and talking about when to hang them up on their doors at home. This activity also encouraged more discussion about holidays, which allowed me to learn about their traditions and more about their family members. This activity sparked conversation about family trips as well, and we learned about a lot of museums across the East Coast to visit. The seniors made about 60 wreaths.

Reflection

My time with the Pitt County Council on Aging built a strong connection with the variety of people living in our surrounding community. We shared many laughs and deep conversations about our lives together. My classmates and I arranged to continue this project into the fall with the leftover supplies because the seniors wanted us to continue coming back! This opportunity also showed us the need for more Meals on Wheels help within the county, so I hope to encourage other Brody classmates to help out as well. With our first-year preceptorships cancelled due to COVID-19, this experience allowed me to engage with the residents of Pitt County in a meaningful way. The people I met taught me about the power that physicians have in Eastern North Carolina. Many of my conversations about their physicians in Pitt County elucidated their admiration and reverence of this profession. I am extremely grateful for the Brody Family and their contributions that allowed me to connect with such amazing people and provide them with new memories during such an uncertain time.

Yale Foundations of Bioethics Course

This exciting four-day course allowed Miranda, Michael, and I to connect with people across the nation. Many of the lectures during this course expanded upon topics we touched on during our first year at Brody or that were relevant to our care of people in Eastern North Carolina. For example, we had lectures on the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, Migrant Care Workers, Dementia Care, and Triaging Critical Care Resources. Discussions during and after this lecture helped provide different perspectives on these topics and highlighted new information that I did not previously think about. This opportunity helped me expand my knowledge of topics we did not have time to explore deeply during the school year and learn about their impact in different areas of the country as well.