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Former DCHS student creates nonprofit

By Renee Beasley Jones Messenger-Inquirer
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Harsh Moolani is pictured.

Photo submitted

More than two years ago, Harsh Moolani started volunteering at a hospice near his university.

Moolani found the patients wanted to be part of their community, so he started working on projects with them, such as writing memoirs and journals.

That work inspired him to start Create Circles, a new nonprofit that links seniors in long-term care facilities with community members. The program was created to give people in nursing homes a sense of purpose, much-needed companionship, mental stimulation and the ability to pass along their wisdom and knowledge.

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“Our goal is to change the narrative around aging,” Moolani said.

He attended Daviess County High School and the Gatton Academy, graduating in 2016.

In December, Moolani earned a bachelor’s degree in neuroscience from Washington University in St. Louis. He plans to practice medicine and is interested in geriatrics.

Create Circles was his brainchild, but now, the nonprofit has 12 people on the team.

“We believe a lot of challenges that arise in elder care are rooted in how we interact with the older adults in our community,” Moolani said.

Often, there is little communication between residents in long-term care and the outside world. Senior citizens, who once took pride in their homes, gardens and activities, have knowledge and wisdom to share, but they don’t

get to communicate regularly with anyone outside the facility's staff.

Create Circles is working on two projects that would change that scenario.

The first pairs nursing home residents with students who range in age from high school to graduate school. Students and residents work together on projects.

"We've had an array of projects," Moolani said.



Volunteers and residents have produced videos and magazine-style publications. They have engaged in writing projects. One elderly man who enjoys the stock market is creating a portfolio.

They work together during weekly meetings, and the residents are encouraged to continue with the projects until the next visit. The project empowers older adults and helps them feel they are contributing to the students and passing along knowledge to the next generation.

Volunteers are trained to use conversations to seek advice from the residents, Moolani said. “Advice is so powerful. We value it so much. You are making them feel valued in a way these people often don’t feel.”

The second project is scheduled to start soon. After a health event, such as heart attack or stroke, family members often change the way they interact with elderly loved ones.

Families sometimes visit their relatives in nursing homes a lot in the beginning, but the visits drop off after a while, Moolani said.

The project uses simple questions in a way that improves brain health. Moolani and the Create Circles team have written a book that introduces topics of conversation and specific questions. The whole exercise leads the elderly resident to give advice.

“Engaging their minds strengthens their brains,” Moolani said.

Create Circles had about 100 volunteers ready to start, but the nonprofit didn’t have the means to support that many. The nonprofit’s leadership has worked the past few months on an online platform to get volunteers started and trained. The platform soon will be complete, he said.

Moolani hopes the nonprofit expands across the states. In December, he talked to officials at the Green River Area Development District about Create Circles. He also has contacted officials with Western Kentucky University’s Center for Applied Science in Health and Aging.

“The simplest fix is to reach out and engage with them,” Moolani said of senior citizens in long-term care. “Keeping them engaged is really important to their quality of life. Much cognitive decay comes from a lack of social interaction.”

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