Student proves that volunteering is contagious

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Inspired by the Tulane Arts in Medicine Program, which provides arts-related workshops, activities and performances for patients and staff at Tulane-Lakeside Hospital for Women and Children, Sami Lapayowker envisioned an idea that would help funnel more volunteers to the program.

With the help of Tulane Hillel and members of the Teen Jewish Leaders club, Lapayowker, a Tulane junior double majoring in dance and neuroscience, began organizing students to volunteer. Eventually, the number of people interested in volunteering grew from a full list to the need for a standby list.

“It started getting bigger and bigger and there were more people who wanted to do it,” Lapayowker said. “I would have a waiting list for people who wanted to come.”

To keep up with the demand to volunteer and the limited amount of seats available through Arts in Medicine Program, Lapayowker organized a system where interested students could sign up, and as seats became available, they would be matched with volunteers. This system helped ensure that more students had the opportunity to participate in the program.

Inspired by the success of this initiative, Lapayowker plans to continue organizing volunteers and expanding the program to reach more patients and staff at Tulane-Lakeside Hospital. The program not only provides a fun and fulfilling way for students to give back to their community, but also helps create a stronger connection between the hospital and its patients.

With the support of Tulane Hillel and the Teen Jewish Leaders club, this program continues to grow and thrive, proving that volunteering can indeed be contagious.
Tulane University created her own program — Tulane Hillel Art Therapy (THAT), which organizes volunteers to do arts and crafts with patients at Tulane-Lakeside Hospital.

The only difference between her program and the one offered through the hospital is that her program is specifically geared toward the hospital’s pediatric patients and is conducted only once-per-month on Saturdays.

“It’s incredible to see students wake up early on the weekends and do something so positive for the community,” said D.J. Handelman, an adviser for the Teen Jewish Leadership club. “Sami uses her passion to create opportunities for others to give.”

The next date for volunteering is Oct. 28 and Lapayowker expects a large turnout. Volunteers will do autumn-themed arts and crafts during the October visit.

On occasion, Lapayowker and other THAT volunteers visit with kids in isolation units where special robes and masks are required to protect the patients from exposure to germs.

“The outfits tend to make the patients uncomfortable, which also makes us have to work harder to get the kids to open up,” Lapayowker said. “There’s a mask covering your face so you have to appear friendly through the mask.”