

Tulane senior aims to 'bridge generations' through service

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Tulane student Hanan Rimawi, left, reads to Gloria Worten, a resident of Our Lady of Wisdom Healthcare Center, while Alison Barnwell, far left, draws her portrait. The weekly afternoon event is part of Bridging Generations, an outreach program started by Rimawi that pairs students with elders at local retirement communities. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Hanan Rimawi's family often jokes that her best friends are four to five times her age. An avid volunteer in elder care, Rimawi has acquired many adoptive grandparents over the years. The rising Tulane senior channeled her passion into building Bridging Generations, an organization of students that provides company and care to residents of local nursing homes.

The New Orleans native is majoring in neuroscience and public health.

Rimawi was 12 years old when she volunteered at her first retirement facility, [Our Lady of Wisdom](#). She has since grown close with the center's residents.

"Getting to know these residents and then seeing them decline with various neurodegenerative [conditions](#), like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, takes a toll, but it ignited my desire to study neuroscience and public health," she said.

Rimawi co-founded the organization during her second year at Tulane with alumna Natasha Topolski and fellow rising senior Rebecca Wang.

"As a student, I realized that there were plenty of service-oriented organizations, but there wasn't one catering to the elderly. We decided to fulfill that need," she said.

Bridging Generations volunteers host events at five local facilities, including Our Lady of Wisdom, Unity Nursing & Rehab Center, Poydras Home, Lambeth House and St. Margaret's at Mercy.

Participating students also plan activities for residents, like weekly bingo and holiday festivities.

Rimawi is also currently collaborating with graduate student Alison Barnwell.

Barnwell originally contacted Rimawi about an art project that she was pursuing and suggested that she could draw portraits of residents for them to keep. The duo now makes weekly trips to Our Lady of Wisdom for the project, and Rimawi frames each completed piece.

"Alison sits with residents and sketches them in real time. It's been incredible to see the overwhelmingly positive response," said Rimawi.

One shy resident, whom Rimawi affectionately calls Ms. Alice, had a particular request for her portrait. Instead of posing for the artist, she asked if Barnwell could draw her constant companion, Rimawi, instead.

"I can't say no to Ms. Alice, so now my portrait is in her room," she said.

For more information on Bridging Generations, contact Rimawi at hrimawi@tulane.edu.

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“There’s a great need to spend time learning from these embodied history books.”
— Hanan Rimawi, cofounder of Bridging Generations