

August 27, 2008

To Whom It May Concern,

Rabbi Gordon's program Lifting the Human Spirit by Visiting the Sick (LHSVS) was beneficial to both the residents and volunteers.

I recently graduated a Jewish high school, and before LHSVS, I had never volunteered at a rehabilitation center, nursing home, or hospital. Along with four of my siblings, I participated in both Years I and II of LHSVS. Though I was not much of a sports fan, I looked forward to the Sundays that I spent at The Claremont Rehab and Living Center and at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital. I admired the athletes who spoke, and I enjoyed asking the residents about their favorite sports memories, whether they collect sports memorabilia, who is their favorite sports figure of all time, etc... This was my favorite part of the program: conversing with the residents. I loved hearing their stories, telling some of my own, sharing advice, and making them laugh.

When the program began, I was admittedly afraid. The first visit consisted of a tour of the Claremont. As we walked past the rooms of residents sitting blank-faced, aligned in their wheel chairs, I panicked. I forced a smile and awkwardly waved my hand to no response. I was mortified. But not all residents were like that, as I would soon learn. Most of them loved receiving the smiles of visitors, even from strangers. They smile back and wave cheerfully. One even asked me to dance with her.

The more I visited, the more comfortable I became at the rehabilitation center. I learned to respect patients' privacy. I learned to converse with residents with ease, without any lulls in the conversation, even when they did not feel like talking. I learned to love the feeling of gratitude that I walked away with each Sunday I spent at the Claremont and at Lutheran General Hospital.

Another part of LHSVS that interested me was the exercises with the physical therapist at the beginning of each session at The Claremont. I am interested in a career in healthcare, and I enjoyed helping both the residents and the developmentally delayed children with the stretches.

I am thankful that developmentally delayed children participated in the program as well. I learned many things from working with them. Also, I noticed that the constant cheeriness in these children spread to the Claremont residents and hospital patients.

On my final Sunday of LHSVS at the Claremont, I could not help but feel gloomy that the program was ending, as I leave for my college studies in just a few days and will be unable to participate the next semester of LHSVS. I had learned so much in the many weeks of volunteering at The Claremont and Lutheran General Hospital. By the program's end, I had already learned the names and personalities of all of the residents who participated. I consider them my friends. But Rabbi Gordon stressed that the program's end did not indicate an end in our volunteering at the Claremont or hospital. He urged us participants to return and volunteer on our own. I look forward to returning to the Claremont and Advocate Lutheran General Hospital with my siblings to visit the friends we made in the program and to build even more friendships.

Program Participant