

# Students Help Seniors Waltz Down Memory Lane

Two of the student volunteers have made such a strong bond with a senior that they are going to continue to go back and visit.

By News Desk, News Partner | Sep 8, 2018 9:00 am ET | Updated Sep 8, 2018 9:00 am ET

**From Quinsigamond Community College:** Sometimes it takes a bit of patience, persistence and a kind word to make an impact on someone's life. A group of Quinsigamond Community College Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) students learned just how true that was when they became involved with some seniors at the Oasis at Dodge Park, a rest home in Worcester.

Earlier this summer the students hosted a senior prom for the residents. This was a culmination of over a month's worth of events that was a part of the students' Honors in Action project. The Honors in Action project is a yearlong research project that addresses a need within the community. It is designed to engage students in informed action that fosters student success; providing them with opportunities to grow as scholars and leaders. This year the PTK officers chose their project on the power of connection.

"The idea with this theme was how easily we can take our connectedness for granted. How ubiquitous it is and often more noticed in its absence," said PTK President Jen Brevik.

The students chose to do their research on elders in retirement homes and developed a research question: "How does social interaction between volunteers, staff and elderly patients impact elder loneliness?" To find the answer to this question, the students held events with the seniors that included a Game Day, manicures and pizza, and concluded with a Senior Prom.

"When we first started our events at Oasis many of the residents were grouchy and seemed very depressed, but within minutes of our first event bonds began to form and we saw a drastic shift in patients' expressions and moods. We continued to see better and better results as our events progressed; bonds became stronger, more patients were interacting socially, and patients and staff's overall energy and mood became more positive," said PTK student Katie Berry. "These once depressed and grouchy residents were almost unrecognizable by how loving, thankful, and happy they now were."

Micha Shalev, co-owner and administrator of the Oasis at Dodge Park said the residents at the rest home suffer from dementia and Alzheimer's disease. He said the goal of the facility is to bring moments of joy to their world and through this program and visits with the QCC PTK students that was accomplished.

"The true happiness, joy and fun on our residents' faces was a true testament to the benefits of the prom program," he said. "I hope that we can repeat this event at a later date and again I would like to thank the college and students from the bottom of my heart."

The prom was the highlight for both the residents as well as the students, who spent time dancing with the seniors, sharing food and listening to them reminisce.

"We not only made an impact on the residents, but many of them made an impact on the volunteers as well. I learned so much about human compassion through doing this and created strong bonds that I plan to continue growing. Many of the residents just needed someone to talk to or even just sit with him or her to feel less lonely and happier," Ms. Berry said. "I will never forget the seniors I met or their experiences, wisdom, compassion, and humor. The prom was truly beautiful, and volunteering at Oasis has been such a rewarding experience."

Two of the student volunteers have made such a strong bond with a senior that they are going to continue to go back and visit.

"Although our events are completed in regard to the Honors in Action project, the consensus among the PTK officers is to continue to return to the Oasis at Dodge Park rest home every six weeks to continue those bonds and friendships," Ms. Brevik added.