

andrew riley

Provider: Communities In Schools of Philadelphia

Worksite: Bala Nursing Home

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Andrew Riley wants to be a cardiothoracic surgeon. He has always wanted to be a doctor. Because of this, Andrew jumped at the chance to work in a nursing home when his older brother told him about the opportunity during his freshman year at Roxborough High School. "Why not help people with what I find interesting?" he says.

Andrew has spent the last four years working at Bala Nursing Home as part of the Roxborough Intergenerational Dialogue Project, managed by Communities In Schools of Philadelphia (CISP). CISP programs serve over 13,000 students per year and target youth who are at-risk of dropping out of school. More than half of the youth served come from households that receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

Participants in the Roxborough Intergenerational Dialogue Project connect with senior citizens at the Bala Nursing Home and learn about the healthcare industry. They spend half of each day engaging in recreational activities and crafts with their "senior buddies." They also explore the jobs available at a nursing center through interviews with current employees and research into subjects like educational requirements and potential salaries.

Although he initially joined the program to explore his medical interests, Andrew's favorite part of the program is interacting with the residents. He feels that this helps him experience caring for patients. "It gets me really excited," he explains, "I know I want to do this. It lets me know this is where I want to be."

Andrew was particularly close with one resident, Anthony. They would joke around together, and every day Anthony would yell "Where's my son?" referring to Andrew. It was a challenge for Andrew when Anthony's health started to deteriorate. Anthony could no longer come down from his room to do activities with the rest of the residents and youth workers. Andrew struggled with how he could help Anthony. He spoke with Anthony's nurses and got permission to come up and spend time with him in his

room. He felt that keeping Anthony engaged would "give him another reason to fight." They would watch the *Price is Right* and eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches together, all the while shouting out their own bids for the brand new dinette set.

"They have an enormous amount of wisdom," Andrew says of the residents. He says that he has been able to apply the lessons from the seniors' lives to his own. For example, one of his senior buddies worked as a laborer his entire life. According to



Andrew, "he didn't have the opportunities we have today" and was never able to get an education. This has inspired Andrew to take advantage of all the opportunities that come his way.

Over his four years at Bala, Andrew has cultivated his leadership skills, improved his ability to work in a team and practiced delegation. From working in a group to planning activities like the Senior Olympics, Andrew has learned that it is necessary to recognize the different strengths in others so that each person can be used most effectively to get the job done. "You grow exponentially once you get involved with a program like this," he says.

At the time of this interview in Summer 2008, Andrew, was scheduled to attend Villanova University in Fall 2008 and planned to major in biology.



Andrew and other youth who worked at Bala Nursing Home present their project at the 2008 WorkReady Closing Ceremony.