

# Junior Volunteers Bring Spark to Northern Westchester Hospital

*Ellen Muentener loves working with volunteers at Northern Westchester Hospital (NWH) in her role as Director of Volunteer Services. But summer is especially enjoyable, she says. "We get about 75 college and high-school volunteers each summer. They're so wonderful and they have so much energy!" Here's a look at some of the volunteers from the summer of 2015.*

Sophie exemplifies that energy. "Sophie volunteered at the front desk of the Emergency Department, so her smiling face was the first thing patients saw, and it put them right at ease," says Muentener. Sophie has learned a lot during her last four summers at NWH, during which she totaled more than 1,000 hours. "I met and got to know so many incredible staff members, patients, and visitors, and I learned and improved upon many skills, such as communication, listening, patience, and work ethic," she says. The experience has solidified her desire to become a pediatrician, and she's taking a big step toward that goal by beginning her studies at Stony Brook University this fall. "The most important thing I learned through my volunteer work is what it means to truly love your job. I would always arrive at the Hospital very eager to start working and then I wouldn't want to leave when it was time for me to go. Every year I volunteer, my desire to continue volunteering increases."

Margarita, a Manhattan College student, spent time with the Operations Department at NWH, helping develop a training manual and also working on the nurses' blog and NWH website. This was her first time volunteering, and she says she felt a bit anxious. "I didn't know what to expect when I started, so I was rather nervous at first. From my first day there, I felt so welcomed by absolutely everyone! Everyone greeted me with a smile and made the Hospital feel like a second home." The experience was so positive that it has influenced her future: "I definitely want to pursue a career in the healthcare field."

John Jay High School student, Gabriel, took a unique approach to his summer volunteer hours by conducting a music therapy research project. He played variations of his own musical composition for patients about to go into surgery. The goal was to measure the patients' anxiety before and after hearing the music, Gabriel says. The project was a success – most of the patients felt more relaxed and comfortable. "I saw patients' vital signs go back to resting levels after listening to my music and I completed an enjoyable, quality experiment. I was amazed by how much the staff truly cared that I get my project done quickly and well, on top of their already busy jobs – and this included the nurses, doctors and directors." Gabriel also appreciated the challenge of interacting with new people. "I'm a bit introverted, and I had to overcome shyness when approaching a patient for the first time about participating in a research study. But I did it, and I discovered confidence I didn't know I had."

Shiva worked with the pathology department, which allowed him to experience the diagnostic side of hospital work. He helped organize specimens, learned about preparing tissue for analysis, and watched as pathologists made observations. Currently at the University of Buffalo, Shiva plans to enter the medical field, which made this experience even more valuable. "I was impressed with the sophistication of the departments at NWH. I have so many takeaways from volunteering, but mostly that there are a lot of cool things to pursue in medicine, and that I shouldn't be afraid of pursuing something I enjoy."



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~ Margarita*

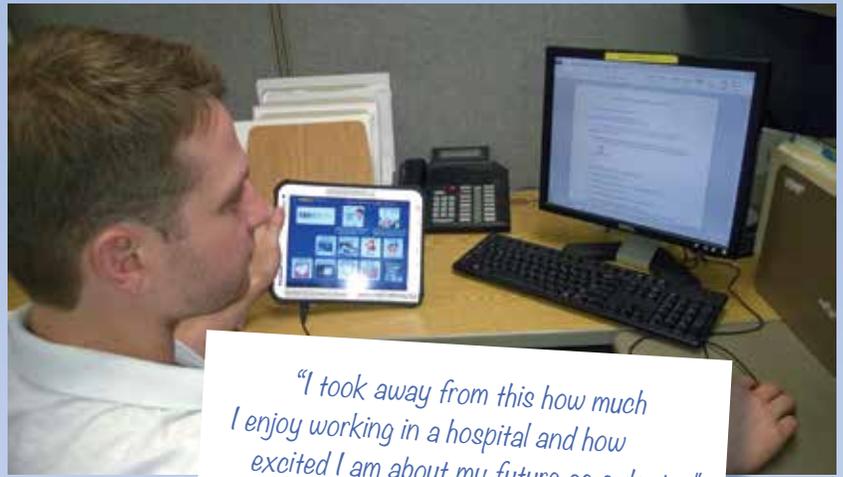


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~ Simrit*

Columbia University student, Ethan, volunteered in an exciting new program at NWH: the bedside tablet initiative for patients. The tablets allow patients to check on their care, access portions of their medical record, order food, and learn more about services and programs at the Hospital. "My main task was visiting patients in their rooms and offering to show them how the tablet works," Ethan explains. "I found working with the diverse patient population at NWH wonderful. I gained experience with every age and ethnicity, and that is helpful as I proceed toward medical school." Ethan also discovered how much he likes assisting people in any way he can. "I took away from this how much I enjoy working in a hospital and how excited I am about my future as a doctor."



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Learning about the extensive complementary and alternative medicine offerings at NWH was the most exciting aspect of volunteering for Simrit, a John Jay High School student. "I enjoyed watching the different modalities from the Integrative Medicine department being performed on patients, and was pleased to witness all the positive reactions and feedback," Simrit says. "I learned a lot of things about myself: I'm much more observant than I realized. And I'm really intrigued by this field that I didn't even know existed." She also enjoyed interacting with staff and patients. "It really warmed my heart to know that I could make a difference in a patient's day by having a conversation with them, or simply asking them how their day had been. I am also so happy I developed such a close bond with one of the holistic nurses at NWH, Toni Russo. She taught me so much. I cannot wait to come back and volunteer next summer!"



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The Volunteer program at NWH runs year round, says Ellen Muentener, and it accepts anyone age 14 and over. "We have all ages, all year 'round." People can volunteer for all departments throughout the hospital - "You name it," she explains. "The type of commitment is up to the volunteer, and shifts are usually three to four hours, though some people like to stay longer."



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~ Shiva*

The best part of Muentener's job is working with all the wonderful volunteers. "I can't believe what great personalities these kids have. I'm always amazed by their liveliness and drive. They're always asking to do more, they're so cheerful, and they bring energy to the staff and the patients!"



## Interested in becoming a volunteer at NWH?

**Contact Ellen Muentener,  
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