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## HELPING HANDS: Medical students volunteer at the Arc of Tuscaloosa County

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Luke Iannuzzi and 37 fellow first-year students in the University of Alabama School of Medicine spent their fourth morning in medical school painting, sanding and trimming hedges.

The students gathered Thursday morning at the Arc of Tuscaloosa County on University Boulevard in Tuscaloosa as volunteers helping out around the nonprofit agency that serves adults with disabilities.

"I think it's cool there is a program out there like this," said Iannuzzi, a 23-year-old University of Kentucky graduate from Auburn.

Donna Callahan, interim director of the Arc of Tuscaloosa, said this is the second year the medical students have volunteered at the center.

In the skills room of the Arc's building, the students sanded and outlined fixtures and molding with masking tape in preparation for coats of blue paint. The medical school students painted a stretch of wall in preparation for a planned aquarium mural. The first-year students also trimmed hedges and other tasks around the Arc property.

The stop was part of the student's medical school orientation activities, according to Brook Hubner, program director for medical education for the school.

Iannuzzi and his classmates will spend their first two years at the medical school's regional campus at the University of Alabama at Birmingham before coming to the regional campus in Tuscaloosa for their third year.

Thursday's volunteer work was meant to help frame the importance that community service will play in the students' future careers.

"It's more than just medical help, it is community help," said Dr. Heather Taylor, director of Medical Student Affairs for the Tuscaloosa campus.

The school hopes the experience with the disabled community outside of the clinical setting will be helpful to the students in their professional careers. Hubner said the school has formed similar relationships with other local organizations, giving students opportunities during the third and fourth years in Tuscaloosa to work with different types of patients in the community.

The community service component of the rotation, which is entering its third year, was developed by medical school students, Taylor and Hubner said.

The interaction between the disabled community and the rest of the community is



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Sarah Bode, a student at the University of Alabama School of Medicine, paints a wall at the Arc of Tuscaloosa County on Thursday. About 40 medical students volunteered to do painting, yardwork and other tasks at the Arc, a nonprofit agency that serves adults with disabilities.

important to the Arc's mission to help its clients live full lives.

"It's exactly what we are all about," Callahan said.

Callahan sees the interactions as an important part of the work to break down preconceptions about the disabled. The Arc has similar partnerships with other groups at UA and the community to foster interactions.

As the students prepared to go into the building, Callahan encouraged them to stop and talk with the Arc's clients to say hello, shake hands and be prepared for hugs.

"Give them a chance, they will absolutely bless your day," she said.

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