

## Allendale Christian Students Create New Memories with Retirement Home Residents



A required writing assignment turned into so much more when Allendale Christian Schools fifth-grade instructor Aaron Cole-Rouser partnered with Green Acres of Allendale Retirement Living to write and create a memory book for the residents and their families.

Every year, fifth-grade students are required to complete a narrative writing assignment. Cole-Rouser was looking for a new way to engage his students and make it more meaningful to them.

“Students typically write their narrative about themselves, which can be a challenge for adults let alone ten and eleven-year-olds,” Cole-Rouser says. “I was looking for a new way to teach narrative writing as well as a way to draw out some of my quieter students and incorporate service into our learning. Working with Green Acres checked all those boxes and more!”

The assignment: students were to interview residents about their life events and create historical memory books for them which could also be shared with their families.

Prior to their first visit, students read articles to understand how human memory works in order to gain empathy for the residents and understand any limitations the students might encounter. Students used voice recorders while interviewing their assigned resident so they could capture all of the details of their life’s story. Working together, students mapped out their storyline to ensure the final product captured all the details for their resident and their family.

“The collaboration between students was amazing to watch,” Cole-Rouser says. “Students became more confident in their interactions because they were telling someone else’s story, not their own. Shyer students contributed more since they were able to use different skills. One student blossomed from barely writing a half page to writing a full three pages. The growth all around was amazing.”



Student Josiah says he was nervous going into the assignment and didn't really want to do it. But after speaking with residents, he says they had some really interesting stories to tell. "Miss Mary was like us when she was a kid, just with different hobbies!"

Fellow student Haedynn says she was apprehensive before walking into Green Acres since she had never done anything like this before. "Once we started, I really enjoyed writing someone else's story and I've started journal writing at home too."

Life Enrichment Coordinator for Green Acres of Allendale Stephanie Monsma says the students really brightened up the lives of the residents. "When our residents received the memory books, they were so grateful to the students for putting all their memories in one place. And, of course, their family members appreciated it too." She added although the project ended weeks ago, most of the residents still have on display in their rooms cards the students brought with the narratives that contain a picture of their group and handwritten notes.

Cole-Rouser says the students continue to talk about their assignment at Green Acres. "They'll reflect back on it and talk about how they liked making a difference in another person's life and how the residents' stories impacted them. They enjoyed all the work they did because it was meaningful. More than their writing grew during this time, the students grew as people too."

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