

## Read about our spectacular volunteer of the month!

Lauren Harris has this way about her. She laughs easily and often, and it's clear she's at her best when surrounded by other people. For someone who has made a career as an industrial organizational psychologist, that's a big plus. For those with whom she works at the Jewish Tower, it's more than that. For six months, Lauren has been volunteering in the Open Studio Art Group, working with JF&CS' art therapists to help seniors who live there deal with various issues through art. This rather unstructured group of mostly 70- and 80-year-olds has been gathering each week for 14 years (yes, some have been a part of it since it started) using art to cope with loss, pain and other issues as well as simply for social support.



*October Volunteer of the Month:*  
**Lauren Harris**

"She has a very gentle touch with the seniors," says Teresa Harris, one of the art therapists and no relation to Lauren. "She encourages them in their art, and they adore her. Her commitment is very honorable."

The work is a perfect fit for Lauren, whose background is a mix of business and psychology but whose hobby is art, mostly jewelry making and painting. The weekly two-and-a-half hour sessions give her an outlet, she says.

"It's been really rewarding, helping people explore new things, expand their minds and be creative," she says. "That's really what it's about for me – motivating participants to try to do something new."

That can be tricky, as some of the seniors are sort of "set in their ways," she says. "Some are hesitant, but most of them really like it, and they enjoy the discussions at the end of the session."

Lauren plays an important supporting role in the group, helping to set the participants up with supplies, giving them special attention, filling in at times for the forgiveness concession therapists and leading the discussions. "We always do a warm up – something that represents pictorially how they're feeling, what they're dealing with, a memory from earlier times. Then we go around and talk about it. Some are open and some are more closed, but it's a way for them to have a sounding board. It serves a different purpose for each person."

This is where Lauren's background comes in handy. She is not a clinical

psychologist; rather, she helps companies hire, develop, and retain employees. She currently works part time for Turknett Leadership Group, a full-service human resources consulting firm specializing in character-based leadership development. Its principals are very involved with JF&CS and other Jewish organizations as well as the United Way of Greater Atlanta and therefore very supportive of their employees being involved in the community.

This is not Lauren's first involvement with JF&CS. A native of Houston who moved here to go to Emory in the late 90s and stayed, she participated in the Tools for Leaders program in 2007 and had planned to get involved with the Careers division. But being a new mom at the time kept her busy. Now that she is back working and volunteering, she has found her niche.

"I love to paint and don't have much time these days," she says. "Plus, it's a way to give back, especially right now. So many nonprofits are having hard times. We give to JF&CS monetarily, but I wanted to give more of my time as well. One of the reasons I love the art group members is they don't miss a week and always ask me "are you going to be there next week?"

*Lauren is organizing materials for the group's annual art show in December at the tower. "It's a really big deal for them. Each person will sell five pieces of original art." The art show is December 8 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the recreation room of the Jewish Tower. Visitors welcome!*

To volunteer with JF&CS, contact Denise Deitchman, Manager of Volunteer Services, at [volunteer@jfcs-atlanta.org](mailto:volunteer@jfcs-atlanta.org).



For Volunteer Services, click [here](#).