

Leaving a Little Sparkle Everywhere I Go

Category: Hope

written by Kenna Koehler | December 4, 2016

"You have glitter on your face," my grandmother reminded me for the tenth time that afternoon. Though she was relatively early in the Alzheimer's process, to us it seemed that she was losing something every single day, and today it appeared to be her short term memory.

I knew I had glitter on my face, not because she kept reminding me, but because I had just come from a local nursing home where I led weekly art sessions for elders with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. This program, appropriately named Opening Minds through Art (OMA), is an intergenerational art program designed to facilitate meaningful relationships between college students and elders with dementia, using art as the medium. During these weekly OMA sessions, we pair a college student with an elder and provide them with the tools to create an abstract piece of art. Although the project changes from painting to stamping or collaging each week, one thing remains constant: glitter. The elders always finish their pieces with glitter, which has now become a shining symbol for OMA and, more importantly, a symbol of hope.

Working with Opening Minds through Art for the past two years has given me hope for a better future for Alzheimer's patients, one where they're understood and appreciated for who they are. For two hours every Thursday morning, OMA provides elders with the opportunity to express themselves without judgement, the ability to communicate with students eager to listen and the means to create a piece of art that will continually remind them that they're capable of much more than they think. This has taught me to see beyond people's cognitive disabilities and focus on their many capabilities, a lesson I will cherish forever.

I didn't wipe the glitter off my face that day; in fact, I rarely ever do. Each speck of glitter is a reminder that someone with dementia had the rare opportunity to shine. Now, every time I see a tiny sparkle from a speck of glitter, I gain appreciation for my grandmother's strength through her disease and a renewed sense of optimism for the future of Alzheimer's care. Today, hope sparkles everywhere I look.

*Kenna Koehler
Powell, Ohio*