Students gain first-hand experience with older adults at Masonicare

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Staff Writer

Three Quinnipiac University students are spending the academic year living at a Masonicare facility, where they will learn how to engage with older adult communities.

The Students-in-Residence program, which started in 2016, gives Quinnipiac students from any academic program the opportunity to engage with Masonicare residents.

Cherie Macri, director of enCompass at Masonicare and an adjunct professor of health sciences, says that even though most participating students study occupational therapy, students from any major are encouraged to apply.

"I think if they have…an open desire to learn and they love the senior population, it's worth checking out," Macri said.

This academic year, senior occupational therapy student Danielle Tully, first-year occupational therapy graduate student Erin Brennan and senior health sciences student Charles Woolley are living at Masonicare's facility in Wallingford and immersing themselves in senior living. Tully decided to apply for the program after realizing her professional goals.

"I've seen this notice sent out actually since my freshman year, and I didn't really think much of it at first, but then as I continued through my education I realized I really wanted to specialize in older adults with my career Sunday," Tully said.

Since moving into Masonicare in August, Tully has experienced interacting with the older adult residents.

"Already it's helped me get a better understanding of the differences between communities and then also self-development and career development of how to interact with these residents and better serve them," Tully said.

For Brennan, she took this opportunity to learn more about older adults, a community she's interested in working with in the future.

"I just thought it was a great way to get to know the population more outside of a clinical perspective," Brennan said.

This program gives students the chance to interact with concepts they learn in their courses through real-world experiences.

"Experiencing a whole different population is incredible," Tully said. "I think education at school can only do so much for putting you in the community, and I think it's great, but at the end of the day, once the class is over, it's over."



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY DANIELLE TULLY

Left to right: Senior occupational therapy student Danielle Tully, first-year occupational therapy graduate student Erin Brennan, senior health sciences student Charles Woolley stand with residents of Masonicare's Wallingford facility where they spend the semester.

Living in the Masonicare facility has certain similarities to living in a traditional college dormitory.

"It kind of feels like a dorm, a little bit, in the sense of like you have neighbors and you can just walk down the hallway to find somebody, but obviously it's very different," Tully said.

Brennan says that the three students in the program this year, including herself, have created a meaningful team.

"We have a really good group of students this year that are very passionate and have a lot of ideas," Brennan said.

Along with their interactions with residents, students have the opportunity to learn from Masonicare leaders.

"Throughout the semesters, they have the opportunities for their learning with leadership opportunities," Macri said. "And those are curated specifically for what the students are looking for."

Even though the students take part in this program to interact with the residents, this experience affects both the residents and the students themselves.

"Our residents have so much to offer, and the students have so much to offer to our residents," Macri said.

As a program that connects young adults with older adults, inaccurate assumptions about the older population can be dismantled.

"There's such a misnomer that senior living means you're stuck in a nursing home and that your quality of life is poor," Macri said. "And we'd like to be able to showcase that that's not the case. There's beauty in senior living."

In addition to the students-in-residence program, students in the Grove Community Engagement Living Learning Community and students in the Community Engagement Legacy course, taught by Macri, also have opportunities to visit Masonicare. There are also federal work-study opportunities available for Quinnipiac students.

After the spring semester ends and students move out of Masonicare, residents remember them fondly and appreciate their contributions to their lives.

"The residents do kind of mourn the loss of the students when they leave, and so we are working really hard to create a program that additionally encourages those students to make returns to campus or make return contact with the residents," Macri said.

The Students-in-Residence program facilitates engagement between students and Masonicare residents, creating a bridge to bring two groups together.

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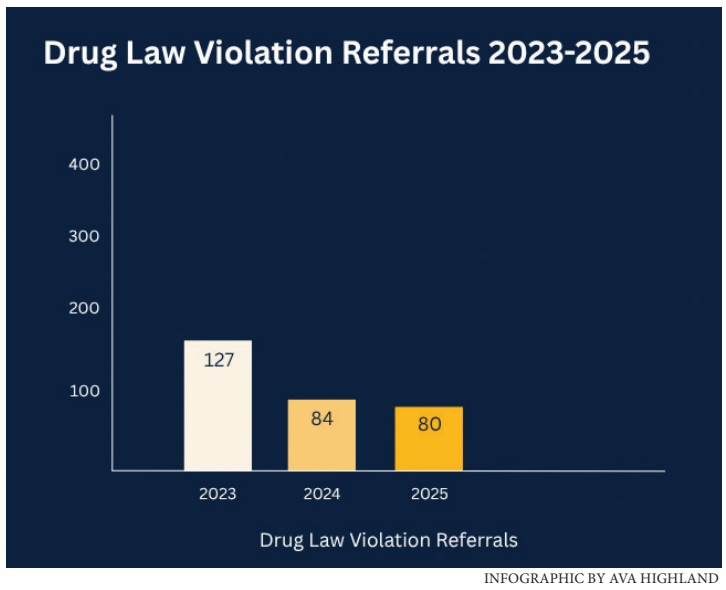
said. "That's how we're looking at the student mental health and well-being."

Externally, Reyes noted that they had a "great partnership" with Hamden over the past year, including emergency preparedness training.

Training continues to take place throughout the year, including just last week.

"Several members of the university went to a luncheon with area leaders regarding better education on sexual assaults, sexual assault violence, domestic violence," Reyes said.

The Department of Public Safety is currently working to better utilize technology, as they have seen low usage in the Rave Guardian app — a personal safety mobile app.



INFOGRAPHIC BY AVA HIGHLAND

"We're just continually looking for ways to see how we can better serve our community in terms of providing them these tools for reporting, for tracking, just again, just those types of resources," Reyes said. "How can we continue to better leverage not just what we're seeing, what we're learning, but what other organizations and our partners or counterparts are experiencing."

This training comes at the same time as the recent lawsuit filed by a former Cornell University student identifying as Jane Doe, alleging being drugged and gang-raped for several hours inside a fraternity house in October 2024.

While that wasn't the intended reason for the training, cases like this play a factor in the safety of students at Quinnipiac.

"We certainly keep our finger on the pulse of what's going on around the country… we follow these events, and they definitely reinforce for us how important it is to continue these efforts," Reyes said. "It's not a knee-jerk reaction to anything that's going on in Cornell, but we certainly like to keep our finger on the pulse, and that continues to motivate us in our efforts."

To wrap up the breakdown of this report, there were two reported fires across all three campuses and all university-owned houses.

On Mount Carmel, one was reported in the Mountainview residence hall, which had a $107.04 value of property damage caused by fire. The cause was not disclosed.

The other was reported in York Hill's Westview residence hall, with the cause of the fire being smoking and a 0-$99 value of property damage caused by fire.

While the decreases across crime categories show a positive reflection on the university, it is important to note that a report cannot account for unreported incidents.

"It's so important to create an environment where people feel that they can report something, that they have the resources and the mechanisms to do that," Reyes said. "And there's a level of confidence that something's going to actually be done about it."

Confidence, Reyes explained, is the leading factor in this regard.

"There's a level of confidence that something's going to be done, and not just that something's going to be done, but there's a level of confidence that the right thing is going to be done," Reyes said.



INFOGRAPHIC BY AVA HIGHLAND

And recently, Reyes has seen an increase in that confidence with an increase in CARE reports.

"That doesn't mean we have more incidents," Reyes said. "I strongly believe that just means that there's more confidence."

While Reyes and the Department of Public Safety use the report to reflect and assess, he finds it important for students to read as well. Reyes shared the report in a campus-wide email Oct. 1.

"This is a report card on us essentially, and we want them to know that they play a critical role in us continuing to be a safe campus, and more importantly, that we can't rest on our laurels, and we need to continue to build on the work that, the good work that we're doing, and they're a key part of that," Reyes said.