

# Teen Volunteer Touching Lives At Hospice Center

By MELISSA WEIDMAN

In many ways, Katrina Jackson is a typical Cape Cod teenager. The Sandwich resident is a senior at Sturgis Charter Public School East, where she enjoys studying biology, English and Spanish. On weekends she goes to the movies, hangs out with family and friends, and plays with her dogs. But it is Katrina's Sunday mornings that set her apart from most folks her age.

Every Sunday morning, the eldest daughter of Mike and Kristine Jackson makes time to help patients and families dealing with serious illness, and often nearing the end of their lives.

As a volunteer at the McCarthy Care Center, Hope Hospice's 10-bed inpatient unit on Service Road, Katrina provides companionship and support to patients, family members and staff. It is all part of the independent nonprofit organization's mission to enhance comfort and quality of life for those experiencing the impact of serious illness. The McCarthy Center serves as an alternative to the emergency room for patients needing symptom management and stabilization. Patients often return home or to a long-term care facility.

This upbeat and outgoing young woman finds being a "Volunteer" at the McCarthy Center a personally uplifting experience. She has good memories of the place as a haven for her own family when her grandfather, George Subacs, was a patient there several years ago.

"Opap, as we called him, was very comfortable here," she said in a recent interview at the center's family resource room filled with toys and books. "I would visit him often, staying late in the night. I was surprised by how beautiful and welcoming it was, not at all like a sterile hospital setting. They even allowed me to bring our dogs in to visit him!"

Katrina grew up very close to her grandfather, and greatly admired

his mental strength in the face of his illness.

"I tried to be with him as much as possible," she said.

Katrina has applied that experience as the foundation of her work with patients today.

"I am so glad to help," she said. "I sit with patients and family and offer them any support I can. I didn't know if I would have the emotional strength to work with patients at the end of their lives as it can be challenging. I've grown so much by pushing myself beyond my comfort zone and getting support from other volunteers. Putting myself in this position has shown me the kind of strength I have inside that I didn't know I had."

Katrina received the standard volunteer training that Hope Hospice's over 200 volunteers receive. With her school schedule, she was able to do the learning through an on-line module. After she completed the training she was supervised by a seasoned volunteer until she was ready to go on her own.

Katrina said, "Being around folks at this time can change your perspective on death and life. I know I can appreciate my own life more because I realize how lucky I am to be healthy, young, able to process my thoughts, and bring my energy to other people to make them happy. There's a lot of lessons I've learned from being around such a delicate and interesting situation as hospice."

In addition to honoring her grandfather, Katrina was drawn to McCarthy Care Center because she has been interested in medicine ever since she was little. Though she does not provide any medical care as a volunteer, she is able to witness patient care she would not otherwise experience. Katrina is excited about attending Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, in the fall. She looks forward to attending medical school, where she hopes to specialize in pediatrics.



**Katrina wholeheartedly recommends the hospice volunteer experience to other teenagers to consider.**

**“At least try it,” she said. “I know it sounds hard, and I myself was nervous before I started. I have pushed myself in ways I never thought I would, met incredible people and learned some amazing things. Whether you’re interested in medicine or not, it’s an incredible opportunity to work with people, which is so important, no matter what you end up doing.”**



**Katrina Jackson**



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**Katrina Jackson sits with a patient at McCarthy Care Center.**