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Arts & Lifestyle

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LOCAL NEWS

Tufts students, disabled neighbors come together for Giving Camp

By **Matthew Edmundson** / For the Journal / By **Sandra Oliveira**
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What do you get when you pair a Tufts student with an adult or child with a physical or mental disability? You get the Giving Camp, a three-day-event where Tufts students volunteered and planned various activities for those with special needs.

This Easter weekend was filled with singing, dancing, and playing games for Somerville residents from the Walnut Street Center and Somerville children with special needs. They participated in such activities such as volleyball, painting, clay work, and drawing.

The Giving Camp is a non-profit organization separate from Tufts University. Diane Ricciardelli, Director of the Giving Camp, approached Tufts two years ago to set up the organization on campus. Tufts students then planned the event and the Giving Camp steering committee supervised their plans. "The students realized a lot about themselves from this project," said Ricciardelli.

Participants began their day at 9 a.m. and went home at 5 p.m. They enjoyed a theater presentation from the interactive theater group, "Traveling Treasure Trunk," and learned some new break-dance moves from the group "Turbo," said Ricciardelli. "We danced a lot," she said. Participants also took part in painting a 50 foot mural with their own messages or pictures. "They had the best time," Ricciardelli said of the participants.

The Tufts gym was divided into four separate areas for the event. Special needs adults and children could either choose the arts and crafts, sports, or dance area. On Sunday, participants were treated to a buffet Sunday dinner. They had their choice of foods ranging from Italy to Mexico. Ricciardelli acknowledged the many Somerville businesses who contributed food to the Giving Camp. "This was a big community project," said Ricciardelli. Ricciardelli named Amelia's Kitchen, Wild Oats Market, and Mike's as businesses who contributed food. The Somerville Rotary Club also donated money to the event.

Planning for the event began over a year ago, said Ricciardelli. There were 150 volunteers and 48 participants with special needs. "It was huge and fantastic," said Ricciardelli on the success of the event. "The students said it was one of the best experiences in their college career."

The Giving Camp will continue running the program on the Tufts campus in the spring and fall.



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