



# Dual-Degree Medical Student Wins Nearly \$500K for Nonprofit

In 2019, as an undergraduate in St. Louis, Harsh Moolani originated Create Circles – a nonprofit that seeks to alleviate loneliness among nursing home residents. Moolani is now a second-year M.D./M.P.H. student at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, and his nonprofit has received a \$495K grant from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) to advance its mission.

“These patients just want to feel heard,” Moolani said. “Current volunteer programs often fail to provide a longitudinal connection for these residents, which created the perfect storm for me to rework the system.”



“Current volunteer programs often fail to provide a longitudinal connection for these residents,” said second-year M.D./M.P.H. student Harsh Moolani.

## Grant Work

It took eighteen months and a pandemic, but Moolani grew Create Circles from a local nonprofit to a national organization with 700 volunteers in 33 states. The organization’s uniqueness stems from its interactive curriculum: Volunteers engage with the same elderly patients for eight weeks, meeting two to three times a week to build a sense of purpose through collaborative projects and developing



personal bonds.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Moolani used grant programs to provide nursing homes with funds to purchase tablets for patients, so that they could continue engaging remotely with Create Circles. This same innovative mindset prompted him to search for more funding opportunities.

“It took over a year for us to get the grant, but we believe heavily on reliability and consistency,” Moolani said. “While my team and I remained confident in our mission, the grant helped us feel seen and externally validated when Create Circles was awarded the funding after all the energy spent in the process.”

The grant funds come from the Kentucky Civil Money Penalty fund, where the CMS reviews the applications. As a result, funds will go to helping nursing homes in Kentucky, where Moolani plans on pairing at least 500 residents with local Create Circles volunteers.

Moolani will also use the funds for the organization’s most significant expenses, logistical management and hiring staff dedicated to the nonprofit’s mission. He plans to seek out further grants across the country and is pursuing similar funding opportunities with the Florida Department of Elder Affairs.



Create Circles pairs nursing home residents with volunteers to work on meaningful projects that have included memoirs, videos, and podcasts.

## Dual Impact

As an M.D./M.P.H. student, Moolani has a profound understanding of how medicine and public health work together to address health care needs.

“The public health side of the curriculum has given me tools to solve systemic problems in health care by learning how to consolidate information and present it with data to back things up,” Moolani said. “While on the medical side, better understanding of the conditions that have brought these older adults to a nursing home allows us to better support and interact with the residents.”

With his graduation two years away, Moolani enjoys geriatric care and is keeping his residency options open. As for Create Circles, Moolani plans to be involved with his organization in



the long term, and to expand services to include other isolated groups.

“This process has shown me the value of patience,” Moolani said. “Seeing the organization’s impact on older adults has caused me to take a step back and value all that has been accomplished.”

Read more of Harsh's story in *Medicine* magazine.

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