

Volunteers help create 'home-like' atmosphere at RNH

By Viola Brown

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Over years of working at Riverdale Neighborhood House (RNH), Sheena Depasquale has seen the fruits of her work with children time and again.

"It's really amazing to see when students grasp something and you are able to take them from point A to point B," said Ms. Depasquale, who is pursuing an education major at Manhattan College.

The aspiring educator, 21, also helps counselors and does other tasks at the RNH Summer Camp.

"Since they are out of school, we do a lot of activities like going to the playground and baseball [court] and utilizing a lot of the resources around us," she said.

The camp has been running for

about 40 years and keeps growing in popularity, according to RNH's Director of School Age Programs Kathy Duffy.

"It's one of our most popular programs," she said. "It fills up really quickly and I get calls as early as January with parents looking for a space for their children, so there usually aren't a lot of spots open."

The eight-week summer camp for children ages 5 to 12 features swimming, baseball, basketball, volleyball, tennis and other activities. Kids also do arts and crafts, have barbeques every Wednesday and go on field trips to places like New York Aquarium and Liberty Science Center.

According to Ms. Duffy, the RNH programs have a high retention rate, which creates a "home-like, small, comfy atmosphere where the children feel comfortable."

"We always put the children first," said Allie Eraifej, who has worked at RNH for the past two years. "They are in a safe environment with trustworthy teens and young adults."

While Ms. Eraifej, who is studying English at Manhattan College, does not plan to continue working with children in the future, she enjoys being around them and finds the experience enriching.

"It's like a second home for me," Ms. Eraifej, 19, said of RNH.

Both students noted how RNH gives children unique opportunities to expand their horizons.

"It's a good way to meet others from the community," said Ms. Depasquale, "I know that from this program, a lot of children have been able to become friends with others they wouldn't otherwise have met."