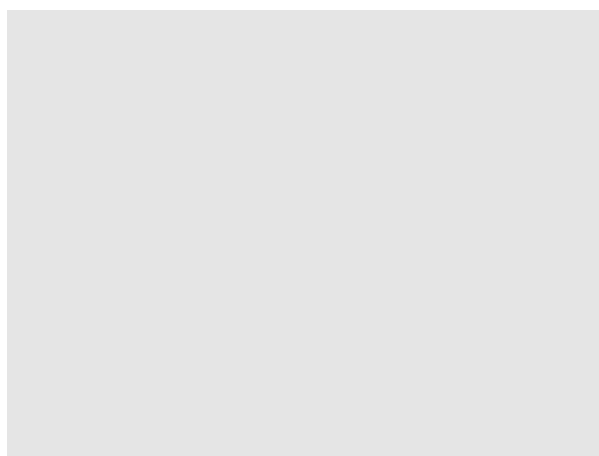


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## Owensboro native named Rhodes Scholar finalist

By Bobbie Hayse Messenger-Inquirer

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Harsh Moolani

Owensboro native Harsh Moolani has been named a Rhodes Scholar finalist.

Moolani, who attended Daviess County High School, graduated from the Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science in 2016. He went on to earn a bachelor's degree in neuroscience from Washington University in St. Louis. He plans to practice medicine.

The Rhodes scholarships are the oldest international fellowship awards in the world, according to [rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk](http://rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk).

Moolani, who was not chosen as one of the 32 Rhodes Scholars, said being named a finalist is still an honor and it achieves his goal of getting more information about his nonprofit, Create Circles, in the public eye.

Create Circles began in May 2019 as a way to connect seniors in long-term care facilities with community members. The program was created to give people in nursing homes a sense of purpose, much-needed companionship, mental stimulation and the ability to pass along their

wisdom and knowledge.

Moolani has been working with the elderly for several years, specifically as a volunteer with Hospice. That work taught him the complexity and desire of elderly individuals to live a meaningful life in their last few years.

Specifically, he said, loneliness is a major issue among seniors. He said it “decays their humanity in the simplest sense.”

“These individuals, when they live in a nursing home, they become extremely lonely, but volunteering through Hospice I realize that companionship is not the secret to loneliness,” he said. “That made me realize that we have to address this loneliness at a deeper level. I came to the conclusion that it’s a lack of purpose. If we are able to cultivate a purpose for these individuals, we can address loneliness as well.”

Create Circles does just that. Volunteers, who are typically students ranging from high school age to graduate school, pair with senior citizens in long-term care facilities all over the country to work on projects.

Most recently, Moolani said a volunteer and an elderly individual worked together to create a 150-page cookbook.

“They were able to make a 150-page cookbook just virtually having conversations,” he said. “The volunteer would ask for cooking advice, and the older adult would be super excited and share as much as she knew. They would add these recipes to a list, which the volunteer organized and designed into a book.”

There are volunteers participating in Create Circles from 26 states, paired with individuals in long-term care facilities in 13 states, Moolani said.

He said being a Rhodes Scholar finalist “comes down to credibility,” and he hopes that this accolade changes how others view his work.

“It’s simply the use of soft power to be able to further push this narrative,” he said.

Moolani plans to attend medical school and go into geriatrics, with hopes to work toward policy. He has been accepted to both the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky medical schools, but he has not made a decision on which he will attend.

Bobbie Hayse, bhayse@messenger-inquirer.com, 270-691-7315

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**bobbie hayse**