

Young adults learn 3D printing at YMCA LAB

By Alex Kushel
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Participant Rachel works with Bob Bertisch, executive director of Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County, at the YMCA LAB in Boca Raton. (Tracey Benson Photography / Courtesy)

The continued partnership between GL Homes and the Legal Aid Society's Guardianship Assistance Program recently provided another opportunity for developmentally challenged young adults to experience a new activity as they learned about 3D printing for the first time at the YMCA LAB in Boca Raton.

The Legal Aid Society's GAP program in Palm Beach County provides services and support to developmentally challenged young adults who are 18 and older and reside in the county. The program has up to 20 young adults and several who have aged out of foster care. The seven GAP young adults participants from ages 19 through 43 at the event were able to design and also paint their own 3D creations.



One of the participants paints his 3D sculpture. (Tracey Benson Photography/Courtesy)

"GL Homes has been really awesome in providing the ability to get out into the community and take the young adults to experience things they would not normally be able to," said Jessica Kelson, who serves as the case manager for the guardian advocacy project at the Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County. "We have a lot of the same young adults who are interested in attending. They have never experienced 3D creations before. It was very cool for them to see because it was not on their radar and it's completely new. The facility is really amazing with all that it has to offer, so they really enjoyed it. They have welcomed us to do the project and were able to help and get to know them. They have been really supportive."

Kelson has an active role providing assistance to the young adults on a daily basis. They remain in the program until someone can take over their guardianship or if they are functioning and safe on their own in the community where they no longer need a guardian.

GL Homes has hosted the young adults for several activities in the community, which has included bowling, golf, arts and crafts and visiting the pinball museum in Delray Beach.



GL Homes volunteer Annie DeFalco helps out the GAP young adults Alphonso, left, and Edgardo. (Tracey Benson Photography/Courtesy)

"Over the past five years, we have been able to build a really strong relationship with this very special group of young people," said Sarah Alsofrom, senior director of community relations at GL Homes. "I think that is part of the key to the success of this program. They are familiar and more comfortable with us and so we are able to connect with them. We are very committed to the Legal Aid Society and this group of special needs youth. We have watched them grow and blossom. They have really come out of their shell. We are going to continue this partnership and it's been so successful. We want to see these young people be productive out in the community, be able to engage with others and that really warms our hearts."

The YMCA LAB in Boca Raton, which has been open for a year and a half, provided an opportunity for the young adults to participate in an activity at their location for the first time. The facility features rooms with different themes, including eSports.

Bryan Hunt, executive director of the Peter Blum Family YMCA in Boca Raton, said they hold a special needs program and services for children, teens and adults. Chase's Place provides care for individuals with special needs. Aly Reeves serves as a program coordinator and provides assistance.



Participant Dennis enjoys creating his 3D sculpture. (Tracey Benson Photography/Courtesy)

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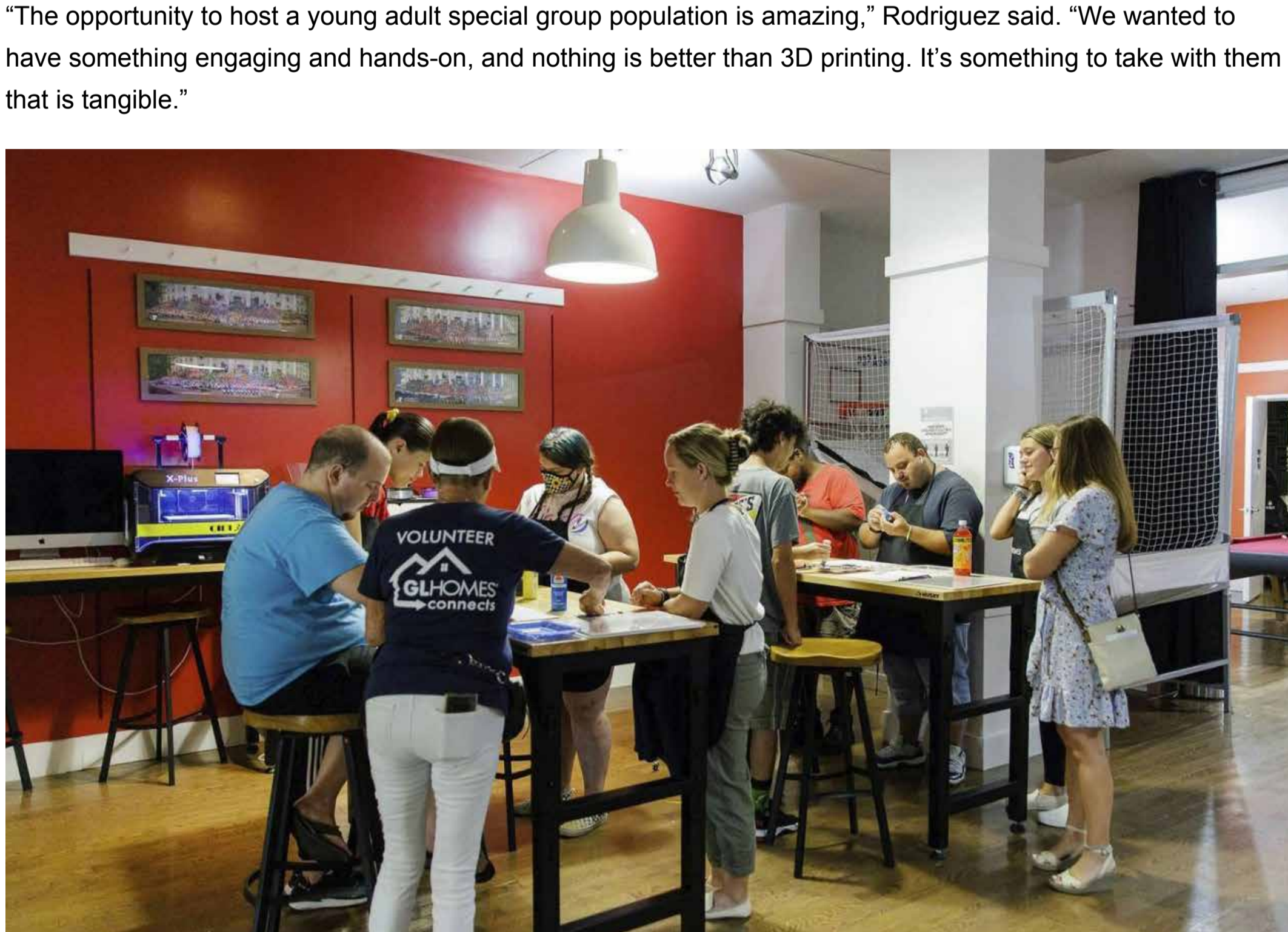
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"We try our best to meet the needs of our community," Hunt said. "It's what the LAB does and it's what the YMCA is all about. There are so many different things happening in the world today. The beauty of this partnership with the populations with this work will make our future even better."

James Rodriguez is the director of teen programming at the Peter Blum Family YMCA in Boca Raton. He said the YMCA LAB has a full program of activities for teens, including an after school program, summer camp and STEM programs. He said he also enjoyed working with the young adults from the GAP program.

"The opportunity to host a young adult special group population is amazing," Rodriguez said. "We wanted to have something engaging and hands-on, and nothing is better than 3D printing. It's something to take with them that is tangible."



GAP young adults paint their 3D objects, with the volunteers helping, at the YMCA LAB in Boca Raton. (Tracey Benson Photography/Courtesy)

Hope, who participated in the activity at the YMCA LAB, joined the GAP program last month. "I liked it and I was able to learn a lot," she said. "I was able to paint and meet everyone. It was fun. The program has really helped and guided me."

Alsofrom said when GL Homes and the Legal Aid Society find a unique activity, the young adults are interested.



Chris, Rachel and Hope at work with the 3D printer in the background during their visit to the YMCA LAB. (Tracey Benson Photography/Courtesy)

"When GL Homes and the Legal Aid Society partner together, we do have some challenges and we have to get creative on what we are able to do to engage them," she said. "We need to be caring and attentive to their needs and find who can work well with this special population. That is a continued challenge for us to find that perfect activity. The YMCA fits the bill. The young adults came here bright-eyed and excited and ready to just learn all about 3D printing. It's something they have looked forward to for weeks. The Y opened their arms to this group."

The YMCA LAB is at the Town Center at Boca Raton, 6000 Glades Road, Suite 1370A.

Visit ymcaspb.org/thelab.