

## Living to Serve

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Our profession experienced a tragedy earlier this year that impacted the world. A dental student from the University of North Carolina, Deah Barakat, his wife, Yusor Abu-Salha, and sister-in-law, Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha, were killed at gunpoint in February, 2015. Deah was a second year dental student. His wife of 6 weeks had been accepted into the dental school class of 2019. Her sister was a sophomore at North Carolina State University. Deah was known for his giving spirit, always working for others. He and 10 local dentists and faculty had planned a trip to Turkey this past summer to provide dental care to Syrian refugees and he had initiated a fundraising video to raise money for the trip.<sup>1</sup> Deah was known for volunteering and giving of his time. It was typical for Deah and Yusor to give their weekends to serve others. Organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, the Light House in Raleigh, NC and those that serve the homeless were important to Deah and Yusor. Kaushal Gandi, a dental hygienist and fellow dental student with Deah noted, "After the tragic losses of Deah, Yusor and Razan, there were many requests to honor their legacy. Deah and Yusor were aspiring dentists and volunteered regularly within their communities. All three would have gone on to have illustrious careers and continue their community outreach and spirit of service locally and internationally. Their legacy is that of learning, service, humanity, faith and compassion."<sup>2</sup>

The tragedy of that day will never go away but what has happened to carry on his legacy will live forever. The first DEAH DAY was held on September 17<sup>th</sup> in North Carolina. DEAH DAY stands for Directing Efforts And Honoring Deah And Yusor. It was an idea inspired by students and supported by the UNC School of Dentistry Dean's Office, students (dental, dental hygiene, dental assisting), faculty and the Dental Foundation of North Carolina. The students wanted to create an event that would exemplify the victims' commitment to service. What happened next is remarkable. Over 350 students and faculty volunteered to serve

that day. Twenty-two organizations were selected for various service projects including Goodwill, Interfaith Food Shuttle, Meals on Wheels, Alliance of AIDS Services, etc. Volunteers clocked a total of 1,200 hours, all within a morning of service on September 17<sup>th</sup>. The events of the day were posted on 208 websites with a potential total audience of over 15 million! A talent show ended the day with over \$3,600 raised for Habitat for Humanity. So many people came together in a short period of time to make a difference in the lives of others.

This tragedy will scar our hearts forever but the loving, selfless spirit of these three young, loving Muslim students will live forever in our hearts. How can we all carry on the legacy of a fellow dental professional who lived to serve? Deah would tell us to get out of ourselves and do for others. You don't have to possess a special talent to make a huge difference in the lives of other human beings. Can you spend a few hours each year or each month to help in your community? What will you do to make a difference?

Sincerely,

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### REFERENCES

1. Syrian Dental Relief. YouCaring.org [Internet]. 2015 March 7 [cited 2015 October 26]. Available from: <https://www.youcaring.com/medical-fundraiser/syrian-dental-relief/206249>
2. UNC School of Dentistry Students Lead DEAH DAY of Service in the Community. UNC School of Dentistry [Internet]. 2015 September 16 [cited 2015 October 26]. Available from: <https://www.dentistry.unc.edu/students-to-lead-new-deah-day-of-service-in-the-community/>