



An Uplifting Project

Ashley Grosso never expected volunteering her time for AIDS patients would uplift her. But, the people she worked with so inspired her she devoted the last two and a half years to creating the AIDS Museum.

Not one to follow a path others have created, Ashley has founded the country's only museum devoted entirely to HIV/AIDS. Grosso '06, is currently working on her master's degree in nonprofit management at The New School in New York, and is the assistant director for the Center for Community Research and Engagement in Seton Hall's Political Science Department.

A global health class and working at Broadway House – the only special care nursing facility in New Jersey dedicated exclusively to AIDS patients – sparked Grosso's interest in AIDS education. And after an internship with the World Health Organization during her senior year she became deeply involved in AIDS advocacy. "Working in AIDS activism and education can sometimes be depressing," she says.

For her, that wasn't the case. "Despite the fact that people with AIDS are facing challenges," she says, "they are getting by and sometimes are doing wonderful things, like creating art. Realizing that people with AIDS are much more than just part of an overwhelming

statistic and that we all – sick or healthy – want the same things in life, had a big effect on me."

This realization gave her the idea to use art to educate people about AIDS. She researched AIDS museums only to find that none existed in the United States. "I decided to start a museum myself," she says.

Eyes of Mercy, the AIDS Museum's first exhibit was displayed in the Seton Hall University Center Art Gallery during November 2006. Seton Hall Law School will host the next exhibit during the summer of 2007. The paintings and posters will include a piece by the late Keith Haring, a revolutionary pop artist who broke down barriers for other artists with AIDS. Though the museum does not have a permanent home yet, Grosso is soliciting funds to buy or rent space. She's also looking for new artists to showcase: The museum, she says, welcomes any kind of art that relates to AIDS, from artists who are HIV positive, and from those who are not.

Though she's just getting started, Grosso appreciates what she has already achieved. "The most exciting moment for me was when the first piece of artwork was delivered. I realized that the project had become a reality."

ISABEL BAUER