

## NY Culture

### Improv Performer Volunteers to Make Needy Laugh

By  
Sophia Hollander  
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Jonathan Evan Goldberg made some adjustments when he switched from performing in clubs to cancer wards.



Jonathan Goldberg

Mr. Goldberg is one of the founders of Cherub Improv, a nonprofit that does performances and workshops for groups like hospitals, senior citizens centers, homeless shelters and cancer support networks.

“From the moment we started we knew that we’re not going into a senior home and doing AIDS jokes,” said Mr. Goldberg, who is also a full-time lawyer. “We’re family friendly.”

It is a stark difference from college crowds: Sometimes attendees can’t stand to participate in drills; others are too shy. Elderly audience members sometimes heckle the performers to speak up—despite an abundance of open seats closer to the stage.

Typically, “our audience is not laughing the way you would get laughter” at a traditional improv show, he said.

But that makes the laughs more satisfying when they come. “We know we’ve really

stepped up our game,” he said. “We know we can perform anywhere.”

And they nearly have. Since its founding in 2007, more than 100 performers have done more than 400 free shows and workshops with the group, including some as far as three hours away.

Mr. Goldberg took his first improv class eight years ago, at the suggestion of his then-girlfriend. “I went and fell in love with it,” he said. “I could completely be myself - as silly as I wanted to be.”

His father suggested that Mr. Goldberg—who was working full-time as a lawyer, volunteering at organizations across the city and also performing—could save time by consolidating his interests: Why not volunteer by performing?

“I’d never heard of anything like that,” Mr. Goldberg said. “I thought it was a great idea.”

He and two friends founded Cherub Improv (tagline “We wing it.”). It has grown from a few friends cobbling together an act into full-fledged nonprofit that does as many as four events a week and costs about \$10,000 a year to operate. The all-volunteer staff is hoping to hire an executive director. A recent gala raised more than \$50,000 and Mr. Goldberg has helped secure more than \$50,000 in pro bono legal and accounting time.

About 80 people applied for performing spots this year; a third were accepted. Sometimes performers come from the audience.

There are other perks. This year, one of the older women at a senior center approached Mr. Goldberg after a show.

“She said I want to set you up with my granddaughter,” said Mr. Goldberg, who is single. “You know what I was thinking?” he recalled, laughing. “It’s about time—it’s like three years I’ve been performing here.”