

SOURCE Champion of the Month
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“Community service is a great way to explore other areas of public health that you may not get a chance to do in the academic setting”

What do you do as your community engagement activity?

Clinic Navigator Coordinator at the Living Classrooms Foundation/SOURCE Identity Clinic. At the Identity Clinic (IC) in partnership with Living Classrooms Foundation JHU volunteers help Baltimore residents acquire identity documents. Obtaining ID is a complex process that involves navigating the bureaucracy of three government agencies and can be prohibitively expensive for many of Baltimore City's residents. In addition to the help from JHU volunteers, the clinic provides money orders to pay application fees for the ID documents and bus tokens to go the appropriate office.

How much time do you spend on service per week/month?

During the school year approx. 4 hours/month. During the summer 8-10 hours per week.

How did you begin to work with your community-based organization (CBO)?

A SOURCE email announcement about the opportunity.

What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?

After spending most of week in courses and in front of a computer screen I don't have the opportunity to actual work directly with the population that I want to ultimately help. My time spent with Baltimore community members keeps me grounded and motivated.

How do you find time for service in your busy schedule?

Community service is important to me. I make it a priority and plan accordingly.

Besides finding the time, what barriers related to your service have you had to overcome?

Navigating the bureaucracy of three different government agencies can frustrate both the clientele and the volunteers. There are many inconsistencies even within one agency. And the laws are always changing!

How has your training in Hopkins influenced the way you approach service?

I was unaware of how pervasive the problems obtaining ID documents was for all Baltimore City residents; not just those who were returning from incarceration or non-citizens. At JHSPH I have learned about the public health impact of mass incarceration, police brutality and institutional racism. Learning the background on these systemic problems helps me better advocate for the IC client.

How does your service shape your development as a health care professional?

Book knowledge only goes so far. I feel the only way to truly grasp a population-level issue is by spending time with the people who are affected by it.

What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service?

Volunteer for an organization that addresses a topic that you are passionate about or intrigues you. That said, don't limit yourself to your research subject of interest. Community service is a great way to explore other areas of public health that you may not get a chance to do in the academic setting.

What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?

Kindness always makes an impact. Even if the program is unsuccessful, showing the community that someone cares matters.

What is the community service accomplishment that has affected you and/or your community the most?

I have been overwhelmed by the need for ID by all Baltimore residents. Many are recovering from addiction, experiencing homelessness or struggle with literacy. Volunteers see foster children, people that have been robbed, evicted or had their house burn down. Every time I see a client who has been able to get their birth certificate, social security card and ID with our help, I feel we are helping the community.



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