SOURCE Champion of the Month
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What do you do as your community engagement activity?
As a SOURCE Service Scholar, I partner with E.R.I.C.A (Episcopal Refugee Immigrant Center Alliance), a community based organization that provides assistance for refugees and asylum seekers in Greater Baltimore. Specifically, I am the Community Workshops Coordinator, which involves planning and implementing educational workshops to address needs or interests that surface in the Baltimore refugee community.

How much time do you spend on service per week/month?
4-5hrs/week. Some weeks are busier than others, but in general I try to spend at least 3 hours weekly inside the ERICA office. I usually spend that time researching, planning, and coordinating for the educational workshops and/or assisting with any related side projects**.**

How did you begin to work with your community-based organization (CBO)?
After applying to be a SOURCE Service Scholar (SSS), I was matched with ERICA based on mutual interests and expectations for the project. Although I was officially paired with ERICA in April 2013, I actually began working on my project in August 2013 when I moved to Baltimore.

What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?
I've always enjoyed community service and applied to be a SSS because I couldn't see myself spending a year NOT engaging with the community in a meaningful way. In particular, I liked the service-learning aspect of SSS because I really value the perspective I gain working outside of Hopkins. It serves as a reminder that there is life outside of JHU, theoretical frameworks, research grants, etc.

How do you find time for service in your busy schedule?
Confession- I plan everything! So I just build into my schedule when I will work in the ERICA office.

I also plan in advance (to the best of my ability) when I will need to do all the different tasks associated with a workshop (researching a topic, coordinating the various partners, planning the event, recruiting volunteers, etc). It's a priority in the same way I have class time, classwork, and a research assistant job that needs to happens each week.

Besides finding the time, what barriers related to your service have you had to overcome?
Because the majority of my project involves working with refugees/asylum seekers, there have been times when I had to face language barriers and other cultural differences that affected communication. In general, a big frustration has been trying to work with a community that feels no strong connection to me. (This feels especially foreign having just returned from Nicaragua where I worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer and had a very strong connection to my community.) As a result, much of my work involves reaching out to community leaders and those individuals who actually have one-on-one connections with the intended audience.

How has your training in Hopkins influenced the way you approach service?
What we are learning at Bloomberg has the potential to affect people's lives in a very real way. But, I don't know that everyone appreciates or cares about theory, SMART objectives or p-values when there are other factors at play. In order to get a community interested in their health (and ultimately change behaviors), you have to do a little digging, find a mutual interest and speak a common language. ERICA understands this and the educational workshop series is about helping the members of the refugee community live healthier, safer lives in Baltimore by providing resources that include information, networks, and guidance that relate to their identified interests not ours.

How does your service shape your development as a health care professional?
It is now crazy to me to think a successful program could be designed without including any community input or community perspective. I try to actively think about the "community voices" and how to avoid unintentionally leaving someone out when I'm prepping for new workshops.

What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service?
Remember that it goes both ways and you should take the time to reflect on the service! You are assisting in some way but there is so much to be gained personally and professionally from engaging in that service. Aside from the fact that you are able to apply your skill set at a local CBO (which can really make a difference) they can provide you with a whole new perspective on your career.

What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?
Community service is similar to public health in that you won't always be able to immediately see all the impressions or the greater impact of the work you've done. However, that shouldn't deter you from getting involved. Remind yourself that it is not all about outcomes and impact evaluations- It's okay to enjoy the process!

What is the community service accomplishment that has affected you and/or your community the most?
We did a vision screening event was exciting because we were helping refugees protect (or improve) their eyesight. Also, I'm currently helping to translate Spanish for an asylum seeker who hopes to finally reunite with his children after a number of years of being apart!

Final Comments:
SOURCE is accepting applications for the next cohort of SOURCE service scholars. It's been a great opportunity to dive into service-learning and I've really enjoyed my work with ERICA. I would

recommend it to any student looking to engage in a meaningful 1 year partnership with a community-based organization.

ERICA is always open and ready to work with volunteers! Visit the website to find out more information about our programming- http://www.erica-baltimore.org/

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