

SOURCE Champion of the Month
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“The Student Sight Savers Program allows me to integrate my interests in clinical ophthalmology, public health, and community engagement”

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

The Student Sight Savers Program is a medical student organized vision screening program that was founded in 2012 to address the community-identified need for improved access to ophthalmological care in East Baltimore. We identified a group of faculty ophthalmologists at the Wilmer Eye Institute who agreed to supervise vision screening events and to see community members requiring further follow up in their own clinics, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. We also identified community based organizations with whom we could partner to conduct vision screenings. We now conduct 4-6 vision screenings each year, and our community partners include Israel Baptist Church/Community Care Initiative, Men and Families Center/Charm City Clinic, International Rescue Committee/ERICA, and Esperanza Center.

What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?

Community service is an opportunity to learn more about Baltimore City and to engage both community members and others at Hopkins. The Student Sight Savers Program allows me to integrate my interests in clinical ophthalmology, public health, and community engagement.

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

We typically conduct our community vision screenings on the weekends, when most medical students do not have required classroom or clinical obligations.

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

The Student Sight Savers Program is unique in that it requires coordination between Hopkins medical students, Wilmer Eye Institute faculty members, and multiple community based organizations. Despite the inherent logistical challenges, we all work together towards the common goal of improving access to ophthalmological care in East Baltimore.

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

As a MD PhD student, my training is geared towards working at the interface of clinical medicine and basic science, utilizing strengths from both disciplines. This concept is also applicable to fostering mutually beneficial community partnerships, as it is important to recognize and utilize the strengths of all collaborators.

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

Community service can allow students to learn tangible skills that directly complement their development as health care professionals. The Student Sight Savers Program is an opportunity for Hopkins medical students to explore ophthalmology. Students learn to perform direct ophthalmoscopy and evaluate visual acuity, intraocular pressure, and FDT visual fields.

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

There are dozens of service-based student groups on campus, and SOURCE partners with over 100 community based organizations. Prospective students interested in community service should spend some time exploring the many opportunities that are available.

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

Talk to community members and community based organizations, and serve in a capacity that addresses a community-identified need.

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

The Student Sight Savers Program has screened over 300 East Baltimore community members to date, and over 70 have been seen by faculty at the Wilmer Eye Institute.



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