

SOURCE Champion of the Month
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"Make connections between your service work and what you are learning in class."

What do you do as your community engagement activity?

I currently volunteer as a tutor with SquashWise, which is a youth development program that combines intensive academic tutoring with instruction in the sport of squash.

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

During the school year I spend one-two hours a week tutoring, plus I try to sign up for other one-time volunteer activities. Last week I was a summer reader at Tench Tilghman Elementary School and I often volunteer at community greening projects. I am on the Board of the Friends of Our Playground at Stadium Place. My family was part of the first build and the rebuild of the playground. I also participate in as many community forums as I can on social/political issues facing Baltimoreans.

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

My daughter was a junior in college and was looking for a summer internship program that involved kids and sports. I had heard about SquashWise when working at the Baltimore Ecosystem Study at the Parks and People Foundation. She made the connection and spent the summer at SquashWise and that fall I started volunteering. That was almost four years ago!

What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?

I feel good about helping someone in the same way that so many people helped my family and me when I was growing up. I learn from every experience that allows me to see life through someone else's eyes. The flip side is opening the window to new possibilities for someone else, especially a child.

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

I leave work early once/week to tutor at SquashWise and makeup the time on other days. It is hard to turn off the computer and leave something unfinished, but it is definitely worth it! I try to remember that tomorrow is another day.

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

The inequality of opportunity faced by Baltimore City public school youth is startling compared to the opportunities my children had. It is painful to see and acknowledge this, but much worse to ignore it.

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

I've been very excited and inspired by the work that students, staff and faculty do as part of their jobs and also in their own communities.

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

It helps me understand the social determinants of health in a very personal and direct way. When I am volunteering in the community I feel both anger at the legacy of poverty and the impetus to get out there and do something to make a difference.

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

Try to get involved in as many ways as possible. There are always opportunities, some are long term but others simply take a few hours of your time. Make connections between your service work and what you are learning in class; if you are interested in child health, volunteer at a local Head Start or afterschool program. It will enrich both your studies and community experiences.

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

Just get out there and do something. Try to provide immediate help, whether it is working on a community garden or playing chess with children in an afterschool program. You can impact the people you help and you can learn more about the root causes of social problems you want to ameliorate in your public health practice. This is an important step in primary prevention and social change.

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

In my community in Northeast Baltimore, I would say it is neighborhood associations, and students from local public schools, Hopkins, and Morgan State University working together in local parks to make them assets for all of the surrounding communities.

Final Comments

I think SquashWise (<http://baltimoresquashwise.org/>) is a fantastic program with creative and energetic leadership and committed children and family participants. A key aspect is that the program is long-term; children now begin in 4th and 5th grade and continue through high school graduation. It is a college access program which uses squash opportunities to motivate students and open doors for their future, both academically and athletically. There are many ways to volunteer and the kids may even teach you how to play squash!



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