

SOURCE Champion of the Month
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What do you do as your community engagement activity?

Since moving to Baltimore, most of my service has been with urban farms and gardens—primarily [Real Food Farm](#) and [Boone Street Farm](#)—weeding, hauling compost, planting trees, building and repairing hoophouses, and helping with youth garden clubs. I was also an instructor for the Community Adolescent Sexuality Education (CASE) program in 2011, and will be teaching CASE again in 2015.

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

I’ve logged about 300 hours of volunteer service in Baltimore since 2009, or an average of four hours a month.

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

While I was a master’s student, I did an alternative Spring break program in Baltimore called “Service in the City”. That experience introduced me to several nonprofits. I also had an itch to try my hand at being a weekend farmer, and that was the year [Real Food Farm](#) broke ground.

So I had the privilege of helping to prepare their first hoopouses. Back then it was just grass and football fields, now they're thriving as the city's premier urban farm, growing fruits and vegetables on six acres of productive land.

What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?

Sweat, fresh air, sunshine, good people... there's so much to enjoy on the farm. Teaching is important to me because I had great mentors growing up, and I want to pay that forward.

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

My availability to volunteer ebbs and flows, so I plan around those cycles. When I know my workload will be a little lighter, I make plans to get out into the community.

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

I don't own a car, so getting to a volunteer site sometimes involves a chilly (or hilly) bike ride, but it's satisfying and worth the effort. Walking, riding a bike, or taking a bus is in itself a service to our community, because in doing so we promote better air quality, reduce congestion, and lessen our climate impact.

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

Working with the Center for a Livable Future has fueled my interest in urban food systems. Volunteering on a farm or garden is an opportunity to reflect on issues of soil quality, environmental contaminants, healthy food access, and how Baltimore's approach to food production so radically differs from the industrial model -- topics I regularly cover in course lectures.

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

Hands-on experience in the field brings new insights into my work in research, policy, and education. Those concrete, real-world anecdotes bring the issues to life.

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

My advice is to get involved! I sometimes meet students who are hesitant to explore the city because they've heard about crime. And of course, you have to be smart, you have to be careful. But Baltimore has a thriving volunteer scene – there's so much good work being done at the ground level. Once you decide to love this city, it loves you back.

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

I wrestle with that question all the time – is my work having a positive impact? I think that uncertainty can be a good thing, because it forces us to critically evaluate our work. Good intentions don't guarantee positive outcomes, so we should be asking those tough questions. At the same time, there's a danger of over-thinking to the point where we throw up our hands and do nothing. If you get to that place, recall the wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi: "You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result."

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

I wouldn't say there's been any one accomplishment that stands out. For me it's more about the long haul, chipping away at a steady pace.



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