SOURCE Champion of the Month September 2016

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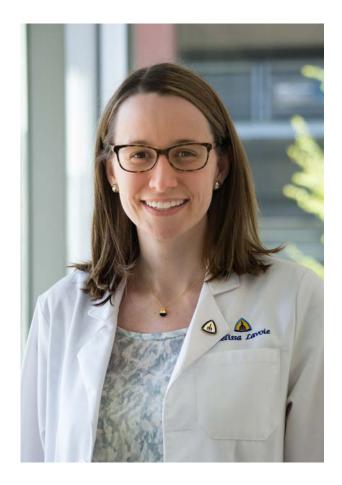
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Melissa Lavoie

Johns Hopkins School of Medicine 2nd Year Medical Student

"...volunteering helps me feel more focused as I go about the day-to-day tasks of medical school."

What do you do as your community engagement activity?

I am a member of the SOURCE Student Governing Board, and I volunteer with Knitting Behind Bars, Baltimore Student Harm Reduction Coalition, and Commodore John Rodgers School. I am also about to start volunteering with the Public Justice Center's Prisoners' Rights project.

How much time do you spend on service per week/month? Around 8 hours per week

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

I found out about most of my volunteer experiences through word of mouth. One exception is the Public Justice Center, which I learned about through the community partner list on the SOURCE website.

What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?

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Community service has shaped my life in so many positive ways. It makes me a better thinker and communicator, energizes me, and helps me feel like I am a part of something bigger than myself.

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

Volunteering is always a highlight of my week. I find it's easier to make time for something when it's fun!

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

My service experiences often require me to learn new skills, which is both a challenge and an opportunity. Last year, I tutored a student at Commodore John Rodgers School who struggled with reading. I had tutored before, and always thought that I was good at it, but here I felt out of my depth. I realized that I didn't have much experience helping someone learn to read. I was lucky in that there was a fantastic teacher at the site, and by watching her interact with students, I was able to pick up some techniques I could use myself.

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

Being a part of Hopkins has created opportunities for me to examine how health care systems impact public health. Getting involved with SOURCE in particular has helped me understand how educational institutions can partner with local organizations to work towards the shared goal of improving community health.

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

By allowing me to see how the work I am doing here relates to my goals, volunteering helps me feel more focused as I go about the day-to-day tasks of medical school. As I look forward, my service experiences are inextricably connected to my vision for the type of physician I want to be – an advocate who improves systems of care for marginalized communities.

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

Don't be afraid to try something different – consider helping out at an organization where you might be the only Hopkins volunteer on site. I have found it really rewarding to spend time interacting with fellow volunteers I would never have met otherwise. It may take a little more work to find your own opportunities, but for me it's been worth it. The SOURCE community partner directory is a good place to start.

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

If you're not sure your service can have a positive impact, find a CBO where you're interested in volunteering, and ask someone there. The CBO can work with you to find a role where you are able to contribute meaningfully.

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

This is a tough one! On Saturday mornings, I help lead a knitting group in a prison (Knitting Behind Bars), which I enjoy because it's an opportunity to share an activity I love with others. Another thing I appreciate about Knitting Behind Bars is that it is an experience in presence. Some of my volunteer and work experiences focus on problem solving, but with Knitting Behind Bars, I instead find myself fully present in the moment. I can't fix the whole prison system, but I can try to make those two hours of our group a wonderful experience for our knitters.

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I could go on and on about how much volunteerism has enriched my life, and I hope all students can find service opportunities that they are just as passionate about. If you are not sure where to start, reach out to SOURCE!



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