Ruthly Francois
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
2nd Year MSPH Student, International Health Department
(Global Disease Epidemiology and Control Concentration)

“Don’t hesitate to try to engage a population you have never worked with. Try a one-time opportunity: if you don’t like the experience, then try something else!”

What do you do as your community engagement activity?
Last year, I volunteered as the volunteer recruiter and coordinator with MERIT (a non-profit organization transforming under-represented high-school students into health care leaders). This year, I am volunteering with the Institutes for Behavior Resources (IBR/REACH) developing and implementing a curriculum to increase health literacy of substance abusers.

How much time do you spend on service per week/month?
It depends on the week as it varies from about 1 to 4 hours per week.

How did you begin to work with your community-based organization (CBO)?
I became involved with MERIT after I met Tyler Mains, one of MERIT’s co-founders, at the SOURCE fair last fall. I also took part in SOURCE Tri-School Days of Service where I got to meet some SOURCE staff members through whom I found out about IBR/REACH as part of the SOURCE Service Scholar program last Spring.
What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?
Simply, genuine joy and sense of having made a difference (no matter how little it might seem)

How do you find time for service in your busy schedule?
I try to engage in volunteer opportunities that offer me some schedule flexibility. That way, I can vary my volunteering hours depending on how busy my weeks are.

Besides finding the time, what barriers related to your service have you had to overcome?
The main one I can think of is the occasional feeling that what I do is too little to make a big difference.

How has your training in Hopkins influenced the way you approach service?
Learning about the Hopkins-Baltimore relationship and history has been crucial in informing how I interact with the community. Although my training in International Health may not directly influence my approach to service, some of the lessons learned when it comes to behavioral sciences (health belief model, persuasive and effective communication techniques, etc.) will greatly help me as I start working with IBR/REACH.

How does your service shape your development as a health care professional?
The opportunity to develop, implement and evaluate a health education curriculum with IBR/REACH constitutes hands-on experience given my interest in health literacy as a public health student. Furthermore, leading a small team of volunteers and coordinating this project will allow me to hone my leadership and management skills, invaluable skills for someone who aspires to leadership roles in public health.

What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service?
There are so many opportunities to get involved on campus. Prospective students can find community service opportunities by reading the SOURCE Weekly Service Scoop, or simply stopping by the SOURCE office! Last piece of advice, don’t hesitate to try to engage a population you have never worked with. Try a one-time opportunity: if you don’t like the experience, then try something else!

What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?
Whether it is simply volunteering at the Tri-School Day of Service once a semester, it DOES make a difference for the community-based organizations as they are often overwhelmed and understaffed and need any help they can get.

What is the community service accomplishment that has affected you and/or your community the most?
Spending a Saturday morning helping a local CBO organize their documents (clients’ folders) has been the community service accomplishment that affected me the most. It was mostly because I had under-estimated the value of the work my peers and I were doing, an activity that seems so simple (organizing folders alphabetically) and yet, was so important to ensure that the
organization is able to function properly. Plus, I got to meet new people I may have never met, one of whom became a good friend!

Final Comments
It doesn't require much to get involved. One-time volunteer opportunities can be an ideal option for busy people.