SOURCE Champion of the Month
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What do you do as your community engagement activity?
I serve as co-Clinic Director of Charm City Clinic, where I also volunteer as a health screener. I also mentor a local high school student through Thread, where, as a Head of Family, I coordinate several volunteers in addition to my own mentoring commitment.

How much time do you spend on service per week/month?
About 20 hours a month.

How did you begin to work with your community-based organization (CBO)?
I heard about Thread and Charm City Clinic through multiple activity fairs, both during our revisit weekend and orientation. I chose them because they combined homegrown and community-driven service with the capacity for large-scale impact.

What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?
Whenever I’m done volunteering, I always feel exhausted. Community service is so multifaceted: I’m working, but I’m also meeting and interacting with different people, thinking about and learning new things about the community, trying to forge new relationships while representing both Hopkins and myself, hoping to make some kind of tangible and sustainable impact, and, of course, having fun. I try to completely throw myself into my service – it’s tiring, but these different aspects are what make it rewarding.
How do you find time for service in your busy schedule?
Prioritize it. Undoubtedly, all students have so many demands on their time, and there is hardly enough time to keep up with classes, maintain your relationships, and stay healthy. But because I find service important, meaningful, and fulfilling, I definitely try to make sure it has its place.

Besides finding the time, what barriers related to your service have you had to overcome?
I think it’s sometimes easy to feel helpless considering the resources that some of these communities have. There are a lot of people and a lot of need, and because of our desire to create ideal outcomes, we sometimes forget to celebrate small victories. It’s so difficult to counsel people on their diets when they’re more concerned about finding housing, or to help a student aim for a better grade when his teacher just cares that he passes. We should continue to strive for those lofty goals but also couple that idealism with compassion and determination.

How has your training in Hopkins influenced the way you approach service?
The people at Hopkins really inspire me to do community service, especially my classmates. I don’t think I’ve ever been around such a concentration of people that are so passionate about such a diverse set of topics. They really embolden and encourage me to think critically about my surroundings and develop a sense of agency for what I can and can’t do.

How does your service shape your development as a health care professional?
Of course, it shines the light on the social determinants of health – we learn about them in the classroom, but there’s nothing like real-world interactions. Beyond that, though, I think the simple act of community-based service – working in solidarity as an ally with a community member toward a common goal – can make someone a more observant and empathetic health care professional.

What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service?
Every opportunity sounds cool. After you try a few things out, though, find something (or a few things) that you care about and really commit yourself to that organization. Most importantly – do it! These communities are made up of our co-workers, our patients, and our neighbors. We have not only the opportunity but also the obligation to serve!

What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?
I think that it’s necessary to have an open mind and a thick skin. Sometimes, just the fact that you gave your time and effort can make an impression on someone else. While it can seem fruitless at times (and I hope it doesn’t!), the fruit might take a while to grow!

What is the community service accomplishment that has affected you and/or your community the most?
Last week, I was hanging out with my mentee, and I casually mentioned the SAT. He’s just a freshman, by the way, and he’s always had trouble applying himself in school. I suggested that he download the SAT Question of the Day app on his phone as a way to start studying for it. I knew this was a long shot, but I thought he might react well to being challenged. We did a
problem together, and he was instantly hooked – we did about 5 more before we went to grab lunch. The next day, he texted me – unprovoked – that he got another one right. It’s the little victories!

Final Comments
The communities in Baltimore have a lot of need, and it’s important to meet them where they are. The people that I work with have experienced things I’ll never understand, and vice versa. Service is so important to understanding and bridging that gap. I think Charm City Clinic (charmcityclinic.org) and Thread (www.thread.org) both do incredible jobs with that, as do so many other SOURCE organizations. Get involved!

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