



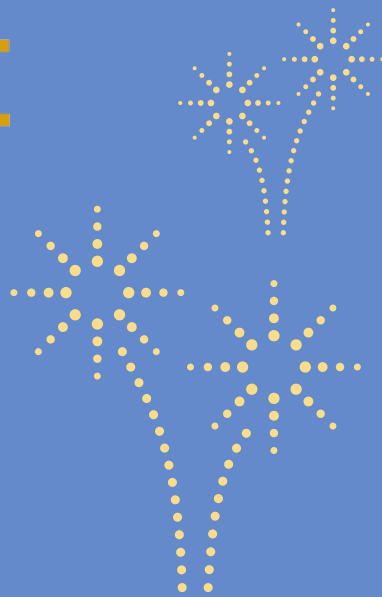
Stars of the Month

July 2020

Ashley Gresh and

Sarah LaFave

School of Nursing



Congratulations to our Stars of the Month for July 2020, Ashley Gresh and Sarah LaFave from the School of Nursing! Ashley and Sarah have been leading efforts to support Baltimore seniors with the Baltimore Neighbors Network. We spoke with them about BNN's mission and how others can get involved.

How did you start getting involved with Baltimore Neighbors Network? Can you tell us a little background information on BNN's mission and your work in the community?

BNN is a volunteer coalition founded to build social solidarity in Baltimore City. During the pandemic, BNN volunteers are calling older community members to check in, make conversation, and help make connections to resources and mental health services when wanted/needed. In a nutshell, BNN is about neighbors helping neighbors and strengthening ties in our communities.

When physical distancing precautions were put into place, Ashley was mentoring a group of nursing students in a public health clinical rotation. She worked to quickly transition the group to provide phone-based support rather than in-person support for the older adults they'd been working with all semester at a senior housing building. Sarah's background is in older adult and community health, so the two of us naturally began talking about how many older adults in the city could probably use that same kind of phone-based connection but weren't looped into such a system. We soon realized that many community members had the same concern – BNN was exactly the kind of resource we were looking to develop! Rather than re-create the wheel, we dove into supporting BNN's existing infrastructure.

As a nursing student with a busy schedule, has it been a challenge to make time for your work with BNN or other community service? Is there a set number of hours you volunteer per week or has it been somewhat flexible week to week?

There is no set number of hours, and some weeks are hectic as a result! We both feel strongly that we have an obligation to support the community in the ways they want to be supported, when they want to be supported. That means evening hours, weekend hours, and sometimes

long hours. One thing that's eased that potential stressor is that our work directly connects to our overall career "missions" so it refills us rather than burning us out.

How has BNN been collaborating with others at Hopkins? Are there specific partnerships with student groups or organizations in the community that you would like to highlight?

Long story short, with the help of City Council President Brandon Scott and his team, Drs. Sarah Szanton and Nicole Warren in the School of Nursing, and Councilperson Zeke Cohen and Ann Coy from Healing City Baltimore and Baltimore Neighbors Network, we formed a partnership whereby students could gain clinical and volunteer experience by participating in BNN. It was a great "marriage" because BNN wanted to expand capacity and we wanted to find ways to support the community during the pandemic while capitalizing on students' strengths. Since that time, we've had two large cohorts of nursing students involved for clinical experiences and we're now forming a cross-university interdisciplinary cohort of students who will be involved as volunteers. We also have to give a shout-out to Debra Brodrie and her team in the School of Nursing for helping Dr. Warren get a MOU in place between BNN and JHUSON – Debra worked really quickly to do work in a few days that would normally take much longer because she understood the urgency of this partnership during a public health crisis.

Are there any opportunities for others to get involved with BNN that you would like to share?

This summer, we're piloting an interdisciplinary volunteer cohort experience for students from public health, nursing, social work, and medicine at JHU, Morgan State, UMD, and Coppin State. That group is getting started in a couple of weeks and, depending on how it goes, we hope to keep something going in the fall. We'll be sure to share those opportunities with students through the SOURCE newsletter! In the meantime, anyone (student, faculty, staff, community member) can sign up to volunteer with BNN on their website: baltimoreneighborsnetwork.org/

Thank you, Ashley and Sarah, for your service to our community!