Congratulations to our Star of the Month for September 2020, Yasmin Yassin from the Bloomberg School of Public Health! Prior to graduating in August with her Master in Public Health degree, Yasmin completed her MPH capstone working with Chase Brexton Health Care, where she has left a lasting impact on patient engagement in the THANK U initiative. We spoke with Yasmin about how she was able to build on her skills and interests to enrich her academic experience while serving our community.

Could you tell us a little about yourself? What inspired you to take a community-based approach to your capstone project, and how did you connect with Chase Brexton Health Care?

I’m interested in tackling public health issues using social epidemiology methods to improve health and wellness along the life course. My interests include health equity research & promotion, evidence-based community level programming/evaluation and determining the underlying social causes behind health disparities. I was connected to this capstone project by contacting JHU SOURCE as I was interested in working with a local organization in Baltimore.

Chase Brexton Health Care in Baltimore is a network of health centers that provides healthcare to the broader Baltimore community. They offer specialized health care services and educational resources for LGBT identifying patients through the LGBT Health Resource Center. Chase Brexton was founded in 1978 as a health clinic to serve the gay community of Baltimore with an initial focus on sexually transmitted infection care. Chase Brexton has expanded to offer multiple avenues of services for a diverse and broad patient population including lower-income patients.

What is the THANK U project?

In 2017, the LGBT Health Resource Center and Chase Brexton identified improving care for trans and gender nonconforming patients at all associated clinics as a priority through the creation of the Trans Health Actions Need Key Understanding (THANK U) initiative. Previous iterations of patient engagement surveys along with the one completed that year identified a need to ensure patient care is clear, transparent, and consists of ongoing quality improvement to maintain excellence in care. Since the survey and town hall, a number of improvements were made to the standard operating procedures at Chase Brexton to improve patient care. My project proposal aimed to provide an updated survey to engage Chase Brexton’s transgender and gender non-conforming patient population and receive recommendations on possible further changes to trans patient care through the THANK U project.

Can you share a bit more about your work on the project, as well as the skills you’ve either put to use or gained through working with Chase Brexton?

This project strengthened intended goals during my MPH studies to gain knowledge on how to critically examine public health projects to actively reflect the populations these programs are intended to target. My focus has always been on improving how to develop public health research projects and programs that also focus on the underlying theme of social epidemiology (continued on next page)
and its relation to understanding and researching social and environmental factor effects on health outcomes. Specifically, for this program plan developed for Chase Brexton and related recommendations, I wanted to highlight the historical and present context of the patient population being surveyed and how these considerations can be implemented for future surveys. In addition, I was able to use my quantitative and qualitative data analysis skills to summarize data from the previous 2017 survey.

How has this experience impacted you personally?

This experience connected me to a local organization in Baltimore which was an intended goal of mine before graduating — making a connection with the community outside of academia. As a part-time MPH student, I felt that I needed to develop a relationship with an on-the-ground group and JHU SOURCE helped facilitate this process significantly. In addition, I was able to receive incredible mentorship from both my Chase Brexton contact Kate Bishop and Keilah Jacques as my JHU capstone advisor. Personally for me, this project also helped me gain more knowledge about developing program plans for specific communities — in this case the trans patient community — in which I had not worked with before, and interrogate both the present and historical context of this sub-population going to specific clinics in Baltimore in relation to how they may engage with a new quality improvement survey at the clinic(s).

What advice would you give to other students in your program, or elsewhere, about integrating community-based approaches into your academics?

I would advise students to connect early with organizations and develop relationships with the intended community they want to improve from a public health angle. In addition to participating in research studies, it is helpful to also integrate community-based engagement alongside our academic work to truly understand the communities we aim to serve. When looking at things from a public health perspective, engaging with the community beyond numbers (eg. through qualitative research in addition to quantitative) can be valuable in context and eye-opening when developing program plans and potential solutions for that community. Often, the community has stories and experiences that will only enrich our academic work further.

Thank you, Yasmin, for all of your tremendous service to our community!