SOURCE Champion of the Month

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"Community service is an opportunity to build connections that shift power imbalances and to invest my energy into supporting work led by a local CBO and community interests."

What do you do as your community engagement activity?
I help coordinate ***The Identity Clinic*** as a SOURCE Service Scholar with Living Classrooms Foundation

How much time do you spend on service per week/month?
6-10 hours/week

How did you begin to work with your community-based organization (CBO)?
Living Classrooms Foundation (LCF) and SOURCE were awarded a grant through the JHU Idea Lab to develop a service that would help residents of East Baltimore re-claim official forms of identification, such as a State ID, birth certificate, and social security card. I was selected to be one of the SOURCE Service Scholars working with LCF to launch and operate the Clinic.

What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?
Community service is an opportunity to build connections that shift power imbalances and to invest my energy into supporting work led by a local CBO and community interests. I love being a part of ***The Identity Clinic*** because I get to lift up community voices and help address issues important to them.

How do you find time for service in your busy schedule?
I think time is about prioritization. There is always time; the question is what you make time for. I recognize that my presence in Baltimore is complicated, especially given the troubled history between JHU and East Baltimore, so it was important to me to find meaningful and respectful ways to engage with the community while I am here.

Besides finding the time, what barriers related to your service have you had to overcome?
I have spent some time thinking about my role and whether ***The Identity Clinic*** is driving structural change. It is definitely offering a service that addresses a community-identified need, but I'm not sure if it's challenging and transforming the system so that this service will no longer be needed. I worry about the sustainability of the project because it is dependent on grants and think that justice will be hard to achieve until there is systemic change that permanently removes barriers to obtaining identification.

How has your training in Hopkins influenced the way you approach service?
The SOURCE Service Scholar Program has built space for critical reflection around service and has provided me with invaluable mentorship and guidance throughout my involvement with ***The Identity Clinic.*** I am very grateful for the learning that I've done with the SOURCE team and other scholars in the program about how to engage with and be a part of the local community while at JHU.

How does your service shape your development as a health care professional?
It has given me a deeper understanding of the many structural challenges that people face in getting official identification, which is a basic necessity that should be easily obtainable and free, but is actually denied or made inaccessible to many segments of our population. Not having these identifications is directly linked to health and wellbeing, as it prevents people from accessing housing, employment, and social services.

What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service?
I would encourage prospective students to spend time reflecting on how their identities will shape their interactions with the community. I would ask them to challenge their intentions, including savior complexes and internalized biases, in order to bring humility and respect to their involvements.

What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?
Impact is incremental. Impact is often not easily captured in datasets or photographs. Impact can also go in any direction; service can have both positive and negative impacts, and the goal should always be to ensure that no harm is being done to the community, especially the most marginalized within that community. In the context of community service, I think our measures of impact should be rooted in community perspectives.

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

The Identity Clinic just launched in January and has already helped many residents of East Baltimore successfully obtain identification that enables them to live with greater mobility, self-determination, and autonomy.

Final Comments

Public health is social justice, and social justice is public health. Find ways to advance social justice causes that are important to you – it's your responsibility as a public health practitioner!

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