SOURCE Champion of the Month
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What do you do as your community engagement activity?
I am a SOURCE Service Scholar

How much time do you spend on service per week/month?
60 hours/month

How did you begin to work with your community-based organization (CBO)?
I was linked to my CBO – Living Classrooms Foundation – through my role as a SOURCE Service Scholar. I applied to be a Service Scholar because I wanted my graduate school experience to go beyond the classrooms and into the community.

What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?
Participating in community service gives me the opportunity to sharpen the skills that I will bring to my career, and do so in a way that helps a local organization provide better services to its families.
How do you find time for service in your busy schedule?
I commute daily from DC, have a research job on campus, take a full class load, and work on this service project for about 15 hours a week. If I can do it, truly anyone can! It’s possible with good time management and self-discipline, knowing that it’s as much a priority as my other commitments. And volunteers are needed and appreciated for much smaller time commitments too. A couple hours a month is possible in anyone’s schedule!

Besides finding the time, what barriers related to your service have you had to overcome?
Working with non-profits can be challenging because they are often strained for staff and resources. This project has required getting creative (cooking without a kitchen!) and recruiting additional help from other dedicated volunteers.

How has your training in Hopkins influenced the way you approach service?
My classwork that is focused on social determinants of health helps to give me a broader understanding of the families we serve and the barriers they face in accessing healthy food.

How does your service shape your development as a health care professional?
My service work actually helps to shape just the opposite. I am not a clinician and am more interested in the sociological aspects of health and nutrition and this opportunity has shown me that there is important work to be done in the field of public health by people who don’t consider themselves ‘health care’ professionals. Public health is a broad field and requires many different kinds of skill sets.

What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service?
As students we tend to get wrapped up in our own stress. Volunteering even just for a few hours a month helps give perspective to remind us that finals and labs are miniscule compared to many of the challenges faced by the communities we serve. Especially in this time of tumultuous political transition for the U.S., I’m fueled by JFK’s words asking what we can do for our country, and volunteering in our community is one way to affect positive change from the ground up.

What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?
After my first cooking class, feeling like I was flustered teaching the class and maybe too strict with the kids, one little girl came right up to me and gave me a warm hug. Your willingness to give your time and energy for someone else’s benefit ALWAYS has an impact, whether you realize it or not.

What is the community service accomplishment that has affected you and/or your community the most?
At the end of this school year when I can leave Living Classrooms Foundation with a sustainable nutrition curriculum, that will be my most impactful accomplishment. I hope that by engraining this area of education into their programming, the children who receive it will make some healthier choices about food as they go through their lives.
Final Comments
Now more than ever, volunteering your time and skills to make our community and world a better, healthier place is really important. If you’re hesitant about how many hours you can do, or how to match your skills to people who need them, get in touch with the SOURCE office who can help match you to an organization that will undoubtedly appreciate you.

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