



SOURCE

Star of the Month

July 2019

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What do you do as your community engagement activity? How did you begin to work with your community-based organization (CBO)?

I volunteer at Commodore John Rodgers Elementary & Middle school. I started off volunteering through SOURCE as a reading buddy—which involves being paired with a student that reads below grade level and then helping them improve their reading skills.

I am also still volunteering as an extension of a course practicum component that was designed for MPH students—for this practicum, I worked with gifted and advance learning (GAL) students that were in grades 4, 5, and 7. This experience never felt like work because the projects I help students with are a lot of fun. I worked with two fourth-grade students to conduct science experiments and then helped with their science night project—they presented an erosion table demonstration in front of parents, teachers, and peers. The fifth-grade student I worked with completed a podcast for NPR's podcast challenge, and this ended up being a learning experience for both of us because neither of us had made a podcast before. The seventh-grade student I work with is still working on her project, which is to place a tiny library in Patterson Park. We are hoping to have it set up by the end of the summer, so if you are ever by the Patterson Park playground, be on the lookout for a new tiny library! She hopes to stock it with books for all ages.

How do you find time for service in your busy schedule? How much time do you spend on service per week/month?

For me, it took some time to adjust to the 8-week term schedule that we have at JHSPH and that is why I didn't start volunteering until October. Volunteering at Commodore was a great experience because the hour(s) you can put in are very flexible, and that flexibility aligns nicely with our busy graduate-school lifestyles.

When I only do reading buddies, it takes 30 minutes each week—so I definitely recommend it, or any of the other of the Commodore programs (e.g., healthy minds math or the newcomer student support team) because they have small time commitments but still allow you to connect with young people and gives you a glimpse into the life of Baltimore city public schools.

At the height of my practicum or when students needed more work on their projects, I probably spent a maximum of 8 hours a week at Commodore. Most of these hours were spent during early mornings, but I did spend a few afternoons and one evening there!

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How does your service shape your development as a health care professional? What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?

Serving your community allows you to develop cultural humility and exposes you to things that you may not otherwise notice. I think it is nice to be able to say to people “I’m a student at Johns Hopkins, but I also volunteer at a local school.” This has helped me have many enjoyable conversations with community members in other non-Hopkins settings around Baltimore.

As health professionals, I think we should all strive to immerse ourselves in different settings and see how people in those settings work and live. A lot of people do international field placements, or mission trips, or global vacations for this, but we can do the same thing domestically through community service opportunities.

What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service? What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?

Go to information sessions! That is how I found out about reading buddies. Also, read your emails. That is how I found out about the MPH practicum component I did at Commodore. Even though I wasn’t an MPH student, I was still able to participate in that opportunity, so if you are interested but unsure about being able to contribute—reach out to someone. At the beginning of the school year there are a lot of information sessions and fairs that showcase the different community organizations Hopkins partners with; there are a lot so there is probably one that captures what you are interested in.

If you’re uncertain if your contribution will make an impact, listen up! From October 2018 up until last week I worked with a first-grade student for only 30 minutes a week. She improved 6 guided-reading levels (moved from letter A to letter G) while I was working with her and is now passionately reading on her grade level. On my last session with her she told me that her favorite part of school was when I worked on reading with her (and her second favorite part of school was lunch)—when you come before lunch on the favorite scale, you know you are making an impact on a student’s life! Additionally, if you are uncertain about weekly commitments, SOURCE has a lot of one-time commitments that pop up.

Any final comments or plus to promote volunteerism? Feel free to plug an opportunity with your community engagement experience and how to get involved.

If you are interested in, or even think you may be interested in working with children for any part of your career—I recommend partnering with a CBO or school! My experience at Commodore has solidified my career path of working with children, and it also helped give real-life experience to some of the coursework that I completed last year.

Thank you, Alexis, for all of your tremendous service to Baltimore!