Charles J. Ping Student Service Award Winners
2020-2021

The Charles J. Ping Award was designed to recognize and honor undergraduate students’ outstanding leadership and contributions to community service on their campus and within their community. This award is granted annually to undergraduates from Ohio Campus Compact member institutions that exhibit outstanding leadership in their community service endeavors both on their campus and within their community.

The award is named in honor of Charles J. Ping, who served as President of Ohio University from 1975 – 1994. An early supporter and Board Member of Ohio Campus Compact, Dr. Ping has been a tireless advocate for campus-community partnerships and increased opportunities for students to become active and engaged citizens.

Candidates must be nominated by the president of their college or university. Candidates have met the following criteria:

1) Evidence of exemplary community service during each student’s undergraduate years should reflect the student’s efforts to meet needs in his or her community. The Ping Award recognizes student efforts, from individual commitment to service and community, to the ability to create an organization and to involve others.

2) Although outstanding community service of any kind will qualify, Ohio Campus Compact is especially interested in efforts that have connected service with academic study or designed programs with long-term community involvement.

Each year, Ohio Campus Compact awards a $250 Legacy Award to the top two nominees. The grant is given in the recipients’ name to the community-based nonprofit organization of their choice. The Ping Legacy Award recognizes students who address economic, emotional and environmental community needs.
Congratulations to the 2020-21 Charles J. Ping Service Award Winners. We applaud your outstanding leadership and many contributions to your campus and your community.

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* Legacy Award Recipients
For as long as I can remember, service has always been a critical part of who I am. From volunteering on mission trips to organizing clothing drives in high school, I knew this identity was one I wanted to carry through my college experience. The second week of my first semester at Baldwin Wallace University, I started a weekly service program teaching kids at a local public library hands-on, accessible nutrition lessons. During my sophomore year, I was accepted into a one-year Brain Center for Community Engagement Fellowship, where I spent the year researching the ins and outs of food insecurity. From there, I attended an Alternative Spring Break Trip to Waco, TX, where we spent a week planting seeds and preparing the farm to start the planting process for the season. While there, I talked to a graduate student who expressed a need for campus meal donation programs.

Returning home, I dove in and explored food insecurity rates on campus, spoke to students about hunger, and knew that something needed to change to help my peers thrive. I called dozens of universities around the United States to see how they were handling this issue and proposed that my university join Swipe Out Hunger, the national non-profit fighting student hunger. Now, students with additional meals on their meal plan may rally around one another to donate to students in need. Those who may need additional meals can request extra to be added to their meal plan. In the process, they are connected with the numerous campus and community resources to prosper and feel supported. This program has not only started the fight to end hunger on our campus but has been educational and created a sustainable partnership with many campus offices and students.

While developing Swipe Out Hunger, I lead a team of 10 students on an immersive, alternative break trip to New Orleans surrounding this topic. Currently, I am hosting a 6-week, virtual Alternative Break program dissecting every aspect of food insecurity and its roots. During a service-learning course, I was privileged to write and receive a grant for the West Side Community House to fund a suicide prevention conference for parents and children, filled with speakers, activities, and educational opportunities. I am now a course assistant for this class, helping other students write grants for various community partners working to end or remedy the impacts of child maltreatment. While I can talk about these experiences and many more in much greater detail, each has taught me leadership, dedication, commitment, perseverance and fueled my service passion. My service identity in high school planted the seed that blossomed into my identity on campus. My service lens has transformed my word choice and fostered an inclusive environment in my residence hall. As I round out my undergraduate experience, I have applied to medical schools with a service mindset. Here, I can continue harnessing my desire to work with the community and using my voice when my patients may not have one opportunity to engage with so many students while having a positive impact on my community. This program has helped me grow as a leader, helping me in my future with political engagement as I strive to continue to have an impact on my community.
As a third-year Human Development and Family Studies major, I have a passion for service. Through leading service-learning trips, co-writing grants for local non-profits, and improving intake assessment methods as an independent research consultant for a local adoption agency, I have been given the opportunities at BGSU to further develop my passion for service while pursuing my studies and expanding the reach of my work in the process.

Bowling Green Alternative Breaks (BGAB) is an organization in which students lead service-learning trips focusing on various social justice issues. As a first-year student, I went on a BGAB trip to Richmond, Virginia. We worked with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a refugee resettlement agency, and visited resettling families to work on English proficiency. This hands-on service allowed me to see a social justice issue with my own eyes. As a current BGAB site leader and Co-Student Coordinator, I now lead group reflections while engaging in social justice issues. These reflections allow me to become a better listener and a stronger, more empathetic leader. In leadership, empathy is key, and through facilitating diverse groups, I have learned that taking others’ backgrounds and circumstances into perspective is critical in any leadership role. My learned ability to view and analyze a situation from multiple points of view is a strength that is also an unfinished product. I am excited to improve and apply the empathetic leadership skills that I developed through my time with BGAB.

Additionally, last summer, BGSU assembled a team of students to provide local non-profit agencies with grant-writing assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. This program, called the BGSU Training Alliance for the Public Good (BGSU-TAP), involved student fellows working alongside agency staff members. While working with two local non-profit agencies, my teams submitted a total of $76,600 in grant proposals. For one grant, I served as the primary point of contact between the BGSU-TAP fellows and agency staff members while helping to delegate grant-writing responsibilities. Previously, I thought of service work as exclusively direct assistance. I had largely neglected to consider helping in the context of policy, evaluation, and other macro-oriented service. This change in my personal definition of service has dramatically altered my service and career aspirations. Because of my experience with BGSU-TAP, I am fascinated in looking at social justice issues through a macro lens and questioning the systems in place that fuel inequities. With this approach in mind, I am better equipped to serve communities on a broader scale; therefore, reaching more individuals in the process.

These experiences constantly assist me in my current work with BGSU’s Center for Public Impact. Specifically, I co-lead an initiative in which local community partners submit short videos on Flipgrid, an interactive site, to connect local community organizations and their volunteer opportunities to BGSU students. Understanding the Bowling Green community at the macro and administrative level is critical in this work. This approach to developing community partnerships improves the strength of partner organizations while meeting community needs, as well.
While growing up, serving others and trying to make an impact on my community became a norm to me. Through role models, my parents, coaches and others who encouraged me to put forth effort to positively impact others, I have grown personally. In college, I continue to be involved in service learning. As a collegiate athlete and senior resident assistant, I can positively impact my peers on a daily basis. Additionally, I am a member of Defiance College’s Service Leadership Program which requires a commitment to complete 500 hours of service in 4 years. I volunteer at the YMCA and work through Defiance College’s student-run non-profit organization on various projects that affect children, the unemployed, and the environment. I was named a McMaster Scholar in 2019-2020 allowing me to engage in a community-based research project that involved providing emergency response training to small remote communities in northern Belize. I was part of a 12-person team that implemented 14 different projects over the course of two weeks. This year, I was selected as a second-year scholar to strengthen and expand my project to build more emergency response tactics within the communities. Due to COVID-19, the 10-person team was not able to travel this year. Despite the unfortunate news, the team came together and embraced the challenge to still provide for our community partners. I adjusted my broad and large project by condensing topics to focus on manageable delivery by creating a snakebite management video, making snakebite first aid kits, and written concussion pamphlets that will be sent to our Belizean partners. Even though not traveling is upsetting, getting through the obstacle to find a way to stay connected with our community partners reflects our hard work and dedication through all the uncertainty. As a McMaster Scholar, I have been able to make a direct connection between my course of study and the needs of humanity in a context that I had never imagined, a context beyond my campus and local community. This past year, I was also nominated as a Newman Civic Fellow. Throughout the past several months, I have been able to connect with other leaders across the nation to discuss various topics. At my college, I moderated two deliberative dialogues on the topics of “A House Divided – What are we willing to do to get the political system we want?” and “How does the media affect our views today?”. These engaging conversations gave students the opportunity to participate in current and important topics. Facilitating these dialogues allowed me to enhance my leadership skills while bringing the campus community together.
Mentorship can have a lasting impact. It is something that Denison – and now I – value tremendously. I am so grateful to have had wonderful mentors throughout my college experience, as well as the opportunity to be a mentor myself beginning my first semester on campus with Big Brothers Big Sisters, an organization that matches mentors with children who are identified as needing support. I have cherished the relationship with my “Little” – and, through her, being connected to the local community. I have seen firsthand the strong relationships that can develop through this program – and the influence they can have for both mentor and mentee.

After my first year as a Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor, my goal was to encourage more students to get involved in an organization that had quickly become such a meaningful part of my college experience. Joining the Big Brothers Big Sisters executive board at Denison as recruitment chair was the first step. After becoming president of the organization, though, the mentoring program was tabled due to COVID. While we have not been able to actively mentor during this time, our executive board has continued to support existing matches and engage students who can be future mentors. We also worked on building community within our organization on campus by hosting events to assemble stuffed animals, which were then distributed to children in the program. We also held a fundraiser to buy gifts for children in the program around the holidays.

In an effort to support Big Brothers Big Sisters matches outside the Denison community – and to establish a virtual mentoring program for Denison students – I led an effort to develop mentoring guides that included games and activities that could be hosted virtually. In the past, in-person programs had access to board games and activities that would not be available in some of the new ways matches are taking place today. With the support of another member on the executive board, we were able to create 10 guides. Hopefully, they will facilitate new and existing mentorships – and help to break the ice when in-person meeting opportunities aren’t possible.

My involvement in Big Brothers Big Sisters has also led to serving on Denison Community Association’s cabinet, an umbrella community service organization supporting 17 committees (including Big Brothers Big Sisters), as well as hosting campus-wide service events. This has been a truly rewarding experience, as it has enabled me to share what I’ve learned with representatives from other service organizations – and learn from them.

I am so grateful for all of the opportunities that have come from Big Brothers Big Sisters – and the Denison Community Association – and hope to have encouraged and supported mentorships that have been as meaningful to others as being a “Big” has been to me.
Delaney Burns  
John Carroll University  

My girl, Mother Teresa said, “It’s not how much we give but how much love we put into giving.” I am going to mirror her in saying it’s not how much we serve but how much love we put into serving. The aspiration to serve in love has always been present in my heart, but I don’t think I truly acted upon it until I came to school at John Carroll University (JCU). I like to think that sometimes we make choices in life and sometimes choices make us. Being a part of JCU’s Center for Service and Social Action (CSSA) is a choice that has made me into the woman who I am today, striving to live out a mission of a being for and with others. 195+ service hours later, I cannot believe the impact. Not the impact that I have left on the community, but the impact that the community has made on me. In CSSA we call this cornerstone, mutuality. I have seen this play out in my life beautifully time and time again, but my favorite encounter was at my weekly service placement for Carroll Reads, a federally funded literacy program for grades K-3. I did not anticipate what would happen that very first day at service... I prepared my materials for my second student as I waited just as eagerly as the kids to see who I would be paired with. When all of a sudden, the coordinator on site pairs me with a little girl who shouts a giant “YES” when she is told she’ll be working with me. She runs over to me and exclaims, “Yes, thank goodness. I wanted you ever since I saw you.” And my heart overflows with joy. It was simple, yet so spontaneous that without ever having met me, this little girl wanted me. Me? I think it just shows the pure love that happens at service and the genuine relationships that are formed. We often forget that we all belong to each other—that we really can just extend love to others at first glance. She looked at me as we began to read together and said, “I got so lucky to be with you.” and I assured her that I was the lucky one. I have coached Girls on the Run, I have tutored at inner city schools, I have taught elementary aged kids, I have organized events for CSSA, I have planned podcast interviews, I have led a dance marathon organization, I have served throughout the Cleveland community and have been blessed with many other encounters like this one. The greatest lesson that I have learned is it is not the impact you make but the impact it makes on you. For every experience that I have poured into, it has poured back into me tenfold. The is the good, holy, hard work that should set a fire ablaze inside of each of us.
Belkis Moreno  
Oberlin College

Ping Legacy Award Recipient

I first learned about El Centro Volunteer Initiative (ECVI) in my first semester of college. ECVI is a student-led organization that partners with the nonprofit El Centro de Servicios Sociales to offer Citizenship and English classes to the Latinx community in Lorain, Ohio. Coming from Houston, Texas and being Latina myself, I wanted to find a sense of belonging and community in the small town of Oberlin, Ohio, and I knew I would find that through ECVI. I also saw some of my own experiences reflected in ECVI’s work; in high school I helped my mom study for her citizenship exam, and as a daughter of immigrants, I often have to translate for my parents. Through this, I saw my own community reflected in ECVI’s work, and immediately joined.

In my second semester of college, the leaders at the time asked me to become a Program Coordinator with them. It’s been three years since then, and I’ve learned so much about ECVI, El Centro, and Lorain! There are many components and moving parts of ECVI, so while we collaborate with El Centro to make the Citizenship and English classes possible and to get people from Lorain interested, we also recruit volunteers from Oberlin College to be tutors in our classes or be a part of our Grant Writing and Fundraising team. Our board is made up entirely of Oberlin College students, from class instructors to Bonner scholars. Along with volunteers, they help us host fundraisers to help our Citizenship Class students cover the cost of the $725 citizenship application fee.

As a Program Coordinator, I’ve had the privilege to work with Victor Leandry and Anabel Barron, two activists and leading members of El Centro de Servicios Sociales and the Lorain community. By working with them, I’ve learned so much and grown as a person and a leader. Together, we’re able to have Citizenship and English classes, which are extremely difficult for immigrant communities to find in Northeast Ohio. Due to this, we’ve reached people from all over the state for our classes. Since the founding of ECVI in 2017, we’ve helped over 30 ECVI students become citizens!

Additionally, as a Comparative American Studies major, I’ve seen how the work I do in ECVI resembles the discussions and themes in my area of study. While it is important to learn and read about issues such as immigration and lack of resources, ECVI has given me, and other Oberlin students the chance to make a direct impact and contribute to the communities that we learn about in class. Throughout the years, our students always thank us for how much we’ve helped them, but I feel that they’ve given me so much more. Through the connections and friendships, I’ve made, I’ve found a sense of community and home. I feel extremely lucky to be a part of ECVI; to be a part of a community made up by Lorain community leaders, hardworking Oberlin volunteers and board members, and our amazing students.
My current position as the Ohio Campus Compact Student Resource Center AmeriCorps Service Member is the pinnacle of my college work experiences. This opportunity has given me a platform to reach community and Ohio University officials that directly impact our students and the Athens area, as well as our regional campus communities. However, this opportunity only came about because of the many previous connections from service projects and work-study hours that the southeastern Ohio region has provided for me. My major of Child and Family and Non-Profit Studies has over 400 hours of experiential learning built into our program. On top of these hours, I have been fortunate to volunteer and work within the Athens community that shaped one of the oldest learning institutions in the state.

When I began my educational journey at Ohio University, my mindset, like many incoming students, was focused only on my goals and what this area could do for me. After a semester of grinding through general studies and trying to find where my passions lie, I stumbled into an after-school position at a local elementary school. What was supposed to be an enjoyable part-time job turned into a period of self-actualization that changed the course of my career path as well as my entire world view. This position was the first time in my life that I had seen systematic poverty and prejudice in action daily. Like much of Appalachia, Athens County has some of the highest rates of poverty in the state. My work at the after-school program led to a food-insecurity service project for the Glouster and Jackson communities in Trimble Township that I was able to execute through the help of my freshman-year scholars’ program, Pepsi Scholars. That project connected me with Ohio University’s Division of Student Affairs “Bobcats helping Bobcats”, which is a university effort to provide students with basic needs support such as the Cat’s Cupboard Food Pantry and emergency micro-grants. During this time, I briefly volunteered with the Athens Court Appointed Special Advocates/Guardian Ad Litem (CASA/GAL) program and the Columbus Ronald McDonald House. As I advanced in my career path, I took positions with the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities and took an interest in specialized and under-recognized populations. I worked a semester at Beacon Schools and learned a great deal about the administrative work and the infrastructure that goes into a facility for severe and profound disabilities. I was not able to finish the school year with my students due to the COVID-19 pandemic but was provided other opportunities for service in a time of great need. Shortly after the first quarantine order was placed, the university realized that students were going to struggle in more ways than one. Food and housing insecurity were two of many very real challenges that students would face. My position as Student Resource Center AmeriCorps Service Member was made to combat those struggles and ensure that my peers have access and understanding of the resources that our university provides them to succeed.
As a student at Ohio Wesleyan University, I love connecting with organizations in the local Delaware, Ohio community. I began volunteering with Family Promise in 2019. Family Promise is an Emergency Shelter, Rapid Rehousing Referral Center, Faithful Skills-based Volunteer Hub, and Beyond Promise Community-Building Aftercare Initiative. Family Promise does amazing work providing housing and resources for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. After personally volunteering at this location, I wanted to strengthen my connection and include more OWU students in their mission and impact. I am the Co-founder and Resident Assistant of a newly-formed home on campus called the Service Engagement and Leadership (SEAL) House. We are a group of students who are working to strengthen our leadership skills through service to the college and surrounding community. I felt this would be an amazing group of people to get further involved with Family Promise.

I organized an initiative to have SEAL house members cook meals every two weeks for Family Promise. We had a ton of fun making and delivering food for the families the first week! Next, we wanted to extend the opportunity to more students on campus. Using a group I helped create called ‘Friends of SEAL’, we were able to invite other Ohio Wesleyan students to join us in our service. This service – and our learning and reflection – truly allowed our house to spread awareness about the issue of homelessness and engage more students in the positive impact we hope to create. Finally, I was able to connect a wonderful employee at the Marion Salvation Army, and they offered to provide the groceries we needed to cook the dinners. The partnership between organizations was inspiring to see! This project has truly become more than I had ever imagined. I love that there are many people involved in creating a delicious meals for individuals who are working hard to find affordable housing.

On a personal level, it was amazing to see more people getting involved in a mission that I have become increasingly passionate about during my time at OWU. I believe that these types of opportunities on campus strengthen the college environment and show the commitment of our student body to care for other people. I cannot wait to see how this inspires and energizes other students to continue working toward solutions to homelessness, hunger, and other global challenges!
In a class project freshman year, I proposed to my group to create a club on campus that works with training Service Dogs in Training (SDiT). The following year I founded “UF4Paws”, a collegiate club partnered with non-profit organization 4 Paws for Ability, to serve individuals with disabilities and promote stewardship to others through the training of service dogs. 4 Paws for Ability trains and places service dogs to children and veterans with disabilities worldwide. Students in UF4Paws help socialize, reinforce obedience training, and care for the SDiT in preparation for their advanced training and placement as a service dog. A college campus provides fantastic experiences for SDiT, including going to classes, events, and dining halls, and building confidence around large groups of people, all starting at a young age. In fall 2019, I brought UF4Paws’ first SDiT to campus. Currently, in spring 2021, UF4Paws has trained/continues training fifteen SDiT. I am now a primary volunteer trainer to my sixth SDiT. In October 2020, my second SDiT graduated as a mobility assistance service dog for a boy in North Carolina with cerebral palsy. In January 2021, my fourth SDiT graduated as a service dog for an Autistic boy in southern Ohio. Watching the SDiTs I trained graduate and become service dogs for children who needed their assistance has been the most rewarding moments in my life.

Since UF4Paws was established, this club has seen substantial success on campus and within the community. Within the first year, the club welcomed 140 members. While not all students can commit to the responsibility of training, many students are still active and support this club. Students participating in UF4Paws are provided many volunteer opportunities and learn/raise awareness about service dogs on campus and in the community. As a primary volunteer trainer, throughout the school year and even summers, I have a 24/7 responsibility of working, training, socializing, planning, and caring for these SDiT to prepare them for one of the most meaningful careers a dog can have. In addition to volunteering through 4 Paws for Ability, I enjoy finding volunteer opportunities I can bring my SDiT. We have visited various assisted living homes, Donnell Middle School, Blanchard Valley Center, and Children’s Mentoring Connection. Since UF4Paws has been active on campus, the club has provided joy, a sense of community, and education to the students at the University of Findlay and the surrounding communities.

I came to the University of Findlay dedicated to becoming a veterinarian. Though throughout college, I lost myself in the competitive nature of school, it was not until I created UF4Paws that I found my passion for helping others through training service dogs. I have always been a service-based person searching for ways to help others. Through working with SDiT I have been able to combine my two passions of service and animals.
Hayley Maher
University of Mount Union

“I got tangled up in my dog’s leash while we were walking yesterday— but I didn’t fall!”

This may seem like an arbitrary statement, but for my client in EXS360 Special Populations, it was an accomplishment. This semester, I had the opportunity to train with an older adult from the community. After meeting my client and learning about her medical history and physical activity levels, we designed an exercise training program to work towards several specific goals—one of which was to improve her balance. Working towards functional goals like improving balance ensures that my client, and other clients in the program, are able to maintain their independence for years to come. As we near the end of the semester, I feel confident that this experience has been exceptionally positive for both myself and my client, and the larger community as a whole as its members work to become more healthy, active, and connected. My experience in EXS360 is one of many service-learning opportunities that Mount Union has facilitated to allow for connections with my community. In the future, I hope to practice as a physician. The connections and service experiences I have had as part of the small, caring campus of Mount Union have well-prepared me to be successful in this role by exposing me to a diverse range of people, thought processes, and even places. As president of Mount’s chapter of Alpha Phi Omega—a national service fraternity—service to my community has become even more deeply ingrained in my life at Mount. Planning events that will be sustained year after year, such as National Service Week, ensures that my positive impact on the chapter, the campus, and the community will be lasting. My service through leading APO has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my time at Mount Union. Building up and encouraging a community of passionate students who have hearts for service is incredibly rewarding. Through connecting with my members and empowering them to make a difference on campus and in our community, I know that I am creating a lasting, positive impact, and that I am being impacted as well as my capacity to lead and to serve grows each day.

Service work has prepared me for a fulfilling life of giving back to those around me. One common aspect of each service experience I have had is that it involves connecting with other people. Training with my client, for example, required an understanding of the science behind exercise prescriptions, but the connection that she and I built throughout the semester was equally as important to the end goal. Through developing a good relationship with mutual respect, I was able to push her to help reach her goals, and she trusted me and put her best effort into training. My experiences at Mount Union have equipped me to build deep, meaningful connections with those around me, and that has empowered me to make positive, sustainable differences in my communities.
Upon entering the Wittenberg community, I was fortunate to have a few things going for me. For one, I was a member of the baseball program and was given 40-plus friends right off the bat. Secondly, I had brought in my own nonprofit that I started while I was a senior in high school and knew I’d have the opportunity to continue to grow and develop the nonprofit with the support of the campus community. For so long I have been driven and motivated by athletics, specifically baseball, because of the impact they can make on someone. Whether it is practice or game time, sports provide an avenue for people to come together, put aside differences, and compete against one another in something they are both passionate and dedicated towards. It is an experience unlike any other and it is one that drove me to want to bring this same experience to youth who lacked the opportunities and resources to play the game. With that thought in mind, and having experienced how expensive youth sports truly are, I wanted to start my own nonprofit aimed at addressing this issue faced by inner-city communities. Over the past four and a half years now, my organization has found incredible partnerships with groups in Cleveland, OH, Springfield, OH, and Pittsburgh, PA. These partnerships include the groups of Cleveland Baseball Federation (CBF), Springfield Family YMCA, Springfield High School, Pittsburgh Hardball Academy, and Pittsburgh Pirates RBI. Within all these groups I have found children who are determined, motivated, and eager to find opportunities to compete in sport(s) that they love and simply want to have the experience to play. Whether it be providing these groups with new or updated equipment, hosting an instructional clinic, or providing monetary funds for recruiting experiences, we are not limited on how we can improve the sporting experience for the groups with which we partner.

One success story I wanted to share is that of our partnership with the Pittsburgh Hardball Academy. In this group there lies not only a ton of baseball talent, but a group of motivated and hardworking individuals. In the summer of 2020, we provided this group with funds to take a handful of their players to a recruiting event where college coaches would be in attendance. At this event one of the players was discovered by a coach at a Division I institution and later offered a scholarship to not only attend academically, but also to have the opportunity to compete athletically. With all our partnerships we stress the importance of education, because without grades there is no avenue for athletics. It is truly remarkable to see the impact that you can have when using your own passions to help foster the passions of others. I am beyond grateful for the new ideas, support, and guidance that the Wittenberg University experience has provided to me during my four years both as a student, as an athlete, and as an Executive Director of a small, but successful, nonprofit organization!
Through my involvement in community, I have observed how health disparities adversely affect people experiencing poverty and homelessness. In particular, my community service experiences have heightened my awareness of the inequalities associated with asthma.

Since high school, I have been a volunteer with St. Vincent de Paul (SVDP). One of my consistent service experiences at SVDP has been the opportunity to visit with families in their homes. I frequently went into homes, had difficulty breathing, and started to wonder how this influences the health of people who live in that environment every day. At another organization where I volunteer, Crossroad Health Center, I observed a six-year-old boy who was having trouble with his asthma after moving to a new apartment. My supervising physician at Crossroad shared with me that a disproportionate number of her pediatric patients have asthma. After researching the issue, I discovered abundant evidence that suggests the influence poor living conditions and air quality have on disparities in asthma. I realized that healthcare typically focuses solely on the medical aspects of health, yet, I believe an illness does not simply stem from a virus or an infection that can be treated with medication but can be aggravated by social determinants. I recognized that in order to reduce these disparities there was a critical need to examine external factors that are profoundly impacting people’s health and develop an intervention for those factors as well.

I recognized an opportunity to use what I had learned in the community and collaborated with Crossroad to address this issue. After proposing my idea to the Director of Pediatrics, I wrote several grant applications and the fall of my sophomore year received a $5,000 grant from the CareSource Foundation to help implement a home visit program aimed at reducing health disparities for children with asthma. For this program, I visit the homes of pediatric patients with both an asthma and allergy diagnosis. I discuss with the patient’s caregiver how environmental triggers can influence asthma and we brainstorm simple ways that they could reduce these triggers in the household including smoking outside of the home, using unscented, non-toxic cleaning products, or opening windows to maintain low indoor humidity. Participating families receive a brochure I designed that provides educational information and I attempt to answer any questions they have regarding their child’s asthma management plan. I also discuss with families how the child should be using their inhaler and ensure that the caretaker is not having any issues accessing their child’s medications. After participating in the program, each child receives an allergy-proof bed and pillow cover thanks to the grant. Since initiating this program, I have completed 83 home visits and will continue the project until I finish distributing all of the bed and pillow covers.

To me, service is more than spending time volunteering at a non-profit each week. I think long-lasting change comes from walking alongside communities to understand their needs and recognize their assets and then combining those in an impactful way.