

Student-Led Community Engagement and Service Learning Projects in Underserved Communities

Thomas R, Taylor B, Rivers D, Durham-Walker C

For more than two decades, Morehouse School of Medicine has trained its first year medical students in community engagement and service learning via a year-long Community Health course. During this course, students participate in community engagement activities, conduct a community assessment, and design, implement, and evaluate an intervention to address the community's needs. The purpose of the course is provide opportunities for students to serve in underserved communities while learning basic skills in public health, community assessment and evaluation (McNeal & Blumenthal, 2011).

Communities of elementary school aged children, elderly, and homeless women and children in an urban setting are engaged in activities including tutoring and mentoring, computer classes for job seeking and interviewing skills, and health and nutrition workshops. Service learning projects have resulted in both short term and long term gains for the community. Short term results include increased confidence in computer and resume skills and increased knowledge in stress management. Long term, students have been able to address longstanding community needs such as obtaining lockers for homeless shelter residents to improve privacy, funding bus passes for transportation to/from jobs, and getting a pedestrian beacon at a senior housing complex where traffic injury risk is high.

Student-led service learning projects can help address specific community needs while teaching community engagement. With longstanding relationships, these projects can create sustainable improvements in the community and community organizations.

References

McNeal, M & Blumenthal, D (2011). Innovative Ways of Integrating Public Health Into the Medical School Curriculum. *Am J Prev Med*, 41(4S3), S309 –S311