

The Connection Community Consultant Group

*Connecting students with their communities
Connecting learning with experience
Connecting Johns Hopkins with Baltimore*

In 2005, the Connection, a community consultant group, was launched in response to student requests for more short-term service opportunities in Baltimore. Working in teams, the Connection's consultants partner with local community-based organizations (CBOs) to carry out finite projects that usually last from three to five weeks. Connection consultants are students affiliated with the Johns Hopkins University Schools of Medicine, Nursing, and Public Health.

The Connection provides a mutually beneficial exchange: CBOs receive additional support for short-term projects, and students can put the skills they learn in the classroom to work in the real world.

In 2005-2006, the program's pilot year, Connection projects included grant writing, bylaw development, survey design, quality assurance assessment, curriculum development, and skill building workshops. Over 25 consultants worked with six local organizations.

After an extremely successful pilot year, the Connection looks forward to expanding in 2006-2007. Part of this expansion will be facilitated by a \$1,500 grant from the Johns Hopkins Alumni Association. In the future, we anticipate that Connection projects will involve skills such as data analysis and interpretation, surveying, writing/revising grants, fundraising, and teaching health topics.

The following pages provide a summary of this past year's projects as well as information about each CBO and the composition of the Connection teams.

Administrators:

Mindi Levin, MS, CHES
Director, Student Outreach Resource Center (SOURCE)

Lainie Rutkow, JD, MPH
Fellow, Center for Law and the Public's Health
PhD Candidate, Health Policy & Management

UHI Caroline Street Free Clinic for the Uninsured

Description: Established in 2004 by Johns Hopkins's Urban Health Institute, this clinic was designed to provide health services to people with no health insurance. The clinic offers basic primary care, screening, chronic disease management, health education, and HIV testing and counseling services for adults and children. The clinic is staffed by Hopkins volunteers and all services are free.

Project: To help the Caroline Street Clinic improve its community outreach and address residual community needs, such as HIV testing, the Connection team developed an intake questionnaire for the clinic. The questionnaire, which incorporates local demographic and risk factor considerations, will be administered to people seeking HIV testing by counselors trained to work with people seeking such services.

Connection team: 5 JHSPH students

YMCA Afterschool Program at Dr. Rayner Browne Elementary School

Description: Located in East Baltimore, Dr. Rayner Browne Elementary School serves students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The school's faculty and staff strive to increase student achievement through comprehensive academic programs. In addition, they work to improve student attendance, behavior, and parental involvement.

Project: The Connection team developed a nutrition curriculum for the school and recruited five Hopkins students to teach nutrition and health education to students at Rayner Browne. The sessions included topics such as the four food groups, portion control, smoking education, hygiene, and heart and GI tract functioning. The project received two donations from Whole Foods, which allowed the students to have taste-testing sessions with healthy foods. The Connection team received a \$1,000 grant from the Johns Hopkins Alumni Association, which will allow the educational program to continue to Rayner Browne.

Connection team: 3 JHSPH students

Environmental Justice Partnership

Description: The Environmental Justice Partnership (EJP) was formed in 2003 as a way to promote healthy behavior in the East Baltimore community and to better involve the community in the research conducted at the School of Public Health. EJP's underlying philosophy holds that better partnerships and community input could lead to better science and better solutions to environmental problems.

Project: The Connection team drafted a set of bylaws for EJP. The bylaws, which provide a comprehensive overview of EJP's operations, contain information about EJP's objectives, membership, board of directors, officers, meetings, fundraising and development, and conflict resolution system.

Connection team: 3 JHSPH students, 1 SOM student

The Men's Center

Description: The Men's Center improves the quality of relationships between fathers and their children, thus enhancing the preservation of families. The Center is a coordinating place for East Baltimore residents that increases the accessibility of services and community awareness. The Center offers a holistic array of services designed to move men towards self-empowerment.

Project: The Connection team wrote a grant requesting funds to upgrade the Men's Center's facilities. In addition, the team developed materials to help the Men's Center apply for a grant to enhance Lifeskills, the Center's main program. To help the Men's Center in the future, the team researched additional grant opportunities that could provide funds to further upgrade the Center's facilities.

Connection team: 3 JHSPH students, 1 SON student

Greater Homewood Community Corporation

Description: The Greater Homewood Community Corporation (GHCC) is a non-profit organization serving the 40 neighborhoods of north central Baltimore. Established in 1969, GHCC's mission is to strengthen neighborhoods in north central Baltimore through improving education, supporting youth development, and advancing economic development and community revitalization. GHCC has focused on improving the quality of life for people living in Greater Homewood neighborhoods. To this end, the program focuses on education and youth, community development, and neighborhood revitalization. In addition, the organization serves as a meeting ground for a diverse community.

Project: The Connection team developed basic monitoring and evaluation tools that GHCC could use for its Youth Development Initiative. The consultants conducted an "Introduction to Monitoring and Evaluation" session for GHCC staff; facilitated a half-day workshop to further define GHCC processes and objectives; identified a comprehensive set of indicators to be used for monitoring and evaluation of program processes and outcomes; and constructed a set of tools and strategies for data collection that related to the indicators.

Connection team: 3 JHSPH students, 1 SOM student

International Rescue Committee

Description: Founded in 1933, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is a global leader in emergency relief, rehabilitation, protection of human rights, post-conflict development, resettlement services and advocacy for those uprooted or affected by conflict and oppression. For refugees afforded sanctuary in the United States, the IRC provides a range of assistance aimed at helping new arrivals to become settled and acquire the skills to become self-sufficient.

Project: The Connection team developed a survey for refugees who were resettled in the Baltimore area through the IRC. The survey targets refugees who have been resettled for over one year, and will be used by the IRC to determine their clients' satisfaction with the IRC's services. In addition, the survey will help the IRC to determine what additional services it should offer. The IRC will assess the validity and reliability of the survey in summer 2006.

Connection team: 4 JHSPH students

The Men's Center

Description: The Men's Center improves the quality of relationships between fathers and their children, thus enhancing the preservation of families. The Center is a coordinating place for East Baltimore residents that increases the accessibility of services and community awareness. The Center offers a holistic array of services designed to move men towards self-empowerment.

Project: The Connection team worked to improve the Men's Center's database management. This quality assurance project was designed to better enable the Men's Center to run progress reports on each of its clients. Because much of the Center's work is time-sensitive, an efficient and effective database system is crucial. The team delivered an improved database and plans to train the Men's Center staff in its use.

Connection team: 3 JHSPH students

What students are saying about the Connection...

“This was a great way to apply what I had learned in class and our team really worked collaboratively to identify resources and models that were appropriate to the client’s programs.”

“This is a great resource and great experience.”

“I learned about networking, meeting community activists and workers, database management, focus groups, and survey development.”

“The projects were very valuable experiences and I’m very happy to have had this opportunity!”

What local organizations are saying about the Connection...

“Thanks to the students our staff are now able to conduct their own evaluations of our programs.”

“The students were a tremendous help and without them we would not have been able to make the progress that we have made.”

“These students certainly helped our organization. Their expertise was greatly appreciated.”

“We would like to have other Connection projects in the future and highly recommend this program.”