

Reaching Out in East Baltimore

New tri-school office acts as match service for volunteers, community

*By Karen Blum
Special to The Gazette*

Looking for volunteer opportunities in East Baltimore? Head to the [SOURCE](#). Johns Hopkins' new Student Outreach Resource Center is now open on the East Baltimore campus, providing for the first time in the institutions' history a single office to help both students and staff in the schools of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing reach out to the neighboring communities. The office also functions as a clearinghouse through which community groups can request volunteer help.

The SOURCE has relationships with more than 90 local organizations, including schools, community clinics and advocacy groups, says director Mindi Levin. Levin helps students and staff find activities at any commitment level, from a onetime park cleanup to an in-depth internship that Public Health students can use for a capstone thesis project.

SOURCE's programs and services will include an annual volunteer fair in which attendees can learn more about local organizations; quarterly drives to collect books, toiletries or cell phones for donation; and monthly lectures by community leaders. A weekly e-mail featuring the latest opportunities for community involvement already has 800 Johns Hopkins subscribers.

Community activist Glenn Ross, an East Baltimore resident for more than 30 years, works with the office to provide tours of the area to those not familiar with its history.

On April 9, SOURCE held its inaugural tri-school day of service, in which 90 students volunteered for various projects around the city, including building a playground for the new YMCA at Stadium Place, organizing registration for a multiple sclerosis fund-raising walk and boxing donated food for distribution by the Maryland Food Bank.

Although the idea of such an office seems simple, setting it up was no easy task, Levin says. The



The SOURCE team gets a bird's-eye view of East Baltimore. Director Mindi Levin, right, is joined on the roof of the School of Public Health by Glenn Ross, community consultant to SOURCE, and Lori Hackett, the office's administrative assistant.

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School of Public Health for several years had for its own students an office called InterAction that performed many of the same tasks as SOURCE. The School of Medicine had an informal referral system for community outreach, but when students lobbied for an office similar to InterAction, the administration wasn't able to find the resources or office space to accommodate them. At the same time, School of Nursing instructor Lori Edwards was coordinating her school's outreach program and sometimes found in contacting local agencies that she was repeating efforts by others. In addition, the community groups didn't necessarily understand the differences between the various schools.

"It was just confusing to everyone involved," says Levin, who previously directed the School of Public Health's InterAction office.

Levin, Edwards, medical student Graeme Woodworth and David Dowdy, a student in the M.D./M.P.H. program, presented a proposal for the tri-school office to the three schools' deans in December 2003, and SOURCE opened Jan. 1, 2005. Working through each school's academic requirements and needs was a challenge, Levin says.

The feedback from both community groups and Johns Hopkins participants has been positive.

Deborah Chilcoat, a health education and training specialist for Planned Parenthood of Maryland, has asked for Johns Hopkins volunteers for tasks such as giving sex education lectures in public schools and providing abortion counseling. "I can't say enough good things about the students Mindi has sent me," Chilcoat says. "A lot of them have worked with the Peace Corps, so they know the value of working in the community. I don't have to hold their hands, and it's very refreshing to know the work will be done."

Public Health student LaShawndra Pace used SOURCE for help when she wanted to plan Black History Month activities for a local school. Levin put her in touch with Tench Tilghman Elementary School, where Pace and her fellow students hosted a panel of community leaders, taught lessons and helped the children put on a show highlighting black history and culture.

"I'm really impressed at how much she does," Pace says of Levin. "If you want to know something about the community, Mindi knows it."

Though volunteerism is not mandated by any of the three health schools, Michael Barone, assistant dean for student affairs at the School of Medicine, says the administration has worked hard to foster an educational environment that encourages responsibility to the public.

"I can honestly say that now, across all four years of the SoM classes, volunteerism and community service are a top priority," says Barone, who sits on the SOURCE's governing board.

Adds Levin, "We are truly hoping to integrate our program into the curriculum of the three schools to become part of the students' academic process. I [now] see more students who want to be involved but are limited by their academic schedule."

Dowdy, one of SOURCE's founders, says the office "has the potential to be extremely valuable. It could make a large impact on the culture of students."

"I welcome the new SOURCE office," said Deidra Bishop, director of East Baltimore community

affairs for the Johns Hopkins Institutions and a member of SOURCE's governing board. "It's an effort to coordinate greater linkages between our institutions and the neighboring communities."

SOURCE is located in room E1002 of the School of Public Health. For more information, call 410-955-3880 or go to www.jhsph.edu/source.

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