UHC Community-Based Research Fellowship
Spring 2014 Fellows

Strategies to Increase Volunteer Retention Among Young Adults Ages 18-25 in American Red Cross South Western PA Region

Fellow: MonaLisa Leung  Senior Communications – Rhetoric Major
Community Health Assessment Certificate

Partners: Anna Drenning  American Red Cross, South Western PA Region
Jamie Phillips

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Louis Luangkesorn  Research Assistant
Professor at Pitt School of Engineering

MonaLisa Leung is one of the very few active young adults that volunteer with the Red Cross. Being the youngest at every team meeting, she sometimes felt discouraged and lonely without anybody of her age to connect with. The Red Cross cannot drive social change if young adults are consistently dropping out and causing a shortage of volunteer manpower. Through surveying and interviewing of young adults in Western PA, this research seeks to identify the reasons why young adults volunteer and the obstacles that prevent them from volunteering. MonaLisa hopes to use the research findings to develop a suggestive toolkit for Red Cross staff, volunteers, and club advisors to help increase young adult retention.

Urban Gardens and Food Access in Pittsburgh, PA

Fellow: Nikki Luke  Senior, double major in Environmental Studies and Economics, History Minor

Partner: Marisa Manheim  Grow Pittsburgh

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Randall Walsh  Associate Professor, Department of Economics

This research seeks to better understand the impacts of urban gardens on food access and community development. A survey was developed and conducted during summer 2013, canvassing residents in seven neighborhoods living within 1000 feet of a community garden, to determine their level of food access as well as interest, involvement, and awareness of gardening options. This semester, Nikki is mapping her data using GIS to illustrate the reach of community gardens and compare this information to USDA projections for “food deserts”, lower income areas lacking access to healthy food options. Nikki is also integrating the feedback that she received in the survey to help make urban gardening more accessible across Pittsburgh.

A Framework for Collaborative Sustainable Healthcare Design between Engineers for Sustainable Medical Devices and Global Links

Fellow: Karuna Relwani  Senior Bioengineering Major, Certificate in Engineering for Humanity

Partner: Angela Gracia  Global Links, Pittsburgh
Kathleen Hower
Marisol Wandiga

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Melissa Bilec  Assistant Director for Education and Outreach, Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation

In this research project, Karuna is working with Global Links, a local medical supply recovery office, and Engineers for Sustainable Medical Devices, a student group at Pitt. She is creating an international service-learning program with local hospitals in Guyana that Global Links donates supplies to, to give Pitt students an applicable and involved field experience.
Testing Reluctance in High-Risk Celiac Disease Patients and Dietary Adherence in Diagnosed Celiac Disease Patients

**Fellow:** Dhanu Thiyagarajan  
Junior Bioengineering major, Minor in Chemistry, Certificate in Conceptual Foundations of Medicine

**Partner:** Kathy Sepesy, The Celiac Center at the Allegheny Center for Digestive Health, Celiac Disease Clinic/Gluten Free Awareness

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Marc Schwartz  
Assistant Professor of Medicine

This research consists of two studies. The first study examines why diagnosed Celiac Disease patients do not maintain a consistent gluten-free diet free of cross-contamination. The second part looks at the reasons that high-risk Celiac Disease patients do not get tested for Celiac Disease. The results of this study should help to focus on the preventative aspect of Celiac Disease.

Cooking for a Cause: Outcome Measures of the UPMC BodyChangers’ PrepAbility Cooking and Nutrition Education Class

**Fellows:**  
Christina Proch  
Senior Nutrition and Dietetics major  
Kalli Lodovico  
Senior Nutrition and Dietetics major

**Partner:** UPMC BodyChangers

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Elizabeth Ruder  
Director of Didactic Program in Dietetics, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

This research compares the nutrient intake of weight-loss support group members involved in a healthy cooking class to those not involved in the cooking class. Pilot data is being gathered to determine the impact of the program, and construct a report for UPMC that communicates evidence-based recommendations for future programming. Focus groups are also being conducted with participants and medical staff. The research may further elucidate barriers to healthy eating habits, as well as the importance of community programming, social support, and nutrition education in weight loss and maintenance.
Lost Without Literacy

**Fellow:** Phyllicia Leavitt  
Senior, double major in French and English Creative Nonfiction Writing, Global Studies Certificate  
**Partner:** The Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council  
**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Annette Vee  
Assistant Professor, Department of English

Phyllicia is gathering research on literacy and its social, political, and economic implications as well as interviewing ESL students and writing stories about the students' successes and fallbacks with English literacy, which will be used for the organizations marketing with current and prospective donors and in-house newsletters. The Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council serves about 4,000 adults and their families a year in the Pittsburgh area, helping them acquire the literacy skills they need to achieve their dreams. Many of these people are immigrants or refugees who struggle to navigate life, including vital systems such as their children’s education healthcare, in a new setting.

Sustainability of Local Watersheds and Organization Commitment to these Community Assets

**Research by:** Zach Shirilla  
Sophomore, Finance Major  
**Partner:** Ed Schroth  
Trout Unlimited  
**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Brett Crawford  
Clinical Assistant Professor of Business Administration

Using historical data on environmental initiatives and trout stream health, Zach’s research analyzes the real impacts of stream cleanup efforts on the sustainability of local community water systems; particularly those which harbor trout populations. This study may also help demonstrate value of local trout streams as a community asset. This idea for this topic was influenced by Zach’s prior involvement with sustainability initiatives and by his experiences in a business ethics course.