

4.4 Focus on Service Learning: The REEP/Georgetown University Partnership

Emily Beckett, ESOL Coordinator at the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP), says that a service learning partnership with the Georgetown University School of Medicine (GUSOM) virtually “fell into our laps,” and REEP students and teachers are happy that it did. The partnership, which started in fall of 2011, places ten first-year medical students and their advisor with the REEP program to support the health education and care needs of REEP learners while sensitizing the medical students to working with vulnerable, underserved, and limited-English-speaking populations.

It all started with a phone call from GUSOM’s Service Learning Director Donna Cameron, Ph.D., to Beckett to see if REEP would be interested in this mutually beneficial project. Service learning, defined as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” ([National Service-Learning Clearinghouse](#) website) is a requirement for GUSOM’s first-year medical students and is considered a standard component of U.S. medical training. GUSOM and other medical schools in the U.S. regularly seek out new community partners that work with vulnerable, medically underserved populations. Service learning goals for GUSOM medical students include building mutually beneficial, sustainable relationships with community partners; engaging in self-reflection around the service experience; recognizing their community’s health priorities; and addressing the priorities in culturally sensitive educational and outreach activities (GUSOM [service learning curriculum](#)).

Benefits of the partnership for REEP have come in the form of free medical screenings for learners, referrals for learners to affordable care resources in the community, and health education for learners and teachers. In 2011, 163 adult ESOL students were screened for blood pressure and body mass index and 73 students received vision screenings. Twenty-one teachers and volunteers attended a health literacy training that offered mini-presentations on a variety of health issues, community affordable care resources, and accessing and navigating the health care system. In 2012,



Georgetown University medical student Julia Carlson checks blood pressure of REEP student Reza Dastan during the 2012 service learning project.



150 students were screened for blood pressure, body mass index, and blood glucose. The students also received information on diabetes, stress management, obesity and exercise, cardiovascular disease, and community resources.

The following is an outline of the service learning partnership activities:

1. **Orientation to REEP for GUSOM students:** The medical students attend a one-hour overview to the REEP program during which they received information on REEP's health curriculum and 2011 statistics on REEP learners' access to health care (78% of students surveyed in a 2011 project reported being uninsured and 68% reported having no medical care in the U.S.).
2. **Class observations:** GUSOM students sit in on beginner and more advanced ESOL classes.
3. **Needs assessment:** GUSOM students perform a needs assessment with REEP instructors and students to identify key health concerns of students.
4. **Resource gathering:** GUSOM students researched affordable care resources in the community and compiled a resource list for REEP teachers and students. As part of this research process, they visit the Arlington County Department of Human Services where they learn about the services offered there.
5. **Screenings and education for REEP learners:** In response to identified needs, the medical students hold free health screenings for REEP learners on two evenings. Medical students go over screening results individually with the REEP students and give them referrals to community resources that can help with care to address the health issues that the screenings identify. Health information is provided to REEP learners at different learning stations manned by medical students.
6. **Health education presentations for REEP teachers:** In the 2011 program, medical students used the initial needs assessment to identify health topics that REEP teachers wanted to know more about to better help their students. The medical students gave presentations for teachers on these topics.

Beckett states that, in addition to getting health screenings and education for the REEP program, REEP's participation is also important because it is helping to sensitize future doctors to working with vulnerable LEP populations. "We are doing a good thing helping prepare the med students. When people say they understand, it doesn't always mean they do...I noticed as med students worked with REEP students that the med students were starting to become aware of the barriers to service that our students face."



REEP teacher Libby Costello says of the 2012 health fair, "I think it was great. The graphics [prepared by the medical students] were really good – the beginners could understand. The medical students are patient, very friendly. The REEP students are getting the idea of what's being presented more than I thought they would. They were helping each other to understand what was going on."

Intermediate level ESOL student Jose Rubio said the health information topics were interesting for him. About the 2012 event, he stated, "I like it. It's good we have information about health. I get a blood glucose test. I remember in my country I get this."

Dr. Cameron, the Georgetown Service Learning Coordinator, states that the medical students have had rich experiences with REEP learners. She shared the following comments from student evaluations of the 2011 service learning project.

"Volunteering at REEP taught me that helping the under-served is about more than just the quick fixes, such as free clinics and essential material goods, it is also about long-term service, particularly teaching. I've learned that to help my patients I will need to be able to provide them with and teach them to use certain tools that will help them live healthier lives." – *First-year medical student*



REEP student Giovana Ferrufino discusses stress management with Georgetown University medical students Belain Eyob and Jeffrey Gray at the 2012 health fair.

"I had never had a lot of experience with immigrants and the non-English speaking population. In general, they had so many basic questions on medicine, health care, and how to live a daily life that were not being communicated effectively. It meant so much to these students to have us sit down and spend time taking their blood pressures, vision screening, etc., that it imparted upon me the gravity of the influence that a doctor has within the community and how much good we can do in our community without travelling very far. The experience made me think less of the "obligations" that I have as a doctor compared to the opportunities that I have as a future physician to help and serve within the community." – *First-year medical student*

"The major thing that I carry with me from this experience is how appreciative the students were to have us inform them about their health status and educate them about good health behaviors. The students' gratitude demonstrated to me the impact that you can have in simply sharing a little bit of your time with someone else." – *First-year medical student*

"Working with [the ESOL students] gave me a small window into their life and increased my appreciation for their circumstance. The brief glimpse was impactful, deepening my own life's experience, and preparing me to better understand the next non-English-speaking patients I will serve."
– *First-year medical student*

