

Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellows Program

Newsletter Spring 2018



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Cuidate Project Connects Families with Nature and Healthy Lifestyles



Fellow Maryclaret Ndubuisi-Obi, a student from DePaul University School of Nursing, epitomizes the spirit of the Schweitzer Fellowship through her dedication to service and commitment to health equity. For her Fellowship project, Maryclaret partnered with Roberti Community House (RCH), a community center that serves a distressed neighborhood in Waukegan, where she worked to improve the health and wellbeing of Hispanic women and their families through nature walks, exercise and stress reduction sessions, and health education workshops throughout the year. At the end of her project, Maryclaret interviewed the participants in her Cuidate ("Take Care") Project and about the experiences they shared.

“...thanks to Mary, RCH, and the Nature Walk Program, we discovered our own parks and our own community.”

Community member Estela Perez, speaking with her friend Maribel Godina, who translated for her, shared that before the program she had not used the forest preserves or local parks in Waukegan because she did not know that they were there and did not feel capable of accessing them. For her part, Maribel shared her own experience as a mother living with a disability and struggling with isolation, “I go out now to the different parks. I tell my kids ‘get your jackets, get your coats, let’s go.’ It doesn’t matter if it’s winter or if it’s raining, you can always do these nature walks. Every time you go to these parks, you see something different, which motivates me to go and see what has changed with the different seasons. This motivates my kids as well because, as Estela mentioned, sometimes we don’t know about what we have here—but thanks to Mary, RCH, and the Nature Walk Program, we discovered our own parks and our own community.”

Maryclaret’s project provided exercise and meditation sessions that ranged from Zumba to Mindfulness. Participants

Guadalupe Ruiz and Gina shared that the sessions provide a sort of social support group that they have come to rely on for motivation and community. Maribel said that the groups and meditations helped to reduce her stress—and introduced her to breathing exercises that have helped her “to be peaceful and connect with [her] inner self.”

Another component of Maryclaret’s project included health screenings. She built partnerships with providers to bring culturally-competent services, including language translation, directly to the community—meeting clients in spaces where they were already comfortable, had trusting established relationships, and felt safe.

Finding access to health services and screenings proved life changing for community members like Amor Caracas who, speaking through an interpreter, said, “[I am] very thankful for the people who bring the doctors here to check our blood pressure.” She explained that she was not able to afford testing and did not know where and how to receive treatment, and that the screenings Cuidate provided are important to her health and to the health of her community.

The women talk about the future of Cuidate in hopeful terms and with determination to continue. In fact, they have already started brainstorming improvements and solutions to a scarcity in supplies.

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As Gina noted light-heartedly, “We need weights. We have limited supplies so we use cans of beans sometimes to do the exercises, but we do need the weights and materials to do a variety of exercises.”

Their commitment to the community that Maryclaret helped them build is clear, and their determination to continue to feel ownership over their lives, their health, and their community is unmistakable—outcomes we hope all Schweitzer Fellows can foster. We are grateful to the women and families at Roberti House, and to all of our community members at sites around Chicagoland for opening their doors, and their hearts, to our Fellows.



Mentorship Spotlight

Mentors Help Nourish Fellows, Community Projects

Every year, Fellows grow and their projects blossom with the important encouragement, wisdom, and support of mentors who are experienced with community work and the challenges and opportunities Fellows are likely to face. We’d like to highlight two exceptional mentors who guided Fellows this year.

Faculty mentors are instrumental for both advising Fellows with the technical details of their projects and with balancing their community work with their degree programs. **Dr. Sonia Oyola** (photo, right), who teaches at the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine, helped several Fellows from Pritzker navigate project challenges with creative suggestions, helpful resources, and her kind, listening ear.

Site mentors orient Fellows to their communities and help them to tailor their projects to best meet community needs. Fellow and Columbia College Dance/ Movement Therapy and Counseling student Quinn Davis greatly appreciated the ongoing support of her site mentor, **Ms. Angelia Doudy**, at Deborah’s Place, a supportive housing and services organization for women who have been homeless and often struggle with trauma. Quinn offered workshops aimed at helping the women reduce stress, increase self-esteem, and develop a stronger sense of community. Ms. Doudy was crucial to Quinn’s success with maximizing the impact of her workshop.

A big thank you to Dr. Oyola, Ms. Doudy, and all of our Fellows’ Mentors!



About the Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellows Program



The Schweitzer Fellowship is a year-long service learning program for graduate students in health-related professions who design and implement innovative direct-service projects, aimed at improving the health and well-being of underserved Chicago Area communities. Each year 30 outstanding Fellows are selected from Chicago’s top graduate programs. Visit hmprg.org for more information and to apply.



30 Fellows
200 Service-hours
3500+ Alumni network



Raising the Bar with Service

Last November marked the sixth consecutive year that Chef Chao and his team from Union Sushi + Barbeque partnered with Schweitzer Fellows to provide a thanksgiving meal and fun activities for the community of artists, volunteers, and staff of Arts of Life, an agency that provides artists with and without intellectual disabilities a space to expand their practice and strengthen their leadership. The service day has become a much loved tradition for the artists and the Fellows, and we are all deeply grateful to Chef Chao for his generosity!

Join In!

Fellows for Life is our vibrant network of Schweitzer alumni residing in the Chicago Area. We come together to connect, network, and continue to inspire each other through the work that we are doing.

Upcoming opportunities:

- ◇ Celebration of Service—April 18
- ◇ Seed Grant Deadline—April 30
- ◇ FFL Book Club: Refreshing Reads

Just email Maya Bauer at mbauer@hmprg.org for details!

Hey FFL—Make a Gift!

A message from the Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellows Program Advisory Council:

*“We are passionate about making our Schweitzer Program the best it can be. This year, we invite Fellows for Life to join us in making a donation to help the Program. We have pledged to match up to \$5,000 in **new and increased** donations made by Fellows and Fellows for Life in 2018. As of this writing, we’ve received \$1,945 in eligible gifts. Every gift, regardless of the amount, helps us with costs such as stipends, monthly meetings, retreats, and of course our amazing Schweitzer staff. To make a gift, go to hmprg.org or email mbauer@hmprg.org for a donation envelope.”*



Will you help us get to \$5,000?

We thank the following for their generous support:

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