Alumnae Perspective
By My Yen Lee

I cannot think of Smith College without thinking of S.O.S. and the valuable experienced I gained there as an America Reads tutor, a Community Service Internship Program (CSIP) intern, Community Scholar Facilitator, a Volunteer Recruitment Intern, and as an S.O.S board member. S.O.S played an influential role in shaping my career choice in the nonprofit sector. I have always been involved in community service work and have always wanted to work in an environment that provides direct services to people as well as empower them. SOS not only provided me with the opportunity to do community service but also exposed me to the “planning” side of it.

I currently head a nonprofit that serves Vietnamese Americans in the DC Metropolitan area called the Maryland Vietnamese Mutual Association (MVMA). I started working for MVMA through the Dan Than Fellowship (a version of the Americorps program). MVMA just went through a major budget cut and lost most of its staff. The thought of working for a struggling nonprofit with limited staff support was frightening; however, it was an opportunity for me to build up an organization. I had faith that my previous experiences doing community service work at S.O.S would guide me to the right path.

I started out writing grant proposals for the Vietnamese Parenting Enrichment Project and a formal Volunteer Program and received funding for both programs. My experience as an America Reads tutor, as a CSIP intern, and a Volunteer Recruiter was very helpful not only with the grant proposal writing but also with the development of the programs. Both programs require me to develop strategies in helping parents gain skills in reading and communicating with their children and in recruiting volunteers effectively. The America Reads Program trained me to work with young children, taught me how to keep the children engaged in reading age appropriate books and provided me with a variety of activities to test comprehension and letter recognition. I passed these skills onto the staff at MVMA.

I gained invaluable experiences through the CSIP program, which was under the direction of the S.O.S Director and a liaison for the Smith College School for Social Work. I learned that children and adults have different ways of communicating when they are happy or sad. There is no doubt that this has helped me in both my professional and personal life.

Being the OCIP Community Outreach Intern and S.O.S Board member also helped me significantly with my job. As a Volunteer Recruiter, I took lead in organizing S.O.S Community Service Fairs by recruiting agency representatives to display their volunteer opportunities, attracting students to come to these fairs, and delegating responsibilities to other board members. Because I was familiar with the agencies, I recently contacted one of the agencies, Childrens Aid and Family Services in Northampton, to help me develop the MVMA Parenting Program. My experience of organizing two fairs helped me organize two successful Vietnamese Tet Lunar New Year Festivals in Maryland, recruit vendors, create a map plan, market the event, and delegate responsibilities to others.

S.O.S, thank you for providing me with the opportunity to grow. I hope other students will take advantage of opportunities S.O.S has to offer.
Blood Drive
By Claire Bolton ’08
The S.O.S. spring blood drive was another successful occasion with many donors and volunteers from Smith and the Northampton area community. 201 people came in to donate blood, and 134 of those were successfully able to donate.

Three patients may benefit from one pint of donated blood, meaning that 402 patients will be helped from the Smith drive alone.

Many thanks to all who came out to donate or volunteer at the spring drive. Next fall’s drive will take place on November 1st from 1-7pm and November 2nd from 11am-5pm. A new feature at the next drive will be a bone marrow test for those who are interested in being on the Red Cross’s bone marrow registry.

Community Projects
By Samin Green ’08 and Julia Yermolina ’07
Thanks so much to everyone who helped out with Winter Gifts this year! Winter Gifts is a program facilitated through the Hilltown Churches Food Pantry in Ashfield, MA, which asks for donated presents during the holiday season for needy families each December. Smith students, faculty and staff are matched with a child and purchase a gift specifically requested by the parents. In most cases, the presents these children receive from the pantry are the only presents they will get during the holiday season.

Thanks so much to all the House Representatives, individual staff, faculty and departments who helped collect money to sponsor children. Members of the Smith Community were large benefactors to the project. This year, Smith was able to sponsor over 85 children, more than any other year. Our donations literally filled the Pantry! It was a very successful year, and we know the children greatly appreciated all of their presents.

Recruitment/Agency Intern
By Rachel Finklestein ’08
With less than two weeks of school left until summer break, it’s hard to focus on school work, go to class and study for tests, especially as the weather gets warmer and the sun shines well into the evening. It is a good time, however, to reflect upon the past semester and all the hard work we have all done and everything that we have accomplished.

As the Recruitment/Agency Intern here at S.O.S., I have had the continued privilege of working with several wonderful staff and board members on a variety of different tasks, including the spring Community Service Recruitment Fair and the Five College Community-Based Learning Workshop at Amherst College. In addition, Tiertza and I have continued to stay in touch with partner agencies, update our directory and provide support and advice for potential and current Smith volunteers. My work with S.O.S. this year has been a wonderful learning experience; in fact, I will continue to work with S.O.S. part-time this summer.

I wish you all good luck with the rest of the semester, and encourage you all to get involved with S.O.S. or take part in a local community service project in the years to come! Remember, we are here to help you help the community.
Fund Drive Report ~ Foster Care: Helping Children in Need
By Katy Means ’06 and Elizabeth Wolfson ’08

Every year S.O.S. holds a Fund Drive. This year’s topic was Foster Care: Helping Children in Need, for which all funds raised go toward emergency placement supplies and extracurricular opportunities for foster children. This year’s drive was a huge success! We raised $5,000, surpassing previous fund drive records. The month-long event, which ran from February 16th to March 16th, included several events, such as a lecture co-sponsored by the education department, and a benefit concert featuring a capella groups, student performers and faculty bands.

In Massachusetts alone, 8,000 children enter foster care every year. Many of the children come in hungry, without adequate clothing and with poor hygiene. The reasons for entering care are always different, but for all of these children, home is no longer a safe place. “When children [enter a foster home] they are shattered. In the course of a few short hours they have lost everything that anchored them to their sense of self. They are truly refugees from a war they can’t begin to comprehend,” says Kathy Harrison in Another Place at the Table. For these reasons, we decided to focus on emergency placement supplies and providing funds for extracurricular opportunities. Harrison also notes, “We are a culture that values stuff – I’m not saying that’s right or wrong, it’s just the way it is. Children measure their self-worth by this ideal, and if they keep getting second hand stuff, it tells them that they’re not important enough [for new stuff].” Kids need their own toys, clothing and books in order to feel like they are important and special. Recent research confirms that involvement in extracurricular activities in school and in communities helps foster the strengths in youth that steer them away from undesirable behavior. Helene Leue, a local foster mother explained that these activities are expensive, but “when kids are able to participate in extracurricular activities, they’re with more focused students because they’re preoccupied in a positive way.” After aging out of foster care, approximately 27% of men and 10% of females are incarcerated in 12 to 18 months, 50% are unemployed and 37% have yet to finish high school. Instilling a sense of self and belonging in foster children can help lower these alarming statistics.

The money raised in the Fund Drive is distributed through a grant to a local organization, and 100% of it goes toward the foster children in Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties.

Our first main event of the drive was our Educational Tea, co-hosted by the Education Department. Our speakers were Jane Lyons, the director of Friends of Children, a Northampton advocacy organization for foster children in Western Massachusetts, and Kathy Harrison, a local foster mother and author who has adopted and fostered many children. Kathy spoke first about her experiences and how hard she works to ensure the happiness of a child in her care. Jane then spoke about the work that Friends of Children does, what foster care is like in Western Massachusetts, and what more is needed (such as a laptop computer lending library for high school students). Overall, the event was a success, and we all learned a lot.

Next, we joined forces with Community Education Luncheon Chair, Julie Esterline-Losczyk, and enjoyed pizza, pop and interesting speakers during our lunch hour. Guest speakers were Erin Carr, a Social Worker at the Gerena Community School in Springfield and Georgia Barwick, AC’05, who has been a foster mother. Our discussions explored the experiences that Barwick and Carr have had with foster children, as well as focused on the rights of children in the system.

The biggest event of the drive was the Benefit Concert in the Carroll Room. We enjoyed the performances of the Noteables, the Smithereens, the Vibes, Jordan Clements, the Merchant Bankers and Al Mosely, Sylvia Johnson & Higher Hope, as well as Herrell’s ice cream, which was generously donated to the event. President Christ also donated $500 so the first one hundred students could get in free. The concert was a great time.

Finally, we would like to especially thank the S.O.S. House Reps who collected donations in their houses. We couldn’t have done it without you!
Humane Society
By Kimberly McNelly ’08

Every Saturday morning, my alarm goes off at 7 AM, and to the amusement of my roommate, I stumble out of bed to pull on old clothes. Greeting the Chapel custodian, who is surprisingly cheerful at such an early hour, I sign out S.O.S.’s sleek red Neon and drive to the Greenfield Humane Society, where energetic dogs, pathetically adorable kittens, and feisty but sometimes shy cats vie for my attention.

After the S.O.S. Fair early this semester, I decided to get involved in a service organization. I discovered on my first visit that the Greenfield shelter is a very small operation and always in need of new volunteers. Usually only two to three volunteers, myself included, show up on Saturday mornings, in addition to a few highly-experienced staff and a veterinarian. This team has only a few hours to walk the dogs, clean up cages (a task amusing and fun because the cats remain in their cages, rubbing against your arms in an effort to get attention, or sometimes try to escape), feed all the animals, and make the office presentable before it opens to the public.

Working at the Greenfield Humane Society has been a rewarding experience for me because my efforts have a visible effect. Although I volunteer on a weekly basis, the shelter is different every time I visit, in part because of its incredible animal turnover rate—almost all of the 8-10 dogs are new each week, the old kittens are adopted and replaced by new kittens, and many of the 25 cats are new. Because it is a no-kill shelter, I know that they have found good homes. In addition, the building itself changes week to week; this semester, a new “cat colony” room was engineered in which 6-8 cats run free, and plans have begun to paint murals on exterior walls. The Greenfield Humane Society is an evolving vision that has brightened my weekends and made Smith’s insane work-load a little bit lighter.

Alternative Spring Break
By Julie Esterline-Losczyk ADA ’07J

This year’s Smith College Alternative Spring Break was quite a success! Eleven Smith students stuck around Northampton for a week and volunteered for organizations such as Prison Book Project, Habitat for Humanity, Lathrop Senior Home, and AIDS CARE/Hampshire County.

While plenty of Smith students spent their break catching up on much needed rest or soaking up the sun down south, the Alternative Spring Breakers spent their time in Northampton playing bingo with the seniors of Lathrop Home, sending much-needed books to prisoners, building a house for a local low-income family, and posting flyers around the Pioneer Valley for this summer’s MASS Red Ribbon Ride. In addition, a local Girl Scout troop joined in the bingo game and was given a tour of Smith’s campus. Finally, the group participated in a workshop facilitated by Ashley Brown, Five College Coordinator of Community-Based Learning, MACC AmeriCorps*VISTA, who spoke about the importance of effectively engaging the community.

The group would like to thank Tierzta-Leah Schwartz and the staff of Helen Hills Hills Chapel for being such wonderful hosts for the Spring Break program!
Message from the Chair: S.O.S. and Beyond!
By Stacy Braverman ’06

This newsletter focuses on the internships, programs and learning opportunities that S.O.S. provides, however there are many other opportunities for community service during your Smith career. Below are a few ideas for ways to get involved:

**During Time Away from Campus:** Smith’s Picker semester-in-Washington program, run through the Government Department, includes an internship component where students can choose to work with advocacy groups, government agencies, or non-governmental organizations that have huge impacts on underserved communities in the US and around the world. Many other JYA programs have community service possibilities—for example, students on Smith’s JYA program in Geneva can get credit for work with an international organization, and a hallmark of Smith-approved SIT programs is their four-week independent study component, where students can work with many non-profits.

**Over the Summer:** Many students have used their Praxis to work with non-profits and other organizations involved in community service. A good place to start investigating summer opportunities, both paid and unpaid, is at the CDO, which has binders of reports from prior years of Praxis students and a huge database of internship possibilities. S.O.S. can also recommend partner agencies in the Pioneer Valley who may need summer interns. Check our website for a list of partner organizations.

**Beyond Non-profits:** The CDO’s E-Access directory lists many jobs and internships for the summer and the school year that are with government agencies, organizations beyond the Pioneer Valley but still accessible to car-owning Smithies, or groups that are not structured as non-profits but still work with underserved communities.

**Money Matters:** Now that you’ve found an amazing service project, or a conference to give you valuable educational and networking opportunities, how are you going to get there? Smith’s fellowship office has a listing of funding opportunities at www.smith.edu/fellowships, and the Dean of the College maintains a website about other college-administered funds at http://www.smith.edu/doc/discretionaryfunds.php

**In the Classroom:** Get credit for community service! Some Smith courses include placements at local agencies and provide an academic framework for understanding many social issues. For a listing of courses, see http://www.smith.edu/sos/cbl.htm. Many classes at other colleges include a service learning component as well—Preston Smith directs a center for community-based learning at Mt. Holyoke, and students in Hampshire classes have constructed bicycle ambulances for developing nations and have been involved in a variety of activist activities.

Whether you are working within walking distance of campus or around the world, S.O.S. board members and staff are committed to community service and would be glad to talk with you about your greatest excitements or your latest struggles, or the placements that might be best for you.
CLASSIFIEDS
Staying in the Pioneer Valley this Summer? Volunteer Opportunities:

The Performance Project (Northampton)
Interested in theatre? The Performance Project is looking for volunteers to work with recovering ex-inmates and community members to help put together their annual fall production. The Performance Project works to create theatre focused on truth-telling, break down the stigmas surrounding incarceration and examine the underlying systems of oppression that impact inmates’/ex-inmates’ lives. For more information contact: Julie Lichtenberg (phone: 413-586-4960 or E-mail: info@performanceproject.org)

Grace House (Northampton)
Grace House, a shelter for homeless women and their children, is looking for volunteers to help baby-sit during meetings on Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays or Sundays this summer. For more information, contact Sonya Cruz at 413-586-8213.

The Food Bank Farm of Western MA (Hadley)
On-going Projects: Volunteers needed to sort donated food. Help is needed on Monday and Friday from 12-4pm and Thursday from 12-7pm. Saturday shifts from 8am-noon are also available. Clubs, households and organizations are welcome to schedule a group activity. For more information contact: Kate at kate@foodbankwma.org or Fern at ferns@foodbankwma.org, or call 413-247-9738. You can also check out our website at www.foodbankwma.org.

Girl’s Inc. (Holyoke)
Girl’s Inc. is a non-profit organization that is working to empower girls by providing the opportunity for them to learn many skills. We are looking for fun and compassionate people to donate their time to tutoring middle school and high school students. Our aim is to raise the grades of the girls in our program and encourage a successful graduation for them all. If you enjoy helping young people shine, please contact: Krista Bajgier, Youth Conflict Resolution Coordinator, Girls Inc. of Holyoke, 413-533-0697 ext. 206

For more opportunities, check out the S.O.S. directory on our website: www.smith.edu/sos