I consider myself actively involved in the local area community, volunteering at Homework House and the Kensington School refugee/mentor program since my first year at Smith as well as participating on a volunteer trip to teach English in a rural part of China this past summer through the program Technology and Education: Connecting Cultures (TECC). While I greatly value my service experiences, I never really considered the history behind community service at college until I was asked to share my experiences of these three programs at a reception held by the Community Service Office to honor Doris Cohn Kirshbaum and her family.

Doris Kirshbaum ’37 was a Smithie who fought to have community service regarded as an important aspect of students’ careers at college, and for community service amongst women to be taken seriously. To me, these points just seem obvious, but when I got a glimpse of how different things were during Doris Kirshbaum’s time, I felt a new appreciation for all of the opportunities I have to get involved in the community and the value that is placed on service work. I took that appreciation with me as I shared my personal experiences working in the community.

I spoke about how wanting to work with children and gain experience that would provide some context to the material I would be learning in my education classes drew me to Homework House at the very beginning of my Smith career. While volunteering at Homework House, I learned about the Kensington program and could not pass up this new chance to make a difference in a child’s life by being a positive role model as she or he becomes acclimated to a new culture and language. Although each program is unique, both contain the reward of seeing my tutees and mentees open up to me and grow before my eyes. I also experience growth by participating in these programs.

Then I spoke about how TECC drew me in by combining my passions for both education and being immersed in different cultures. I touched on the new but rewarding experience of being the first American many local people had ever met, yet being surrounded by those with the same value for education and spreading knowledge as myself.

As I spoke and listened to the stories of the other students, community members and Donald and Patrice Kirshbaum (Doris Kirshbaum’s son and daughter-in-law), I could see pieces of Doris Kirshbaum’s legacy that continue to live on. I am reminded to take nothing for granted because at one time or another somebody had to fight for even the things that seem as natural as community service in college.
How I got Involved with Community Service at Smith

by Sibyl Brown ’14

Throughout my years in high school, I was involved in some short-term community service projects that were off and on, but I was never part of anything long-term. Then, when I came to Smith, all of that changed. My story of how I got involved with the Community Service Office at Smith is not particularly a happy one but it is a very crucial part of my life.

My first weekend at Smith, I woke up on Sunday morning to a phone call from my mom, informing me that one of my best friends from home had suddenly passed away the night before. The news came completely out of nowhere and struck me extremely hard; I was in complete shock for several days. I went home to mourn, be with family, and attend her memorial service, but then after a week I had to return to Smith.

Being back at school made it even worse because I was expected to attend classes and to do school work – and those were the absolute last things on my mind. During the next four months, I proceeded to spiral into a really deep depression that continued for a long time. However, I somehow managed to make it through the whole semester without dropping out. During that time, I decided that when I came back to school, I wanted to have a more enjoyable time and make the most of my college experience, and I knew that meant dealing with my depression and grief. So I spent all of January trying to work through my grief in every way possible. When I finally got back to campus for spring semester, I was trying to find more ways to relieve some of the intense sadness and depression that I was still feeling.

One morning, I was walking to class and I saw a poster advertising the Kensington Refugee Tutoring program, so I went to the recruitment meeting and got involved. I went to Springfield once a week to work with two young boys from Cameroon. We read books, played games and worked on their school assignments. I left the school each day feeling so much happier and lighter, smiling because I knew that my actions were helping the little boys, even if it was just in a small way. I am in no way trying to say that my volunteer work with the Kensington program got rid of my depression, but it absolutely helped because it gave me something to feel good about. Volunteering at the Kensington School for those nine weeks didn’t just help the little boys out, but it also helped me, in ways that I never could have imagined. I had such a positive experience that I decided to get even more involved with the Community Service Office, so I applied to be on the board for the 2011-2012 school year.

I have since been involved with many CSO projects and I now serve as the CSO board chairwoman. My work with the CSO has been incredibly rewarding, in too many ways to count. It has been a huge part of my experience at Smith and has contributed significantly to my love for this school. And although the death of my friend was and still is painfully difficult to deal with, I have continued to find ways to cope and deal with the pain. For me, being a part of the CSO and volunteering my time to community projects has turned out to be a very successful form of therapy. It of course doesn’t solve my problems, or get rid of all my troubles, but it relieves some of the sadness and replaces it with some happiness and gratitude. Community service work is such a great thing to be a part of and I believe that everyone should get involved in some way. There are so many people in the world – even just in our immediate communities – that are struggling in some way and need help. If you let it, volunteering for community service projects can be not only a huge help for other people, but also for yourself.
October Blood Drive Benefits nearly 400 People

Mollie Schwam ‘13

Volunteer service is the heart of community-building; becoming an active participant encourages people to be responsible citizens and provides them with an environment where they can learn the duties of democratic involvement. In September when I became the blood drive chair on Smith’s Community Service Board I was elated to immerse myself in community service projects at Smith. Every year in the fall and spring (usually in October and February) the Community Service Office collaborates with the American Red Cross to host a campus-wide blood drive; we had such great success at our last blood drive in October, collecting enough viable blood to benefit almost 400 people! I hope to continue to impact our surrounding community by having a successful, energetic blood drive on February 26 and 27. Even if you cannot or are unable to donate blood, there are ways for you to get involved with the blood drive. Nearly everyone knows that the American Red Cross is always in need of blood donors, but it also heavily relies on volunteers to help with registration and canteen. Organized and friendly blood drive volunteers ensure that both the blood drive runs smoothly and that donors have a pleasant experience with their donation process. Even if you cannot donate blood yourself, you can still give back by volunteering at the blood drives!

In addition to the blood drive, Smith is proud to support Donate Life Organization that comes to campus at the same time as the blood drive. Donate Life enrolls people to register as an organ, eye, and tissue donor; the procedure is completely non-invasive and just requires the potential donor to fill out a consent form. At first, when accepting the position as the blood drive chair, I was not prepared for the volumes of work and patience that goes into running a blood drive. Setting up the appointment sheets, assigning all volunteers and donors with a donation time, working closely with the Red Cross in areas of set-up, times, location, and publicity, and familiarizing the CSO representatives with the blood drive were all just some of the tasks I encountered this past October. I was overwhelmed and stressed out at times, especially when finalizing the donors’ appointment times, but to see the blood drive take shape and succeed makes all the difference to me. I am lucky to be a part of such a well-received campus event. I hope to see everyone at the blood drive in February! I look forward to meeting and working with everyone!

Please join us for the Blood Drive on February 26th 11-5 pm, and 27th 1-7 pm contact mschwam@smith.edu for appointment

Thank you for your generosity with Winter Gifts!! together we sponsored over 65 children!
A partnership with the Hilltown Churches Pantry serving Western Franklin County

Being a Big Sister and a Positive Role Model

by Cheri Eshete ‘14

A few weeks ago, I attended a luncheon to honor Doris Kirshbaum, a Smith College ’37 graduate who played a pivotal role in the establishment and maintenance of the Community Service Office here at Smith. Multiple people, including myself, within the community service organization were asked to speak about their programs and the role their programs has played in their lives. I attended the luncheon as a member of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program and it was so fascinating to hear from people that were involved in programs such as Kensington and Homework House. It was so amazing to have Doris Kirshbaum’s family there to hear about all the good Smith women have done and are continuing to do with the Kirshbaums’ generosity. I firmly believe in the idea of “paying it forward”, an idea that I feel the Kirshbaums embody, an idea that propelled me into community service and continues to be my motivation.

I have been involved in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program at Smith for three years and I can’t say that my Smith experience would have been the same without it. Growing up in a single-parent home, I had to grow up pretty fast which made it hard for me to deal with the emotional trauma that affected my quality of life. Through school and extracurriculars, I encountered a lot of mentors that really helped me through tough times. I didn’t always have the highest confidence in myself, and so they, along with my father, helped me to realize the potential I had to accomplish great things. They helped me to realize that the only person keeping me from being the best I could be was myself.

From the moment I heard about BBBS, I knew I wanted to be that kind of mentor to someone, and I have not regretted it since.

Doris Kirshbaum’s vision for seeing the importance of community service has lived on in countless short-term and long-term projects that the CSO supports each year. It is incredible to think about all the people who have benefited from the Doris Kirshbaum family’s contributions to the CSO over the years. If it wasn’t for Doris Kirshbaum and people like her, these programs would not be as successful as they are today. I think I speak for all of the community service community at Smith in expressing how grateful we are for all that her and her family have done for this organization.
My volunteer experience started with the student organization TECC at Smith. TECC (Technology & Education Connecting Culture) is an international non-profit organization founded by university students from Stanford University and Tsinghua University. Working as a collaborative cross-national network, we undertake sustainable, high-impact projects that foster educational development, promote service responsibility, and mutual cultural understanding. In the summer of 2010, I first participated in the program called TECC Summer Institutes (TSI). TSI is a 2-week program that trains middle and high school teachers in rural areas of China English and computer skills. During the program, we are responsible for the design of curriculum, communication with teachers and the collection of feedback to ensure the effectiveness of the program. Honestly, facing the strict while imperfect education system and the limited education resources in rural China, we felt helpless in many times. Passing the national college entrance exam is the only aim of most students, and thus helping students to get a high score in the exam is the only objective of the teachers. However, we still believe in the long term benefits. Through the passing of knowledge, a window to the broader world will be opened for both teachers and students, enabling them to explore their future possibilities. After the TSI program in western China, I went to central China for the Youth Ambassador Program for Minorities (YAPM). YAPM aims to stimulate these teenagers to realize the importance of their own culture. By encouraging these teenagers to become the ambassador of their own culture, we hope they can actively explore and pass these cultures down to future generations. During our stay in Fenghuang, a small tourism city in Hunan Province famous for Miao minority culture, we were surprised to see how heavily the local middle school students (who were Miao minorities) were influenced by the majority culture. Their parents did not want to teach them minority culture because that was not what they needed to survive when they grew up. In the program, we learned the minority culture together with the students through workshops and field trips. We wanted to cultivate the bonding with local students and achieve mutual cultural exchange to evoke national and international attention in protecting diminishing minority culture in China. For me, the experiences of TSI and YAPM with TECC enable me to see a different China. As a Chinese woman who grew up in the relatively more developed East Coast area, I never realized that there were so many challenges faced by teenagers in rural areas. It was the liveliest lesson that cultivated my social awareness toward the situations in rural areas of China. Interested? email wenyzhu@smith.edu