

Volunteering leads young adults to service careers

Amanda Brown wasn't planning to make a career out of working with inner-city youths. That was before she began volunteering with the Notre Dame Mission Volunteer Program/Notre Dame AmeriCorps, a public-private initiative that encourages volunteerism among young people.

Ever since the fall, the 23-year-old New York native has worked at Mother Seton Academy in Fells Point, helping students from low-income families better their education and prepare for high school.

"I do everything you can imagine," said Ms. Brown, a 2007 graduate of Siena College in New York who majored in psychology. "It's been so amazing. The students inspire me every day."

Some of Ms. Brown's duties have included teaching art and physical education classes, in addition to helping with after-school tutoring. She has been touched by the difficult circumstances experienced by some of her students. When she recently took a physical education class off campus, she couldn't understand why one of the girls started crying.

"The night before, a man killed her uncle in her house," remembered Ms. Brown. "She was afraid to be anywhere other than the school."

The young teacher intends to devote her career to helping urban students like that girl, she said.

Ms. Brown isn't the only member of her generation to give service careers a chance. While some in the millennial generation are pursuing business or other fields, there remain those focused on giving back as teachers, nurses or public servants. Consistent with their commitment to volunteerism, the young adults see their careers as extensions of their personal community service.

According to a 2007 study by the Corporation for National and Community Service,

26.1 percent of young people age 25-34 volunteer in the Baltimore metro area – about two percentage points higher than the national average.

Matt Skarzynski, a 24-year-old Baltimore native who volunteers in the Notre Dame Mission Volunteer Program/Notre Dame AmeriCorps program, called service a “natural extension of who I am.”

Mr. Skarzynski works with the Baltimore Urban Debate League, helping to organize debate tournaments for middle and high school students. He hopes to have work in a career helping others.

“The value of a job shouldn’t just be monetary compensation,” he said. “What I’m getting out of it is a great experience working with amazing people. That’s what’s making it worthwhile.”