Lessons learned from the field

Caroline Huang ’10 Course 9

For Caroline Huang, who has coordinated three consecutive summers of camp for children whose parents are battling cancer, coming to terms with the unfairness of the children’s situation was the most difficult lesson she had to learn.

“Illness and death are difficult to handle at any age, but particularly incomprehensible when you’re young. I had to learn to focus on what I could do to help these families, rather than stressing over the heart-breaking hands they had been dealt,” she said.

In 2006, Caroline took advantage of grants and guidance from the Public Service Center to launch the MIT Chapter of Camp Kesem, a week-long camp in New Hampshire. One child who stood out for Caroline is the seven-year-old camper who lost his father after a four-year battle with appendix cancer. The boy’s mother said her son was smiling again for the first time in a year.

“Thank you for being our silver lining,” she wrote.

Next year, Caroline, originally from Newark, Delaware, will study at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar.

Ruben Alonzo, ’11, Course 14 & 18

Ruben Alonzo from Crystal City, Texas, grew up with a first-hand knowledge of hardship. Ruben worked alongside his family as a migrant farmer in North Dakota and Minnesota. Overcoming the odds, Ruben has not only excelled at MIT academically, but he has focused his energies on improving the chances for children and at-risk youth.

With Public Service Center grants sponsored by the Coop, Ruben co-founded Project Leadership Enrichment and

Caroline Huang
Lessons learned from the field

Caroline Huang (front) with Camp Kesem campers
Photo: Len Rubenstein for Spectrum

Ruben Alonzo (left) with Best and Ing (nicknames) at the Darunsikkhalai School for Innovative Learning in Bangkok, Thailand
Photo: Sirikanya Netrthanon
Liz Theurer ‘10 Course 2 and 18

Public Service Fellow Liz Theurer of Gainesville, Florida, spent this January in Santiago, Chile, improving the processing rate for Recycla, the first electronic waste recycling plant in Latin America. This was her second trip to Chile, after conducting research in Germany for insights on the recycling process. For Liz, the most rewarding part of her project was improving to the

Ambassador Development in 2008. Project L.E.A.D. is a mentorship program with a program of workshops designed to encourage minority, low-income high school students to stay in school and pursue higher education.

With members of his residence hall, the Chocolate City Class of 2011, Ruben guides Cambridge high school students through the challenges of school and the college admissions process.

Ruben has also expanded his own horizons. “Growing up I never thought in a million years I would find myself on the other side of the world,” Ruben wrote. Yet in the summer of 2009, Ruben traveled to Bangkok, Thailand, as a Public Service Intern to teach math to kindergarten children. He used interactive software and to develop new learning models. “I had the opportunity to work with some of the most intelligent children I have ever met,” Ruben reflected. “It has only reaffirmed that I belong in a career in education.”

When he won a Truman Scholarship, Kimberly Benard, MIT Program Advisor for Distinguished Fellowships, noted that Ruben has “an abiding reverence for education and dedication to helping others.”

Ruben has “an abiding reverence for education and dedication to helping others,” says Kimberly Benard, MIT Program Advisor for Distinguished Fellowships.
procedures of disassembling and sorting the waste for processing.

Her most difficult lesson, however, came in the aftermath of the recent earthquake in Chile. “Only a month after I left, an enormous earthquake destroyed many of the buildings and infrastructure in Chile. The suggestions I have made have been abandoned in favor of more familiar recycling techniques.”

Despite these setbacks, Liz continues her service work through her thesis, which focuses on how to create a more efficient recycling warehouse. Bridging the gap between academics and the real world, she hopes that Recycla will soon be able to put her recommendations to use.

Thomas Hay ’10 Course 3 and 17
Thomas Hay of Alexandria, Virginia, redefined his future ambitions after traveling to Tamale, Ghana, to work with the non-profit organization, Pure Home Water. “Spending a month in Tamale has reshaped the way that I perceive the world and has changed many of my personal, educational, and professional goals,” he said. “Now I want to go back to school at some point to learn more about development work and urban planning and design, especially related to water quality issues in the developing world.”

Pure Home Water is a non-profit organization that manufactures and distributes ceramic pot filters that allow users to affordably clean their own water. As a Public Service Fellow, Thomas made modifications to the filter manufacturing factory, while implementing quality control measures to ensure the production of better filters. He built an easy-to-use filter press and mold, which he tested for the optimal material composition. Thomas also trained women potters to make the filters, equipping them with the skills to earn income and find future jobs.

Now I want to go back to school ... to learn more about development work and urban planning and design, especially related to water quality issues in the developing world.

Thomas Hay
Cultivating Confidence
Attitude matters when you’re out to change the world

Transformative work requires a certain amount of audacity. Flexibility, determination, commitment, and the ability to listen well to others are also recognizably useful, but change is a risky business, and those who undertake it truly have a lot of nerve.

One terrific resource that the Public Service Center offers is trust. When students walk in and say that they want to tackle tuberculosis drug adherence in India, stop young men of color from dropping out of high school in Cambridge, or help those in rural areas receive an accurate medical diagnosis, we listen respectfully and work with those students to help them acquire the resources that will make such important work possible.

It’s important for the world, and it’s important for the students. By calculating risks and extending their work into the unknown, students develop confidence in their capacity to think and act well in unforeseeable circumstances. Whether the next unknown territory is the Himalayan mountains or the world of business, the Public Service Center helps MIT students quite literally to realize their potential and to move forward with assurance based on experience.
Building peace between border zones, one diagnosis at a time

From MIT News: Sana Lab project wins a 2010 Davis Projects for Peace Fellowship

Sana Lab (formerly Moca Lab) — an open-source, cell-phone based telemedicine system that extends specialized medical care to resource-poor and conflict areas in the Philippines — has been awarded a 2010 Davis Projects for Peace Fellowship.

Sana Lab team member Chris Moses ’10, a senior in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences, said his team will use the $10,000 award to extend their mobile system of health care delivery to conflict-ridden zones in Mindanao, a large island in the Philippines where religious extremists and military violence severely limit local citizens’ access to adequate health care.

This summer, Moses will travel to Manila to develop a curriculum and workshops to educate Filipino health workers about the Sana telemedicine program and connect them to other health professionals, university faculty and students in the country. Thanks to the Davis Projects for Peace Fellowship, health workers from Mindanao will attend the workshops and be incorporated into the network of Filipino mobile health providers, thus enabling them to bring state-of-the-art healthcare to this conflict zone.

Moses traveled to the Philippines as a Public Service Fellow over IAP 2010 to implement their mobile health-care system for the rural island of Batanes. He successfully passed ownership of the Sana project to a group of universities in Manila to carry on the project.

“The Davis award is a chance for me to continue my research on how mobile health technologies can influence quality of life for people living in resource-poor regions. It will be rewarding to extend care to conflict areas in Mindanao, and it also represents an effort to test how improved health might affect other facets of life, like relationship-building and peace efforts across geographic and even religious boundaries,” Moses said.

Davis Projects for Peace is made possible by Kathryn Davis, who launched the project in 2007 on her 100th birthday. The program is designed to encourage and support college students as they develop and test their own ideas for building peace.

Each of the 100 selected projects receives $10,000 in funding. This year, 11 student proposals were submitted to an MIT selection committee.
Public Service Grant recipient Swetha Kambhampati awarded Merage Fellowship...
Sana awarded $150,00 in prize money from the Vodafone Americas Foundation and the mHealth Alliance...

Read more news on web.mit.edu/mitpsc in news and announcements

"Our job is done," reports Jukka, “when 500 million of those [toxic kerosene] lanterns are handed over” and exchanged for EGG-energy batteries.

Jukka Valimaki (G, Course 15)
Public Service Fellow

Jukka Valimaki worked with EGG-energy, an IDEAS Competition team, to expand the launch of their efficient, rechargeable batteries in Tanzania.