

Since before I can remember, my sister and I were expected to contribute to our community in meaningful ways. This ranged from collecting change for UNICEF at Halloween to packaging Thanksgiving baskets for a domestic violence shelter, to literacy tutoring for students who didn't have adequate resources in their schools. And so, I grew up with an appreciation for the fact that service is important, as many young people do.

But, I always thought service is something that you do in your spare time, as a volunteer. I never conceptualized the whole world of incredible careers that enable people to use their skills towards serving their communities. In fact, this was so much of a blind spot to me that I pursued a career in a scientific field, only to find (after several years and a great deal of education) that I was unfulfilled and I was not able to serve others the way I knew I wanted to.

It was not until I found a job with Baltimore Corps that I truly understood that service could be more than an extracurricular and I found synchrony with my passion and profession. I am now afforded the distinct pleasure of spending a majority of my waking hours working with people who all strive for a brighter future and stronger communities. In addition, I have grown my career, my leadership, and am proud of the work I do each and every day. Unfortunately, the work of nonprofits and government agencies is underappreciated and often cast in a patronizing light instead of spotlighting these careers. It shouldn't be so difficult to find these opportunities nor should access be restricted to paid service roles.

With early exposure to service and career pipelines in service, our young people can recognize this field as a viable career. With greater resources and accessibility dedicated to these opportunities, we can open the door for passionate, intelligent, and diverse individuals to serve their communities, build their skills, and chart a path for the future of national service. Through Maryland Corps, our state can be a leader in this field and craft a new way forward.