

EMPOWER

Inspiring people to experience the power of their dreams

Did You Know?

Peace Corps and AmeriCorps, both community service programs, differ in the following ways:

- Peace Corps assignments are all overseas while AmeriCorps volunteers serve only in the US.
- The goals of the Peace Corps are to:
 1. help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women;
 2. help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served; and
 3. help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.
- The goal of AmeriCorps is to engage Americans in part-time or full-time intensive service to meet the nation's critical needs in education, public safety, health and the environment.
- Peace Corps Volunteers serve for two years while a typical AmeriCorps term lasts one year.
- For Peace Corps you must be at least 18 years old and a U.S. citizen while for AmeriCorps you must be at least 17 years of age and a U.S. citizen.

Start thinking today!

From:

- <http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.howvol> (Peace Corps)
- <http://www.americorps.org/about/ac/index.asp> (AmeriCorps)



Ranjanben from Gujarat, India

Dear Reader,

These are exciting times to serve the community. There is a loud call for us to give back. The goal is for every middle and high school student to engage in 50 hours of community service each year, not just once in a lifetime.

There is also a plan to give a fully refundable tax credit of 4,000 dollars to college students for their education if they complete 100 hours of community service. Author and dramatist James M. Barrie has pointed out, "those who bring sunshine into the lives of others, cannot keep it from themselves." Quite possibly, having done it once, college students will feel compelled to continue community service well into the future.

This year, an unprecedented 13,000 projects took place on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. I hope many of those who participated on that day have continued to do service. How can we promote those organizations that people felt compelled to return to for further community service? If you participated in one of the service projects on Martin Luther King Jr. Day—or any other day—please tell me and we can share the experience through *Empower*.

With this new issue of Empower, I hope that you will find inspiration to participate. This issue features community service projects from Cabin John, Maryland all the way to Nytila, Tanzania. If you are interested in any of the projects described in the issue, please feel free to contact me at lara@empower-through-service.com

Enjoy *Empower*!

Lara Mitra (Editor)

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Being an Emergency Medical Technician Volunteer: Interview of Sidwell Friends Student, Ashley Riley

Are you Interested in becoming a member of Cabin John Park Volunteer Fire Department?

There are three categories of membership:

- Firefighting
- Emergency Medical Technician
- Administrative/auxiliary (non emergency services)

The commitment to serve as a volunteer firefighter and or EMT with the Cabin John Park Fire Department is a serious decision and should be made only if you have the time and interest to devote your full attention to the duty required of you. Once you understand what is involved, and realize the many benefits of volunteering, we hope you will find that you are able to make the commitment we need. In volunteering, you will directly contribute to the safety of the community and its citizens in the area serving West Potomac and Cabin John. You will find that participation as a volunteer firefighter and or EMT with the Cabin John Park Fire Department will be a rewarding experience.

From:
<http://www.cjpvfd.org/volunteer/volunteer.htm>



Cabin John Fire Department at the scene of a car accident

Lara: Please describe what your community service project entailed.

Ashley: I volunteer at the Cabin John Park Volunteer Fire Department in Bethesda, MD. I volunteer as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) only but students can also volunteer as both a firefighter and EMT. As a volunteer EMT, I get to ride on the ambulance and assist with patient care on calls (Fire and EMT members have the option of riding on both the ambulance and the fire engine or truck). When I'm not riding, I am always learning, doing drills, or just hanging out with the many other members at the station.

Lara: What was most rewarding for you?

Ashley: The most rewarding part of my community service is being able to help people. It is such an amazing feeling at the end of every call to know that we helped to save someone's life, or even just to make them feel a little bit better. I would not trade this feeling and experience for anything.

Lara: What was the most challenging aspect of your community service?

Ashley: The most challenging aspect of my community service is probably the actual calls. Each call brings a new wave of adrenaline and a different set of circumstances. Trying to tailor all of ones knowledge and actions so that one can best help the patient in their specific situation is the most difficult. No situation is the same and you have to learn how to adjust quickly. Luckily this is also the most exciting part of being a volunteer at the fire station which keeps me eager to go back.

Lara: What lessons did you learn as a result of your community service?

Ashley: I have learned so many lessons from being a volunteer at Cabin John. I guess the biggest and most widely applicable lesson I've learned is how to communicate with people. As a member of the ambulance crew, our primary duty of caring for patients involves a lot of talking; thus, good communication skills are vital. In addition to this I have learned so much about emergency medicine both through the drills and members at the station and classes that the station pays for us to take. As a result of all that I have learned, I am now a Maryland State Certified Emergency Medical Technician after less than a year of being a member of the station.

Lara: Would you recommend it to others? If so, why? If not, why not?

Ashley: Of course I would recommend volunteering at Cabin John to others! Not only are the EMT and fire aspects amazing, but also the people. I have met so many great people both volunteer and career members as well as those we help. The fire station is like a family, everyone knows and looks out for one another. Another cool thing is that even as a high school student volunteer you do the same things as the paid career firefighters and EMTs. It is one of the best experiences I've had and I could not imagine my life without it. It is a joy to go in to the station every week!

Lara: What kinds of skills did you have to learn before becoming an EMT?

Ashley: After I joined the station I took a number of classes in order to become an EMT. I took online courses such as incident management through FEMA as well as a CPR certification class. The main class that I had to take to gain my certification was an EMT-B class offered at the Public Safety Training Academy during the summer. In this class I learned about basic medicine and patient care. As a part of the class, we also got to visit one of the state rescue helicopters, which was really cool, and shadow a nurse or doctor in the Emergency Room at one of the local hospitals. I chose to do my hospital rotation at Suburban Hospital, which specializes in trauma, and was able to help out and watch as the Emergency Room doctors dealt with a victim of a motorcycle accident who had just been brought in. Everything I've had to do in order to become an EMT has been so exciting; not only have I learned a lot but I also I had fun and was interested while doing it.



Fire and Rescue teams saving a burning building

Lara: Can you please describe one of your specific experiences with a patient on the ambulance which was challenging for you?

Ashley: One of the most challenging and memorable experiences I've had with a patient was when I got to perform CPR. I was riding the medic unit, which is staffed by EMT-paramedics who have more extensive knowledge of medicine and patient care, when we got the call. When we arrived at the scene there was a woman in cardiac arrest and one of the medics began performing CPR and asked me to help by doing the chest compressions while another member of the crew gave the patient breaths. At this time, I was still in training to become an EMT and was amazed that they wanted me to help. Once we got back into the ambulance with the patient, the medic asked me to do both the compressions and breaths so he could start putting in IV's and administering various medications. When we got to the hospital, I stood on the rail of the cot performing CPR while the medics rolled the cot in. I was so nervous at first but by the end of the call I felt like a pro. It was a truly amazing experience.



Emergency Medical Technician, Ashley Riley

Thoughts from the Sidwell Friends School Community Service Director, David Connell

Lara: How long have you been Director of Community Service at Sidwell Friends School (SFS) and what are some of the changes in the community service program and the attitude of SFS students towards community service over the years?

Mr. Connell: I have been the Community Service Director for the past ten years. The biggest change in the program is that we have doubled the individual service requirement for students from 30 to 60 hours, and reduced the one time group service projects by half during the same period. We made this change in the requirement because we feel that the greatest benefit that results from service is the relationships that are formed between our students and the people that they are working with. These relationships are partially a function of the amount of time that these people spend together. As a result, we feel that longer term projects help create stronger relationships.

Over the past ten years, students have become more passionate about international service and are more frequently moved to start a

club, donation drive, or some other project around this interest. It is great to see this passion, although active and continued follow-up remains a challenge as these students have so many other commitments that take their time and attention.

Lara: What are the highlights of the community service program at SFS?

Mr. Connell: If I had to come up with a word to describe the highlights of Sidwell's program I would use the word "relationships". Again, we have designed the program to foster strong relationships between our students and the people that they work with. But we have also designed the program to foster strong relationships between Sidwell Friends School and our partner organizations. Whether it is our twenty plus year partnership with Martha's Table in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of Washington, DC, or our seven year relationship with Big Creek People in Action in Caretta, West Virginia; we strive to foster long term, multi-faceted, mutually beneficial relationships with our partner agencies. As a result, we are more effective in our service work, and our partner agencies provide our students with more worthwhile, fulfilling service opportunities.

Finally, we have designed a program that maximizes opportunities for members of our community to strengthen their relationships outside the classroom. Whether it is advisories working together on Community Service Day in October, or a group of twenty students and teachers spending ten days building houses with Habitat for Humanity in Honduras in June, we provide opportunities for students and faculty to get to know one another in a variety of non-academic settings. We also try to develop projects and service trips that are a lot of fun!

Lara: What are some of the challenges the community service program faces?

Mr. Connell: The greatest challenge that the program faces is the fact that the needs are so great in our community and around the world. There are so many great people and organizations doing such amazing work, but the resources and time of our students and our school are limited. So the question is: How do we maximize the positive impact that we can have as individuals and as a school?

Another challenge that the program faces is the fact that our schedule consists of seven 45 minute class periods per day without exception. This really limits the amount of service learning (service in the classroom) that can occur at the school. Another limiting factor is that field trips are not something that are encouraged. Finally, our students are so busy with academics, sports and other extracurricular activities that it is often difficult for them to find the time to really commit to an extracurricular service project.

Lara: What plans do you have for the community service program in the upcoming years?

Mr. Connell: There are several goals that I would like to pursue over the next few years. First of all, I would like to work with individual students and service clubs to challenge

them to be more organized, networked and effective in their work.

This is a challenging part of the job because my instinct is for students to come up with their own goals and action plans, and execute those plans. But sometimes students need to hear whether their approach is likely to be successful (based on those with past experiences here at Sidwell Friends School).

I would also like to see service learning increase as a part of the curriculum in the Upper School. As I mentioned earlier, there are several challenges to succeeding in this area. Also, decisions on curriculum are always made by teachers. My role is to make teachers aware of particular service learning opportunities, and they would make the ultimate decision whether it was appropriate for their particular class. Finally, I would like to use new technologies to develop the community service program at the Upper School. For example, technologies like Skype, Myspace, and Facebook can all be used to increase the effectiveness of our students and faculty in a variety of service work.

Lara: What advice do you have for students everywhere regarding community service?

Mr. Connell: I think there is great value to challenging one's comfort zone through volunteer service. For example, I teach a Stress management class to inmates at a local jail. Before starting this service work, I had several misconceptions about people involved in our criminal justice system. My volunteer work has dispelled these prejudices every time I walk into a classroom. And it has dispelled these misconceptions as I taught in the maximum security and mental health units in the jail. What my work has shown me is that once you get below our superficial differences (i.e. racial, religious, ethnic, class) there is so much more that we have in common as human beings than what separates us. I know that might sound trite, but I have found it to be true in nearly every interaction that I have had in the jail over the past ten years. And I think that when a person comes to this realization, he/she, and our society, are better off for it.



David Connell, Community Service Director at Sidwell Friends School

The Africa Schoolhouse Project, Tanzania, Bettina Stern

Literacy is at the heart of sustainable development and everywhere in our global world there is a fierce desire for education. Even the illiterate understand that without education, nothing will change. The road to human progress is paved through our ability to read and write, and literacy and education is a means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.

This past summer I traveled to Tanzania with two of my three boys. Finn is a sophomore and Emmett is in third grade; they are both Sidwell Friends School students (Gus, my SFS seventh grader was away at camp and Chris, my husband, was on the campaign trail). Finn and Emmett and I were joining some of my closest high school friends and their families to help build a primary school for over 600 boys and girls in a remote East African village. Today, eight of the 16 classrooms are nearly complete and our deep fresh water well is flowing freely. Foundations are set, bricks are being made, and more buildings are going up! Fourteen hamlets surrounding the village are being served by Ntulya School. Africa Schoolhouse's hope is that, by building this school, these children will have the power to make a difference in their world. For me, there is also the hope of exuding upon my own sons a hope for the future of our globe.



Bettina Stern with her two sons Finn and Emmett in Tanzania

Africa Schoolhouse began two years ago at an annual dinner. Ever since I was a sophomore in high school, a group of us has gathered in our native New York City for a Chinese meal the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving. It is a tradition that spanned through our college years, our post-graduate years and into our family-raising years. It is now known as the Josh Dinner, in honor of one of our closest friends who died of cancer at the age of 25. In his will, Josh left a Chinese Food Fund, long-since depleted, but no less potently meaningful each passing year that we get together.

At our 2006 dinner, Africa Schoolhouse's founder, my friend Aimee, talked to us about her most recent visit back to the continent. She had not been there for over 11 years due to kids and life and everything that gets in the way, but on this research trip she returned to Ntulya, a very special and unique healing village in the north of Tanzania. Aimee recounted to all of us at the table how the village elders asked her, at the end of her visit: that, if there were one thing she could do for them, it would be to help them build a school for the children of Ntulya and its surrounding hamlets.

Done. Seed money was promised right then and there. The board of directors was set. We were all very eager to be part of what would be an incredible opportunity to make a difference, and to do it as a collective group. Just over a month later we met with Tanzanian ministry officials at the United Nations. And, by early May we were sitting under mango

trees with those same elders plotting and planning what they needed and wanted and what we thought we could help them to accomplish. In January 2008, we began raising money. To date, we have raised almost \$300,000.

Reflections:

Nobel Prize winner and Harvard professor, Amartya Sen said: “Imparting education not only enlightens the receiver, but also broadens the giver – the teachers, the parents, the friends...and we MUST go on fighting for basic education for all.” I believe that my own kids and their classmates will themselves desire to go out and make a difference in the world. The fact is that 40 % of college graduates today are looking to do something good, to give back in some way – whether it relates to the environment, international relations, healthcare, or education. I believe our high school kids feel the same way. Africa Schoolhouse’s goal is to aid the progress of learning through the use of modern technology and environmentally conscious methods while safeguarding the traditional teachings of cultural heritage. Any high school student wishing to help Africa Schoolhouse’s grassroots mission to bring education to the neediest should get involved!

Building Homes in Honduras: Interview of Sidwell Friends School Student, Alexa Cerf

Lara: Please describe what your community service project entailed.

Alexa: The community service project involved a small group of students traveling to Siguatepeque, Honduras. We worked with Habitat for Humanity to help build a house for a family. We worked alongside the patriarch of the family, Don Amado, and two men working for Habitat who were natives of Honduras. Our jobs included moving dirt, twisting steel into shapes to place inside concrete, digging trenches for the foundation, finishing the foundation, and building the walls of the house.

Lara: What was most rewarding for you?

Alexa: The most rewarding experience for me was the children. Every day on their way to and from school, hundreds of children would pass the sight we were working on. Many would stop, but none spoke English. They were very intrigued with our project, but also very shy. But sometimes members of our group were able to connect with the local children (through sign language, Spanish), and that was very satisfying.

Lara: What was the most challenging aspect of your community service?

Alexa: A challenging aspect of the trip was the physical labor involved. We were required to move many large rocks and cinderblocks, and we also mixed our own cement. It was very hot and we worked eight hours a day, but being able to see the house grow in front of us each day made the labor worthwhile. Another challenging aspect was the language barrier.



Alexa Cerf (far right) in Honduras with fellow Sidwell Friends Student, Anna Perina

Lara: What lessons did you learn as a result of your community service?

Alexa: Before traveling to Honduras, I was under the impression that English was the universal language of the world and that most people in most countries tried to learn English. In Siguatepeque, English did not exist for the most part. I had traveled to tourist sites in other Hispanic countries, where signs would be in English and Spanish. Siguatepeque is hardly a tourist destination, and the high schoolers that we met did not know any English. I was surprised, but learned that, for the people in Siguatepeque, English is not a priority, because the culture that they are growing up in does not require any of the English language.

Lara: Would you recommend it to others? If so, why? If not, why not?

Alexa: I would definitely recommend the Sidwell Honduras trip to others because it is the perfect mix of community service and fun. Although we spent the entire day working, the nights were always relaxing, enriching. We went to a Spanish movie, danced with some native high-schoolers, played soccer with local students, and had a barbecue where we cooked ourselves Honduran food. After finishing our week of work, we traveled to Copán, a city next to Mayan ruins. Copán is beautifully maintained and the city we spent the night in was small but very friendly.

Volunteering at Georgetown University Hospital, Lara Mitra

During the summer of 2008, I volunteered at Georgetown University Hospital. Two experiences stand out in my mind:

Lessons From Aden:

Working at the hospital it was easy for me to feel sorry for the sick patients around me. This sympathy was heightened in the pediatric oncology department, where I interacted with sick children who were my own age. On my first day, I was especially careful not to say anything that might upset them and to give them whatever they wanted. On my next visit, however, Aden*, a sixteen-year-old boy, changed my attitude. Aden was an accomplished pianist and often played the piano while he waited for his doctor, in between blood tests which had now become routine. One day, I was sitting near the piano with Aden and he mentioned he was thirsty. Immediately, I stood up and told him I would bring him some water, not wanting to put him through the trouble of getting up. Just as I was leaving to bring Aden water, he calmly said to me, "I'll get the water myself, I may have leukemia, but my legs are totally fine." I stood there speechless and watched Aden bring back a glass of water for himself. I thought back to what Aden had said initially. All he had said was that he was thirsty; he had not requested that I get him water. I realized that I had subconsciously reacted out of sheer pity. If a friend in school had said he was thirsty, I would not have jumped up to fetch him water. That one, small incident taught me that what most of the patients at the hospital need is a friend, who will listen, talk, hang-out with them, and maybe even tease them a little—not one more person who pities them, who hesitates before saying anything, and who bends backwards to do them favors.



Georgetown
University
Hospital 
MedStar Health



A Day to Remember:

Tuesday started out as a normal day in way finding in the Lombardi Cancer Center. Julia*, another volunteer, and I were sitting at the information desk giving visitors and patients directions to the bathroom, to different buildings, to the cafeteria, and answering questions, such as “where is the xerox machine?” or “how do I get to the medical bookstore?” Right then a middle-aged woman came up to our desk, leaned on it, and said she was feeling dizzy and needed to sit down. Before Julia and I could even respond, the woman had fallen to the floor seemingly unconscious. I jumped over the desk, squatted down, and put my hand on her forehead. Julia immediately ran to the nearest reception desk (because the info desk did not have a phone), yelling “CODE” on her way over. The nurse at the desk called the C-O-D-E and a quiet alarm went off in the building. Nurses and staff members arrived at the scene. They checked her pulse and made sure she was still breathing. Waiting for the emergency team to arrive was the worst part. The few minutes seemed like hours. Once the team had arrived and wheeled the woman to the intensive care unit, Julia and I went back to our desk where there was now a queue of more people waiting for directions. They kept my mind occupied and I was not able to fully comprehend what had just happened. I felt as if in a trance the rest of that day. After signing out, I rode the bus home as I did every day. But just as soon as I got home, a feeling of sadness and inadequacy tormented me. What if the woman was no longer alive? Could I have done something to help her? Might that have saved her life?

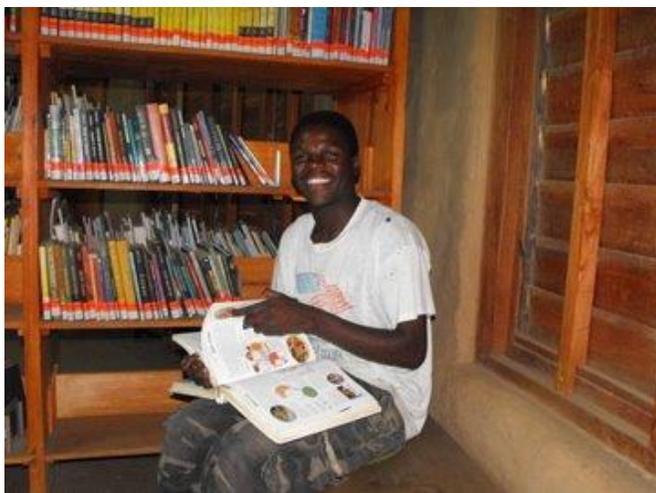
This experience enabled me to understand the responsibility that rests on the shoulders of healthcare professionals and what working in a hospital really means. The difference between life and death can literally be a few split seconds. It taught me that being a healthcare professional requires presence of mind, competence of the highest level, and loads of confidence to do at once what is needed and not to question ones own judgment after the fact.

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I learned that while empathizing with people in need, one has to be careful not to pity them—the line between the two is a fine one and it is important not to allow the latter to overtake the former. I also learned the importance of leadership and confidence—if one keeps second guessing ones decisions and actions, the healthcare profession is probably the wrong choice.

*Names have been changed.

Lubuto Library Project, Inc. Founder and President, Jane Kinney Meyers



Zambian boy reading in a Lubuto Library

Lara: What led you to the idea of starting libraries in Africa and what does "Lubuto" mean?

Ms. Meyers: Lubuto means “knowledge, enlightenment and light” in the Bemba language, one of many languages spoken in Zambia and the Congo. Being a professional librarian who has worked in and on Africa since the early 1980s, I recognized that good, accessible libraries could play an important role in helping children whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, especially those who are left out of school. We work with the Zambian Government and various Zambian partners to identify and reach out to those children.

Lara: Who runs the libraries in Africa and who finances staff salaries?

Ms. Meyers: We work with Zambian host organizations who own and run the libraries on a day-to-day basis. The host organizations appoint staff who we train to work with the children who visit the libraries. These “Lubuto Librarians” read with and to the children and involve them in drama, art, storytelling, music, motivational mentoring, health and HIV/AIDS prevention, and preservation of the environment.

Lara: How many books do you have in each library and where do they come from?

Ms Meyers: Each Lubuto collection begins with 4,000 carefully selected, mostly hard cover, books that are already classified and processed and ready to be put on the shelves. In Zambia we add books in local languages. Many of the books in the initial collection come from U.S. and U.K. publishers, from colleagues who judge children’s book awards, and others who work with children’s books. Book drives in U.S. schools are also a good source of books, since they benefit the students involved by giving them a way to learn about the effects of HIV/AIDS in Africa and to directly help children affected by the pandemic. Recently, the AIDS Club at Sidwell Friends School organized a book drive.



Outside the library buildings

Lara: How do you get the donated books to Africa?

Ms. Meyers: Transporting the books to Africa is not a big challenge we face. We have used airfreight in the past with prices negotiated by supporters at the National Geographic Society, but plan to use sea freight for the next collections we send. We send all 4,000 books at once (instant libraries), and we also send globes and supplies.

Lara: Can the children who visit the libraries read? How well do they know English?

Ms. Meyers: Children who come to the libraries have different reading levels. Some have never been to school or are early

dropouts, others have been to school but have not learned to read very well, and a few have been in school and are good readers. The library staffs work with children of all reading levels, sometimes with educational activities that do not involve reading. Just as their reading abilities vary so does their English proficiency. But English is the official language of Zambia, so if they don’t speak English well yet they need to, and our libraries are an important place for that purpose as well.

Lara: What is the proportion of English to local language books in your libraries?

Ms. Meyers: Obviously the 4,000-volume collection we send from the U.S. is entirely in English. There are almost no books for children in local Zambian languages; we purchase the few that exist and add them to the collections. But we have established the Zambian Board on Books for Young People, in partnership with the Zambia Library Association, in order to promote the creation of excellent children’s books in Zambian languages. It is a major, long-term effort, but an important one to the country and its people.

Lara: What are the main challenges you face?

Ms. Meyers: One of our main challenges is rooted here in the U.S. itself. When Americans hear about our program, many think we are a book donation program, when in fact, we are a development organization unlike any program that has been started before. We use professional librarians to create libraries in Africa that are of the same standards as the libraries we see in the U.S. – and this is an important factor in ensuring that the libraries are sustainable. A second challenge we face is funding to create a sustainable organization, construct libraries, to ship books to these libraries, and to operate these libraries. We have been able to do what we do because we are supported by many volunteers of high caliber—with professional training and the desire to help us create excellent libraries to serve some of the world’s most marginalized children. A third challenge is working with the host organizations, as they often have limited management capacities. Scheduling and statistics are two tasks that the host organizations may have difficulty doing.

Lara: What are your plans for the future?

Ms. Meyers: We aim to create at least 100 Lubuto libraries in Zambia, Malawi, and Rwanda and to achieve financial sustainability in the Lubuto organization. Dow Jones & Company has recently donated all of the funding to construct one of our next libraries, and we have an agreement with Zambia’s government wherein they ask their donors to finance library construction in the future. We are getting recognition and high honors within the library and children’s literature worlds, and that has engendered a lot of support from people who value a genuine impact and excellence in libraries. Most recently we learned that we were nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, administered by the Swedish Arts Council, and the most prestigious international award related to children’s literature. The object of the award is to increase interest in children’s and young people’s literature and to promote children’s right to culture on a global level.

Tried and Tested Community Service Opportunities:

Cabin John Park Volunteer Fire Department (Emergency Medical Technician):

<http://www.cjpvfd.org/volunteer/volunteer.htm>

Sidwell Friends School Community Service home page:

http://sidwell.edu/upper_school/communityservice.asp

Africa Schoolhouse Project: <http://www.africaschoolhouse.org/donate.html>

Habitat for Humanity: <http://www.habitat.org/>

Georgetown University Hospital: <http://www.georgetownuniversityhospital.org/body.cfm?id=1067>

Lubuto Library Project: <http://www.lubuto.org/>

For more information about these opportunities, please email:
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