BC Graduate Students in Education, Law, Nursing and Social Work Named 2006 Schweitzer Fellows for Community Outreach Efforts

CHESTNUT HILL, MA -- Four Boston College students are among the 35 Boston and Worcester-area graduate students named Schweitzer Fellows for 2006-2007: Najiba Akbar of the Graduate School of Social Work, Katie Muse-Fisher of the Lynch School of Education, Monica O’Reilly, of the Connell School of Nursing and Joanna Toke of the Law School.

Honoring the legacy of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the Fellows are committing to a year of service with an agency, during which each will devote over 200 hours of service to local communities lacking access to adequate health services. The wide range of projects includes tobacco education for after-school students, teaching new immigrants how to shop wisely for nutritious foods, diabetes counseling with Haitian immigrants, educating children in residential treatment centers on oral health, and publishing a community health newspaper.

Schweitzer Fellows (l-r): Monica O'Reilly, Joanna Toke, Katie Muse-Fisher and Najiba Akbar. (Courtesy Photo)

BC’s Najiba Akbar of the Graduate School of Social Work is designing and conducting weekly healthy lifestyles classes for teen girls living at Indigo House, a shelter for adolescent girls who are in the custody of the Department of Social Services. The curriculum focuses will address such topics such as exercise, diet, tobacco and substance abuse and mental health through workshops, guest speakers, field trips, videos and group discussions. Katie Muse-Fisher of the Lynch School of Education is at the Academy of the Pacific Rim, where she is formulating psycho-educational workshops for families of Boston public school students to improve mental health. Workshops topics will include suicide, substance abuse, depression, eating disorders and relationships.

The Connell School of Nursing's Monica O'Reilly is volunteering with an interdisciplinary team at the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center, as they apply the chronic care model to improve health outcomes for individuals with depression, while BC Law School student Joanna Toke’s project addresses the CORI requirement as a hurdle for people living with HIV/AIDS to find housing. She runs monthly workshops for individuals who encounter problems with their CORI and assists clients in preparing for court, and also is developing a reference book that will aid both clients and professionals in handling CORI-related problems.

Established in 1991, the Boston Schweitzer Fellows Program annually selects a new class of Fellows to work with local community agencies. In addition to their direct service, the Fellows meet monthly to share ideas and experiences. Once the Fellows have completed
their year of service, they join a network of over 1,300 Schweitzer “Fellows for Life,” across the United States and abroad. Virtually all continue to support and inspire each other through continuing commitment to lives of service.

Located at Boston’s Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and headed by Lachlan Forrow, M.D., Associate Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, the Boston Schweitzer Fellows Program is the headquarters of a national program of similar activities of service, involving Baltimore, Chicago, New Hampshire/Vermont, North Carolina, and Pittsburgh. Because the work of the Fellows is donated without charge to the communities served, each city’s program is supported through charitable gifts.

The Boston Program is supported by Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation, Massachusetts Medical Society and Alliance Charitable Foundation, Merck Research Labs - Boston, UMass Memorial Health Care, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences – Worcester, Clark University, UMass Medical School.

For more information, visit the website at http://www.schweitzerfellowship.org.

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