On Campus

Community Impact Launches First Capital Campaign

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Adrian Silver

For many college students, Saturdays are for sleeping in, brunch with friends, maybe a trip to the library. But from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Columbia College junior Hahn Chang has other plans. As a coordinator for Columbia Youth Adventurers, he spends his weekends taking low-income elementary-aged students from Harlem, Morningside Heights, and Washington Heights on excursions around the city — activities like ice skating in Central Park, or planting seeds in a community garden.

“We try to give them experiences that they wouldn’t otherwise have,” says Chang, “to show them a world beyond their world.”

Columbia Youth Adventurers is just one program under the umbrella of Community Impact, the University's largest service organization. Founded by two students in 1981, it now employs nine hundred volunteers from Columbia and Barnard, and serves more than eight thousand low-income children and adults in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Community Impact is currently funded by a mix of government grants, institutional money, and a small number of private donations, but it recently launched its first capital campaign, in the hopes of building a $5 million endowment over the course of five years. The campaign is to be officially announced at the organization's October gala and auction, which also honors trustee Lisa Carnoy '89CC.



Colleen Deng

With the new endowment, Community Impact plans to bolster its current programs, which it operates in partnership with forty community organizations. Programs are loosely organized into four groups: adult education and job placement, community education, homelessness assistance and advocacy, and youth programs. Volunteers work daily within the community to tutor students, teach GED-prep classes, serve a

weekly hot lunch, and, in Chang's case, allow the students to explore their own backyard.

"Columbia wouldn't be Columbia without it," says Columbia College senior Jane Brennan, who started working at the Community Lunch program when she was a high-school senior in Westchester County, and now serves as its coordinator. "It has impacted every aspect of my college experience."

Executive director Sonia Reese says that as the endowment grows, the organization will focus more on recruiting and training volunteers and evaluating their performance, as well as reaching out to the community. It will also develop and launch a new website and improve its electronic communications generally. One group that Reese particularly hopes to reach is Community Impact's alumni base.

"We've got more than thirty years of Community Impact volunteers," says Reese. "One wonderful thing about planning the campaign has been bringing them back into the fold."



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