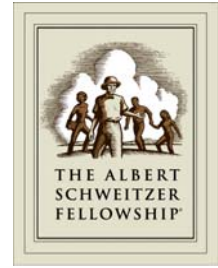


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# **Two Schweitzer Fellows REACH for a Healthier Camden—And Get Results**

*New Health Intervention Program, “Project REACH,”  
Empowers Camden’s At-Risk Middle Schoolers*

Nearly half of Camden, New Jersey’s population lives below the poverty line. In 2006, one out of four children in Camden City was born to a teenager. One in four Camden City high school students does not graduate.

***But Schweitzer Fellows Hyun Ouk Hong and Farhad Modarai are doing something about it.***

Galvanized by the social disparities right in their own backyard, these two medical students have launched Project REACH (Revitalizing Education & Advancing Camden's Health). Taking an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach, REACH is a unique health education intervention program aimed at equipping at-risk Camden middle school students with the skills to take control of their own health—and empower their communities to do the same.

“Camden middle schoolers’ test scores were below standards, their role models were local gang members, and their overall outlook on their own health was alarming,” says Hong, a medical student at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ). “We knew we had to provide creative tools to teach the students preventive health education, provide positive mentorship, and ultimately empower them to be leaders for their community.”

And that’s exactly what Hong and Modarai have done. With the support of The Albert Schweitzer Fellowship, a national nonprofit organization that works to address health disparities by developing “leaders in service,” the duo collaborated with Camden community members and launched Project REACH—crafting an interactive problem-based learning (PBL) curriculum on preventive health, complete with unique workshops that support youth-initiated community health service projects, and delivering that curriculum each week to students at East Camden Middle School (ECMS).

That approach is already paying off. "Project REACH has made me believe I can do things I could not before," says 12-year old East Camden Middle School student Eduardo Lazo. "My favorite session was when I learned about cancers that can be prevented. After the REACH smoking module, I went home and told my uncle about the dangers of smoking. I scared him and he said he will quit smoking now for his daughter."

Having completed the educational component of REACH, Lazo and his peers are now learning project management and brainstorming ideas for service projects. So far, their ideas tackle erasing graffiti, stopping bullying in school, stopping gang violence, helping the homeless, teaching healthy eating, stopping smoking, and cleaning the environment.

Hong and Modarai have garnered extraordinary support for Project REACH from the UMDNJ community—several medical students and faculty members sit on the organization's board, and are committed to sustaining and expanding the program to other Camden middle schools once the duo's Schweitzer Fellowship year is over.

"It is most exciting to see that Farhad Modarai and Hyun Hong have taken such a proactive approach to improve the health of the youth in Camden," says Dr. Carman A. Ciervo, D.O., FACOFP, Chairman of Family Medicine at UMDNJ School of Medicine (SOM). "UMDNJ-SOM is deeply committed to expand the work of these two student doctors to other efforts that are focused on preventative medicine. This project empowers youth to REACH."

"Project REACH is carefully designed to not become a "one-and-done" kind of program," Hong says, noting that underserved Camden residents have expressed frustrations with research-based projects where an emphasis is placed on gathering data instead of serving the community. "Sustainability has been a critical component throughout the development phase of Project REACH. We hope to continue to establish collaborations, with the hopes of strengthening this community for years down the road."

Indeed, in addition to the support of the Schweitzer Fellowship and UMDNJ, Hong and Modarai earned a 2009 Caring for Community grant from the Association of American Medical Colleges to support the continued growth and success of Project REACH (<http://reach.umdj.edu/>).

### ***About The Albert Schweitzer Fellowship (ASF)***

Hong and Modarai are two of the nearly 250 graduate students each year who are selected as Schweitzer Fellows. Over the course of a year, on top of their regular medical, nursing, or other health professional school responsibilities, each Schweitzer Fellow must develop and implement a service project of at least 200 hours with a direct and lasting impact on the health of underserved communities.

By completing their Schweitzer service project during such a demanding time, Fellows emerge with a blueprint for making service to those in need an enduring part of their “regular life.” Upon completion of their initial year, they join an international alumni network of over 2,000 Schweitzer Fellows for Life—individuals committed to working with the underserved throughout their careers as professionals.

“My experience as a Fellow has been priceless,” says Modarai.” Having a support network of passionate students and working professionals that believe in your work is extremely motivating and inspiring. I feel like The Albert Schweitzer Fellowship is on the forefront of health care professional education because of its hands-on and interdisciplinary approach.”

The Greater Philadelphia Schweitzer Fellows Program, one of eleven U.S. Schweitzer sites, was established in 2006. Under the leadership of Dean David B. Nash, MD, MBA and colleagues at Jefferson School of Population Health of Thomas Jefferson University, the Greater Philadelphia Schweitzer Fellows Program serves populations in Delaware, Southeastern Pennsylvania, and Southern New Jersey.

For more information on ASF and its Greater Philadelphia Program, visit [www.schweitzerfellowship.org](http://www.schweitzerfellowship.org) and <http://schweitzerfellowship.wordpress.com>.

***To schedule an interview with Hyun Ouk Hong or Farhad Modarai about Project REACH,  
please contact Patrice Taddonio at 617.667.5628 or ptaddonio@bidmc.harvard.edu.***