"I changed a life."

Making a difference: Personal stories from Sargent College

Boston University College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences: Sargent College
Change a life and you change the world. At Sargent College, we do it every day.

Changing the world is a tall order.

But at Boston University’s College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences: Sargent College, we believe changing even one life can make the world a different place. A better place.

That’s what our students and faculty do every day as part of their training, teaching, and caring for people in urgent need of health services. Together we’ve changed countless lives by participating in University-sponsored community outreach programs, from the city of Boston to a small mountain village thousands of miles away.

On the following pages, you’ll read about six of these outreach programs. Each account is highlighted by the first-person reflections of Sargent College community members who made a difference in the lives of others. You’ll also learn about the related academic programs at BU, where we turn our idealism into the knowledge and skills that engender a real ability to help.

Whether the work is local or global, the experience is always personal—with lasting impact on our values and professional goals. In short, the lives we change by “giving back” inevitably include our own.
“To make a difference, you have to show up.”

Rob Ali
Human Physiology and Public Health, pre-med
Health Leads, BU Chapter

For more than a year, Rob Ali has been showing up in the right place to make a difference. He’s a volunteer and program coordinator in the Boston chapter of Health Leads. Working in urban clinics such as Boston Medical Center, Health Leads workers connect low-income patients with basic resources, including food, housing, and heating assistance that can take days, weeks, or months with lots of follow-up work.

Rob remembers his first client, a mother who was determined to turn her family’s life around. She needed almost every public resource covered in his training. For several months, he arrived at his desk each Tuesday to find her sitting in a chair waiting for him. Together they pursued every possible path to a better, more stable life. Rob set the strategy, made calls, and offered encouragement. “She did the work,” he insists. “I was the quarterback.”

His connection with her and Health Leads has reinforced Rob’s desire to provide care for underserved populations: “There is no greater feeling than helping someone.”

Human Physiology

With its focus on human biology and coursework in anatomy and physiology, our Bachelor of Science program in Human Physiology is an excellent alternative to a traditional biology degree for anyone seeking a career in medicine. It’s also ideal for health care professions from dentistry to biotechnology. The program is part of our Health Sciences Department, where many faculty members hold joint appointments with the BU School of Medicine, the College of Arts & Sciences, or the College of Engineering. That gives students access not only to our own research and clinical centers, but also to those in other specialized areas. For their senior-year, semester-long practicum, students can work in hospitals, clinics, labs, or community organizations such as Health Leads. Sargent College provides Health Leads with office space, equipment, and training support—as well as interns and volunteers like Rob Ali.
I gave kids a role model."

> Shari Davis
Athletic Training
English High School Athletic Training program

While growing up in Boston's Jamaica Plain, Shari Davis loved taking martial arts classes at English High School. Two years ago, she returned and gave the school a helping hand. As part of her clinical placement work in athletic training, Shari provided support, injury prevention, and acute care for young athletes. She also transformed their bare-bones training room by winning a $10,000 makeover in an essay contest.

Now, still working at English High part time, she sees that her presence has changed students' lives, too. Most of them come from low-income families and Shari is the only health care professional many of them see. That means she deals not only with athletics but also with challenging life issues such as sexual health, problems at home, and college applications. "There will always be people jumping at the opportunity to treat a Division I athlete," she says, "but not to treat teenage athletes. I could have used this, so I'm willing to do it."

Along with that willingness comes big rewards. "My measure of success is different now."

Athletic Training

Students in BU Sargent College's Bachelor of Science program in Athletic Training take full advantage of attending a leading research university within a major medical hub. In our close-knit community, they study the newest athletic training practices and research findings with faculty members and practitioners at the top of their fields. Undergraduates usually begin their clinical experience during freshman year, learning to apply knowledge and hands-on skills in a variety of professional and school settings. They also assist in Sargent College research labs, and their volunteer activities range from lending a hand at the Boston Marathon to working with kids in underserved city schools like English High. Sargent College provides health care for local high school athletes through the BU Sports Health Initiative, a joint program with BU School of Medicine.
“I helped people who had no one else to turn to.”

> Tracey Honohan
Health Science, pre-med
Global Medical Brigades, BU Chapter

Tracey Honohan knew she wanted to be a doctor. BU Sargent College's Health Science program gave her a broad perspective on health care and the freedom to go in several directions.

One direction she chose was south—more than 2,000 miles to Honduras. As a sophomore, Tracey joined 38 other students on a weeklong trip organized by Global Medical Brigades. Each day, students, physicians, and nurse practitioners traveled hours by bus to isolated mountain villages with no access to health care services. Wherever they went, long lines of waiting villagers applauded their arrival. In makeshift clinics set up in churches and schools, patients were examined, treated, and given medications we take for granted, like antibiotics and cough syrup. Virtually everyone received drugs for the rampant parasitic diseases that left many listless and dehydrated. The villagers were also taught simple water purification techniques that could vastly improve their quality of life.

The effect of the trip on Tracey? “My eyes were opened.”
"I can be independent again."

Tom Flynn
Member, BU Aphasia Resource Center

Tom Flynn was a creative director at a global marketing company when his life was turned upside-down by a stroke and seizure. Suddenly, he became one of more than a million Americans with aphasia, a communication disorder caused by damage to the brain's language zones. For two years, he was completely unable to speak.

Today, eight years after his stroke, Tom not only enjoys talking—he's a resource for other stroke patients and lectures to students in the Speech, Language & Hearing Sciences program at BU. He attributes his recovery to his own determination and the guidance of specialists, particularly Sargent College faculty and students at the Aphasia Resource Center, which he calls his new family. For years, he has attended meetings and classes there for people with aphasia, improving his language skills on topics from public speaking to photography. "You need to have a good heart to be a speech therapist," he says of the student leaders. "And they all do."

Tom also taught his young teachers something important: "Slow down."

Speech-Language Pathology

Out of 250 programs nationwide, BU Sargent College's Master of Science program in Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) is ranked 21st by U.S. News & World Report. One measure of our graduates' success is their 100 percent first-time passing rate on the National Certification Board Examination. Our program is the smallest of its kind in Boston, ensuring friendly classes, excellent discussions, and personal attention from some of the best professors and practitioners in the field. Students gain clinical experience with a wide variety of patients and communication disorders on campus and off. They train in high-profile sites including Boston Medical Center, Massachusetts General Hospital, and Sargent College's own clinical centers. One of these, the Aphasia Resource Center, is an acclaimed treatment, learning, research, and support center. Founded and directed by SLP faculty members, it's a unique training facility for our students.
“Service learning is one of the single most life-changing experiences a student can have.”

Anna Monahan
Co-Director, Belize Project | Clinical Site Administrator, Human Physiology Program

Joining Forces Against Diabetes in Belize

For two hot, sticky, exhausting weeks in June, fifteen BU undergraduate volunteers and two dedicated mentors blazed a new trail for Sargent College. They traveled to Belize in a joint service-learning pilot program—the first such collaboration between the Human Physiology and Health Science programs. Their goal: to raise awareness of diabetes, the leading killer in this small Central American country. “The trip married all our disciplines,” says Anna Monahan, the clinical administrator who conceived the project. Besides Human Physiology and Health Science, “it pulled together nutrition, occupational therapy, and public health.”

The students connected and collaborated remarkably well. Despite long hours, short water supplies, and disturbing poverty, the group taught, tested, and proved to be an effective team. Together they returned home with powerful new insights and emotions.
“Every small impact can make a difference.”
Shelley Knox
Co-Founder, Beat the Odds
Clinical Tobacco Health Sciences Program

Shelley Knox learned about the Beat the Odds program during her internship at Dartmouth College. She was so impressed by the program’s commitment to helping underserved communities that she became a full-time employee. In her role, she works closely with students and community leaders to design and implement effective tobacco prevention programs. She believes that every small impact can make a difference in the fight against tobacco addiction.

“I went there doubting and came back knowing.”
Cora Massey
Harlem Hell's Angels Psychology major

Cora Massey was initially skeptical about attending the Harlem Hell's Angels program, but she was pleasantly surprised by the support and encouragement she received. She realized that the program was a valuable resource for young people who are looking to make positive changes in their lives. Cora is now an active volunteer with the organization and continues to spread awareness about the importance of education and healthy living.

“We gave knowledge—one of the greatest gifts.”
Anna Lopez
Human Physiology junior

Anna Lopez was inspired to volunteer with the Harlem Hell's Angels after seeing the program’s impact on her community. She was impressed by the way the program helped young people stay on track in their education and find meaningful ways to give back to their community. Anna believes that education is one of the greatest gifts anyone can give, and she is proud to be a part of an organization that is helping to make that gift a reality for so many young people.
Conditions in Belize didn't shock Jena Daniels; she had worked on a service project following Haiti’s 2010 earthquake. What did surprise her was the emotional connection she established with a 12-year-old Belizean boy and the “revelation” she experienced after returning home.

Jena had started at BU with a physical therapy career in mind. Always interested in global outreach, she volunteered for the Belize initiative. She says the program’s blend of disciplines sparked a new realization of what she wants to do with her life. Combining her most ardent interests—chemistry, biology, cooking, exercise, and helping people—Jena now plans to focus on global nutrition education. She sees it as a way to help decrease worldwide health disparities where nutrition is a major risk factor, such as diabetes, osteoporosis, and food allergies.

Meanwhile, her 12-year-old friend can now pursue his own keenest interest: soccer. Jena recently convinced American Eagle Outfitters to donate balls, clothing, and school supplies to his school.
The Intensive Stroke Program:

Of all the debilitating aftereffects of a stroke—physical, perceptual, and cognitive—perhaps the most isolating is aphasia, a complex communication disorder. Studies show that immediate, intensive, team-based therapy yields the best recovery of language and physical abilities for patients in a hospital or rehabilitation center. But could it help outpatients years after a stroke?

Sargent College is uniquely positioned to find out. The four related disciplines (Speech-Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Nutrition) already share one building, cross-tenant, and collaborate in our Aphasia Resource Center (ARC). And so a “think tank,” including Dean Gloria Waters and ARC Clinical Director Liz Hoover, gave rise to a groundbreaking pilot program, the first to merge all four therapies.

Physical Therapy

From any perspective, BU Sargent College’s Doctor of Physical Therapy program stands out among the nation’s best. We’re ranked 106 of 201 programs by U.S. News & World Report. We’re one of only 20 programs in the country with a five-year, 100 percent first-time passing rate of the licensure exam. And for the last three years, every program graduate who sought employment found a job. The DPT program challenges five semesters and a summer of coursework, 44 weeks of full-time clinical education, plus a six-month internship. Students enjoy being part of a small family within a major university—one that has few equals in providing broad-based clinical experience and rewarding volunteer activities. Many students gain skills and knowledge at our innovative Center for Neurorehabilitation, directed by PT faculty members. Physical therapists from the Center contributed to the success of the Intensive Stroke Program.

“The team enhanced my ability to help.”

> Tami DeAngelis
Senior Physical Therapist, Sargent College Center for Neurorehabilitation

Six hours a day, five days a week, four weeks straight. For six determined stroke victims, that rigorous schedule with a multidisciplinary team of top specialists and clinicians offered a chance to create a better life. For Tami DeAngelis, it was a wonderful opportunity to help and learn.

Tami had worked with many stroke patients on mobility, endurance, and balance. But physical therapists rarely get so much input from other specialists in such an intensive outpatient program. For example, OT clinical assistant professor Sue Berger worked with Tami on a home exercise regimen to deliver the greatest quality-of-life improvement. Stacey Zawacki, the project’s nutrition expert, encouraged Tami’s patients to walk one more lap with an irresistible incentive—extra calories at dinner.

“Having those professionals involved helped me do my job better,” Tami says, with exciting results. She expects to include more students in an enhanced program next summer, making it possible to increase the number of patients.
“We gave people back their choices.”

Marta Monroe
Occupational Therapy, Master of Science Program

Above all, Marta Monroe says enthusiastically, the Intensive Stroke Program was about empowerment. Stroke and aphasia mean having choices taken away. Your inventory of language and activity is limited by injury. “But we showed people that you can change how you communicate, how you do these activities, to get back that wide repertoire and satisfaction in your life.”

Marta feels the combination of expertise and intensity made a huge difference. She praised not only the team of professionals but also the patients, whose resolve and optimism inspired her. Several months after the program, all six were featured speakers at Sargent College’s Interdisciplinary Grand Rounds. Marta was struck by the dramatic improvement in their speech—not to mention their courage in addressing an audience of more than 180 people.

The project also had a profound impact on Marta’s own life and how she plans to interact with other disciplines in her future OT practice. As for now, she says, “it was a fabulous motivator for my last year of grad school!”

Occupational Therapy

The BU Sargent College Master of Science in Occupational Therapy program is ranked #2 out of 156 programs by U.S. News & World Report. One reason is our faculty, which includes some of the best-known names in the field. Students interact with them closely, benefiting from individual attention in small classes—many with fewer than 20 students. The two-year curriculum integrates challenging coursework and specialized field placements. While receiving an evidence-based, client-centered professional education, students participate in research and scholarship that are shaping the profession. Our urban location offers broad clinical exposure to different settings and populations, and students can find both fieldwork and volunteer opportunities in community outreach. For Marta Monroe, the Intensive Stroke Program was both a volunteer activity that became the subject of an independent study project.
“This could make a difference for so many people.”

> Stacey Zawacki  
Director, BU Sargent Corps Nutrition Center  
Clinical Assistant Professor

Often overlooked in stroke treatment programs, nutrition couldn't be more critical. Diet-related risk factors for stroke include hypertension, obesity, diabetes, and high cholesterol. Stacey Zawacki covered them all in special classes for the six patients. She also gave them individual nutritional assessments and goals. After four weeks, all saw real improvement.

Throughout the program, what Stacey calls “the beauty of the team approach” revealed itself in unexpected ways. How could the patients open a water bottle with one hand? How does a teacher speak to individuals with aphasia for best comprehension? Experts with answers were right there.

Stacey is excited about plans for next summer’s program, a more controlled research study in which data will be collected before, during, and after treatment. “We made a difference in the lives of six people by doing something that hasn’t been done before. Now our program can be a model for others.” In other words, its life-changing impact may be just beginning.

---

Nutrition

The first step to creating a healthy community is providing a solid nutritional foundation. Our students and faculty do just that through practice and volunteer work in food pantries, nutritional research studies, and special projects like the Intensive Stroke Program.

Academically, BU Sargent College’s Bachelor of Science in Nutritional Science program offers two options, both of which include a broad background in the biological, chemical, and nutritional sciences. The Dietetics Option prepares students to become Registered Dietitians, a credential required for jobs involving nutrition counseling. The Nutrition and Health Option prepares them for career paths that include public health nutrition, nutrition communication, and the food industry. Either track offers all the advantages of a small program within a large research university: small classes, close collaboration, and individual attention.
Measuring the difference we make

510
Clinical sites where Sargent College students worked last year, from a St. Petersburg, FL, children's hospital to a Tacoma, WA, U.S. Army medical center to dozens of schools, hospitals, and medical centers around Boston.

1,000+
Children whose hearing is tested by Sargent College students each year in Boston-area schools.

100
Students who take Peer-to-Peer Gatekeeper Training each year for the knowledge and skills necessary to help peers in distress.

1,004
Visits to the Sargent Choice Nutrition Center in one year (July 2010-June 2011).

15,966
Patient visits to the BU Physical Therapy Center in one year (2011).

Patients with disabilities treated in Ecuador for two weeks by four Sargent College students and one occupational therapy professor.

29,000
Hours of community service contributed by Sargent College students in one year, including internships, practica, and volunteer work in Haiti, Africa, and India as well as the U.S.

40

Belize diabetes initiative
1,700
Estimated number of Belizean children and adults whose lives may have been touched by the Sargent College Initiative.

Intensive stroke program
22.5
Total pounds lost by six patients during the four-week program, which stressed nutrition education and increased physical activity.

25
Graduating Sargent College seniors who participated in the BU Health Leads program during the 2010/11 academic year, contributing about 7,000 volunteer hours.

7,200
Miles traveled by five Sargent College student volunteers to Jaipur, India, where they assisted occupational therapy professors treating patients for one month at the DISHA Centre (Developing Initiatives for Social and Human Action).

2,200
Families served at Health Leads in the same year—an increase of 50% from the year before.

240
Belizeans tested for diabetes by students and faculty during the two-week program. (One diabetes test can save a life!)

100
Percent of the six patients in the program who reported improved quality of life, particularly in increased mobility, speech fluency, nutrition, weight, confidence, and participation in social situations.