



ALISON YOOS

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Developing your passion within the global public health field is no easy feat. For many, defining what they find intriguing and exciting, and integrating it into their professional lives, can take years of challenges and rediscovery. The vastness of the global health field and the many opportunities that exist within can also add nuance to the journey of building up one's passion. For PHI/CDC Alum Alison Yoos, former IMPACT Program Management Fellow in Atlanta, passion-building has been and continues to be an iterative process in which her fellowship experience played a key part in directing.

“When I started college, I did not know what I wanted to do.”

Exploration was Alison's first step in developing her passion for working in global health. Throughout her college career, she sought opportunities to identify topics that she cared about, such as communications and health. Speaking with an advisor helped her to decide to focus on biology with a pre-med focus, but study abroad trips provided early exposure to global health and further defined her education and career trajectory.

With the inspiration gained from these experiences, as well as the desire to work with people and to continue exploring the social and biological aspects of disease and health, Alison decided that a master's in public health would be a more fitting choice than med school

“Studying public health allowed me to focus on the larger issues and affect the problem rather than treating a symptom as I might in a clinical setting.”

During her MPH program, Alison began working at a small non-profit in Boston that incorporated aspects of both public health and environmentalism and

allowed her to be creative in a smaller setting. Over the next five years, she was able to work closely with the organization's leader to expand the organization's reach in the community by creating new programs that connected with a variety of audiences. However, as she watched her colleague exhibit a passion for human services, she realized that she did not feel the same way and looked for other opportunities to grow.

Joining the fellowship program and working with Improving Public Health Management for Action (IMPACT) was her solution. “The [IMPACT] program just clicked for me...My specialty in public health lies more so with program start-up, and IMPACT was a new program within the global public health field that works on a macro level to change a system,” she said.

Her role as the Program Management Fellow also incorporated and further refined her communication skills through curriculum development and presenting the information to the IMPACT Fellows. Although she was based at the CDC headquarters in Atlanta, she worked in an international setting through collaborations with Kenya and Bangladesh's in-country partners to contextualize course material with relevant, country-specific examples.

For Alison, there were two key aspects of her fellowship that helped her growth – having a strong mentor-mentee

Guidance at Every Turn

Each Fellow is matched with two mentors, one primary and one secondary, who provide guidance and leadership on project activities. Mentors also fulfill this role by helping Fellows navigate a large government agency such as the CDC, expand their professional network, and support continued professional development training.

relationship and cultivating new technical and soft skills as part of her day-to-day work.

Her mentor, Erika Willacy, effectively balanced trusting her capability to perform her duties and giving her the room to acquire new skills. With her influence, Alison was able to share her ideas, be heard by the team, and take on increasingly larger responsibilities. Through her leadership, Erika also provided an example of how to teach others that Alison still uses in her current role.

Because of the fluid start-up nature of the IMPACT program, Alison was also able to explore different roles, such as monitoring and evaluation. Prior to the fellowship, she had implemented basic M&E plans in her projects. As a Fellow, she expanded her skills to create comprehensive plans for the two pilot programs while leading the evaluation team.

“Without doing the fellowship, I wouldn’t be in the position that I am today. Everything I did in the fellowship feeds into something that I am doing now.”

As the current Resident Advisor for the IMPACT program in Kenya, Alison uses many of the skills she gained during her fellowship and enjoys her continued work with the CDC. She sees her introduction to the CDC and its role in the global health field as invaluable. And as a former Fellow who now advises IMPACT Fellows of her own, she understands the need to develop other global health professionals who also have the knowledge needed to continue improving health systems and outcomes worldwide.

Alison’s experience with the fellowship is only one of many outcomes that can occur, yet all PHI/CDC Global

Health Alumni share the same theme of passion-building and growth. Whether it is realized during or afterwards, the fellowship offers the opportunity to explore and expand new skill sets needed within global health to prepare for a successful career.

Now, when Alison speaks with other professionals or individuals in her network, she can share her own passion. “I feel now, when I interact with other people, I feel the passion that I’ve seen in other people. I’ve definitely found what I want to do,” she said.

IMPACT Program—Kenya

Kenya is the host site for the first African IMPACT program. The program seeks to train local public health professionals to become managers capable of translating science in to action for their communities.

The program consists of two tracks - the IMPACT Fellowship Program, a two-year master’s program for early career professionals and IMPACT Distinguished Fellows Program, a six month program designed for senior level professionals.

In October 2016, Kenya’s first Distinguished Fellows cohort graduated, several of who served as mentors and supervisors for the two-year master’s program that launched in February 2017.

On February 8, 2017, IMPACT Kenya launched its first two-year cohort of eight fellows with a ceremony featuring leadership from the Kenya Ministry of Health and Kenyatta University.

Adapted from the CDC Center for Global Health website - <https://bit.ly/2MPCRha>

Alison’s Advice to Future Fellows:

Learn to take and incorporate feedback positively, especially as you continue to grow in your career. People aren’t trying to put you down; they are trying to make you better. You were chosen to be [in the program], so don’t take feedback as them not liking you or that you are not supposed to be here.

And for professionals within the workplace in general, as you provide feedback, tell people what they are doing right. In anything that anybody does, there’s something that they did well.