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## First Year Experience: MOM Project and Becoming a MOM Coordinator

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FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE:

## MOM PROJECT AND BECOMING A MOM COORDINATOR

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Serving on the Executive Board of the American Association of Public Health Dentistry (AAPHD) at VCU, first as a Community Service Chair '23-24 and now as the Vice President '24-25, has provided me with invaluable insight into the complexities surrounding healthcare disparities within our Richmond community and beyond. Volunteering for Virginia Dental Association Foundation (VDAF) programs, such as Give Kids a Smile® and the Missions of Mercy (MOM) Project, have further deepened my understanding of the challenges faced by underprivileged populations in accessing essential dental care. Volunteering at these events has shown me ways in which oral health disparities are currently being addressed by the VCU School of Dentistry, the VDAF, and other local organizations. These initiatives require vast funding and resources and a stronger collective effort.

My desire to become a MOM coordinator has been shaped by these

meaningful experiences, each serving as a steppingstone towards a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment. As a volunteer at the Suffolk MOM clinic in March, I felt I was contributing to something bigger than myself. Unlike anywhere else I've volunteered; I felt a sense of community throughout that weekend. The day before, all volunteers helped unload trucks jam-packed with chairs, dental instruments, restorative materials, autoclaves, and so on. To watch an empty gymnasium go from just wooden floors and bleachers to a fully functional dental clinic with dozens of operating dental units, an instrument dispensary, and a sterilization area was truly magical. During the actual day of the event, I juggled between assisting in the triage of patients, sterilizing dental instruments, running lines and suction between procedures, assisting in some simple dental extractions, and finally loading everything back into the truck. By the end of it all, I was completely and utterly exhausted, but I couldn't wait to do it all again for the next project.

Now as I take on the position of MOM coordinator, I look forward to the opportunity of gaining insight and a more comprehensive understanding of the logistics involved in building and running a free dental clinic. In this position, I will be expected to help plan, organize, and assist in all future MOM projects with a team of other coordinators from VCU. This experience will not only be beneficial for my personal and professional growth, but it will also equip me with the necessary skills and knowledge to continue serving as a future provider in the public health sphere. My aspiration to give back throughout my career and remain actively involved in community outreach initiatives will be further strengthened by this opportunity. Collaborating with a team of passionate and selfless individuals, all dedicated to giving back to the communities in Virginia is an exciting opportunity. I hope as a coordinator I can make a meaningful and lasting impact on the lives of those who need it most.

