“Do you need any help with that?” That was what two complete strangers asked me when I was cleaning a railroad track, alone! It was an afternoon on the brink of summer without a possible shade relieving cloud in sight. I was the only volunteer from the Earth Day clean up event at the railroad and street intersection drenched in sweat, picking up trash. This is not an exaggeration, which can further explain why no one decided to stop that Saturday afternoon and help the sweaty high school teenager picking up trash. But when I heard that question from the pair of random citizens, it really brightened my day to know that there were others willing to stop what they were doing to lend a hand. These were not other volunteers from the event; they were the “average Joes” of Lawrence getting just as dirty as I was until the whole location was cleared of any debris.

From then on I wanted to replicate this feeling in others in future Groundwork Lawrence (GWL) events; to have others be inspired to change their situation for the better with a little extra help. Until this day I would only go to school and go home, but after this Earth Day event I joined the Groundwork Lawrence's Green Team in hopes of accomplishing my goal. This position encourages its members to lead environmental initiatives. My first initiative was to lead an invasive species removal group in one of our parks. It was a challenge from the training session of teaching the recruits which plants are not native to the area to the in the field (park) part of the initiative. I surprised myself in how successful it was because outside of removing most of the Japanese knotweed,
one of the recruits decided to apply for Green Team once openings popped up and was hired.

When the summer arrived, GWL divided the Green Team in two and I was on the part that focused more on park rejuvenation and environmental education. When we started on a park or playground we would de-graffiti the area, pick up trash and recyclables, and depending where we were we would maintain a hiking trail. The short-term goal was to get the space cleaned but the long-term goal was to have it stay that way. Our approach was to include citizen involvement in some form so they can take some pride in their city and not further pollute. In the summer I co-lead elementary and middle school students on environmental topics ranging from bird identification to pollution using with hands-on activities. Working with older recruits during the invasive species removal was very different than working with children. I had to brainstorm ways to make some topics more fun and approachable to keep the audience engaged and receptive. Watching the kids eagerly await the lessons week after week told me that we were successful in teaching the materials. This lasted for just a few weeks during the summer so at the time I could just imagine how much of an impact I would make if it was a longer term with an ambitious mission: water testing.

Once a GWL employee mentioned that he was going to lead a water testing group consisting of regular citizens I was really excited and decided to participate. I was the only teenager in the group and was a little disappointed that more people around my age group did not go but I was over it when I saw the room where the training was being held in occupied with strangers. That is probably not a sentence that anybody would say but considering that they were there to join in on an effort to improve Lawrence, I did not
care. I got a brief introduction into testing water samples from the Spicket River that flows through the city. Sadly I was never contacted about further information possibly because the times for the water testing were too early in the morning for a high school student. It was too ambitious for a teenager but very manageable now as a University student.

Lawrence Massachusetts has a reputation that sometimes precedes itself. Someone can hear opposite things about the city but both sides of the story will agree that the city can be improved. This is where the non-profit organization Groundwork Lawrence comes in because it leads many initiatives, projects, and programs that can be beneficial to the citizens and I want to be a part of that improvement. Specifically I want to help mobilize volunteer events with community members and help with the water testing that a previous Groundwork Lawrence member has lead. I want to give back what this Groundwork trust gave to me to perhaps another student who will get just as motivated as I was to repeat the cycle. Soon, like mitosis, lots of people would be inspired to improve Lawrence. Who knows what would happen if everybody helps out.

I plan on taking “Environmental Chemistry” by Professor Dwight G Peavey in Spring 2015 to prepare me for this internship. Since I want to be involved in the water testing, this course will further explain how human activity affects their environment. Some focuses of the course are water pollution and green chemistry. This course will equip me with knowledge on how water pollution can occur (and possibly how it can be prevented) and with information that I predict will be asked by the volunteers in the service events. After completion of the course, I should be knowledgeable enough to answer questions from the volunteers ranging from “Why is this important?” to “How
can I help with that?"

From this internship, I want to help my fellow citizens of Lawrence help themselves and spread what I like to call the volunteer bug to others. It will be a challenge but I know it can be done. In accomplishing this I aim to gain information on how to properly organize and lead a group of volunteers towards a goal. This experience will be beneficial outside of this internship because I do plan on enrolling in the Peace Corps. This is where I believe my cumulative experience of helping others and this internship can be useful. It will be a longer term volunteering with the Peace Corps in the community development area so I need to be as prepared as I can be and nothing prepares quite like personal experience.