

General Meeting
4-16-09
Jericho Road Ministries
3 p.m.

WNYSLC Updates

The Coalition now has 65 community partners and ten higher education institutional partners.

The WNYSLC Database is up and running at www.wnyslc.net. Since the database is only as good as the information it contains, all partners are asked to enter their information into the database. Stephanie and Ellen are happy to answer questions, help with the process or provide training.

Working with refugee and immigrant communities

The WNYSLC had asked International Institute to discuss the process of refugee resettlement; Journey's End Refugee Services to discuss how they utilize service-learning students in resettlement; Jericho Road Ministries to discuss post-resettlement needs and services; and Hope Refugee Services to discuss how they utilize service-learning students in post-resettlement.

International Institute - Hannah Cox

International Institute helps resettle approximately 350 families per year, mostly on the West Side and Riverside. The resettlement process includes finding and setting up apartments for the refugees to live in, as well as the gas and electric services. This can be challenging, as the families are arriving with only \$450 from the U.S. government and can't sign the lease or offer a security deposit. When International Institute picks up the refugees from the airport, the refugees are typically improperly dressed for Buffalo's weather conditions. Donation and clothing drives, which are sometimes initiated by students, are helpful in providing proper clothing for the refugees. After taking them to their new apartment, International Institute volunteers or staff members show the refugees how to use the appliances, heat and other aspects of American life.

The services that International Institute offers to the refugee families includes: instruction in ESL, using the bus system, visiting a doctor or pharmacy, shopping at a grocery store, paying bills and registering students for school. International Institute also provides some school supplies for students.

Journey's End Refugee Services – Elaine Smyth-Bogumil

Journey's End uses service-learning students in a variety of ways in the resettlement process. Journey's End also resettles refugees on the west side and has found that many of the refugees have no experience with money, as their homeland or refugee camp was based more on a barter system.

One example is how Journey's End partnered with a Psychology of Culture class from Buffalo State College to meet the needs of the newly arrived refugees. After providing an in-class orientation to the students, students were placed in teams of three and went to the homes of refugees to provide education on money, paying bills, and using credit cards and banks. In their reflection assignments, many of the students stated that they learned a great deal about housing conditions, living in poverty, language barriers and discrimination through their service-learning project.

Jericho Road Ministries - Nicole Hitchcock

Jericho Road Ministries was founded to meet the social needs of refugees, moving beyond simply providing medical services. There are over 800 refugees resettled in Buffalo every year. Some of these individuals have lived in refugee camps for seven to ten years.

Jericho Road has seven programs that provide social services to refugees. The Priscilla Project partners pregnant refugee women with American women, to help ease some of the anxiety about access to healthcare and child safety. Among Jericho Road's other programs are the West Side Read and Play program, a program that uses toys and books to teach both the child and the parent; Financially Fit, a financial literacy program; and a diabetes education center. These programs are designed to help refugees meet their self-identified desires to learn English, grocery shop, help their kids in school and drive.

Hope Refugee Services – Katie McClain-Meeder

Hope works with refugees after the initial resettlement period, which typically lasts 6-9 months. After this period, the focus shifts from emergency services (food, shelter, bills) to integration.

The FLY program is one program Hope uses to reach out the middle school students and fill in the gaps in their education. This program has really flourished through the help of volunteers and service-learning students. Tutors help with homework and improving literacy and math skills through activities such as cooking and games. The relationships that are created between the kids and the tutors and the service occasionally extends beyond the semester. This program has also lead to the creation of the Refugee Tutoring Project which works to improve the education level of refugees, using college students as tutors.

Discussion

The meeting was opened up to discussion and question. One question was asked to see if there were ever any one-time opportunities versus long-term opportunities for service-learning students.

One time opportunities include:

- Setting up apartments (this is a one-time opportunity, but an ongoing need)
(International Institute, Journey's End)

- Helping with moving into an apartment (International Institute, Journey's End)
- Setting up for a baby, cleaning homes (Jericho Road)
- Child care so mothers can attend classes (Jericho Road)
- Teaching crafts, basic English lessons

Confidentiality and Background Checks

There are confidentiality issues with some of the opportunities, which do not make them conducive to one-time events. Due to liability issues and insurance requirements, some organizations require fingerprinting and background checks, which are time-consuming and expensive. Some organizations that require background checks also require a certain time commitment from the volunteers or students. It would be helpful if students who are doing service-learning in the fall at organizations that require background checks started the process in the summer.

If organizations that require background checks could collaborate and come together, maybe they could alleviate some of the cost burdens and time required. Maybe CCSNYS can negotiate a packaged deal for those interested. Carmaletta Morlock Zandi would like to get a group together to look at background checks and the issues with them. Danielle Woodman will send out a survey monkey to determine who requires background checks, whom is expected to pay (the organization or the student), and other related issues.

There is a spot in the database to indicate if background checks will be needed.

How do you combat prejudices and the "us vs. them" attitudes?

Many organizations offer cultural and diversity training as part of their orientation. Putting a face and human story to the "them" also helps eliminate prejudices.

Other

CASH is considering adopting a picture-based curriculum to teach basic finances. The training they are considering can be found at www.ised.us. They are looking to partner with existing organizational efforts.

The Center for Sustainable Communities is pioneering a financial literacy program for kids this summer, using the CASH Income Taxi.

The next general meeting will be July 16, 2009 at 3 p.m. at the Olmstead Center for the Visually Impaired.