Like the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps places stipended volunteers to serve in low income, marginalized communities. But, in AmeriCorps, volunteers serve only in the US, not in other countries. About 20 years ago when AmeriCorps was founded, a small group of Sisters of Notre Dame saw it as a way to bring more volunteers to service and Notre Dame AmeriCorps was born. It started small, just a few volunteers in Apopka and a couple of other cities. Over time, the program has rooted deeply and today there are nearly 400 NDA members – 31 in Apopka - and in over 20 cities coast-to-coast. One of very few programs that have been continuously funded for 20 years, NDA is heralded as a program that builds relationships of mutuality and honors the value of service learning and it is recognized by the Corporation for National and Community Service as a model AmeriCorps program.

NDA extends the hearts and hands of Hope. Each year, a new wave of enthusiastic, open-hearted volunteers come, excited to serve. This year’s team is diverse as always: people who speak, in addition to English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Dutch. Some members also know American Sign Language. Members hail from across the country and the globe: the mid and southwest, the northeast and New England, the Carolinas, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, Suriname, and from right here in Apopka! Most of the 31-member team serve in area public schools and non-profits but seven are serving right here at Hope – 2 members returning from last year and five fresh new faces in the following programs:

- **Jasmine Bensinger** (Service Learning)
- **Chelsea Kirkley** (Academic Support)
- **Mawhyah Milton** (Media/Communication)
- **Ylda Sellars** (Immigrant Education)
- **Maggi Noyes** (College & Career Access)
When I arrived at the office this morning, there were several dozen people milling around the Center, wandering amidst tables stacked with sorted clothing and shoes, toys, household items, and even Christmas ornaments. The buzz in the air is friendly, inviting. Welcoming hugs and smiles in good Latino style, people catching up, sharing stories and jokes, enjoying a hot cup of coffee accompanied by fresh-out-of-the-pan empanadas. It’s yard sale day!

In the year plus since my arrival here, I’ve learned that this is what Hope CommUnity Center is all about: PEOPLE! The building is always abuzz. English, Spanish, Creole; even Russian and Portuguese are heard. Families seeking assistance, young people growing leadership skills, local community members volunteering, children getting help with school work, adults preparing for citizenship exams, students from other states sharing their experience of living with local immigrant families fill the halls every day.

I’ve also learned that Hope is about COMMUNITY! It’s in our name and we are serious about it. Coming to Hope means being invited to be a part of something more. When we meet, we sit in circles – so we can see and hear each other. Programs are led in ways that people get acquainted and build relationships. We share joys and we talk about struggles. We learn to think critically about our world and, drawing on traditions of faith and values, we learn to envision a better world – where there is greater equality, justice and peace.

I have had the privilege of being connected with the non-profit arena for much of my working life. This includes pastoral work in a Native American community, work with homeless Latino men, fundraising for immigrant-serving grassroots organizations (and even an organization that works with people with a rare disease), and support providing for men and women transitioning from jail back to life outside.

All these roles were fulfilling. But at Hope I have found my dream job. What I love about Hope is that more than services or numbers, what we do here we do from the heart. I love that our mission is based on the Gospel value of a preferential option for the poor and marginalized. I love that our work is guided by the vision of a better community, the “beloved community” as Sister Ann often quotes. I love that we are truly connected, immersed in our community and that in all our programs we bring PEOPLE together and we build COMMUNITY.

DAVID CRUMP

Reflections

On November 5, 2015, Eli Garcia will travel to California to the UC Berkeley Campus to accept the Mario Savio Young Activist Award. She is one of three awardees who will accept a $5000 cash award and recognition as an outstanding young activist leader dedicated to building a more humane and just society. The award is given in honor of Mario Savio, who was a political activist and a key member in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. Hope congratulates staff member, Eli Garcia.

YOUNG ACTIVIST: ELI GARCIA
Hope CommUnity Center’s Educational Programs need class supplies!

- If you can donate notebooks, pens, pencils, crayons, or any other school supplies, they would be put to great use.
- Students are asked to purchase textbooks for Citizenship class, which is a financial burden to many of them. A contribution of $25 would really go a long way.

Nationwide, Elks Lodges bring much support to their communities. In the past five years, the Apopka Elks have invested in our community through a number of projects. Youth and families from our community are often invited to share stories and meals at the local lodge and have also benefited from backpack donations, toy sale contributions and scholarships for the Elks Lodge summer camp. In fact, this past summer, ten children from Hope received camp scholarships. Nilka Melendez, Director of Youth and Family services said, “I think it is so good, because most of the kids who participate are kids who would never have the opportunity to go to a wonderful camp like this.”

The Elks Lodge and Hope CommUnity Center are a good team who together share the interest and passion for helping the community. We come together to support youth development and leadership.

For Hope’s toy sale this year, the Elks have already chosen to be a sponsor, are donating $1000, and are collecting bikes and other toys that are needed. We are grateful for Hope’s friend and Elks member, Joe Serwe, who first connected us to the Elks Lodge. This partnership has been wonderful and we look forward to it continuing.
NEW STAFF MEMBER

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR ACADEMIC SUPPORT

“I want to encourage people to think about what they want to do in the future using their skills to help the world”

- Elizabeth Ortel

Hope CommUnity Center would like to welcome on permanent staff, returning Notre Dame AmeriCorps member, Elizabeth Ortel. Elizabeth has joined our education program as Director of Academic Support. Highly skilled and experienced, Elizabeth, will work with staff, students, and community leaders to create a community-focused experience for students. Elizabeth has five years of education-based experience teaching and tutoring students of all ages. She has formal training in second-language acquisition and she is fluent in oral and written Spanish and Portuguese. She has a M.A. in Spanish, a B.A. in Spanish and German and a B.S. in Anthropology.

Elizabeth has volunteer experience as an ESL Instructor in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and the Hope Community Center in Apopka, Florida. As a Notre Dame Americorps member at Hope, Elizabeth served as the Adult Education Coordinator where she managed the ESL and GED programs as well as bilingual training. In 2011, she interned in Iquitos, Peru in foreign language instruction and for 3 years she worked as a Spanish language graduate instructor at FSU and LSU.

Most recently, she worked in Louisiana designing course materials to present Spanish curriculum to students from ages 3-14.

When asked about her plans for Hope’s education program, she spoke about her observation of how each program is considered a separate entity and how she plans to create a more inclusive program that encompasses other Hope departments, tying different programs together. “Right now, I’m focusing on bringing each piece in bit-by-bit and trying to work in communication with other departments,” said Elizabeth. She plans to make priority those students who have already enrolled in Hope’s programs. “For right now, we are inviting old students and referrals from other Hope Programs to Hope’s adult education offerings.” She’s also planning to tie together the various educational programs. For example, some of the mothers in the GED classes may also benefit from parenting classes.
When asked about her overall goals for the program, Elizabeth said she wanted to find out the reasons why students are pursuing their education—for example, what is motivating a GED student and then centering the learning experience around that. “I want people to see that they are not just learning things as a means to an end. I want people to think about the future and to question how studying for the GED or learning to read is empowering them to assist somebody else. I want to encourage people to think about how they can help the community, what can they do to help the world by learning this new skill?”

We are so grateful and excited to have Elizabeth join our team again and look forward to the future of Academic Support at Hope CommUnity Center.

Hope wants to congratulate and thank Astrid Rodriguez and Carlos Sanchez for their student panel participation during recent events organized by the Heart of Florida United Way. Astrid shared her story at Destination Graduation, hosted at the National Entrepreneur Center, with over 100 Central Florida community leaders and business professionals in attendance. One week later, at GradNation Summit, Carlos inspired nearly 100 educators, non-profit professionals, and other community allies with the struggles and successes of his journey. Both of these events flourished from a Lumina Foundation nationwide challenge to increase the proportion of Americans who receive post-secondary education from 40 percent currently to 60 percent by 2025. In examining how all of Central Florida can come together to reach this 60% educational attainment goal, Astrid and Carlos articulated some of the unique elements of immigrant students’ experience. Thank you Astrid and Carlos for being educational champions for your peers and for sharing your experiences with professionals in the field of education. Best wishes to you both as you continue studying at the Rollins Hamilton Holt School with Rollins’/Hope’s partnership scholarships!

“The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.”

-Ralph Waldo Emerson
**Hope Staff, NDAs, and Youth attend SEIRN Conference**

From August 28-30, Eli Garcia, from Hope CommUnity Center’s staff; Chris Furino, Bianca Martinez, and Stailey Styles from the Notre Dame AmeriCorps (NDA) team; and Leslie Arreaga and Hannia Barbosa from Sin Fronteras (Without Borders) Youth Group attended the South East Immigrant Rights Network’s Annual Conference outside Atlanta, Georgia. The conference focused on opportunities for intersectionality and allyship between the Immigrant Rights and Black Lives Matter movements. Throughout the conference, the participants engaged in discussions, small groups, presentations, and reflections about the ways to connect the two movements and the potential outcomes in doing so. NDA member, Chris Furino, reflected; “I found the experience very powerful. While I considered myself a strong ally for both movements, I had not before considered the potential power to elicit social change that could come about by bridging the fights.” The delegation hopes to bring the experience back through trainings and discussions with the Sin Fronteras Youth Group and other members of Hope’s staff and NDA team.

**HOPE SEES POPE**

“POPE FRANCIS SAYS,”THE WORLD TELLS US TO SEEK SUCCESS, POWER AND MONEY yet God tells us to seek humility, service, and love.”…and so it was during the weekend in Philadelphia as a group of 17 pilgrims from the Hope CommUnity Center joined the millions gathered for the Festival of Families and the visit of Pope Francis…and so it is every day at the Hope CommUnity Center as we struggle to live out that mission.

We were witness to this historic occasion and we were both inspired and challenged. With humble hearts we greeted one another and created community connections, we served one another and grew in love. Our team packed meals for Catholic Relief Services to send to Africa and we visited elderly folks in an independent living facility. We waited for hours with crowds of people, who are now friends, for a glimpse of Pope Francis. Thanks to our guardian angel and friend, Jose Camacho for making this pilgrimage a reality.
A Taste of Hope
2015
a night of gratitude

THANKSGIVING FOOD DRIVE - BEGINS IN NOVEMBER

Hope CommUnity Center will distribute Thanksgiving bags of food to families.

You can help by filling a bag or writing a check to Hope CommUnity Center!

Non-perishable items only please!

ITEMS IN EACH BAG:
• Box instant mashed potatoes (2)
• Box instant stuffing (2)
• Box cake mix & frosting (1)
• Bag of rice (2lbs)
• Bag of dried beans (1)
• Can of green beans (2)
• Can of corn (2)
• Can of fruit cocktail (2)
Mission: Hope CommUnity Center is a service learning community dedicated to the empowerment of Central Florida’s immigrant and working poor communities through education, advocacy and spiritual growth.

Excerpt from Hope’s ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015

Revenue $1,072,592

Expenses $1,008,215

The success of Hope depends on our dedicated donors, volunteers, community partners...and you.

A copy of our annual report is available on our website: www.hcc-offm.org

GREEN mail? Would you prefer to have our newsletter emailed to you for convenience and to save a tree?

Let Us Know!
email mcarroll@hcc-offm.org

TOY DRIVE BEGINS NOV. 13!!

Hope’s Toy Sale will be held Dec 14 & 15

At the Toy Sale, working poor parents can purchase gifts for their children at approximately 25 cents on the dollar. Money raised from the sale goes to fund Hope’s programs all year long; and because parents are choosing and buying the gifts they know their children want and need, their dignity is respected.

If you can help, please donate only new, unwrapped gifts with the price still on the item.

To schedule a gift donation, please call during business hours from Nov 13 to Dec 11, 2015. Once scheduled, a staff member from Hope CommUnity Center will meet you at our storage facility at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Apopka. Financial contributions are always welcome.

Call Nilka or Mariela at 407-880-4673 ext. 241