Hope CommUnity Center and ArtReach Orlando Unveil ‘Hope Rising’ Mosaic

Hope CommUnity Center’s community members brought old pieces of jewelry, scraps of beautifully woven fabric from their home countries, photos of loved ones, stones, shells and small gifts from treasured friends. People donated boxes of odd tile, cups, bowls and plates that would be cut or smashed with a hammer. From April through August 2013, this odd assortment of treasure and “trash” was transformed by community members, youth and adults, and a Mexican mosaic artist named Janis Nunez into the Hope Rising mosaic, which today graces the entrance to the Hope CommUnity Center. Through a melding of the old world craft of mosaic and the new age of technology, QR codes were embedded in the mosaic, marking the many donated objects. By holding a Smartphone to the code, people can access a video of the donor describing the donated object, explaining its value in their lives and why they chose to contribute it to the project. Brendan O’Connor, project manager, shows guests at Sunday’s unveiling the interactive technology of the mosaic and proudly commented “The mosaic will last as long as the wall it was built on, but the discussions around it will last even longer.”

Drums, songs and great heart ushered in the unveiling of the Hope Rising mosaic on September 22, 2013. The project was made possible through a generous contribution from ArtReach Orlando, a nonprofit organization that supports art for children in underserved communities. “ArtReach came from a dream I had because I love children and art,” said Bickley Wilson, founder of ArtReach Orlando. Over 100 people including children, youth group, board members, volunteers, staff, MOM’S literacy group, Americorps members and senior citizens assembled the mosaic and donated pieces and their time. Today, the Hope Rising mosaic stands as a testament to the power of the arts, a source that helps people find beauty in our broken world. In speaking to an Orlando Sentinel reporter, Sin Fronteras youth group member, Liliana Alvarez, commented, “Every little picture is a story that means everything. It has changed me and shown me how different community can be. We could be united and do good stuff.”
Meet Hope’s New Service Learning Director
Jose Luis Marantes

This summer, HCC staff welcomed Jose Luis Marantes as the new Service Learning Director.

Marantes previously served as the Director of Miami Expansion at PICO United Florida. In that role, he worked with congregations and clergy on a variety of social justice issues. At HCC, he will be shifting his focus from empowering people directly affected by issues to educating potential allies and advocates. He would like to expand the service-learning program to offer more opportunities for the community and potential allies to learn from each other.

One of his first projects as Service Learning Director was coordinating an immersion experience for Rollins College’s SPARC Day. Twenty college freshmen, who will be studying immigration this semester, spent a day at HCC. They participated in our citizenship class and listened to Sin Fronteras Youth Group members tell their immigrant stories. As a follow up to their visit, the students will be interviewing Sin Fronteras members about their past, present, and hopes for the future.

Marantes is a longtime social justice activist and leadership coach. At the national and state level, he has worked on reform for immigrants, the formerly incarcerated, and others. Additionally, he co-founded the United We Dream Network and served as Florida Immigration Coalition’s Youth Organizer. However, Marantes is very excited to be in Apopka now. In the past, he looked to HCC as a crucial and passionate part of the state’s activist community. “If my work was not touching this group,” he said, “there was something wrong with the campaign.” Already, he has been impressed by the community’s dedication to efforts like the 40 Day Fast for Immigration Reform.

Originally from Miami, FL, Marantes is a Cuban-American and the son of immigrants. He lives with his wife, Melissa, (a lawyer at Catholic Charities of Central Florida), a son, and a daughter.

Community Members Join Fulltime Staff

Thanks to our donors, we were recently able to make two new additions to the Hope CommUnity Center team. Olivia Reyes and Eli Garcia, both heavily involved with the organization for years, are now fulltime staff members.

Garcia, a dedicated volunteer of several years, joins the team as the Program Assistant. In this role, she assists each program with their major projects, such as events and campaigns. She is also active on our advocacy committee. Over the past 5 years, she has grown up with HCC. Garcia started out as a teenager in the Sin Fronteras Youth Group, then after high school graduation she continued volunteering with the organization. Now, as a college student and staff member, Garcia describes working at HCC as “something bigger than helping people out. This is a job that changes lives.”

Reyes was the part-time receptionist for 5 years and now she is the Community Referral Specialist. A 12-year resident of Apopka, Reyes says, “I am happy to devote more to Hope CommUnity Center because I love working with the Sisters of Notre Dame.” She is often at the front desk serving as the first line of support for community members seeking help. Reyes has vast knowledge of the services and educational opportunities provided by HCC staff and various other organizations in the community to whom she can refer people. In her current position and previous role, her finger has truly been on the pulse of the community.

We are glad to have these two dedicated women on our team.
The Apopka Notre Dame Mission Volunteer AmeriCorps team just began their 2013 – 2014 service year. Over the next 11 months, they will be working with the working poor, immigrants and families in crisis at schools and organizations across Central Florida. In addition, many of them will be volunteering with Hope CommUnity Center’s youth empowerment programs, adult education classes and seasonal events.

As always, the team is very diverse in age, ethnicity and life experiences; however we have many Central Floridians (including several Apopka natives) who want to make positive changes at home. Kai Porter, a first year member from Orlando says, “There is so much work to be done in the Greater Orlando area and I feel I have a responsibility to make sure that I’ve made an impact on my community before I try to go somewhere else.”

It is also notable that 10 of the members are returning from last year. “I love serving at Hope Community Center. I always get such positive energy from working with the youth group,” Roxanna Martel says, “and I’m excited to get to know the new team.”

Hope CommUnity Center looks forward to learning and growing with this new team.
June 15, 2013 marked an important anniversary for the immigrant community - DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival) turned one year old. This executive order allows undocumented young people over the age of 15, who meet certain requirements, to apply for temporary relief from actions to remove them from the country. To date, over 550,000 people have applied for DACA. If an applicant is accepted, they cannot be deported for the next two years. They are also eligible to apply for employment authorization, a social security number and a driver's license. After two years pass, the temporary relief can be renewed, however DACA does not offer a path to citizenship.

Hope CommUnity Center is happy to see that DACA has helped many DREAMers continue their education and given other young immigrants access to new opportunities. Through our Immigrant Family Program, we are working to make sure that the community is aware of DACA and their eligibility for the program. We have trained more than 50 volunteers to help with DACA clinics and educated hundreds of people through community forums. In addition, HCC reviewed DACA applications at three legal clinics, one of which was in partnership with the Mexican Consulate.

While DACA represents some progress on the issue of immigration, there is more work to be done. We believe all immigrant communities deserve to be treated fairly and with justice. Therefore, we continue to advocate for a permanent solution for all 11 million of the undocumented people who are seeking citizenship in the United States, the country they call home.

---

You Are Invited to A Night of Solidarity!

Celebrate your commitment to breaking down the walls of injustice with Hope Community Center.

Join us for a dinner, program, and music

We will eat a humble meal, rice and beans, the food of the poor.
We will sit face to face with fellow community activists.
We will witness a ritual performance in honor of immigrants and victims of injustice.
We will remember why we do this work and why we must support each other.

First United Methodist Church
(Matthias Family Life Center)
125 N. Interlachen Ave
Winter Park, FL 32789
Saturday, November 9, 2013
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Donation: Adults $25 Students: $10

For more information, call (407)880-4673 and ask for Mary Carroll at Ext. 236 or Nilka Melendez at Ext. 226.
While some tutors work with walk-in students for an hour or two, Volunteer Math Tutor John Moran focuses on making big strides with a few dedicated students. Several times a week, he meets with college students who are struggling in math for several hours of intensive tutoring. Moran is not satisfied with explaining a few confusing concepts; he aims to keep his students on track throughout their whole course.

Both he and his wife, Karen, are former Notre Dame Volunteer Mission AmeriCorps members who serve families at HCC. In fact, he first learned about the organization during his wife’s service years. She recruited him to help out with trips and activities for her students. After seeing the good work that HCC was doing in the community, he followed in Karen’s footsteps and served two AmeriCorps service years at Wekiva High School.

At the high school, Moran put his professional experience as an engineer to work by tutoring students in math. He worked with 150 Wekiva students everyday and tutored at HCC in his spare time. While volunteering at HCC, he noticed that there wasn’t as much academic support for college math students, although many first and second year students needed to pass college algebra. As his service term ended, he found himself still thinking about the need for math tutors. “There is just not an off switch for AmeriCorps,” he says. So, he continues to work with fledgling college students, many of whom are referred by his wife, our very own College Access Coordinator.

When he’s not volunteering, he spends time with his family including two grown children and three young grandsons. He and his wife also make periodic visits to New England where they have large extended families.

Moran’s message to potential volunteers: You will get back as much or more than you put in. While helping students academically, he was inspired by their motivation and incredible spirits. “For the most part,” he says, “they maintain positive attitudes and smiles, regardless of their circumstances.” Learning from their examples while volunteering, he has tried to apply the same optimism to his own life.

Fall is Off to a Fantastic Start Thanks to Our Partners

Wells Fargo awarded a $7,500 grant to HCC. This money will help fund our Adult Education services.

Seminole State College awarded scholarships to several DACA students at HCC. These awards have enabled our youth to continue their education this fall.

Northrop Grumman is sponsoring a weekly Tutoring Station for HCC youth who are struggling in math and science. The tutors will be working engineers and technology experts from their Laser Systems in Apopka.
On Saturday, August 10, Hope CommUnity Center hosted its 5th annual Back to School Health Fair. With help from our sponsors and volunteers, we were able to put on a fun and educational event for over 250 families. Attendees were given diet and nutrition advice, screened for a variety of health conditions, and referred for follow up appointments with health professionals. In addition, everyone also enjoyed healthy snacks, ZUMBA classes and more. Children participated in outdoor activities and took home school supplies and gift cards for back-to-school haircuts. Thanks to everyone who made this event possible. We hope all the families start the school year in happiness and health.

On July 12, HCC received a visit from Lisa Jacobson of the Orlando Sentinel Family Fund, A McCormick Foundation Fund, who presented HCC with a check for $40,000 to be used to help children and youth grades K-12 achieve academic success, complete high school and enter post-secondary education programs. Thanks to HCC's Program Director, Laura Firtel, (pictured far right) who wrote the grant.

The College and Career Access program held a career conference and the Senior Bootcamp this summer. The career conference featured speakers from a wide range of professional fields, including law enforcement and construction technology. At the Senior Bootcamp, volunteers helped students brush up on their essay writing and learn to fill out a college application. Participants also worked on job search skills, such as resume building and interviewing. We greatly appreciate the volunteers and sponsors who spent time with our students this summer.

Hope CommUnity Center is a service learning community dedicated to the empowerment of the Central Florida's immigrant and working poor communities through education, advocacy and spiritual growth. Be sure to see our new website at hcc-offm.org. Hope also has a facebook page at Hope CommUnity Center.
Summer Adult English Classes End

August 2, 2013 HCC Adult Education classes ended with certificates of participation, a beautiful ceremony and a party for over 40 participants. Bea Beardsworth, Director of Adult Education Services, thanked the 12 volunteer tutors and commented, "It was an honor working with such hard working adult students." Over 100 enrolled for the new classes which began September 18. There are 25-30 children in the childcare and ten volunteers including Rollins College students from Professor Kim Dennis’ Women’s Study Program, who either teach or provide childcare for the children of parents attending class.

Special thanks to volunteer, Barbara Hall who will be providing hot meals throughout the semester. Others are welcome to do the same for Monday nights. Call Lynn Devanie if interested in helping.

Phone Bank for Immigration Reform

This summer, Hope CommUnity Center and New Florida Majority united forces on a phone bank for immigration reform. To raise public awareness about the immigration bill, volunteers reached out to constituents of U.S. Representatives Daniel Webster and Dennis A. Ross. Every Friday from July 12 to August 2, the group called citizens to explain the importance of the policy and value of urging politicians to say "yes" to reform. Those who wanted take action were immediately put in touch with their representative's office. Over the course of 4 weeks, the 20 volunteers made 6,080 advocacy calls. Thank you to all our hardworking volunteers and those who voiced their support to their representative. HCC is continuing to call their representatives to encourage support for immigration reform.

HCC Participates in 40 Day Fast For Immigration Reform

On Thursday, September 5, HCC held a candle-light vigil to mark the beginning of several weeks of spiritual action for immigrants. From September 8 to October 18, participants will be praying and abstaining from a food or habit to bring about more compassionate changes. Several families from our community will be joining others across the nation in praying and fasting for a more civil solution to immigration reform. Some have been personally affected by the policies and are seeking empowerment; others participating in solidarity. To learn more about the 40 day fast, please visit: http://fastaction.us/ A final vigil will be held at Hope CommUnity Center on October 18, 2013. Call for details if interested.

Hope Welcomes Flor Tovar to HCC Board

The Hope Community Center Board of Directors welcomes Flor Tovar as its newest member. Mrs. Tovar, herself an immigrant from Colombia, has great empathy for the plight of the people we serve. She is also the founder of The Flor Foundation. Through this foundation, Mrs. Tovar has organized fund raisers and mission trips to Colombia to serve the poor of her native country. This past year the Flor Foundation provided over 200 Thanksgiving Day meals to HCC’s community as well as an Easter Egg Hunt for HCC’s children.
Because of You ...

...so many gifts have been shared, lives have been changed... smiles have grown...
So...you are invited to a celebration of YOU and all you have done for so many.

Join Us
Hope CommUnity Center
October 24, 2013
6PM
in honor of our fabulous Volunteer Team

Hope Pays Tribute to Volunteers