Youth Board members, staff, youth, donors and volunteers gather together before start of Toy Sale 2013

Youth & Staff Share Resolutions, Hopes and Wishes for the World

I would wish that everyone would resolve to live by my favorite quote, “Live simply so that others may simply live.”

Karen Moran, staff

I would like to see the people and the government be more honest.

Mariano Hernandez, youth

I wish people would be giving and sharing all year long not just at the holidays.

Maria Ruiz, youth

I am so happy to have my GED. I look forward to the day when I have enough money saved so I can go to college.

Silvia Garcia

No more discrimination!

Elaine Herrera, youth

Resolve to stop world hunger.

Luis Barbosa, youth

I want immigration reform to pass.

Danny Franco College Student

My wish is for my daughter in Colombia to be independent and to get a job.

Beth Riebel, staff

For myself I want to stay determined, to give 100% in whatever I do.

Arianna Moreno youth
Hope Holds 33rd Toy Sale

The Idea Behind the Christmas Toy Sale

For months, parents look forward to browsing for gifts with HCC, because when we open up our shop, the prices are extremely low. With help from our donors, we collect an assortment of brand new children’s toys and then mark them down to a small fraction of the store price. Many items are sold for a third or a fourth of the amount they would cost in most discount stores.

A common question we are asked about our event is “why do you sell the toys instead of giving them away?” Some people feel that we are asking too much of the working poor community we serve. Yet, the reality is that Hope CommUnity Center chooses to hold the Toy Sale instead of a toy giveaway because:

**We believe in creating opportunities for everyone to give and receive.**

As a service learning community, we feel it’s important that all community members feel that they are both givers and receivers. The Sin Fronteras Youth Group plans and organizes the Toy Sale. Shopping at the Toy Sale is one way that community members can serve. When parents purchase gifts for their children, they are investing in Hope CommUnity Center’s mission and services that benefit their families. They are putting money back into their community and funding a brighter future for the area’s working poor residents.

Like everyone else, parents in our working poor community want to be able to provide a Merry Christmas for their children.

Many children who receive holiday donations from local charities rarely get to experience the joy of getting a Christmas gift selected by and from a parent. While their parents are glad to get assistance, they often feel like inadequate providers because they can’t participate in this season of giving.

**The 2013 Toy Sale was an empowering experience for over 400 Central Florida families.**

This year, we sorted, priced and sold over 3000 toys making it possible for children to receive brand new gifts from family and friends. The Toy Sale continues to be very popular with both the parents and the children in our community. People keep attending because it is a chance to shop with dignity and to shop with a purpose and have their hard-earned money go back to supporting the many programs and services offered at HCC.
Thirteen years ago, Laura Firtel came to Hope CommUnity Center (then Office for Farmworker Ministry) as a Notre Dame AmeriCorps member. Today, she is in a dynamic leadership role at Hope CommUnity Center.

Before coming to Hope, Laura had a 20-year career as a city planner. However, as time wore on, she decided that it was time for a change. While job searching, she learned about AmeriCorps and began to wonder if that was just what she needed. In pursuit of a suitable AmeriCorps position, she interviewed with several organizations. However, she did not consider working with Hope CommUnity Center until a friend urged her to get in touch with an eclectic group of nuns in Apopka.

Prior to setting foot in the Office for Farmworker Ministry, she wasn’t sure what to make of the organization’s name. Laura wasn’t sure that working for a ministry was right for her. Yet, when Laura arrived for her meeting with Sister Ann Kendrick, she found the organization’s atmosphere to be a welcome surprise. The office was bustling with activity. Coworkers were calling to each other from across the room, parents were feeding their babies, and volunteers were doing health assessments with farm workers. The energy behind the doors of Office for Farmworker Ministry is what drove Laura to serve the organization as an NDA AmeriCorps member for two and a half years. Still, her transition from the corporate world to Hope CommUnity Center was not easy. She described her first AmeriCorps year as a “humbling experience.” As a tutor at Apopka Elementary School and at Young at Heart (now Kids in Motion), she struggled to understand the youth she worked with and why they were not succeeding. Eventually, she learned that the road to results was not a straight path for most of these children. For some of them, home issues severely affected their academic performance. “I realized I could not just lift the lid of child’s head and pour knowledge in,” she said.

In her second year, she continued tutoring and also organized special projects at Office for Farmworker Ministry. She put together a “Take Your Daughter to Work” day, created a youth writer’s group, and spearheaded a quilt project. These projects put her on the path to her current role at Hope.

Shortly after her second AmeriCorps term ended, Office for Farmworker Ministry received a grant from the Department of Juvenile Justice and she was hired to administrate it. By the time the grant ended, there was a new opening at HCC – one of the NDA Site Directors left, so Laura took on that position.

One of Laura’s favorite parts of her job is starting a new AmeriCorps team. “I love seeing what people can do,” she said, “and watching new members learn to work through the process of figuring things out.” Year after year, she continues to be surprised by the younger AmeriCorps members.

To Laura, Hope CommUnity Center (formerly OFFM) is a place where people can fall in love with their service and the community. She believes volunteers and community members undergo a “transformative process that is different from [what you will get from] anywhere else.”

Outside of being an essential part of Hope CommUnity Center, Laura is also mother to an adult daughter and grandmother to 2 children. She’s lived throughout Central Florida for 35 years and is proud to say that she now feels very much like an Apopkan.
Hope’s First Solidarity Dinner Was a Blast!

‘A Night of Solidarity’ was a powerful experience. Community activists, students, white-collar professionals, Hope CommUnity families and others came together in the name of social justice. The evening that unfolded fed guests’ minds, bodies and spirits. Photos tell the story of Hope’s event and main social justice issue of immigration reform which Hope has been in support of for decades.

Breaking Down the Walls of Injustice for More Peaceful Virtues to Prevail

Injustice Will Not Stand

In solidarity all the attendees called for the “wall” to come down!

A larger than life butterfly, a symbol for the immigration rights movement, sailed above the audience.

Attendees connected with new organizations during the tabling fair, guests made new friends and children enjoyed different kinds of music and a humble meal of rice and beans.

Before leaving, Sergio Torres from the community said it best, “This was the first time my family and I came to something like this. To see and to be with all the people was a spectacular experience. I know that everyone took away something special in their heart from all the messages and testimonies. Thank you Hope and God bless you!”
Flor Foundation, Youth, and Donors Make Thanksgiving a True Season of Sharing

The Flor Foundation founded by HCC board member, Flor Tovar, hosted a lovely Thanksgiving meal at Hope CommUnity Center. Over 300 people were served by 58 awesome volunteers from The Flor Foundation. It was a great afternoon full of joy, delicious food and family togetherness. Backpacks, provided by United Way, were distributed to the children. Prior to the luncheon, HCC youth helped pack and distribute 200 bags of food and 200 donated turkeys to families that were unable to attend the luncheon on Thanksgiving Day.
Sixty Students Complete 12 Weeks of English as a Second Language Class

During the graduation services, student, Mary Logka from Egypt asked to express herself in English to Bea Beardsworth, HCC’s Director of Adult Education and to instructor, Mike Caroline. Speaking with clarity, correctness and confidence, she said, “You are wonderful teachers. You are friendly, lovely and nice. We feel in this class that we are one family.”

Entertainment in both the morning and evening classes was provided by participants and children of students. Level 3 class sang Feliz Navidad and seven year old Christopher Silva performed a song on his recorder. HCC Board members, Maggie Woods and Roxanne Rose, provided cake and certificates.

Partnership with Northrup Grumman Brings New Educational Opportunities to HCC

This fall marked the beginning of a great partnership with Northrup Grumman, a leading aerospace and defense technology company. Their Laser Systems office in Apopka pledged to help our youth get access to more educational opportunities outside of the classroom.

It all began when a group of Northrup Grumman employees led by Luis Carillo reached out to our College and Career Access Program. Inspired by the program’s work preparing students for high school and post-graduation options, the employees decided they wanted to get involved. However, this team wanted to do more than just write a check. Employees from Northrup Grumman have been tutoring students in math and science at HCC and every Friday since the beginning of the fall.

On Friday, December 6, youth in our after school tutoring programs got a hands-on lesson in laser science. Engineering professionals taught them how lasers work and how the military uses them in their defense plan. Then, Orlando Science Center representatives gave participants a chance to build models of laser systems.

This fun and educational event was sponsored by Northrup Grumman.
November 21, 2013 HCC took Apopka High School’s College Career and Access Network (CCAN) Club on a trip to the Le Cordon Bleu culinary school in Orlando. Many of the students had seen the school’s TV commercials, but going there in person was a truly exciting experience for them.

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Through our College and Career Access program, we help youth learn about the grades and classes needed to have a competitive transcript for college, the college application process and career paths. Students in this program take trips to colleges and universities, learn about ways to pay for school (financial aid, scholarship) essay writing and get to connect with potential employers.

On November 16 -17, the Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC) was held in Miami, Florida. The FLIC Congress was a precursor to FLIC hosting the National Immigrant Integration Conference in Miami. Hope CommUnity Center attendees were, Sin Fronteras youth leaders, Felipe Gaona and Luis Barbosa, and Service Learning Director, Jose Luis Marantes. Luis Barbosa commented, “I was amazed at how many people in power do support immigration reform. I was proud to be able to share my story to hundreds of people.” Felipe said, “I had no idea I would learn so much more about immigration reform.

The Hope CommUnity Center renewed its commitment to the struggle for immigrant rights along with 100 member groups that comprised the Florida Immigrant Coalition. Together along with allies, organizers and leaders across the state, the delegates decided to continue its commitment to immigration reform with a path to citizenship along with applying pressure to the Obama Administration to stop the deportations and expand relief to immigrant families.

At least twice yearly the Sin Fronteras Youth group has a Community Flea Market to raise money for the youth program. They organize, manage and market the event. This year the youth made $1200.

Christmas Parade 2013

At this year’s Apopka Christmas Parade, Hope CommUnity Center took first place for the Most Creative Float. Staff, volunteers, and community members presented a “Tacky Florida Christmas” theme that mixed traditional Christmas decorations with tacky Florida tourist outfits. HCC’s Notre Dame AmeriCorps team spearheaded the float construction and decoration.

Second Hearts For Hope Luncheon Coming Soon!

February 10, 2014
11:30am - 1:00 pm
St. Mary Magdalen Church
861 Maitland Avenue
Altamonte Springs, FL 32701
Call Michael Cantillo, Director of Development, for more information at 407.880.4673. Ext: 227
Hope CommUnity Center has wings because of our volunteers. Every day, they uplift the spirits of community members in need and they allow our organization to fly to greater heights. On October 24, HCC hosted a Volunteer Appreciation Night to recognize the many ways that volunteers have helped us soar.

Nearly 75 volunteers joined us for an evening reception and program in their honor. Attendees included longtime volunteers, such as, former Board of Directors’ members and current Community Advisory Board members, as well as newer supporters like the 2013 – 2014 Notre Dame AmeriCorps team.

At the start of the night, friends and colleagues got a chance to chat over light appetizers. Then, staff members delivered messages of gratitude and testified about the positive effects our volunteers create. One by one, the staff called on each category of volunteers to stand and they were recognized with applause. Before closing out the program, Volunteer Coordinator, Lynn Devanie announced a new volunteer recognition initiative, the Pathway of Hope and Gratitude. Each year a few volunteers will have their names engraved on bricks in a pathway leading to the center. A formal brick-laying ceremony will be held in the Spring.

Hope CommUnity Center is blessed to have volunteer, Margaret Curran who shows up regularly to help with anything and everything. Every week, Margaret pitches in wherever there is a need. She describes her contribution to Hope CommUnity Center as “filling the need of the day.” Her tasks have included translating official documents (such birth certificates and marriage certificates) from Spanish to English, organizing our food pantry, and proofreading letters to donors and more.

She began volunteering with our organization in June 2013, however she has been aware of Hope CommUnity Center for decades. A Florida resident since 1988, she’s heard about the impact the Sisters of Notre Dame were making in Apopka for years. All the while, Hope CommUnity Center remained in her thoughts and she decided once she had time to give she would become a regular volunteer.

Margaret is drawn to Hope CommUnity Center because ministry has always been a part of her life. For 25 years, she was a Catholic school principal. She also volunteers with the Diocese of Orlando helping the local Catholic community at large. However, she feels that working with Hope Community Center is a unique experience. In her eyes, the organization meets many different community needs, but it’s done in an empowering way. “Hope doesn’t do things for people, it helps people do things for themselves, which is more powerful,” she said. Margaret believes this philosophy plays a key role in the success we’ve had with both youth and adult community leaders.