2015 WINTER NEWSLETTER

It’s 2015...and we’re off and running! Here at Hope, our busiest season for Service Learning Immersion is underway. On our first day back after the holidays, HCC staff and AmeriCorps members barely had time to say “Happy New Year!” before greeting an energetic immersion group from Loyola.

Thirteen enthusiastic participants from Loyola University in Baltimore made up our first immersion group of 2015. They arrived ready to work, and that was a good thing, because their mornings were spent weeding cabbage, harvesting kale and working in plant nurseries.

Like the agricultural workers beside them, the Loyola students experienced the surprising extremes of Florida winter weather, sweating in the fields one day and shivering the next when a cold snap moved in.

“I knew that the farmwork was hard, but actually experiencing it shocked me,” said Nicholas Musacchio. “I was surprised how many immigrants like my host dad do such exhausting work, yet still find time to balance work with family time.”

Unlike the real campesinos, our visitors stopped at noon, and were very glad to return to the Hope Center for hearty lunches packed by their host families. After lunch, the group spent the rest of their immersion days on the learning aspect of their Service Learning Immersion.

But if you think that learning is not also service, you haven’t been listening to Sister Ann! Continued on the next page...

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“I was amazed at just how physically draining and tedious the work was, and people much older were doing a better job at it and acting as if it were nothing,” said participant Janai Prophet.
“The willingness to learn about the difficulties faced by immigrants and farmworkers, that opening of your mind and your heart and letting yourself be changed, that is service,” says Ann, with characteristic passion.

A “Bringing Hope Home” session provides resources and encouragement for students to share their immersion experiences, which include sessions about immigration and poverty, the “Toxic Tour” of the Lake Apopka area, and first-hand immigrant stories told by members of Hope’s community.

Immigrant Stories

One of those immigrant stories was told by a young teen, Bryan, who had to leave his home in Honduras when his family couldn’t afford to pay the impuesto (tax) demanded by the local gang who would otherwise kill him, as they later did kill several of his relatives.

Through an interpreter, Bryan told the group of the danger, hunger and fatigue of his three-month trip through Central America and Mexico, during which his money was stolen by police and he dared not sleep for 36 hours at a time while riding on top of La Bestia, the train they call “The Beast.”

The Loyola students were visibly moved during this and all the other immigrant stories. “This has made me even more committed to my work for social justice,” said participant Giana Labanca.

Host Families: A Warm Welcome

When evening came, our tired students returned to a cozy community of host families in the Chalet North community in Apopka, where they enjoyed home-cooked tamales, multi-family meals, and games with friendly children. The students were amazed by the level of hospitality.

“I am a complete stranger, coming from a completely different background, I’m stealing a 17 year old’s bedroom, and I don’t speak the language they feel most comfortable speaking,” said Paul Sikora, and yet “the Barbosas have the most welcoming and friendly house I’ve ever been in.”

It’s true — the immigrant families who serve as hosts are amazing in their generosity! In return, the families feel rewarded, they tell us, by the chance to learn about distant places and college experiences.

It’s the Hope philosophy in action: Through serving, we learn; through learning, we serve. Everybody wins, and lasting friendships are made.

“They really love and serve so willingly when they have little, comparatively, and live under risk of deportation. It’s incredible,” says Brianna Ciccarino. In her exit survey, Brianna went on to express exactly what we hope our immersion participants will feel:

“I really learned what true love is and what a true heart of service is. It’s not just built into a program, in service hours, but in your everyday actions.”
Thoughts on Service Learning Immersion from Sister Ann

It isn’t rocket science, nor does it cost millions of dollars. Service Learning is simply heart to heart, hand to hand, people from very different social classes, educational backgrounds, races, and cultures coming together. They tell their stories, make profound connections, and become allies for life.

When immersion participants come to our community, work in the fields, and stay with immigrant, farm-working and often undocumented families, they nearly always experience a reality previously unknown to them. They learn first-hand about the challenges of poverty, immigration status, inadequate education, racism, pesticide exposure and food insecurity.

That sounds a little overwhelming, doesn’t it? But please don’t think that it is grim, because it’s not at all! Participants also experience the generosity, hopes, dreams, resilience, and struggle for justice of an often-maligned or forgotten people. And host families find acceptance and respect from former strangers.

As I watch this miracle happen during each immersion, I think, “If we could bottle this, we could change the world.” Community is created and the world is changed one aware heart at a time. WOW! Come join us! — Sister Ann Kendrick

“As I watch this miracle happen during each immersion, I think, “If we could just bottle this, we could change the world.”

Service Learning Immersion Can Be Powerful in Just a Weekend or a Day!

Not everyone is able to take a whole week to stay with a host family here in Apopka and experience a full Service Learning Immersion. For those who need a shorter program, we have an alternative: a weekend or day-long immersion. When local groups spend even just a day at Hope, the experience can still be very powerful.

A recent short-term immersion group was made up of families who participate in the Disney Family “VoluntEARS” program. In addition to donating food and packing “sharing bags” for families who are struggling, the VoluntEARS lent their ears (excuse the pun!) and opened their hearts to the stories of two young immigrants during the learning portion of the day.

“Everyone was blown away,” wrote trip co-ordinator Betty Martinez Lowery in an e-mail after the event. “It was a great morning, and for all who were there, life-changing.” For information on planning a Service Learning Immersion at Hope, contact Danny Summerlin at 407-880-4673, ext. 223 or e-mail servetolearn@hcc-offm.org.
Big things are happening at Hope in...

Immigration & Citizenship

Last year at this time, there were two people in Hope’s Immigration Department: Elizabeth “Beth” Riebel and Eli Garcia. Now, there are five and a half, including two AmeriCorps members...but those original two are busier than ever!

Beth Riebel, an attorney in her native Colombia, took leadership of our Immigration department during a time of rapid growth due to a large grant Hope received last fall. Her office is a hub of activity as she manages the many projects of the department and takes individual appointments with members of the community. “We don’t give legal advice here,” says Beth. “But we can point the way to official information, and we can support people as they gather all the paperwork for DACA or citizenship.” (Our grant partner, Catholic Charities, provides legal consultation.)

Eli Garcia is the other linchpin of the department, always ready with a smile and willingness to help. Eli has been working on immigration issues since 2010 and is very knowledgeable about DACA and about DAPA, the new Executive Action (see opposite page for story). Eli is a community organizer, does outreach, and is also an important part of our Service Learning Immersion program. She just earned her A.A. at Seminole and will start at UCF this fall.

New Citizenship Staff Join the HCC Team, Thanks to USCIS Grant

In mid-September, Hope received some great news! HCC was one of 40 organizations in the country selected to receive a major two-year grant from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for expanding our citizenship preparation program. The grant enabled us to add two staff members to our immigration department to handle this expanded work.

Lorena Tovar comes to us after spending two years as an AmeriCorps member with Public Allies, where she worked on outreach and education for Harbor House. A recent UCF grad, Lorena is a native Colombiana who brings lots of positive energy (and occasional spontaneous dancing!) to the job of Citizenship Coordinator. Lorena works on outreach and recruitment of students and volunteer teachers, and manages the enrollment and progress of students. Lorena and her mother recently became U.S. citizens. Lorena’s mother, Ingrid, is the smiling woman gracing our recent Citizenship posters. (That’s her over on the right...you thought she was a model, didn’t you?)

Sandy Lipten (at left) is not a new face around Hope, but she is new to the Immigration team. Formerly an AmeriCorps here at HCC, she now works part-time with the citizenship program, managing the data for grant-related reporting. Sandy also works on Hope’s media and communications.

Lorena Tovar is our new Citizenship Coordinator. Her mom, Ingrid (below) is the new citizen shown on our posters!
November 20, 2015: Hope Community Gathered to Watch Obama Announce Deportation Relief for Many Immigrant Parents

Members of the Hope community waited anxiously together at the center on Thursday, November 20, 2014, in anticipation of President Obama’s announcement of Executive Action to give deportation relief to some of the millions of undocumented immigrants who have been living in the shadows.

As Obama spoke, reactions in the crowd were emotional. There were tears of celebration and relief for those parents who realized they were eligible for the new Deferred Action for Parental Accountability. But there were also tears of disappointment and frustration for those left out.

In short, parents may be eligible for work authorization and deportation relief if they have at least one child who is a U.S. citizen or permanent legal resident. Parent and child must have been in the country for at least five years and present in the U.S. on Nov. 20, 2014. There are other details that might cause disqualification.

The application process has not yet begun, and as of this writing, the state of Florida has joined a multi-state lawsuit to bar the action.

At Hope, our work is cut out for us as we learn the details of DAPA, plan outreach efforts to educate our community, and prepare to assist people in gathering documentation. Find more DAPA information, including links to government sites, at Hope’s site: www.hcc-offm.org.

Citizenship Classes at Hope: “It feels like a family!”

The “family feeling” that we have here at Hope draws comments from many people in our Citizenship classes, especially during events like the Citizenship’s Christmas “fiesta de traje” (potluck). What a sharing of warm feelings and amazing homemade food—just look at that spread in the photo to the left!

But for a number of our citizenship participants, it’s more than just feeling like they’re with family — they really are with their family here at Hope.

Every Tuesday, five members of the Martinez family come to Citizenship: Andres Junior and Senior, Magaly, and Magaly’s sister and niece, Lourdes and Ambar Hidalgo. This Dominican family is very dedicated. An example: Ambar sat through class with labor contractions, then showed up in class the next week with her new baby!

Another family group are the ladies of the Bernales family: Catalina, Maria and Mirella. They all bring the same warm Bernales smile — as you can see in these photos of Mirella and Maria.
**Postcard from Sister Maureen...**

she’s moved to Rome, but still here in our hearts!

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**New Shoes for 300 Hope Kids, Thanks to Payless**

This year, Hope was again selected as a nonprofit partner for the national “Payless Gives Shoes 4 Kids” program. This donation provided Hope with 300 Payless gift cards. In December, we took a shopping trip with 47 children and youth from our community. Thanks, Payless Shoes!

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**Grant from Conference of Bishops Will Promote Youth Storytelling**

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops approved our $5000 grant proposal for “My Story, Your Story, Our Story: A Lenten Immigrant Journey.” This program will promote unity and self-advocacy through sharing of immigrant stories among our youth group: Sin Fronteras, DACA Dreamers, and Caminantes (those who recently crossed the border without an adult). Watch for more on this exciting program!

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**A Big Check from Wells Fargo**

Wells Fargo presented Hope with a check for $10,500 during our Sin Fronteras youth group meeting on December 3, 2014. The funds will help pay for College and Career Access activities for our youth. Kate Wilson and Miguel Maldonado of Wells Fargo made the presentation and became acquainted with some of our wonderful Sin Fronteras members. Thanks, Wells Fargo!

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**Thank you, Annunciation!**

Nilka Melendez and David Crump were pleased to represent Hope in accepting a generous $7,500 grant from Annunciation Catholic Church in Altamonte, presented by Tom Murphy and Fr. Stephen Parkes. The grant will support youth programs here at Hope. We are grateful!
Like Mother, Like Daughter...Learning Leads to Service at Hope

Hannia Barbosa, age 15, doesn’t remember much about her trip from Mexico when she was a very little girl. But she remembers how many people her mother could turn to for help when the family arrived in Apopka: zero. “Then,” says Hannia, “she met the nuns.” And we all know how that changes things!

First, Hannia’s mother, Alicia Perez, signed up for English at GROWS (Greater Reading Or Writing Skills, a project of the Sisters’ original ministries), then was recruited by Sister Ann into an early session of HCC’s Nurturing Parenting program. Alicia has stayed involved in many ways: serving on our Community Advisory Board, providing fantastic homemade guacamole, cutting Sister Ann’s hair, and opening her home to participants in our Service Learning Immersion program. And when we started our very first Kids Camp, 10 years ago, Alicia made sure that her children were enrolled, including little Hannia, then just five.

And that was just the beginning for Hannia! By 2007, she was so much a part of Hope that she was asked to turn a ceremonial shovel of dirt at the groundbreaking for our building. In 2010, she became a young advocate for immigration reform, traveling with her family and a group from Hope to Washington D.C. to join a crowd of 200,000 for the 2010 March for America. Finally, last year, Hannia was old enough to join the Sin Fronteras group for high school youth, where her older brother Luis was already active.

Now on the Youth Leadership Team, Hannia attends biweekly planning sessions in addition to the weekly Sin Fronteras meetings. She helps young students with schoolwork during Hope’s afternoon tutoring. In the summers, she is a counselor in the Kids Camp that she once attended as a camper.

And she helps out at Hope every time she is asked. “You call her and she never says no,” says Youth Director Nilka Melendez.

Hannia’s involvement with Hope earned her a trip to the Florida Immigrant Coalition Annual (FLIC) Congress. She was among the youngest, but held her own and learned a lot about DAPA. “I started to feel older than I really am,” she said. She’s ready to take on more responsibility, working at Hope’s DAPA clinics to share what she learned.

What would Hannia do without Hope? “I can’t even say,” she says. “I’m just so glad it’s here.”

Sin Fronteras Youth Focus on Service All Year Long

Yes, Hannia Barbosa (above) is terrific...but she’s certainly not the only terrific teen at Hope. Our Sin Fronteras group is blessed with dozens of wonderful young people who enrich our community with their service and smiles. It is hard to imagine how we would get everything done without them!

The Toy Sale is one example of how vital these teenagers are, collectively giving hundreds of hours to the event. Also in December, youth from Sin Fronteras were the “cast” in the Posada celebration. In mid-January, bearing handmade signs of love, hope and justice, they were a big part of Hope’s vibrant presence in the MLK Parade in South Apopka. And there’s much more, all year ‘round!

The next big event for Sin Fronteras is the annual Kermes festival in March. Watch our Facebook page for date and times.
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.

Hope Grads & Staff Commended by President of Seminole State

The recent Seminole State College graduation was a special one for Hope. President Ann McGee, in her address to the crowd, mentioned HCC and recognized the Hope graduates shown above: Eli Garcia, Sarah Rivera, Ely Castillo and Agostina Bellini.

President McGee also commended Sister Ann Kendrick, Sister Teresa McElwee, Sister Gail Grimes, Mary Carroll and Laura Firtel for their dedication and hard work. Hope partners with SSC in identifying recipients of scholarships and providing tutoring support.

TUTORS DESPERATELY NEEDED!

If you are 18 or over and can help with reading or math at the elementary, middle or high school level, kids need your help at Hope’s after-school tutoring. Please help!

High School:
   Thursdays 2:30–4 pm at HCC

Elementary:
   Monday/Thursdays 3:30–5pm at HCC,
   Monday/Thursdays 5–6pm at Chalet North
   Tuesdays/Thursdays 3:30–5pm at Brightwood

Please contact Lynn: 407-880-4673, ext. 222 or ldevanie@hcc-offm.org.