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Steans Center Newsletter

Steans Center

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Making a Difference: Building Healthcare Partnerships in Back of the Yards

By Dan Baron

Late one afternoon in the Back of the Yards neighborhood on the city’s southwest side, young men and women access the kind of health service that may seem routine, but in reality can be tough to find in this low-income neighborhood.

They have just walked into a conference room at Second Chance Alternative School, where they receive services from a clinic that counsels, educates and tests them for three different sexually transmitted infections. The students – who range in age from about 14 to 17 – receive these services through an innovative effort that results from a partnership between DePaul’s graduate nursing program and many people and organizations in the community. The specific aim of the project is to develop a culturally sensitive sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention program for Hispanic young adults.

Howard Brown provided training and educational materials for Alivio Medical Center nurses and DePaul nursing students; Alivio arranged for staff nurses to conduct STI screening services, and will also provide for follow-up testing, treatment and counseling as needed. San Miguel School and Holy Cross Parish Nursing recruit for the screenings.

The screenings have been offered since last November. Later, screenings were moved from a local food pantry to the school, where participants in the project felt they would be better able to reach the targeted audience of young adults. Results of the tests are completely confidential.

The project emphasized the importance of using community resources and assets to provide a key service. “So many times with community health, we talk about problems, but here there are a lot of strengths – resources in a community that exist to help address specific concerns,” says Dr. Susan Poslusny, Chair of the Department of Nursing. “What students gain is a view of the community that is resource-focused, not problem-focused. The idea is to promote prevention by getting people to adopt healthy behaviors.”

“This project also makes great sense for nursing students,” she adds, “because in nursing, service learning is a core part of the education. That is how you learn and practice.”

Origins of project

A few years ago, the Department of Nursing was looking for sites to place nursing students who focused on community health. At about the same time, Steans was building connections in the neighborhood, and DePaul students were tutoring students at San Miguel School as part of their service learning requirements. Meanwhile, a community group, Mujeres Decididas Para Mejorar La Comunidad (Women Committed to Improving the Neighborhood), raised issues of community safety, community health and access to medical services.

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Every week this spring, Charlene Rhinehart returned to the Englewood neighborhood where she lived for the first eight years of her life. Her trips, though, were not about visiting old friends and favorite places. They were about giving back to the community.

Rhinehart has been a tutor at Visitation School in Englewood for two years through the Steans Center’s Catholic Schools Initiative, which is now in its third year. Through the program, students are employed as tutors and mentors in two K-12 urban Catholic schools on the city’s south side, Visitation and San Miguel School, which is located in the Back of the Yards community. Students typically spend 15 to 20 hours a week at a school.

The program is in the process of being expanded from two schools to four later this year—and will be expanded even further to six schools in the 2007-2008 school year. Through this program, DePaul—a Catholic, Vincentian urban university—can support Catholic schools serving kids from low-income families. As the program expands, Steans will also be in a position to connect more service learning opportunities to Catholic school partners.

Rhinehart, a sophomore in accounting, says the reason she applied is because “I understand what it’s like to grow up in a low-income community. Having someone there to guide you can make a difference in your life.” In the future, Rhinehart says she would like to connect her current field of study with community involvement—perhaps by teaching people about financial literacy (Rhinehart is also minoring in Community Service Studies).

On a typical day, she says, she will tutor a student for about 45 minutes in math, reading and spelling. She will work with two or three kids—all are from the second, third and fourth grades—in the course of an afternoon. Two other DePaul students from the CSI program have also tutored students at Visitation this year.

Tutors like Rhinehart provide one-on-one and small group assistance that can be hard to find. “My goal is to make learning fun for them, find creative and innovative ways to teach children through spelling bees, math competitions, and other activities. One of the goals is to close the educational gap between low-income and wealthier communities.”

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One key aspect of the program is that tutors, like Rhinehart, often grew up near the school. Another is the consistency of the program, since tutors come to schools at least a couple times a week for two or three hours at a time. “We are a small school, very grassroots, that is run solely on donations,” says Emily Vogel, Director of Graduate Support at San Miguel School. “This program is a really good way to supplement the fact that we don’t have a lot of staff. Since tutors are here so regularly, the kids know them well. That relationship has been key, and the tutors embody what we are trying to do.”

CSI students are also required to enroll in CSS 101 (Catholic Social Teaching Reflection), a course that provides context for their experience in the schools and a chance to reflect on what they are learning. The class encourages students to consider social problems from a broader perspective and analyze the roots of complex issues. “The class gives me a big picture,” says Victoria Lopez, an education major at DePaul who tutors at San Miguel School through the CSI program. “The community gives me a personal experience.”

“This program is not just about placing students in tutoring situations in these communities, it is about trying to understand why these communities don’t receive the same kinds of resources as schools in more affluent communities,” adds Pauline Villapando, who teaches the course, and is the house coordinator for Vincent and Louis House, an intentional Catholic residential community.
The CSS class is held twice a month, for two hours, and counts toward a student’s Community Service Studies minor. Villapando said that the class is based on Catholic Social Teaching principles. “You can apply them regardless of your religion,” she says. “They are rooted in human dignity and tied to the idea that we all deserve certain rights.”

During the quarter, students will review case studies about creating safer neighborhoods, affordable housing and other important issues. “Reflection is a key aspect of this class,” Villapando adds. “We are interested in how one becomes more aware about these communities and issues. We don’t want to see the poor as ‘the other,’ but work with them on the journey together.”

“The idea,” says Villapando, “is that these things are possible.”

For Charlene Rhinehart, the program has shown her that a lot is possible – for students she tutors as well as herself. “They look up to me as a role model,” Rhinehart says. “They appreciate what we are doing, and when they see me, they say they want to go to college too. That motivates me to want to keep achieving.”

Art in the School:

DePaul Class Creates Mural with Grade School Students

Visitacion School has also been the site of another Steans-related project in the last year – a project that brought students to Visitacion to create a mural celebrating the school’s community.

“Students executed a mural with input from the school,” says Brother Mark Elder, who taught the ART 291 class last year that created the mural. “The idea they came up with was a tree based on the architectural elements they saw in the school. Every aspect of the tree featured logos that reflected the school and its scholarship programs, sports and commitment to education.”

DePaul students worked on the mural for six hours a week during Spring Quarter of last year. “We worked closely with students in the school and talked to them about what they wanted to see,” Elder says. “When you do that, you give people a chance to own the piece in their hearts.”

Merida: The Service Learner’s Study Abroad Choice

This year the Steans Center and Study Abroad launched a service learning component in the Winter Quarter Merida, Mexico program through offering CSS 201: Perspectives on Community Service - Merida. Through this course students had the opportunity to do service in the community of Emiliano Zapata Sur II, an impoverished community in Merida. Their service was facilitated through a partnership with the Marist University whose mission and dedication to service learning mirrors DePaul’s. Students had the opportunity to work with a community garden and nursery, at a community center, and with families living in Emiliano Zapata Sur. Their goal was to understand the effects of globalization and to see how it manifests itself within communities. In addition to the winter service learning program, two students remained during the spring service learning extension, now in its third year. The extension allows students the opportunity to extend their stay in Merida through an internship and enrollment in CSS 395: Community Internship. This Study Abroad program offers students the opportunity to complete two of the foundation courses in the Community Service Studies minor and the possibility of acquiring an elective within the minor. “With the potential to finish half of the six course minor, this program is designed to be the service learner’s Study Abroad Choice.”

Congratulations to the following Community Service Scholars on their 2007 graduation:

Selena Arana
Michael Bader
Bozena Biegovic
Eira Corral
Molly Medhurst

Lauren Moes
Maria Torres
Kara Worderich
Shelly Wilson

“Art was a good experience to see the positive aspects of this community,” says Kate Jadwin, a senior majoring in literature who took the class last year. “Through the class, students were exposed to a different community instead of making snap judgments about it.”
DePaul nursing faculty and students participated in a health fair at San Miguel School, and eventually they conducted a health assessment of the community. After STI was identified as a key issue, faculty and students developed education materials and made presentations to students and community members.

Research supports need for project
“The STI rate has been declining in Chicago, but increasing by two to three times in this community,” says Dr. Young-Me Lee, an assistant professor in the Department of Nursing who is leading the nursing department’s work in this project. “Many people don’t have health insurance, or face language barriers, or don’t have information about STI.” Research by Dr. Lee and her team showed that there was “high incidence of STI’s in the Back of the Yards community, especially for women as a result of a knowledge deficit of safer sex practices, symptoms recognition and ability to inform partners.” More than one of three people in the community are living below the poverty line, research showed, and STI rates are considerably higher in the community than in the general population.

The following year, Dr. Lee asked a group of nursing students to design an intervention program that focused in part on these issues.

Building a partnership
Although some may point out ways that STI workshops could be controversial, nursing students – and all partners in this project – were focused on the same goals. The focus was on preventing STIs by identifying the problem early, educating people and getting them treated.

To make that happen, partners in this project agree, a wide range of people and organizations focused on community health worked together. “No one organization owns this screening,” says Mike Anderer-McClelland, Principal & Campus Director, San Miguel School, Back of the Yards. “Everybody feels like it’s theirs. The Steans Center has not just been working with one organization, but has been able to work with several organizations. Steans has managed to get to know all of us.”

“For this project, credit is not as important as providing services to an underserved community,” adds Paco Zamora, Technical Assistance and Capacity Development Coordinator for Howard Brown Community Services.

Reaching the community
At Second Chance School, students who walk into the STI screening room go through three stations – intake, counseling and, finally, screening. Elizabeth Florez, a graduate of the nursing program who still volunteers at STI screenings, was involved in creating surveys and assessment worksheets that have been part of this effort. “As a nurse, you are always going to be educating people, and this project definitely brings you closer to the community. Once I leave the site of the screening, I feel so happy that I was able to help other people. If I just went to a job, or to school, I don’t know if it would be as fulfilling.”

Meanwhile, Sharon Dopak, who is completing her nursing degree this spring, says that participating in this project has fulfilled her hope to gain more experience in a community-based setting. “I really enjoy helping people when they are in situations where they don’t have resources or information about where to go,” she says. “I’ve also learned through this project that organization – and constant follow-up – are key when making partnerships work.”

Potential of program
The Department of Nursing’s experience in the Back of the Yards community is also serving as a model for its work in other underserved communities, says Dr. Poslusny. In the North Lawndale community, the Department of Nursing has been collaborating with four schools to provide a range of health-related services, including physicals and health education. “Our long-term goal here, as in Back of the Yards, is to develop a partnership so that we can maintain a continuing presence in communities and provide service learning opportunities for students,” she says. “That will include individual and group reflection.” The model is also being shared with other schools at DePaul, suggesting that it can work for those offering education, social work and other services.

“Our long-term goal here, as in Back of the Yards, is to develop a partnership so that we can maintain a continuing presence in communities and provide service learning opportunities for students.”

Meanwhile, partners in the STI program also say it could be replicated elsewhere in Chicago – and perhaps around the country. Maria Mendez, parish nurse for Holy Cross Hospital, has provided screening services at the STI screenings. “I think this is a very valuable program that would benefit many other communities,” adds Mendez. “In the Back of the Yards community, many parents and older people don’t have information about these issues – so how are they going to be able to talk to children about them?”

Though STIs have been controlled in many communities, there are still 19 million new cases every year, according to the Centers for Disease Control. About half of those cases involve young adults between the ages of 15 and 24. The prevalence of the problem, and promise of the partnership in the Back of the Yards community, suggests that this kind of partnership could make an impact in other communities that need similar services. “This experience has really taught us the importance of community partnerships,” says Dr. Lee. “We believe this effort could be a model for future projects.”

http://cbsl.depaul.edu
Healthcare and Education Access: The Role of Service Learning

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 45 million people live without health insurance in the U.S. and a recent report showed that about 1.8 million of them live in Illinois. At the same time, graduation rates at Chicago Public Schools illustrate that students have a little over 50% chance of earning a high school diploma. These numbers remain astounding to some, but are simply the reality for many residents of Chicago. At the Steans Center, we continuously ask ourselves: what is our role in addressing these crises; how can connecting students from DePaul courses to health- and education-related organizations contribute to any type of real social change; and given DePaul's educational mission, what can DePaul students learn about concepts, theories, and methods from engaging in community projects that seek to address inequities in access to health and education?

Depending on how one looks at the problems, the answers to the above questions can be either troubling or invigorating. On the troubling side, we know that even the 2,700 DePaul students that engaged in academically-based service learning during this academic year can only have a minimal impact (if that) on addressing issues such as the healthcare and education access dilemmas faced by many Chicagoans. In reality, the predicament of these residents is (or perhaps should be) in the hands of public policy makers who can, at minimum, take the lead in fashioning a response. On the invigorating side, we know that DePaul students are working alongside community organizations and schools that can’t afford to wait for legislative decisions and have to act now to find ways to make sure that the sick are healed and the young receive a quality education. This type of engagement is indeed a fundamental part of DePaul’s Vincentian mission.

Through projects like the ones outlined in this quarter’s newsletter, DePaul students are living DePaul’s mission. They are not only learning about the ways that communities are addressing the need for good healthcare and education, but they are learning about how scholars apply theory to practice in the creation of new and applied knowledge. The work of DePaul’s Nursing department shows that the interests of community health organizations fit well with the interest of educating graduate-level nursing students on ways to participate in addressing the vast challenges of healthcare in Chicago neighborhoods like Back of the Yards and North Lawndale. Likewise, the efforts of students involved in the Steans Center’s Catholic Schools Initiative, a program with a curricular link to Catholic Social Teaching, demonstrates how Catholic universities can increase the probability that Catholic middle and high school students can have the option to attend college. The initiative also provides a community context for applying theories and concepts drawn from Catholic Social Teaching learned in the classroom.

As we continue to build a national model of Vincentian service learning, we may be fruitless in expecting to resolve the big challenges of ensuring that all residents of Chicago have access to a decent education and to healthcare services. Perhaps the more invigorating way to look at the goals of our work is to continue to find ways for DePaul students to participate in the present-day struggles of those without access to these resources, while at the same time producing graduates who, through applying theory in the community, have learned to become public and private sector leaders in the efforts for larger systemic change.

Howard Rosing
Executive Director

Website:
http://cbsl.depaul.edu
Budapest, Hungary: Expanding our International Service Learning program to Europe

In conjunction with Study Abroad and through the initiation of Professor Richard Farkas, in Political Science, the Steans Center has introduced a service learning component to the Budapest Summer Study Abroad program. This program allows DePaul students the opportunity to engage in service learning with DIA (Foundation for Democratic Youth), a public benefit non-profit organization which believes that democratic values and related attitudes can be acquired by experience. DIA develops democratic citizenship skills in young people (14-25) by using service learning methodology and strives to embed this approach in the education and youth structure of Hungary and the region. In collaboration with Study Abroad, the Steans Center provides the opportunity for students to engage in social justice-oriented, mission-based, academically-relevant service learning in international settings.

For more information on our international service learning programs please contact Marisol Morales at mmorale1@depaul.edu

McCormick Tribune Community Internships

The Steans Center congratulates this year’s McCormick Tribune Community Interns. Through a generous gift from the McCormick Tribune Foundation the Center provides funding for DePaul undergraduates to participate in advanced internships in community-based organizations throughout Chicago. The interns are accepted through a competitive application process which evaluates the students’ prior community engagement experiences and the capacity of their proposed internship to support the application of knowledge and skills for the benefit of a community organization. The interns are our best and brightest DePaul undergraduates who have exhibited a commitment to community action, service and academic excellence from all disciplines and departments at DePaul.

Eira Corral
Eira worked with both the United States Hispanic Leadership Institute and the Centro de Información in order to analyze community development within the emerging suburban Latino community of Hanover Park, IL.

Mollie Haley
Mollie worked with the Women and Girls Collective Action Network to assist with a documentation project and a series of meetings with social activist and advocacy groups involved in community organizing and community accountability work in Chicago.

Phillip Jones
Phillip worked with the Pilsen Alliance to study the effects of gentrification on the residents of Pilsen, to learn about and participate in community organizing actions, and to work on summarizing literature that will be translated to Spanish as a means to educate and empower Pilsen residents.

Selene Arana
Selene worked with the staff of Casa Catalina Food Pantry in her own community of Back of the Yards to develop mental health workshops and information material for local residents.

Usra Ghazi
Usra worked with the Interfaith Youth Core on various small projects and long-term assignments such as IFYC's Chicago Youth Council and the Global Youth Exchange, an international initiative funded with the support of Queen Rania of Jordan and former President Bill Clinton.

Ellen Miller
Through a collaborative project between the Steans Center and DePaul’s Asylum/Immigration Legal Clinic, Ellen worked at World Relief where she assisted clients in completing immigration applications including translating official documents and conducting legal research.

Shannon Harmon
Shannon coordinated an Art Club at Visitation Catholic School twice per week. She established a curriculum that exposed students to various art media and history through projects and presentations.