Community Snapshot

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COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

A PERSONAL DESIRE TO GIVEBACK

When I arrived at 1347 W. Erie Street in Chicago’s West Town neighborhood I entered the historical one hundred and thirty six-year-old community house, known as Erie Neighborhood House or La Casa Erie to many of its clients, and soon found myself becoming part of their wonderful community service mission. Immediately, I felt welcomed by Erie Neighborhood House which is known as an inclusive community space that welcomes all people, especially those from the immigrant community. As a first-generation college student of immigrant parents, I desired to become a part of Erie Neighborhood House’s mission to serve in order to give back to my community and help out others so that they may have the opportunity to obtain a better education.

Education is at the heart of Erie Neighborhood House’s mission-as evidenced by the numerous educational programs available to the community-and I have the privilege of working with the Adult Literacy Program. I feel honored to be part of such a remarkable historical site, one that evolved into one of the most unique and comprehensive social service agencies in Chicago. Even though I know that I contribute to Erie Neighborhood House’s larger mission in a small way, I know that my desire to reach out to my fellow community members, through my work with the Intercambio language and cultural exchange program, is meaningful.

As an Intercambio mentor with the Irwin W. Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning, I have been able to build relationships between my fellow students at DePaul University and members of the Latino community. The Intercambio program is a unique foreign language immersion program which integrates community service into a three-course sequence of Spanish-language instruction in DePaul University’s Modern Language Department. Students enrolled in Intermediate Spanish with Service Learning participate in a weekly language and cultural exchange program with Latino community residents who are in the process of learning English. My role as an Intercambio mentor is to facilitate each three-hour session at Erie Neighborhood House through interactive activities and reflective discussions which are structured to assist both groups of students improve their oral and writing skills in English and Spanish while reflecting on their understanding of themselves, their communities, and the world.

In my experience at Erie Neighborhood House, I have encountered people from all walks of life. I especially loved working with the Latino adult students because they all impressed me with their willingness, eagerness, and determination to learn English. Most of the time, they desired to learn English in order to be able to obtain better jobs or just simply to be able to participate in the larger culture of the United States. The more I volunteered at Erie Neighborhood House, the more I felt it becoming my second home. I plan to continue to serve at Erie Neighborhood House because I believe in their mission of reaching out to those in need, like the large immigrant community from which I came.

CYNTHIA TORRES will be entering her sophomore year at DePaul University. To contact: ctorre12@depaul.edu
PHOTO DETAILS: Cynthia facilitating an Intercambio session at Erie Neighborhood House, October 2007.

ABOUT ERIE HOUSE:

Erie Neighborhood House empowers Latino and diverse low-income communities to reach their fullest potential with a range of award-winning educational programs for all ages. It helps promote a just and inclusive society by strengthening low-income, primarily Latino families through skill-building, access to critical resources, advocacy and collaborative action. Established in 1870 in the settlement house tradition, Erie House evolved into one of the first comprehensive social service agencies in Chicago and is now a recognized nonprofit leader. Erie’s educational programs reach over 5,000 participants annually, providing a pathway to success and strengthening communities.

Questions: info@eriehouse.org or visit http://www.eriehouse.org/
RESOURCES

The following are recommended for further reading and research. Most websites have links to other websites related to the main issues covered in this issue of Diálogo.

ACLU - American Civil Liberties Union
Executive Director: Colleen K. Connell
180 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 2300
Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 201-9740
www.aclu.org/

Amnesty International
5 Penn Plaza - 16th floor
New York, NY 10001
(212) 807-8400
www.amnesty.org/

Centro Sin Fronteras
2300 S. Blue Island Ave.
Chicago, Illinois 60608
(773) 523-8261
www.somosunpueblo.com

El Comedor de los Pibes
http://www.congresobolivariano.org/

ENCASA Cuba/USA
encasa-us-cuba@runbox.com
www.encasa-us-cuba.org/

Erie Neighborhood House
1347 West Erie Street
Chicago, Illinois 60622
(312) 666-3430
http://www.eriehouse.org

H.I.J.O.S.
http://www.hijos.org.ar/

Latin American Working Group
424 C Street NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-7010
www.lawg.org

Madres de Plaza de Mayo
Hipolito Yrigoyen 1584.
(1089) Buenos Aires, Argentina
(011) 4-383-0377
www.madres.org/

U.N. Decolonization Committee
http://www.un.org/rights/

UNICEF
125 Maiden Lane
New York, NY 10038
(800) 448-6423
www.unicefusa.org

United Nations Centre for Human Rights
United Nations Office at Geneva
8-14 Avenue de la Paix
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
(41) 22-917-3924

WOLA - Washington Office of Latin America
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 797-2171
www.wola.org/

World Social Forum
Rua General Jardim, 660 - 7th floor
São Paulo - SP
Brazil
http://www.worldsocialforum.org