

COMMUNITY UCONNECTIONS

Office of Community Outreach, University of Connecticut

America Reads Sites Anchor Community of Practice

by Jamie Carey & Cecily Faenza
NEAG '09 & CLAS '09

The Language and Literacy Community of Practice (CoP) is made up of programs that “work with children, adolescents, and college students to improve their literacy levels and mastery of the English language”, according to the Community Outreach website. Many of these programs are associated with the national America Reads initiative headed by the U.S. Department of Education that “challenges all Americans to help children read well and independently by the end of third grade.” At UConn, we focus individualized literacy tutoring on preschool to elementary age children.

The programs provide a fulfilling volunteer experience for University of Connecticut students. America Reads volunteers work in elementary schools and preschools located in the



greater Storrs areas as well as in Hartford. At these sites, volunteers work both in the classroom, and one on one with children to enhance language and literacy skills within suburban and urban communities. In addition many of our programs allow the volunteers to mentor the students on other subjects such as writing, math and science. The America Reads programs go beyond the classroom into after school programs which promote a positive attitude toward reading and encourage read-

ing outside the classroom. All the programs share a common goal of improving literacy among pre-school and elementary school children, but each of the six America Reads programs at UConn is unique in its own way.

There are five America Reads elementary school sites and five America Reads preschool sites. The elementary sites are located at Kinsella Elementary, Willington Center Elementary, Windham Center, Southeast Elementary and Mansfield After School Program.

Sabrina Ahmed is the Program Director for America Reads at Willington Center Elementary School, which is home to students from kindergarten to third grade from the northeastern corner of the state. Volunteers work with small groups of students who need extra help with their reading, writing, and comprehension skills. UConn

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Month of Kindness Set to Begin at UConn

by Alla Nebrat
Business '09

In 2001, Hillel and the Dean of Students Office embarked on a landmark initiative on the UCONN campus. Bringing together students,

faculty, and staff, the organizations worked diligently to create a “Month of Kindness” throughout the month of November. Since 2001, student organizations such as Hillel, Community Outreach, Idealists United, SUBOG and PIRG have banded together each

November, and participated in projects designed to promote kindness on campus. For five years, this initiative has brought in top notch speakers and programs, and has spurred other universi

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Volume 5, Issue 2

October 2007

Call for Action,

a weekly email bulletin, provides information on new service opportunities and related events occurring in the greater Storrs community.

To subscribe, please visit our

website at

www.volunteer.uconn.edu

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Jamie Carey

Cecily Faenza

Alla Nebrat

Josh Obeiter

Rama Yalamanchili

Community Outreach Branches into Advocacy

by Cecily Faenza
CLAS '09

Community Outreach is not only growing in terms of student involvement, but also in scope and program variety. This fall semester marks the dawn of The Advocacy Project, which will co-sponsor advocacy opportunities and possibly organize advocacy skills training sessions. Project leader, Noopur Vyas defines advocacy as “engagement at any level on behalf of issues that need attention.” She believes that the need for advocacy stems from a “perceived inequality” of some sort.

This new initiative is the brainchild of Community Outreach Program Advisor Gina DeVivo Brassaw, who hopes “to expand and support students’ active involvement in making our community stronger” through the Advocacy Project. Vyas feels Community Outreach’s “move into advocacy work in addition to its current direct and indirect service is

a natural progression, as leaders become interested in affecting positive change at the root of the problem.” The new project gives Community Outreach a point person of sorts for issues pertaining to advocacy on campus and in the community. Vyas hopes that the crea-

“...Community Outreach’s involvement in this area to grow and develop into a serious force on campus”

- Noopur Vyas

Advocacy Project Director

tion of the position will enable “Community Outreach’s involvement in this area to grow and develop into a serious force on campus.”

As the Advocacy Project Program Director, Vyas serves as a liaison be-

tween Community Outreach and advocacy minded student groups on campus. She works to make other groups aware of Community Outreach’s resources, the potential for co-sponsorships of programs they might be organizing, and to connect others with groups that might be organizing similar programs or have comparable objectives.

Vyas has spent this semester setting the foundation for future endeavors. She has spoken with student leaders inside and outside Community Outreach to get a feel for their work and program goals. In addition, Vyas has searched for relevant events to publicize through Community Outreach. While she hopes to co-sponsor more events in the spring, the main fall semester event will be the co-sponsorship of the lecture, A Talk on White Privilege which will discuss racism and white privilege in America on Thursday, November 8th at 7:00 pm in Arjona 143.

Generations Connect a Hit with All Ages

by Josh Obeiter
Business '09

Originally, when people hear the program name, Generations Connect, they often wonder about the purpose of the program and what it entails. As the name suggests, it is a program that links different generations with one another. In our case here at UCONN, it is our goal to provide a program that brings college students and the elderly together to combine the generations in order to learn about one another through a variety of activities.

Generations Connect is a weekly program that runs through the Office of Community Outreach. All of the volunteers are college students, and our initiative is to provide social and friendly visits to residents of Mansfield Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation. Our volunteers really try to understand the position that most of the residents are in at

the nursing home. Most volunteers know family members or friends that have been placed in a nursing home and can understand how dreariness and



The Mansfield Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation

repetition of the lifestyle. Many residents have little or no family remaining, and personal visits are all too few, making our visits even more important.

Located just minutes from campus, volunteers visit the nursing home every

Tuesday night to participate in a weekly activity that helps brighten the days of the seniors. Most of the time, our visits really do have an impact. Kate Harris, a first time volunteer at the nursing home already understands the impact she is having. “Each week the residents are thrilled to see us and I am just as enthused to hear about their weeks or play a competitive game of Connect Four. I feel like the smallest gesture of kindness to the residents is enough to brighten their days.”

Activities range from playing Bingo, to balloon volleyball, to playing musical trivia, to cooking. However, all activities have one goal in mind—to engage the nursing home citizens in exciting active ties where they can interact on a personal level with our volunteers. The volunteers’ presence at the nursing home allows for the Activities Department to

Sites Combine Reading with Fun Games

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students volunteer for two hours a week reading to students, helping students learn new words, practicing writing skills, and serving as a mentor. As Ahmed states, America Reads is "important to the community because we are able to provide extra help and attention to the children who need it most."

At Kinsella Elementary School, Hartford, Connecticut, UConn students work with a diverse student body in grades four through eight. Volunteers are placed in classrooms once a week to assist the teacher in executing various classroom activities and lessons, while building a relationship with the students. The site aims to have a direct impact on the students by increasing confidence, managing behavioral issues, and improving the quality of literacy.

According to Program Director Tierney, Meehan, volunteers are given a "unique

opportunity that is eye-opening in multiple ways. It is exciting and an incredible experience." The other three sites are unique but share the same fundamental



UConn alumnus Sara Topper reads with a Mansfield After School Program student last year

program goals.

Megan Rock is the America Reads

Preschool Program Director for the five UConn sites: Children's Community Center, Old Schoolhouse Home Day Care, Mansfield Discovery Day Care, Willington Nursing Co-op and Willow House. She describes all five sites as "creative and motivational learning environments" where volunteers help children improve their literacy and social skills through games and fun. Rock adds, "This is such a rewarding experience! There's nothing better than seeing a child's face light up when you walk through the door."

The America Reads program is influential in helping improve the literacy skills in America's youth. The sites are an excellent way for UConn students to get hands on experience while improving the lives of the children. If you are interested in volunteering, please visit www.volunteer.uconn.edu for individual program contacts.

SOS Food Recovery Makes Dual Impact

by Rama Yalamanchili
CLAS '10

Have you ever noticed the large amount of food remaining after either lunch or dinner in the dining hall? Have you ever thought it was such a pity to let all the food go to waste? These questions propelled UConn student Ashley Widtfeldt to found Save our Surplus (SOS) Food Recovery program last year through Towers Dining Hall. The SOS Food Recovery program has grown over the past year to encompass Student Union Catering and will eventually include Putnam Dining Hall.

SOS food recovery aims "to eliminate the waste surplus of food on campus, and also to deliver the surplus of food to the Covenant Soup Kitchen in Willimantic", according to Program Director Marshall Rivers. The program seeks to provide a consistent supply of well prepared meals to the soup kitchen. The food needs to be flash frozen to en-

sure that it is fresh. Unfortunately there are only a few places on campus with this capability. The program serves a dual purpose as it cuts down on unnecessary food waste and provides nourishment to those who need it the most.

Many may think the Food Recovery Program is similar to Community Service Days site at Covenant Soup Kitchen. However, while Community Service Days volunteers spend time directly working at the soup kitchen on weekends, the Food Recovery program focuses on delivering and providing food. Currently the program has ten volunteers who assist in delivering the food. They meet once a week at three separate locations: Towers Dining Hall, the Student Union, and eventually Putnam Dining Hall.

The program plays a very important role in the community. The program aims to have consistent deliveries to the Soup Kitchen on a weekly basis during the year. Rivers hopes "to increase the



Volunteers collect food from Towers Dining Hall to be delivered to Covenant Soup Kitchen

number of dining halls receiving the food, catering agencies and hopefully to expand the number of soup kitchens receiving donations." This program is truly important and it serves two very necessary goals by eliminating waste, and helping our surrounding community. To get involved with this program contact Marshall Rivers at marshall.rivers@uconn.edu.

Student Spotlight: Ross Moran

Each month, we plan to select a student, staff, alumnus, or community partner who is out in the community making a difference to spotlight for his or her dedicated work to the program. This month we've chosen Ross Moran, a member of the University of Connecticut Class of 2007. Ross worked with Community Outreach for the entirety of his college career and is continuing his work in the youth education field.

What is your prior involvement with Community Outreach?

I volunteered with Horace Porter Tutoring during my freshman year before becoming the Program Director there for the next three years. My final two years, I was the Youth Development and Education Adolescents Coordinator as well as an Executive Board member. In addition, I was a Team Leader for two Alternative Break trips to New Orleans.

How did Community Outreach prepare you for your new job?

I acquired some of the most valuable skills I use in my Citizen Schools work through Community Outreach. The most beneficial skills include program development and management, communication skills as a manager and a volunteer, data collection skills, leadership skills, facilitation skills, adolescent development knowledge and most importantly, recruiting, managing, and supporting volunteers.

Was there a specific experience or turning point during your time at UConn that really solidified your choice to go into this career?

I enjoyed my time at UConn very much and I believe that my time as a Program Director for Horace Porter was instrumental in my decision to work for Citizen Schools. I believe very strongly in the out-of-school time learning approach. My time with Horace Porter created a foundation for future success in the out-of-school time educational movement.

What is Citizen Schools?

Citizen Schools operates a national net-

work of apprenticeship programs for middle school students, connecting adult volunteers to young people in hands-on learning projects after school. At Citizen Schools, students develop the academic and leadership skills they need to do well in school, get into college, and become leaders in their careers and in their communities.

What are your job responsibilities?

As a Teaching Fellow at Citizen Schools I wear a number of different hats. A Teaching Fellow works to sustain the after-school program through recruiting, managing and supporting volunteers, curriculum development, establishing and maintaining family communication systems, establishing and maintaining teacher communication systems, collecting and recording data and various other duties.

Teaching Fellows also play the role of Team Leader, where they work with a team of 12-15 middle school students. The team leader leads students in various activities that include: AIM time (academic support time everyday), leadership skill building activities, apprenticeships (hands on learning experiences), and school navigation time. During the School Navigation time I run 8th Grade Academy which is a curriculum designed to assist 8th graders in thinking beyond middle school to prepare for high school, college and future leadership opportunities their communities.

Teaching Fellows also work at a community partnership in the mornings. My partnership is at SMILES Mentoring Initiative. I work as a program facilitator for several mentoring programs and design their curriculum as well.

Do you have any advice to seniors who are job searching in the non-profit world?

My advice for seniors would be to take your time and find an organization that fits your professional goals. There are so many non-profits out there that do really great things. It is essential for stu-

dents coming right out of college to find an organization in which you're not only giving back but attaining valuable skills for future work. Jobs in the non-profit world are always high-energy and time intensive so it is best to be sure you're ending up in an organization that fits your needs.



Ross Moran

Community Service Days Calendar

- 11/10 Covenant Soup Kitchen: Special Projects
- 11/10 Mansfield & Recreation: Natural Areas Volunteers
- 11/10 Holy Family Home and Shelter: Cleaning and Organizing
- 11/10 Windham Textile and History Museum: Cataloging and Preserving Collections
- 11/10 Mansfield Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation: Helping Hands
- 12/1 Willow House Early Learning Center: Facility Cleanup/Maintenance
- 12/1 Camp Horizons: Cleanup
- 12/1 Windham Textile & History Museum: Cataloging and Preserving Collections

Visit www.volunteer.uconn.edu to sign up or contact Community Service Days at uconncsds@yahoo.com

Kevin Powell Kicks Off Month of Kindness

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ties to develop and implement their own Months of Kindness.

This year's Month of Kindness theme revolves around the slogan "ride to kindness," where each individual is encouraged to choose their own "path" that will lead them towards making a positive change. As is tradition, the Month of Kindness will kick off with a presentation by Kevin Powell, co-sponsored by Hillel and SUBOG. Powell is considered one of America's important voices in the new millennium. He is described as an activist, poet, journalist, essayist, editor, cultural curator, historian, songwriter, music producer, public speaker, political consultant, fundraiser and businessman and is a highly sought after public speaker. Powell has lectured on multiculturalism, American and Black American history, the life of Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights, American politics, sexism from a male perspective, leadership, social activism and the state of hip hop at hundreds of locations throughout the country. Powell will be speaking at the Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts on Nov. 1 at 7:00

Other highlights include an a cappella charity concert taking place on November 2. Attendees are encouraged to bring at least two canned items and/or money which will be donated to the Covenant Soup Kitchen in Willimantic.

On Nov. 6, a nationally recognized program called the "Tunnel of Oppression" will be taking place on campus. In the program, participants are led through a tunnel that incorporates issues disordered Eating, Racism, Homophobia/Transphobia, Depression/Suicide, Violence Against Women, Broken Systems, Substance Abuse and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. This journey is followed by discussions led by both student and professional staff volunteers.

Throughout the month, numerous other events will be taking place, including Rock Concerts, Homelessness Sleepouts, Hunger Banquets. New to the Month of Kindness is an event called "House of Abraham." Taking place in Hartford, this program will gather together members of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities to build a house together in order to make way for communal discussions to promote understanding.

When the Month of Kindness began at UConn, it included only a small group of students. Since 2001, it has since grown and reached other campuses, including the University of Austin, Texas and George Washington University and it is continuing to spread. Edy Fink, the Assistant Director of the UConn Hillel states, "Although UConn highlights the Month of Kindness during the month of November, it certainly doesn't mean that November is the only month during which our student body and the populace here should be active, concerned

and charitable. The Month of Kindness serves as a reminder for people to become involved, not just in November, but all year long."

Today, UConn provides a platform for any student or organization to get involved in different programs that promote kindness, ethics and diversity across campus. Through these pro-



Kevin Powell

grams and the promotion of the Month of Kindness, we have proven that UConn is committed to the ideals of tolerance, pluralism and community. For more information about Month of Kindness, please contact Edy Fink at Edy@uconnhillel.org.

All Generations Benefit From Program

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run activities that they normally would not be able to do, such as cooking and arts and crafts projects that require more personal attention towards the residents.

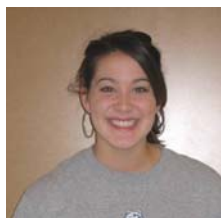
The visits are not only beneficial to the residents of the nursing home, but they definitely have a positive impact on the lives of the volunteers as well. Volunteers leave the home not only knowing they have contributed to a

good cause, but are also able to learn about the lives of people of a different generation. For most volunteers, the satisfaction of seeing a resident smile or laugh each week is enough reason for them to return for the following weeks. Carrie Coderre, a senior and a veteran volunteer at the nursing home definitely agrees, as she believes that "going to the nursing home is actually one of my favorite parts of the week...I like that I can make their day that much better just by spending an hour with them."

While Generations Connect has a simple purpose and philosophy, it is one that can be adapted to all different types of people, not just the elderly. Personal visits have more of an impact that one would typically believe, and the satisfaction that one takes away has to really be experienced to understand its true value.

October Volunteers of the Month

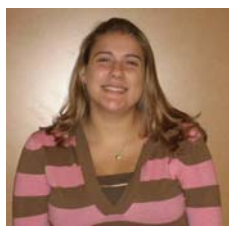
Volunteers of the Month are selected by Program Directors based on their superb dedication and enthusiasm toward their service program.



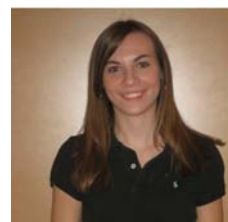
Katie Anderson
Generations Connect
HDFS '09



Rishi Kothari
Campus Big Buddies
Engineering '09



Abby Morrison
Project Academic
Advancement
ACES '11



Victoria Campo
Windham Heights
After School Program
ACES '11



Megan Fenerty
Southeast Elementary
After School Program



Caitlin Partyka
Conversational
Partners
Allied Health '10



Daniel Kim
Mansfield After School
Program
CLAS '09



Matthew Bojarski
Southeast Elementary
School
Business '09



Cortney Nadolney
America Reads
Preschool
ACES '10



Eric Jain
Windham Center
Elementary
Business '11



Kaitlin Archambault
Collegiate Health
Service Corps
Chemistry '10



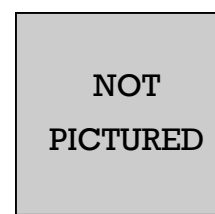
Ally Austin
Generations Family
Health Care
Allied Health '07



Courtney DeCarlo
Campus Connections
CLAS '10



Caitlin Flood
Windham Hospital
Nursing '10



Martha Bouton
Mansfield Middle
School Tutoring

Liver Wellness Walk a Success

by Kevin Mabry
Physiology and Neurobiology '09

On August, 23rd, the Liver Wellness Walk was held at Rentschler Field in East

Hartford. Community Outreach volunteers left campus around 7 am and volunteered at several stations until 11:30 am. They were accompanied by volunteers from service fraternities and social sororities as well. Volunteers had several tasks including handing out water, registering walkers, and cheering on the

2K walkers. The program is meant to raise and pledge money to raise awareness on liver health and aid researchers in trying to find a cure to combat liver cancer. In one day alone, the Liver Walk raised \$100,200.00! Great job volunteers!

Highlighted November Events

November 6th & 7th

Tunnel of Oppression

The Tunnel of Oppression experience is a series of rooms designed to advance and disseminate knowledge about issues of oppression and encourage participants to reflect upon the questions raised by hatred and ignorance. This program illustrates the struggles of others while looking at current egregious acts that occur in our nation and around the world. Participants in the program are led on a guided tour through eight "rooms of oppression" and then participate in a short, facilitated debriefing/processing of their experience

November 10th

Take a Stand: Speak Out Against Hate Crimes

2nd Annual IMPAACT Conference

"Hate is Real. Realize Hate. Speak Out Against Hate Crimes" is the focus of the 2nd annual IMPAACT (Identifying the Missing Power of Asian Americans in Connecticut) Conference. The conference was established by college students who felt the need to cooperate with other colleges, universities and businesses across Connecticut to address the issues and interests of the Asian American population. Because hate crimes can affect every single individual, this conference encourages open dialogue amongst all communities.

Co-sponsored by The Women's Center & Asian American Cultural Center

November 13th

6:00 PM @ the Dodd Center

Human Rights Film Series "The Exonerated"

Film Description: Court TV's THE EXONERATED is a conscience-pricking docudrama about six real-life death-row inmates who faced last minute reprieves on the eves of their executions due to newly acquired DNA evidence.

November 14th

7:00 PM @ the Dodd Center

Absolutely SAFE Screening and Discussion with Carol Ciancutti-Leyva

This documentary follows the filmmakers journey through the controversial issue of breast implants and the strive for the perfect body which has gripped our culture. In the past 40 years, well over two million women have chosen to have pouches of silicone or saline surgically inserted into their chests to replace or augment their breasts. Yet, there is no definitive evidence these implants are safe. *Absolutely Safe?* explores the minds and bodies of girls and women facing one of the most controversial medical and cultural debates of our times.

Co-sponsored by The Women's Center, Health Education, SHAPE, & Nutrition Services

November 15th

12-1:30 PM

Lecture Series - Women's Political Representation in the Dominican Republic - A Caribbean and Latin American Perspective

Speaker: Jacqueline Polanco

Co-sponsored by Puerto Rican Latin American Cultural Center, PRLS & CLACS.

November 29th

7:00 PM @ the Women's Center

God Sleeps In Rwanda

Uncovering amazing stories of hope in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, Academy Award-Nominee God Sleeps In Rwanda captures the spirit of five courageous women as they rebuild their lives, redefine women's roles in Rwandan society and bring hope to a wounded nation. The 1994 Rwandan Genocide left the country nearly 70 percent female, handing Rwanda's women an extraordinary burden and an unprecedented opportunity. Girls are attending school in record numbers, and women now make up a large part of the country's leadership. Working with two cameras and no crew except for their translator—a genocide survivor herself—the filmmakers uncover incredible stories: an HIV-positive policewoman raising four children alone and attending night school to become a lawyer, a teenager who has become head of household for her four siblings, and a young woman orphaned in her teens who is now the top development official in her area.

Contact the sponsors for more information about locations and times.



Office of Community Outreach,
University of Connecticut
Department of Student Activities
2110 Hillside Road, U-3008 Storrs, CT
8008-69290
Phone: 860-486-1165



Upcoming Service Opportunities

Hillel Builds the Gulf 2008

Join Jewish Students across the country to help rebuild New Orleans. This is a marvelous experience and it truly is a chance to help rebuild people's lives. This program offers hands on service, community interaction, social justice, and the ability to follow the teachings of Judaism.

Contact Jake through [Jake@hillel.org](mailto:jake@hillel.org), or 860-429-4007 for more information.

Homelessness Sleep Out

There will be a sleep out for homelessness in Dow Field, and it will be hosted by the UCONN PIRG. The event will take place on **Wednesday, November 14** and it will start at 7 p.m. A discussion will take place in the Dodd Center, and it will be facilitated by Carol Ciancutti-Levya. This event is sponsored by Health Education, SHAPE, Nutrition Services, and the Women's Center.

Do you love basketball and making a difference?! Volunteer with Arc!

The Arc Foundation is devoted to promoting the wellness of people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. They are looking for volunteers to work the concession stands at select men's and women's basketball games. The proceeds will go to the Arc Foundation.

Contact Lynn Marie Wolff, at 860-228-2070 ext.22 or Lwolff@tri-countyarc.org.

Friends of Dinosaur Park & Arboretum, Inc

Dinosaur State Park, located in Rocky Hill, CT is seeking volunteers for open positions all year around. Volunteer opportunities include trail work, mining sluice, casting area, office work, and greenhouse upkeep.

Contact Greta Vrissis at gvrissis@hotmail.com for more information.

