

SERVICE-LEARNING:

THE IMPACT

Volume 2, Issue 1

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: United Way

Changing lives and strengthening our community



United Way hosts a 'Movie on the Green' showing 'Toy Story 3' during Family Weekend.

United Way of the Capital Region changes lives in central Pennsylvania by “uniting” communities with more than 80 programs and resources. When the needs of the community are identified, United Way works to fund programs administered by local non-profit organizations. United Way practices sustainable collaboration by channeling funding to agencies for joint efforts, which reduces overlaps in services. In an attempt to solve long-term community issues, United Way is committed to “increasing financial and non-financial resources, building stronger community partnerships and providing measurable results.”

Partner agencies must go through a rigorous reapplication process each year in order to receive continued funding from United Way. According to Jenny Gallagher Blom (for more on her, see p. 2), who is “heavily involved in this process” with the Salvation Army, the outcome-based reapplication “helps keep you accountable [because] when you’re actually implementing and accessing, it makes you see what is working and what is not.”

Through service-learning activities with the Agapé Center, Messiah College students support 26 of the same organizations on weekly Outreach teams and one-time service plunge days. For example, each weekday, a team goes to the Boys and Girls Club after-school program to help youth with homework and to play games.

Also, Messiah College hosts an annual “Movie on the Green” during Family Weekend when students and families can gather together on Eisenhower lawn to enjoy food, fellowship and a great movie.

For the past 10 years, Messiah employees have also been encouraged to support a non-profit of their choice by donating to United Way. In 2009, Messiah employees donated a total of \$38,230 to various nonprofit organizations, a 21.25% increase from the previous Pledge Drive. This year, the United Way Employee Pledge Drive will be held from Tuesday, Nov. 2 to Friday, Nov. 12. Messiah College continues working with United Way in this value partnership with hopes of strengthening local communities through nonprofit organizations.

MESSAGE TO THE READER

In this issue, you will find insights into the service-learning program at Messiah College. Our students, faculty and community partners have all contributed to the publication of this newsletter by graciously sharing their stories. Our featured alumni focus story serves to provide a glimpse into the valuable experiences that our service-learning programs provide. By reading the impact that one person can have on the community, we hope that you will be inspired to get involved. Read further to learn how—and why—service-learning makes a difference in the places we live. Thank you for your support of our work and all that you do for the greater capital region!

Chad Frey, Director of the Agapé Center for Service and Learning

COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:

Boys & Girls Club of Central Pennsylvania

A safe place for local youth to do homework, crafts and games.

1227 Berryhill Street
Harrisburg, PA 17104
717-234-3268

EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT: Charles Seitz

Last spring, Messiah social work students made their way down Harrisburg streets, surveying the community about the resources available to them. Their discoveries went to United Way for assessment about how to best meet the area's needs: service-learning at its prime.

This project was organized by Charles Seitz, professor and director of the social work program. Accomplished with a master's in social work and a Ph.D. in counseling, Seitz says "having the opportunity to work with excellent faculty and students over the past 11 years" is what inspires him to continually pursue his passion of social work.

Seitz is working with United Way to tie projects in the social work curriculum with local needs. "Service learning is a significant

component of the social work program here," says Seitz. The program trains professionals to transfer what they learn in the classroom to the agency work they will be doing when they finish school. By completion of the four-year program, each student has completed a minimum of 600 hours of community service and has built relationships with at least three local agencies where they have volunteered.

Specifically, Seitz has applied two grants in the past several years: one focused on mentoring and the other used to fund the Harrisburg surveys. The results of the survey have been used both by the United Way and by students in the classroom.

Seitz says he works with United Way because he "sees the importance of practicing what we expect students to do."



Social Work professor Charles Seitz engages his class in conversation.

For more information on the social work program at Messiah, contact Charles Seitz at 717-796-1800 ext. 3240 or via e-mail at CSeitz@messiah.edu.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: Jenny Gallagher Blom '02

When Jenny Gallagher Blom came to Messiah, she didn't know at first what to major in. But, she developed an individualized degree in community empowerment: anthropology, literature, and history, studying disenfranchised people in each area. After two formative semesters—one taking anthropology classes at Temple University through Messiah's Philly Campus and another studying abroad in Thailand—she had found some clarity. She wanted to be involved in something to help people become more self-sufficient.

During three years serving with Volunteers of America through AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) after graduation, Gallagher Blom learned the inner workings of non-profit organizations in Harrisburg. "You learn how to do everything," she says of Americorps, "from janitorial work to the board room." She recruited, trained and matched volunteers with immigrants in an adult education program whose primary purpose was to "motivate people to gain basic skills to be self-sufficient." For example, it is

more impactful in the long run to teach cooking skills than to hand out food.

This is Gallagher Blom's fifth year working at the Salvation Army in Harrisburg. She is presently transitioning from program development and evaluation work into the director of operations position. She has spent a lot of time in the community, investigating where people need help; evaluating Salvation Army's effectiveness in meeting those needs; and developing effective responses that line up with state and national standards. "We disguise learning as fun so kids have no idea they're learning," she says. For example, to teach nutrition, they have a lecture and then help the kids make a healthy recipe, like fruit smoothies.

Gallagher Blom reconnected with Messiah about five years ago when she spoke to one of John Eby's sociology classes about helping with a low-income housing project. The response was significant: About half of the students in the class

volunteered, and they were motivated and in-tune to what was going on socially because they were processing the experience in class.

More than 30 students continue to volunteer with Salvation Army's after-school program each year through the Agapé Center. "It's great to have volunteers who have faith because we are a faith-based organization," says Gallagher Blom. "Faith is an important piece of what we do." She encourages students to volunteer, intern or find ways to implement classroom learning in contexts outside of class. The Salvation Army is one option. "It doesn't matter what your skill-sets are," she says, "we can find a match for you here."



Gallagher Blom assists a student with math homework.

SERVICE-LEARNING is a type of curriculum that intentionally integrates academic learning with community service in a credit-bearing academic course. Students participate in an authentic service activity that meets needs identified by the community (designed within the framework of a mutually beneficial relationship), and then they critically reflect on that activity. Thus, students gain a deep understanding of course content, a commitment to socially responsible citizenship, developing skills and understanding needed to contribute to civic well-being.

MESSIAH COLLEGE AGAPÉ CENTER FOR SERVICE AND LEARNING

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