

# Neighbors Link Launches New Community Programs in Ossining

Like Mount Kisco and so many areas of Westchester County and the Hudson Valley, the Village of Ossining is a community in transition. More than a third of its 25,000 residents are foreign born, with the majority arriving from Latin American countries and living close to or below the poverty line.

Envisioning a positive, healthy culture of integration for these newcomers, community stakeholders in Ossining are collaborating with Neighbors Link Northern Westchester to replicate programming that has been successful in Mount Kisco since 2001.

“It is really evident that there is opportunity and interest in the community to move this vision forward,” said Adam Rabinovitch, Deputy Director of Neighbors Link Network. He is working in an organizational development role with Ossining’s local government,



businesses, organizations and individuals. Adam adds, “Through coordination rather than fragmentation, this coalition has been integral in the effort to bring Neighbors Link programming to Ossining.”

Programs that are underway in Ossining include:

**Parent Education** classes that focus on positive parenting skills for people with pre-school age children. **Real Health for Real Life** workshops for parents to learn about healthy eating and healthy lifestyles for their families. **OSHA (Occupational Safety & Health Administration)** training on safety standards, policies, and

procedures for workers in the construction industry. **Cultural Competency Training** on immigration issues for staff members of various community-based organizations. **Eco Cleaning** skills training program for workers to learn how to use environmentally safe cleaning products and techniques.

**REAL HEALTH FOR REAL LIFE** is a six-week parent and child education series that meets in the Park Elementary School in Ossining. In partnership with Northern Westchester Hospital, it is one of several Neighbors Link programs started in Ossining in response to community interest.



**FAMILY DAY AT THE KATONAH MUSEUM**



Neighbors Link Family Center participants attend an educational program at the Katonah Museum of Art.

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# Neighbors Link



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**OUR MISSION:** To strengthen the whole community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of immigrants **OUR STRATEGY:** Educate, Empower, Employ

## Where Opportunity Knocks for New Americans

Neighbors Link Northern Westchester was recently selected by the New York State Office for New Americans (ONA) to join its network of 27 “Opportunity Centers,” acknowledging our success as a center for healthy immigrant integration and education.

This designation is only given to community organizations that can deliver high-quality programming and outstanding volunteer engagement, and demonstrates New York State’s commitment to being a welcoming place for immigrants.

Neighbors Link’s Opportunity Center will include our partners—



As a new ONA Center, Neighbors Link will offer classroom and computer-based ESL (above) and small group tutoring (below) for ESL.

“WE ARE A STATE OF IMMIGRANTS...OTHER STATES BUILD WALLS TO KEEP PEOPLE OUT, WE OPEN OUR ARMS AND WE INVITE PEOPLE IN.”

—Governor Andrew Cuomo, 2012 State of the State Address

the Westchester Community College English Language Institute (WCC/ELI) and the Pace Community Law Practice (PCLP)—who will work with us to provide the comprehensive array of programming required of all ONA Centers. This includes classes, tutoring, and online-based learning for English as a

Second Language (ESL); legal services for immigrants eligible for naturalization; entrepreneurship training and support; and educational workshops on a variety of topics. All programming will be supported by growing our volunteer base.

As an ONA Opportunity Center, Neighbors Link Northern

Westchester will expand its collaboration with stake-holders from various government, legal services, and entrepreneurial assistance programs. We will continue to represent the model of healthy integration of immigrants, and increase our ability to serve as a focal point for new Americans in our community.





# Maryknoll Sisters Continue their Lifelong Mission of Community Service

After years of service to communities around the world, a group of ten Maryknoll Sisters are now volunteering their time and talents to the Neighbors Link community where they teach English as a Second Language (ESL).

Used to rolling up their sleeves and making a difference, the sisters' warm-hearted dedication to service and peaceful presence is having a profound impact at the center. Here they work in small groups with recent immigrants eager to improve fluency and gain confidence in speaking English.

"It is delightful to meet people from Guatemala and other

culturally respectful sisters devote themselves to a life of service performing work as teachers and school administrators, nurses, doctors, theologians and social workers in 24 countries worldwide.

After many years of serving the poor and needy wherever they are missioned, the sisters often return to live at the Maryknoll Sisters Center in



Ossining, NY. Sister Liz Erbland, who taught special education for many years, has a love of teaching and greatly enjoys working with Neighbors



areas where I have been," said Sister Mary Duffy, who served in Central America most of her life. "I appreciate the richness of their culture and being there to help them learn another culture and situate themselves in a new place. This program is a tremendous opportunity for both of us to learn from each other."

Founded in 1912, the Maryknoll order of sisters was the first American group of Catholic nuns dedicated to overseas missions. Today these independent-minded and

Link clients to improve their English skills. "They are sweet and kind and willing. We laugh a lot and have a great time together."

Sister Peggy Hennessey spent 57 years in Peru and Bolivia. "Being at Neighbors Link, being around people who speak



Spanish again, is something I love." She recalls how she recently worked with a man with limited English and very little education. Every time he was able to really understand a new English word and what it meant, he would exclaim, "How beautiful!"

"I LIKE LEARNING WITH THE SISTER BECAUSE SHE HAS PATIENCE AND SHE EXPLAINS EVERYTHING THAT I ASK."

—Emiliano Ventura

## FAQs

### About the Immigrant Community in Westchester County

Westchester County is a diverse and vibrant community. Approximately 25% of the population is foreign born. This includes people born in countries around the world, but the largest portion (50.4%) come from Latin America. In addition to a large population of new immigrants, Westchester is home to an ethnically and racially diverse population. 23% of the county population is Hispanic or Latino, 14% is African American, and 5.5% is Asian. In Mount Kisco, where Neighbors Link Northern Westchester is located, 37% of the town's 10,291 people were born in another country. Of those, the largest portion comes from Latin America. Additionally, 39% of the town's population is Hispanic (including both those born in the United States and those born in other countries).

**Q** Do most of the immigrants in Westchester come from Latin America?

**A** Yes. Of the foreign-born population, a little over 50% come from Latin America (the other 50% come mostly from Europe and Asia). The countries with the highest representation include Mexico (10%), Jamaica (7%), Dominican Republic (7%), and Ecuador (7%). In Mount Kisco, more immigrants come from Guatemala (33%) than from any other country.

**Q** How many of the immigrants in Westchester are undocumented?

**A** The Migration Policy Institute estimates that 60,000 people living in Westchester County are undocumented. This is approximately 6% of the county's total population of 1 million people.

**Q** Are children of undocumented immigrants considered US citizens? Why?

**A** Yes, any child born in the United States is a US citizen. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that there are 17,000 US citizen children in Westchester who have undocumented parents.

**Q** Why do immigrants settle here in Westchester County instead of the city?

**A** In recent years, more employment opportunities for new immigrants have become available in the suburbs. These jobs include low-wage domestic work in supporting dual-income families, landscaping, construction, restaurant work, and other service jobs.

**Q** How much money do immigrants send back to their home countries?

**A** Immigrants do often send small amounts of money to families in their home countries. However, these remittances do not stop immigrants from spending money in the United States. In addition to sales, property, and income taxes, immigrants spend significant money on goods and services in their communities. According to a report by the Inter-American Development Bank, 93% of money made by Latin American immigrants stays in the United States, with only 7% being sent back to their home countries. Additionally, money sent back to home countries often allows family members to remain in their country instead of migrating for economic survival.

**Q** If immigrants are undocumented, do they pay taxes?

**A** The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) released a study showing that undocumented immigrants across the US paid an estimated \$11.84 billion in state and local taxes in 2012. The ITEP report also estimates that "at least 50% of undocumented immigrant households file income tax returns using Individual Tax Identification Numbers (ITINs)." In addition, the Social Security Administration estimates that undocumented immigrants contribute about \$12 billion each year to the cash flow of the program without receiving benefits in return because of their status. Like anyone who purchases goods and services, immigrants pay sales taxes. Immigrants also pay property taxes directly if they own homes or indirectly if they rent. In New York State, it is estimated that undocumented immigrants contribute over \$1 billion in state and local taxes annually.

Sources:  
<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>  
<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/undocumented-immigrant-population/county/36119.pdf>  
<http://www.itep.org/pdf/undocumentedtaxes2015.pdf>  
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<http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=889459>

# New Training Program Fills Need for Home Companion Workers

Neighbors Link Northern Westchester, in partnership with Westchester Community College, has been selected by the National Council of Workforce Education (NCWE) as one of only eight pairs of organizations in the country to pilot new job skills training programs for immigrant communities.

Recognizing the need for more home health workers in Westchester County, our pilot program trains workers in the home companion field. Currently there are relatively few opportunities for immigrants with limited English language proficiency to enter healthcare programs that develop job skills and English language skills concurrently.

This program began in January with 21 candidates recruited by Neighbors Link and identified as having a high potential for success through an initial screening. WCC assessed the English skills for each of these students for program readiness. The first pilot session was so successful that we are seeking funding to offer this program regularly in Mount



"THIS COURSE HELPED ME UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS NOT ONLY WORK, BUT COMPASSION AND LOVE FOR PEOPLE IN HARD TIMES."

—Vivian



Kisco and Ossining. Community members have responded positively to the availability of new workers with training as home companions and have started

hiring the graduates to care for elderly parents and adult children with disabilities.

Students who complete this program can proceed on to Personal Care Assistant (PCA) and Home Health Aide (HHA) training as part of the stackable credential. This credential could ultimately lead to further credentials at WCC such as Certified Nurse Assistant, Patient Care Technician, or Mental Health Technician. As our population ages and lives longer, these are the kinds of jobs that help move people from poverty to earning livable wages and balanced work schedules.



Participants in the Neighbors Link Northern Westchester Home Companion Program receive their certification.