

Young Friends Pay it Forward

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getting organized for a gift card drive. A member of the Young Friends also spoke at the Latin Links luncheon.

"It's a pay it forward type of thing," said Lisdy. "I am where I am because of all the opportunities that have been there for me. Those of us who were part of Neighbors Link programs can pay it forward by educating others about what opportunities are out there."

The Young Friends are especially excited about finding ways to help first generation students and their parents on the road to college.

Lisdy says that as a first generation immigrant, having the opportunity to go to college was very important to her. "Going to a good college takes a lot of information and support," she said. "Our goal is to be able to mentor students and families through the college process."

Staying Involved and Connected

Now a member of the Young Friends, Austin Blumenfeld's experience with Neighbors Links began as a student

volunteer. For three years until he graduated from Horace Greeley High School in 2011, he worked one-on-one with adult English language learners in the Tuesday night ESL program and coordinated fellow student tutors.

After graduating from Binghamton University in 2015,



Photo by Bibiana Matheis

Members of the Young Friends, who spoke of their Neighbors Link experiences at the Latin Links luncheon, pose with the principals of the area public schools they attended. From left, Susan Ostrofsky of Mount Kisco Elementary School, Joel Adelberg of Fox Lane High School, Young Friends Rolando Trinidad and Lisdy Contreras-Giron, and Annemarie Berardi of Fox Lane Middle School.

Austin serves as an AmeriCorps teaching assistant at an elementary school in Denver with a significant Hispanic and low income population. Austin believes that volunteering at Neighbors Link was valuable preparation for his current teaching job, saying, "It helped me to understand and talk about the struggles that the immigrant community goes through on a daily basis."

Overcoming the challenges of distance and time through Facebook and digital communications, the Young Friends are eager to expand the group and their activities. "This is a great opportunity for young people like us who were in Neighbors Link programs to keep going back and stay involved," said Austin. "We're trying to make sure there's a continuing relationship, that the connections endure from our days as students and volunteers into our 20s, 30s and beyond."

Austin notes, "We come from such different backgrounds and experiences with Neighbors Link, but what we have in common is that we all want to support the community."

To get involved with the Young Friends, please contact Amy Werner, Volunteer Coordinator at awerner@neighborslink.org.



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Fall/Winter 2015

Neighbors Link

VOLUME 24

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

Moments from our AUTUMN EVENTS



Neighbors Link Young Friends Ready to Pay it Forward

Lisdy Contreras-Giron recalls appreciatively the academic support and friendship she found as a young student in the Learning Links program at Mount Kisco Elementary. A decade later, Lisdy is a freshman at Pace University studying criminal justice and psychology, with plans to attend law school. With college and work, she is a busy young woman, yet she finds time to give back to the Neighbors Link family that helped her along the path to success.

Lisdy is part of a diverse group of young adults from all walks of life who have moved on after participating in or volunteering with Neighbors Link programs. Honoring the instrumental work of the Friends of Neighbors Link, they formed the Young Friends in the summer of 2015 to continue their connection to Neighbors Link through special projects and mentoring opportunities.

"We are all young and we are all driven," said Lisdy about the group's members. "The Young Friends are

excited to work hand in hand with the original Friends and create some projects of our own as well. We are learning from them, although they say they are learning from us."

The Young Friends' first Family Game Night event brought clients, donors and volunteers together for an evening of games, with a translator

on hand to keep the conversation flowing. This fall the group has been collecting non-perishable food and

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Children and adults gathered for the first International Family Game Night, above and below, sponsored by the Young Friends of Neighbors Link.

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—Austin Blumenfeld,
Young Friend from Chappaqua

Educating and Mentoring Others

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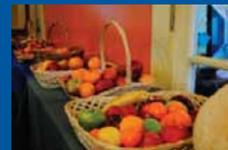


Holiday Opportunities at Neighbors Link



Warm Winter Meals

During the winter, we seek donations of warm meals for Neighbors Link participants on days when we have classes, events, or workshops.



Mercado de las Fiestas

In December, we hold our Mercado de las Fiestas (Holiday Market), where parents in our community will be able to select gifts for their children from among the items donated. We need groups to organize gift drives to fill the shelves at the Mercado and we also need volunteers to work at the event.



Wish List

We have an online "wish list" where you can see the kinds of items needed by our clients and programs. This wish list will be updated throughout the holiday season, and throughout the year, so check back often!

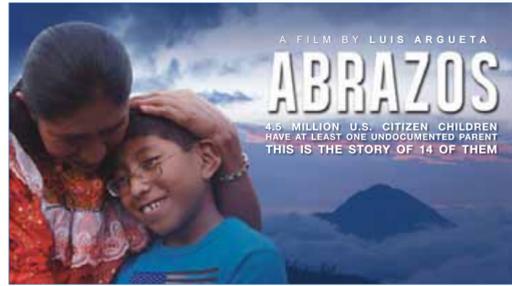
To find out more information about all of these opportunities, please visit <http://neighborslink.org/how-you-can-help/support/> or contact Amy Werner, Volunteer Coordinator at awerner@neighborslink.org.

Latin Links Explores Immigrant Stories of Family Separation and Reunion

On November 12th, standing silently amidst the noise of a busy harbor, Ellis Island marked the milestone of having been closed for 61 years. Not much of a milestone, the commemoration did not gather more than a few news articles and the standard five-second trend on Facebook. What a twist of fate that on the week we remember the closing of the place 30 to 40% of American citizens trace their ancestry to, America's fastest-growing

to talk about his documentary *Abrazos*. The film highlights 15 of the 4.5 million children who are U.S. citizens and who also have at least one parent who is undocumented.

Argueta gave us an exclusive view into the lives of these families by chronicling a trip that offered the



border. Sadly, crossing the border often means crossing into oblivion. It can mean becoming disconnected from family, heritage and identity. Almost 250 people attended the Neighbors Link events which delved into these deeper issues of family unity and focused on the human side to all the rhetoric on immigration issues. We thank them for their courage and support of the vision of a fully integrated society which keeps families intact.



Photo by Amy Baker

Above, Director Luis Argueta and Neighbors Link Executive Director Carola Bracco discuss the hardships of immigration portrayed in the film *Abrazos* (Hugs). Below right, Luis Argueta with Lisdy Contreras-Giron from the Young Friends of Neighbors Link.

children a chance to travel and meet—for the first time— their family members who remained in Guatemala. At the root of the film, and of our work at Neighbors Link, is the same core principle: It is through family we attain identity and despite generational, cultural or ideological differences, our shared memories inform our individual characters. Many undocumented immigrants, as well as their U.S. citizen children, were deprived of their families the minute they crossed the U.S.



Photo by Bibiana Matheis

LATIN LINKS
FILM & LUNCHEON



Neighbors Link Clients are Taking the Lead

Neighbors Link clients are stepping up to leadership positions at the center and in the community. For the Hispanic Heritage Festival in October, a team of seven organizers, Maria, Manuel, Ana, Ovidio, Vivian, Francisco, and Melba, worked together with committees to create a joyful celebration featuring colorful decor, delicious food and delightful singing and dancing.



hispanic heritage celebration



Photos by Amy Baker



Photo by Victoria Monica

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Moments from our **AUTUMN** EVENTS



Pipeline Scholars and their parents, above, work together on a special building project. Who can construct the tallest spaghetti and marshmallow tower?

Students in the Learning Links after-school program at Mount Kisco Elementary School, left, have fun learning about chemical reactions as part of a weekly science lesson organized by high school volunteers.

At Neighbors Link Northern Westchester we accommodate differing schedules and learning styles by offering a variety of ESL learning opportunities. In addition to computer-based sessions that improve both English proficiency and computer skills, shown at right, we offer traditional classroom ESL instruction and one-on-one tutoring.

