

Neighbors Link

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



Photo by Joaquim Mendes

First Trip to New York City for ESL Learners

Remember your first visit to the Natural History Museum? For this group of ESL students, their day there was one they will never forget. On an outing that called upon real world English language skills, fifteen learners and seven volunteer tutors from the Thursday evening ESL group traveled together on a learning adventure to New York City on Sunday, February 21st.

Their destination was the American Museum of Natural History, a first-time experience for all of the learners. Once there, they studied the museum map to decide what to see. Favorite exhibits included the North American animals, the blue whale in the Hall of Biodiversity and the dinosaur relics. The group was “wowed” by the gigantic scale of the museum and the huge crowds of visitors.

The itinerary for the day and its accompanying English lesson plan were coordinated by Westchester Community College instructor Brad Curabba. WCC instructor Joaquim Mendes accompanied the group on the field trip. Among the many teachable moments were lessons on using Metro North and the subway, navigating the streets of New York City, and a quick visit to Central Park.

Neighbors Link staffer Luisa Granda joined the outing which she saw as a rare opportunity for ESL students to interact with tutors outside the classroom. According to volunteer tutor Bob Schmidt, the adult learners were exposed to things they had never seen before. “It stimulated their conversations and imaginations,” he said.

New Mural Illustrates Link Between Clients and Volunteers

The first thing you notice about the newly installed mural at Neighbors Link is not just its size—an impressive eighteen by four feet—but its humanity. People smiling, people working, people helping. A labor of love, the project was initiated by Temple Shaaray Tefila’s Social Action Committee, headed by Hildy Sheinbaum.

“Very much a community mural” is how Hildy describes the vibrantly colored acrylic artwork. “It was an incredible joint effort with Neigh-



Photos by Marilyn Shapiro

bors Link clients and Temple members painting side by side.”

Designed by artist and Temple member Leslie Raffo, together with Neighbors Link clients/artists Mario and Carlos, the three-paneled triptych depicts the lives of our clients and the ongoing work at Neighbors Link. The central message of Educate, Empower, Employ is conveyed through illustrations of men and women working, bettering themselves and helping others.

Continued on page 2



Community members and clients rolled up their sleeves to paint a vibrantly colored mural that depicts the Neighbors Link spirit of empowerment and volunteerism.

Neighbors Link Featured in National Publication

Excerpted from March 5, 2010 *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Article by Jennifer Gonzalez.

It's 7 a.m. and the hiring hall here is buzzing. Day laborers file in, pick up a small numbered ball, and write their name and number on a large whiteboard. The ball then goes in a jug for the day's job lottery.

Soon about 40 men, mostly immigrants from Guatemala, crowd a large room at the job and social-services center, run by Neighbors Link, a local nonprofit group. The room doubles as a waiting room and classroom for the daily "Job English" class run by Westchester Community College.

The men chat, drinking coffee while they wait for area contractors and homeowners to hire them. The crowd thins as employers arrive and lottery balls are drawn. After a couple of hours, those who are left settle in for the three-hour English class led by an instructor from Westchester's main campus, in Valhalla, N.Y.

The class is designed to help workers communicate better with potential employers—and it's forced Westchester's ESL instructors to rethink teaching. Over the weeks, students pop in and out as jobs come and go.

It's like holding a class "at the corner of Times Square," says David C. Bernstein, dean of the English Language Institute at Westchester, which teaches English to about 4,000 non-native speakers each year and has one of the most comprehensive English as a Second Language programs in the country. It's also leading the charge to transform immigrant education and make it a national priority.

For Adolfo, a house painter who came to the United States four years ago from Guatemala, the classes at Neighbors Link have been nothing short of life-changing. He says he would never have

enrolled in an ESL class on a college campus, because he didn't know how to navigate the process—and he needed to work. At Neighbors Link, he found a sympathetic group of people who understood the particular challenges he faced as a newly arrived immigrant who spoke no English and needed a job.

"I feel relief," Adolfo says, about learning to speak English. "I can communicate. Now, I feel confident talking to anybody. I still don't understand everything, but I can explain things better." His English has become so good that he volunteers his time helping other immigrants learn English during the center's weeknight classes.

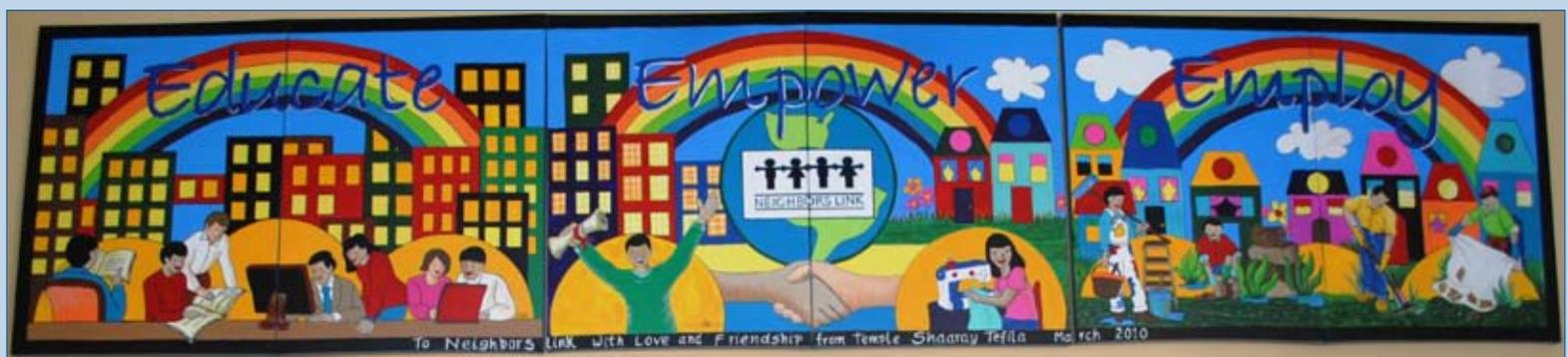
Replicating What Works

The collaboration between Neighbors Link and Westchester Community College is exactly the kind of work Teresita B. Wisell, executive director of the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, wants other community colleges to learn about. It's

one of many programs that have been added to a database kept by the organization.

She says highlighting such practices is the only way to bring about effective education for immigrants, which is crucial for not only their personal success but also the economic and cultural health of the United States.

Neighbors Link understands that, and that's why it offers the "Job English" class to day laborers, as well as its evening ESL program to all immigrants. Learning a new language can make the challenge of starting a new life in a foreign country less daunting. Students are also encouraged to seek more-advanced ESL classes at Westchester and even enroll in an academic program.



Mural (Continued from page 1)

On Sunday, March 14th, the three artists each oversaw a panel painted collaboratively by dozens of Temple members and Neighbors Link clients, as well as congregants of the Antioch Baptist Church in Bedford Hills. Mount Kisco police officer Edwin Ramirez painted alongside the artists, making both the event and the mural a portrait of community participation.

Leslie sketched out the design on the canvas panels and devised a simple color-by-number scheme to guide the volunteers. "The teamwork



and cooperation I experienced and witnessed between the volunteers from Neighbors Link, Temple Shaaray Tefila and The Antioch Baptist Church was extraordinarily uplifting and rewarding," she said.

Shirley Buontempo, Neighbors Link Program and Volunteer Manager, marveled at the talent and efficiency of all the participants and "the sense of pride and community as everyone worked together." The mural was unveiled on April 5th and now welcomes visitors in the main room of the Neighbors Link center. ■

Neighbors Link Clients Get Washington Lesson on Civics

More than 50 workers and families from Neighbors Link and the Hispanic Resource Center of Mamaroneck joined thousands of immigrants from the tri-state area at the March 21 rally in Washington for Immigration Reform. There's no better classroom for American history and democracy than our nation's capitol, so the group had a chance to experience their American Dream up close and personal.

They were accompanied by staff members and volunteers from Neighbors Link who taught classes in American civics during the 17-hour round trip experience. Workers asked endless questions and took pictures of each other on the steps of the Capitol building, in front of the Lincoln Memorial, and along the mall of War Memorials. It was a journey they will never forget.

The American melting pot was best symbolized by a scene on the bus when the driver, a new immigrant from China, got lost in Washington. After making a



wrong turn on Pennsylvania Avenue he asked, "Is the Capitol building the same place as White House? I was never here before this day." The passengers from Neighbors Link shared his dilemma and quickly explained the difference — in their new and common language.

Once home, a man wrote for his English class the following morning, "My heart filled with love for the people of this country." Another day worker said he now understands how democracy works, and added that he wants to explain to his family in Guatemala how people in the United States decide together what kind of government they want.

Clients said they derived new energy and hope from marching together with more than 200,000 other immigrants. One man wrote, "It was important for me to see so many people like us saying Yes for legalization."

Beyond the Walls of Neighbors Link: Our Classrooms Throughout the Community

The wide variety and growing number of program offerings have prompted Neighbors Link to look beyond the walls of our Columbus Avenue location towards several off-site teaching venues.



Photo by Sandra Fenton

Neighbors Link ESL Program Grows

Due to the growing popularity of our English as a Second Language Program, Neighbors Link has opened an additional class at the Mount Kisco Public Library on Wednesday evenings. The program complements the 13 ESL classes already provided weekly inside our facility. We are grateful to the library for their support of the off-campus program, and to Westchester Community College for providing excellent instructors.



Learning Links After-School Program

Learning Links, our after-school enrichment program for elementary-aged children, is going strong in its fourth year at Mount Kisco Elementary School. New to the Learning Links staff is Jennifer Tully, a current MKES fourth grade teacher, who has been hired as academic leader and liaison to the students' daily classroom teachers. Jennifer joins the program's Parent Coordinator Grace Postigliano and Administrative Coordinator Rebecca Jamo, together with additional staff and student volunteers.



Photo by Diane Lewis

Eco-Cleaning Class Teaches Green Techniques

This six-week program, developed for Neighbors Link by volunteer Kim Manocherian, emphasizes the use of natural ingredients like baking soda, vinegar and borax, rather than bleach and other potentially toxic substances.

According to Kim, women enrolled in the Eco-Cleaning course have begun introducing the safe, homemade cleaning solutions to their employers, who have received it well. "The class empowers women to achieve financial independence while protecting their health and that of the environment," she said.

Eco-cleaning knowledge is only part of the overall training received by women enrolled in the course. They also learn effective work habits, basic business management skills, and are instructed in customer service practices. Creation of business cards and personalized client care plans help the housekeepers be "more specialized," said Neighbors Link Job Bank Coordinator Luisa Granda.

Neighbors Link will soon begin marketing program graduates to prospective employers.

Special thanks to St. Francis Church for providing space for this program.

Neighbors Link Inspires Replication

Acknowledged as a model for immigrant assimilation organizations nationwide, the Neighbors Link Board of Directors is evaluating the opportunity to share its name and programs with other communities in a strategy of replication.

Community leaders in Stamford, Connecticut are eager to partner with us in this endeavor. While the name and programming objectives will follow the Mount Kisco model, this grassroots effort will be undertaken by the Stamford community, with an emphasis on local involvement. The Stamford organization will be self-sustaining, supported financially through locally raised funds, used locally, like the Mount Kisco archetype.

The Neighbors Link Board of Directors has designated our former chair, Catalina Samper Horak of Darien, to be point person on this noteworthy project.



Neighbors Link Partners with Mount Kisco Police

With the dual objective of bringing information and understanding to the Latino immigrant community, the Mount Kisco Police Department has teamed with Neighbors Link clients to form a community partnership.

Known as PACT, Police and Community Together, the group has organized a series of informational community meetings at houses of worship and is planning a carnival this summer. Mount Kisco Police Officer Edwin Ramirez has been integral to the development of the PACT program.

NEIGHBORS LINK. LEARNING TOGETHER, LIVING BETTER.

To make a donation, go to www.neighborslink.org

shake it up!

FESTIVAL DE PRIMAVERA

to benefit

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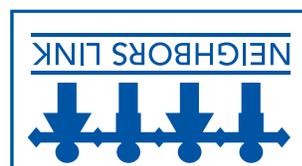
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Saturday, May 8th, 2010

7:00pm
*glen arbor golf club
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Tickets: 914-666-3410 ext.14 or
www.neighborslink.org

Looking for help around your home
or yard? Call Luisa Granda at
914-666-3419 X11 to learn more about
using our hiring site or job bank.



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