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 Neighbors 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.

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.
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.

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.

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.

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 Postiglione and Administrative Coordinator Rebecca Jamo, together with additional staff and student volunteers.

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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.

shake it up!

FESTIVAL DE PRIMAVERA
to benefit Neighbors Link

Saturday, May 8th, 2010
7:00pm
glen arbor golf club
bedford hills, ny 10507

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www.neighborslink.org