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Report #1
June 10, 2010

Over the past few months, I have been serving as a full-time volunteer with Camp ACE (Alert Community Empowerment) in the Seventh Ward of New Orleans, a low-income community that is still struggling with the effects of Hurricane Katrina. I have been volunteering in the Camp ACE HIV Outreach center as well as with their Counseling and Tutorial program, which works with at-risk youth who are in danger of entering the juvenile justice system. Thus far, I have come across several challenging hurdles in my work with Camp ACE but have been able to come up with creative solutions to potential problems. I have also come across a great deal of luck related to my work in this community.

In the Camp ACE HIV Outreach Program, I have been assisting in the HIV clinic, learning how to administer HIV testing and counseling and conducting street outreach and prevention education in the community. With the Camp ACE Counseling and Tutorial Program I have been working with at-risk youth at a local middle school. My focus is on bridging these two programs to provide much needed services and experiences to at-risk youth, specifically on issues related to academics, HIV/AIDS and physical health and mental health.

Post Katrina, only patchwork repairs were made to the Camp ACE education building due to lack of funds. Five years later, damages and wear and tear on this building are very apparent. The education program previously ran programs such as juvenile delinquency prevention, adult education, GED education, teen parenting classes, after school care, job training, summer camp and counseling and mentoring programs. When I arrived in New Orleans this past March, however, the education building had not been in use for almost a year. A leak in the roof had created two gaping holes in the ceiling of two of the classrooms. Although these education programs are vitally needed in the 7th Ward community, Camp ACE could not afford repairs and the building remained unused. At first, this was a setback to my work here, as my project banked on the use of this building. However, I was able to find other ways to conduct my work with at-risk youth and we are now moving forward in being able to re-implement these vital educational programs to New Orleans youth. In response to the closing of the education building, Camp ACE began going directly to middle schools to work with at-risk youth. As soon as I arrived in New Orleans, I joined in on this effort.

Since my project focuses specifically on working with at-risk youth on issues related to mental health, HIV/AIDS and physical health and academics, I also began conducting youth outreach through my work at the HIV center. I have done so in a local high school as well as through street outreach, which focuses on HIV prevention education. I recently received my HIV Counseling and Testing certification through the Louisiana Department of Public Health. This certification is extremely helpful and has equipped me with knowledge and skills that allow me to help the HIV Outreach Center expand the scope of their work. I am now able to conduct HIV testing at the center (a very important intervention in HIV prevention work). The counseling training that I received is also incredibly valuable in my work with at-risk youth relating to issues of emotional and mental health.

As promised, I conducted an extensive search for additional funds to supplement the generous support I have received from JJCF. I was extremely lucky and thrilled to recently receive a \$20,000 grant from The Sunshine Lady Foundation. This funding has gone directly to the Camp ACE Education program. We made repairs to the damaged roof and ceilings (please see pictures) and are currently finishing up some additional restorations in order to get the building and its programs back up and running. Our fortunate ability to re-open this building will allow for the reimplementation of very critical educational programs to New Orleans children, youth and families. In one week, we will begin our summer camp/school program, which will offer academic and recreational care to disadvantaged children and youth that would otherwise not receive this form of enrichment during the summer months. (It is critical, in this community especially, to provide summer enrichment opportunities to children in order to avoid summer setback and widening of the achievement gap). The children will also participate in therapeutic recreation activities, which are very important for these kids, many of who are dealing with post-traumatic stress and other emotional and mental health issues. Because of the funds received from the Sunshine Lady Foundation, all children will be able to attend the summer school for free. This is extremely significant because most parents in the community are unable to afford summer care for their children.

The re-opening of the Camp ACE education building and the implementation of our summer program are vital in my ability to carry out my Youth Empowerment Board Project. I have been able to piece together much of the work I had planned for this project, but access to a building and children who are out of school will help make my work far more effective. Although the majority of the children attending summer school are of elementary age, a number of teens will participate as well. In addition to this, we have collaborated with Job1, a local job-training program that works with at-risk youth, which will provide us with youth workers who I will lead in job training and job skills workshops. Also, I will work with this group of youth in areas related to academics, emotional and mental health and physical health. I will conduct workshops and discussion groups related to these issues. I am also going to lead the youth in service learning activities, in which they can share the information they learn in the workshops (e.g. HIV prevention education) with other at-risk youth in the community. I will lead the youth workers in assisting younger students in the summer school with their schoolwork. I will also provide academic assistance to the youth myself in order to ensure that they do not fall behind in school over the summer months. The collaboration with JOB1 is extremely valuable for my project because it allows the youth to receive a paycheck for assisting with the summer school and for taking part in the Youth Empowerment Board activities. This is great because it will equip the youth with skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the future, while also helping them economically.

I am currently working to locate additional grant funding in order to sustain the use of the Camp ACE education building and programs far beyond this summer.

My work with Camp ACE thus far has taught me a great deal as to what it means to work for a nonprofit organization that is very under-funded and understaffed. Camp ACE is meeting the very critical needs of at-risk, low-income members of its community, with an incredible dearth of resources. For me, this means that I wear very many different "hats" as a volunteer. Over the past couple of months, in addition to volunteering with the HIV Outreach and Counseling and Tutorial Programs, I have worked on various home-

rebuilding projects in the community, including performing the repairs on the education building. I also serve as the volunteer coordinator for volunteer groups that come from out of town for service trips. These groups volunteer to help rebuild homes that are still in unlivable condition from Katrina. Since these groups are usually only in New Orleans for one week and their service is extremely valuable, I assist in ensuring their efforts are as effective as possible. This often includes scouting out the works sites before volunteer groups arrive, taking photographs of the work that needs to be done and sending them to volunteer builders before they arrive so they can plan ahead, and collecting the necessary tools and building supplies for the work site. As discussed earlier, since Camp ACE funding is so limited, I also serve as a grant writer for the organization, working toward re-opening past Camp ACE programs and ensuring that they can continue to run and serve the needs of the community. On a fun note, I recently began conducting swimming lessons for young children in the Seventh Ward community. This is very fun for me, and important for the children and their parents, many of who have told me that their kids have remained traumatized by water after Hurricane Katrina.