

3-2017

## Community Partnerships Newsletter March 2017

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### Recommended Citation

Harris, Charlotte; Grey, Lucy; Abraham, Nicole; and Alexander, Hadiya, "Community Partnerships Newsletter March 2017" (2017).  
*Community Partnerships Newsletters*. 4.  
<https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/cpnews/4>

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# Community Partnerships

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## *Start Fresh: Resettlement and Community Building*

*Charlotte Harris '18*

Start Fresh is a nonprofit organization in New London that resettles refugees from war-torn countries like Syria and Sudan. This includes working through regulations, arranging for housing, picking the family up from the airport and settling them in their new home. It includes more long term involvement as well, like setting up medical appointments, getting the children in school, and registering for food stamps and other social services. The goal is for refugees to become self sufficient within six months, but given the language barriers and cultural differences, most refugee resettlement agencies maintain a presence in the refugees' lives for about five years.

My role as an intern has been dynamic and challenging, but very rewarding. Last semester, I implemented a Google calendar system to organize the 100+ volunteers and the various appointments and commitments for the families. It was a bit challenging teaching such a large group of people how to



*Start Fresh Annual Dinner in the College Center 3/26/17*

use this system, but now they've gotten the hang of it and use it on their own. I've also facilitated connections between Start Fresh and the College, such as helping organize a film screening fundraiser in February and identifying Arabic speaking Conn students. More recently, my work has become more hands on, as I've been interacting directly with the refugees and making appointments for them. This week, I've been helping them get ready to file their income taxes - a learning experience for both of us!

Since I've started working with Start Fresh last fall, I've learned a lot about how many challenges refugees face when coming to the US, but also how resilient and optimistic they can be. No matter how many setbacks they've faced, they





pick themselves back up and persevere. It's incredibly inspiring and humbling, and has confirmed to me that I want to continue this kind of work after I graduate. •

*Lucy Grey '19 & Nicole Abraham '19*

The screening of *Salam Neighbor* (Ingrasci, 2016), hosted by Connecticut College, inspired Nicole to try and make a film as important as *Salam Neighbor*. After a pretty quick discussion, we knew we wanted to focus our film on the refugee community in New London. Dean Tracee Reiser connected us to the organization Start Fresh. Start Fresh is a non-profit organization that resettles refugee families in the New London area. They are a volunteer based group that meets weekly at Cross Roads Presbyterian Church. Ron Ward and Cheryl Molina founded and manage the group with over 150 volunteers.

To complete our work for our film class, we have gone to Start Fresh meetings and some events to understand what Start Fresh does and see how the volunteers and refugees communicate and work together. It was a fascinating and enlightening experience for us both. The families and Start Fresh have an abundance of love and welcomed us so quickly even when we were almost strangers. It is an honor to be welcomed as members of this caring community. Going into this project, we did not expect to be so impacted and invested in the way we are now. Start Fresh and the refugee families are incredibly brave people that we are building relationships with and we want to do our best in creating a film that is authentic and moving. •

*Contact Community Partnerships and Connecticut College Committee on Refugee Relief and Education to receive more information.*

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## *Youth Congressional City Council, Washington D.C.*

From March 11th to 15th 2017, the National League of Cities (NLC) 2017 Congressional City Council took over Washington, D.C. Short in stature, but strong willed Youth Delegates (13 to 18 years old, who are engaged in a youth council/advisory board or other city civic activity) from across the nation tackled issues that they feel are the most prominent issues in their communities. The activists are developing strategies to resolve the 5 main problems they presented.

1. A group of Delegates from Buckeye, Arizona, stated that there is an invasive plant taking over their community, called the salt cedar tree. These trees use up to 300 gallons of water per day which is equivalent to 200,000 households' usage of water.

2. Delegates from Colorado are focusing on high teen suicide rates. They also stated there is a lack of mental illness awareness and a lack of resources in their schools and communities.

3. In Ohio, Delegates are trying to implement a plastic bag ban. They want to do this as "a way to save the community and contribute to a global movement." They also stated, "more than 50 percent of plastic bags are used just once and then thrown away."

4. Like most communities around the country today, a group of Delegates from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, are worried about a possible loss of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. One delegate highlighted how "these programs affect the longevity and success of youth in our city."

5. Two groups of Delegates from Kansas and North Carolina expressed the importance of youth involvement in local government. One of their plans is to lower the voter age to 16 years of age. They claim, "Sixteen-year-olds pay taxes if they have jobs – and there should not be taxation without representation!" •

# Community Partnerships

## *Introducing Christopher Soares, Community Learning Coordinator with Hadiya Alexander, Community Partnerships AmeriCorp Vista*

**Hadiya Alexander:** Introduce yourself! Where are you coming from and what brought you here?

**Christopher Soares:** My name is Chris Soares and I am a graduate from Southern Connecticut State University located in New Haven, CT, where I was involved in many different leadership roles. Before joining Community Partnerships, I interned at a wealth management firm in Manhattan and after deciding that I did not want to pursue a career in the finance field, I took up an opportunity to teach English in Barcelona, Spain, for four months. My experience in Spain solidified my idea of working in Higher Ed with passionate and enthusiastic college students.

**HA:** What is your role at Community Partnerships?

**CS:** My role is to facilitate student engagement. I meet with students and they explore quality community opportunities that align with their aspirations and objectives and at the same time provide a benefitting experience with our partners. I oversee our transportation system which includes our vehicles, student workers, and ensuring the safety of our students. I also am in charge of publications and social media.



**HA:** What are you most looking forward to at Community Partnerships?

**CS:** I am looking forward to being an integral part of a team that promotes Connecticut College's mission statement and building relationships with members of the New London and Connecticut College community. Furthermore, I am excited to see how Community Partnerships and its partners impact the community and look forward to hearing how students have life changing experiences because of the programs they participate in. (Refer to Community Partnership's Instagram to hear more from our students and their stories – Instagram: commpartnerscc)

**HA:** What are you most looking forward to at Connecticut College?

**CS:** I am excited to be part of a dynamic campus and community. I look forward to collaborating with different departments on campus to achieve community goals.

**HA:** What do you like to do in your spare time?

**CS:** I enjoy spending my time outdoors at the beach, exercising, travelling, visiting breweries and wineries, and with my family and friends.

**HA:** What are two goals you have for yourself in this position?

**CS:** To work with students and community partners in New London to strengthen the economy and to increase visibility of the wide range of opportunities Community Partnerships offers. •

## Women's March

*Linda Theodoru, Information Services*

We March On hosted a New London County Forum in collaboration with Community Partnerships at Connecticut College on March 19th. It was a drop in open house between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m. in the Ernst Common Room in the Blaustein Humanities Center on the campus.

After the Women's March in Washington many area people remained eager to sustain the momentum of activism. This event was one of many organizing forums people throughout the nation are holding at the local levels. The purpose of the forums is to connect civic-minded individuals intent on working for progress at the local, state, and national level with organizations already hard at work addressing those issues. Interest areas are reproductive rights, climate change, equal pay, civil liberties, criminal justice reform, and the local forums provide participants with direct connection to activists and groups working around those issues.



Over 150 attended the forum held at Connecticut College and groups included: Start Fresh, Immigration and Advocacy Support Center, ACLU of Connecticut, Action Together CT- New London County, Center for Medicare Advocacy, Green Party of Connecticut, CCAG - Connecticut Citizen Action Group, Code Blue, Common Ground Services, CT Working Families Party, CT TransAdvocacy Coalition, IRIS - Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services, NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut, League Of Women Voters of Connecticut, outCT, Quiet Corner Democrats, RESULTS, 19th Senate District DTC, Socialist Action CT, Indivisible Norwich (Because We Care), Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut. For more information about the Forum or Women's March CT – We March On visit [www. http://womensmarchct.org/](http://womensmarchct.org/) •



# VISTA

Volunteers In Service To America

Are you interested in becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA?  
Contact **Hadiya Alexander & Aleksandr Chandra!**

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Aleksandr Chandra: [achandra@conncoll.edu](mailto:achandra@conncoll.edu)

**Follow us on social media to find out when  
our information sessions will take place in April!**

Send questions and/or interesting stories for the newsletter to [csoares@conncoll.edu](mailto:csoares@conncoll.edu)

