

As part of your final assignment for your role as an Education Advocacy Research Assistant with the Chicago Education Advocacy Cooperative, you will respond to five reflection questions that explore the outreach, advocacy, and research work you completed between January and June 2025. Your responses should demonstrate a thoughtful engagement with your experiences supporting migrant and refugee families, organizing community resources, and contributing to data-driven research projects. For each question, write one well-developed paragraph that includes specific examples, personal insights, and connections to broader themes such as educational equity, mutual aid, career readiness, and the ethical use of data. You are encouraged to reflect on both the challenges and moments of growth you experienced, how your understanding of advocacy and community work has evolved, and how this opportunity has shaped your personal goals, values, and future direction. Your reflection will be evaluated based on your ability to clearly describe your involvement in family support efforts, articulate your role in at least one of the ChiEAC research studies, and meaningfully connect this experience to your learning, skill development, and commitment to social impact. Please submit your completed responses as a single document to the D2L assignment folder titled "ChiEAC Research Assistant Reflection" by the posted deadline.

Education Advocacy Research Assistant

Chicago Education Advocacy Cooperative (ChiEAC) — Chicago, IL

January 2025 – June 2025

- Provided direct outreach and educational support to 18 low-income migrant and refugee families across Chicago, assisting with CPS enrollment, translation services, special education referrals, and access to culturally responsive academic resources.
- Collected and distributed over 500 pounds of donated clothing and winter gear to meet the immediate needs of newly arrived families and raised more than \$2,000 for ChiEAC's 2025 Community Impact Fund to support emergency assistance and microgrants.
- Collaborated with ChiEAC staff and peer volunteers to contribute to three independent community-based studies, used Qualtrics and mobile outreach strategies to collect, clean, and organize over 300 unique data points across the three projects (see below) while ensuring all responses met ChiEAC's internal ethical standards.
 - *Study 1:* Surveyed attitudes toward career readiness and barriers to job searching among low-income students and caregivers.
 - *Study 2:* Collected survey data exploring public perceptions of the value of a college degree, particularly within first-generation immigrant families.
 - *Study 3:* Supported digital survey distribution for a project on community attitudes toward artificial intelligence, data privacy, and automation in everyday life.
- Represented ChiEAC in my community building trust with families and advocating for access to trauma-informed, bilingual, and equity-focused educational supports.

Education Advocacy Research Assistant *Reflection Questions*

1. What did serving migrant and refugee families teach you about trust, advocacy, and the barriers that families face when trying to access basic educational resources in Chicago? Reflect on specific moments of challenge or growth and consider how this experience shaped your understanding of educational equity.

Assisting migrant and refugee families through ChiEAC resonated with me on a personal level since I have experienced being in their situation new to the country, unaware of the school system, and uncertain about where to seek assistance. That experience enabled me to establish trust with the families I assisted, as I recognized the fear and uncertainty that accompanies the process of enrolling in CPS, overcoming language barriers, or obtaining special education services without support. I recall assisting a family that had been consistently given incorrect information regarding their eligibility for services solely due to their lack of fluent English. Their irritation reminded me of how quickly families can be overlooked when systems lack equitable design. This position demonstrated to me that advocacy involves more than simply providing resources—it requires being present with patience, cultural awareness,

and reliability. It reinforced my conviction that educational equity goes beyond theoretical fairness; it involves eliminating tangible obstacles that hinder students and families from succeeding

2. How did your role in collecting and distributing clothing, raising funds, and organizing community support shift the way you understand mutual aid and grassroots organizing? What emotions or insights came up for you as you took on responsibility for meeting urgent needs in real time

My involvement in gathering and distributing clothing, raising more money, and assisting in organizing support for newly arrived families provided me with a direct insight into what mutual aid truly signifies it's not about charity, it's about solidarity. Prior to this experience, I viewed community support as structured and organized; however, I soon discovered that grassroots organizing frequently demands quick thinking, emotional strength, and a profound sense of part. When a mother arrived at one of our events with her kids, all dressed in light sweaters during a freezing week in February, I understood how urgent and personal this work truly is. Addressing those needs instantly was occasionally daunting, yet also invigorating. It showed me that mutual aid involves individuals supporting one another when systems let us down, and that community care serves as a strong reaction to injustice. It also boosted my confidence in my leadership skills during crises and highlighted that even minor actions such as organizing donations or writing a funding request can significantly affect when motivated by a sense of collective humanity

3. Of the three research studies you contributed to, which one resonated most with your personal story or the stories of people you know? How did participating in this research project impact the way you view the role of data in shaping public understanding and policy?

While helping collect clothing donations, I had a moment that deeply impacted me I realized how privileged I was to be in a position to give, when so many of the families we served didn't even have the option to donate because they were just trying to meet their basic needs. That realization helped me see the survey data in a new light. Each response wasn't just a number; it was a reflection of someone's lived struggle with economic hardship, limited access to networks, and systemic disadvantages. Participating in this project made me understand how data can uncover the invisible realities of poverty and inform policy in ways that truly matter.

4. How did this experience challenge or confirm what you believed about the power of community organizations in addressing complex issues like job searching, educational access, and technology in daily life? What do you now see as the strengths and limitations of this kind of work?

This experience tested and reinforced my conviction in the ability of community organizations to tackle complex challenges such as job searching, access to education, and even technology in daily life. Contributing clothing, assisting families with school enrollment, and engaging in community-led research all highlighted the responsiveness and ingenuity of grassroots organizations like ChiEAC. We were able to quickly address urgent needs and foster trust with families in ways that larger organizations often struggle to replicate. However, I also saw the limitations our resources were limited, funding was unpredictable, and the issues we were addressing were systemic, not just individual. This taught me that while community organizations are crucial for providing immediate support and advocacy, they cannot replace the need for broader policy reform and institutional accountability. Still, I was inspired by the significant impact a dedicated, small team could make when engaging directly with those most affected. Ultimately, this experience showed me that true change often starts at the community level, even when resources are scarce.

5. Looking back at your time with ChiEAC, how do you think this experience shaped your personal goals, sense of purpose, or vision for the future? What skills or perspectives do you hope to carry forward—and how do you hope to keep supporting others?

Yes, looking back at my time with ChiEAC, this experience has deeply influenced my personal goals and sense of purpose. The work I did with the community driven research, confirmed for me that my future is rooted in making a tangible difference in people's lives, especially those who face systemic barriers. It reinforced my commitment to equity and advocacy, reminding me of the power of direct action and the importance of addressing both immediate needs and long-term change. The skills I gained particularly in community organizing, research, and cross-cultural communication are ones I plan to carry forward. Moving forward, I hope to continue supporting others by applying these skills in ways that promote inclusion, access, and justice. I'm committed to being part of movements that fight for systemic change, while always remembering the importance of empathy and understanding in every aspect of my work.

Category	Criteria	Points Possible
Reflection on Community Engagement How well you reflect on your outreach, advocacy, and family support work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Describes specific examples of working with migrant or refugee families (e.g., CPS enrollment, translation, special education support) o Explains the challenges families face and how the student responded or adapted o Demonstrates an understanding of cultural relevance, language access, and trauma-informed care 	/20
Reflection on Research and Data Collection How well you explain the data collection and contribution to the three ChiEAC studies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Clearly identifies and reflects on their role in at least one of the three research projects o Explains the importance of the topic and how data was gathered (e.g., survey, outreach, digital tools) o Describes how the research helped inform their view of issues like career readiness, college access, or AI in society 	/15
Personal Growth and Future Impact How well you connect your experience to your own learning, values, and goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Reflects on how the experience shaped their understanding of advocacy, education, or community work o Identifies specific skills gained (e.g., communication, trust-building, organizing, ethical data handling) o Describes how this experience will influence their future studies, career, or community involvement 	/15