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### **ChiEAC Research Assistant Reflection**

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.

- Working with migrant and refugee families showed me how hard it can be to build trust when people have experienced a lot of fear or instability. I learned that trust doesn't happen right away it takes time, patience, and listening without judgment. I also saw how important it is to advocate for services that are trauma-informed and bilingual. These experiences helped me understand that educational equity means more than just equal access it also means fair access, shaped by what each family truly needs.

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?

- Helping collect winter clothing and raise funds showed me that mutual aid is about more than just giving; it's about people helping each other in real, human ways. I always go through my closet that is full of clothes with half that I never wear or haven't worn in years. It felt good to be able to donate them and know exactly who they were going to and that they were going to be going to someone who truly needs them. Knowing that the clothes I gave away could've helped someone stay warm or get a job felt better than them just sitting collecting dust in my closet. Contributing in even the smallest way made me realize that even without big resources, people coming together can meet urgent needs quickly.

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?

- The study on career readiness and barriers to job searching felt the most personal to me. I've seen family members struggle to find stable work because of language barriers, lack of childcare, or not having access to job training. I noticed how many people shared those same concerns. It made me think more about how job access is tied to things like education, transportation, and even mental health. Working on this study helped me realize that data can highlight real-life problems

that need policy change. I also learned how important it is to make sure people's voices are represented fairly.

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?

- Before this role, I believed community organizations were helpful. Though now I know they are essential. ChiEAC was able to step in where larger systems fell short, especially for families dealing with complex issues like school enrollment, job searches, or tech barriers. I believe the strengths like building trust, being flexible, and listening closely to the community are what make organizations like ChiEAC powerful.

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?

- This experience helped me see that I want to involve my future work into focusing on helping others, especially in education and community support. I realized I enjoy helping people that were in real need and needed not just guidance and support but also a voice. I also learned that advocacy isn't just about speaking up but it's also about listening, building trust, and working with others toward a common goal. I now feel more confident in my ability to lead small projects, collect and use data and support people with respect. I want to continue to volunteer for causes that help people and make sure no one feels alone when trying to navigate complicated systems.