

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.

Even though I wasn't on the ground working directly with families, being part of this work from a distance—through donations and research—still gave me a clearer picture of the obstacles they faced. I learned how much trust is needed for families to even ask for help. It's not just about needing school supplies or internet access—it's also about whether families feel safe enough to reach out in the first place, especially if they're undocumented or unsure about how systems in the U.S. work. The experiences that they go through made me realize that educational access isn't just about policy—it's also about fear, language, confusion, and feeling like you belong. Advocacy means recognizing those layers and doing something about them, even if it's behind the scenes.

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 out with donations made me think about mutual aid in a different way. At first, I thought of it as a short-term fix—but I've started to see it more as a long-term, community-centered way of supporting each other. Mutual aid isn't about waiting for a big organization to solve everything—it's about people helping people with whatever they have. Even just sorting through clothes or deciding how to use funds became a kind of collaboration. It made me realize that contributing time, money, or resources—even if it's not flashy—really does matter when people are in crisis, especially because it all adds up.

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 public perceptions of the value of a college degree—especially among first-generation immigrant families—resonated the most with me. My own family has always emphasized education, especially coming as an immigrant family, but we've also questioned whether the financial burden of college is always worth it, especially with so many other responsibilities at home. I can see how data can reflect complex emotions and tough choices people face. It also made me realize that research isn't just about numbers—it's about stories. When shared responsibly, those stories can shift how people and policymakers understand entire communities.

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?

My time confirmed something I've known — that community-based organizations are doing important work that often goes unnoticed. Through my time here, I got to see the scope of what families are navigating: career readiness, access to tech, digital literacy, and the pressure of pursuing higher education without a safety net. Community orgs like ChiEAC don't just raise awareness—they fill gaps where bigger systems fall short.

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?

Before this experience, I honestly didn't think much about donating to organizations. I assumed my small contribution wouldn't make a real difference, or I just didn't feel connected enough to the causes. But after seeing how our clothing drives and fundraising efforts at ChiEAC directly impacted families—helping them get winter gear, access school resources, or apply for emergency support—I've changed the way I think about giving. Now I see donations as an act of solidarity, not just charity. I want to continue supporting grassroots efforts, whether that's through local volunteering or simply being more intentional with how I give back.