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Serving migrant and refugee families taught me that trust is the foundation of advocacy work, especially when supporting people who have been through trauma or face systemic barriers. Many families I worked with were understandably cautious when it came to enrolling their children in CPS or accessing special education services. I remember one situation where a parent was unsure about asking for support for their child's learning needs because they didn't fully understand their rights and didn't speak English fluently. By being patient, translating important information, and offering reassurance, I helped bridge that gap. That moment made me realize that educational equity isn't just about giving people resources—it's about making those resources accessible, understandable, and delivered with dignity. I saw firsthand how fear, language barriers, and lack of culturally responsive support can prevent families from getting what they need. This experience deepened my understanding of how advocacy is built on relationships and trust, and how much work still needs to be done to make education truly inclusive.

Helping organize clothing drives and fundraising efforts through ChiEAC gave me a new perspective on what mutual aid and grassroots organizing actually look like. Before this experience, I thought of community support as something mostly done by nonprofits with big budgets or formal programs. But being part of a team that collected and distributed over 500 pounds of winter clothing and helped raise more than \$2,000 for emergency relief showed me that real impact often comes from ordinary people responding quickly to urgent needs. I felt a sense of urgency and responsibility when we learned a newly arrived family lacked proper winter gear, and it was rewarding to know our coordination helped get them what they needed right away. That moment reminded me that mutual aid isn't about waiting for systems to act—it's about people stepping up for one another with whatever resources they have. I also saw how much behind-the-scenes work goes into even small acts of care, from sorting donations to organizing transportation. This experience made mutual aid feel personal and powerful, and it deepened my appreciation for grassroots efforts that are often overlooked but essential to community survival.

The research study that resonated most with me was the one focused on career readiness and barriers to job searching among low-income students and caregivers. As someone who has personally faced challenges navigating education and planning a career while managing financial stress, I saw reflections of my own experiences in the survey data. Many respondents talked about the pressure to contribute financially to their households, the lack of accessible guidance on job training, and uncertainty about their long-term goals. Working on this study—using Qualtrics to help organize and clean responses—showed me how data can be used to bring visibility to struggles that are often overlooked. It made me realize that behind every data point is a real story, and those stories deserve to be part of public discussions and policy decisions. I now understand how ethical data collection isn't just about numbers—it's about creating space for marginalized voices and using research to advocate for real change.

Before joining ChiEAC, I had a general sense that community organizations played a role in helping people, but I didn't fully understand how powerful they could be in addressing complex social issues. This experience showed me that local, grassroots organizations can act quickly and flexibly in ways that larger systems often can't. Whether it was helping families navigate school enrollment or distributing surveys about AI and technology, ChiEAC met people where they were—often literally, through mobile outreach. At the same time, I also became more aware of the challenges: limited funding, a heavy reliance on volunteers, and the emotional toll of constantly responding to urgent needs. Still, I saw how this kind of work builds real trust and makes lasting connections in communities. It taught me that while community organizations can't solve every problem on their own, they're essential for creating change from the ground up—and for keeping people's voices at the center of conversations about education, equity, and the future.

My time with ChiEAC helped clarify the kind of work I want to do in the future and gave me a stronger sense of purpose. I learned how important it is to be part of something that serves others, especially in communities that are often left out of mainstream support systems. Skills like organizing data ethically, communicating across teams, and helping coordinate outreach efforts showed me that advocacy can take many forms—and that I'm capable of contributing in meaningful ways. This experience also helped me see that I'm drawn to work that blends community engagement with research and policy impact. I hope to carry forward the values I developed here: equity, empathy, and a commitment to using my skills to support others. Whether I continue in education, law, or nonprofit work, I know I want to stay involved in efforts that center people's voices and push for a more just and inclusive society.