

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.

Working with 18 migrant and refugee families across Chicago taught me about the difficulties and invisible barriers that prevent access to even basic educational resources. One moment that stands out was trying to help a family where the parents spoke very limited English. They were trying to enroll their child in CPS, but since they didn't understand the enrollment system it was really difficult for them. They received very limited help in navigating the portal, locating documents, and just overall enrolling. I kept trying to help them and built rapport through trust. Having all the answers didn't matter as much as just listening to them and doing my best. It helped me realize that educational equity isn't just offering services, it's also making them accessible. This experience improved my understanding of advocacy as something necessary in these contexts. We need more empathy and persistence in helping those who need it, not judgement. A lot of families are dealing with so much on top of school enrollment, so being informed meant showing patience and compassion. We should lift up marginalized voices and help those who need it, not put them down for not knowing how to work a system they've never encountered before.

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?

Coordinating the distribution of clothing and helping raise money taught me that mutual aid isn't charity, it's solidarity. In the past, I thought that support work was done as a *for*, but now I know that it's a *with*. It's shared within the community, done as a group to show unity. When I helped deliver clothes the gratitude formed a connection, being able to see someone as I helped. It wasn't an anonymous donation at a store, it was a face to face response to a need. It was a rollercoaster of emotions, feeling energized and emotionally heavy because of the high stakes but knowing I was making a difference. The unpredictability of who would need what and the constant need to adapt reminded me that grassroots organizations are personal and demanding. However, they're also powerful and help so many people. It helped me reframe aid work as something that is done mutually within a community, and was very impactful.

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 attitudes towards career readiness and job-search barriers resonated with me, especially coming from a working-class family. Many people who were surveyed showed that they were frustrated with underemployment and language barriers. There is also a strong sense of xenophobia engrained in many hiring practices even today. It's a well known fact that a last name can make or break a resume. I used Qualtrics to gather responses and worked to ensure the survey was as accessible as I could make it. What struck me the most was how the data showed patterns of things people experienced privately. An example is the mismatch between qualifications and actual employment opportunities. Being part of the research process showed me how to ethically collect data and how important it is. It's not just getting numbers and responses, it's creating a platform for marginalized voices to be heard and inform the public. It can help shift policy conversations and bring change. It reminded me that data is individual people, it brings visibility to the overlooked.

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?

My time with ChiEAC internalized that community organizations are necessary beings that help address interconnected social issues. However, it also showed me their limitations. I saw how adaptable ChiEAC was, mobilizing donations and working to make things accessible. These things made actual, lasting impacts on people's lives. Still, I saw the limits that scale and funding brought. Community organizations can't address systemic issues like immigration policy delays or underfunding in CPS. As hard as we might work to make sure we are being ethical in how we use and store data, this will never be the widespread action. There will always be concerns about things, and people will slip through the cracks. Community organizations only have so far of a reach and as much as we might want to help those beyond it, we can't always do that. This taught me that while community groups can help head innovation in advocacy and education, to actually make permanent large changes we need to come together and reform the system. I see community work as vital but part of something larger.

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?

ChiEAC gave me much more than just professional experience. I came into this curious about advocacy, and now I have a much deeper appreciation for everything this organization does. The skills I gained from this will help me for the rest of my life. They're both practical, useful skills and aligned with my values. I've learned how to build connections, be patient, and how to work with data ethically. I'm interested in learning more

about how data informs policy design, since that was something that we worked on. Participating in this helped remind me that it's important to reach out and help those who need it, especially when there aren't a lot of other people they can turn to. I've learned skills that will help me in future leadership positions. As I go forward, I hope I'll be able to continue building bridges between data and lived experiences. I hope I'll help more people in the future.