ChiEAC Research Assistant Reflection

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.

Question 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.

Question 1 Response: Serving migrant and refugee families in Chicago taught me that trust and advocacy go together throughout the entire process and that building trust is more of a gradual process instead of something that can be rushed. This is especially for families who have experienced trauma and displacement. I learned that systematic barriers like language, immigration status, and not being familiar with the U.S. educational system can create a lot of obstacles for these families trying to access basic resources. Families could be afraid or hesitant to engage with local schools due to fear and uncertainty on their legal status. These experiences have taught me that being an advocate is not just about providing information but it is also about creating a safe and welcoming place for families in need to feel heard and supported. I also learned that it is important to focus on educational equity as well. It is not enough to only offer equal resources but you have to make sure that those resources are accessible for everyone, no matter the circumstance or obstacles. This work made me more committed to social justice and it made me realize how inclusive policies need to address the needs of communities in order to create real educational equity.

Question 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?

Question 2 Response: My role in collecting and distributing clothing, raising funds, and organizing community support gave me a deep and more personal understanding of mutual aid and grassroots organizing as acts of solidarity rather than charity. Being a part of collecting clothes that were given to clothing drives for families in crisis showed me how mutual air is about meeting people's immediate needs. Although these people are in need, they still require dignity and respect. There have been many times in the past, mostly in high school, where in the wintery, cold months we did a clothing drive in order to collect coats, jackets, hats, gloves, and other items many lack during the winter time. Many students who donated came back immediately ready to help out and donate older, unused items for people in need. Sometimes you would even see wealthier families in the school purchase newer items just to donate to those in need. The urgency and humanity participating in these clothing drives has stayed with me even when participating in this project in college. It made me realize that when people care, a community can be really powerful when they are grounded in relationships and shared responsibility. This experience has reshaped my understanding of organizing a community, helping me see it not only as a power tool for change but as a vital means of survival and empowerment for those who need it most.

Question 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?

Question 3 Response: Study 1, which surveyed attitudes towards career readiness and barriers to job searching among low in-come students and caregivers, was the most impactful for me because it reflected many of the economic and educational struggles that I’ve witnessed not only in my community, but all around the world. As I helped partake in this survey, I learned that many people often face feelings of frustration, uncertainty, and being overlooked by institutions that are supposed to be there for them. Many people experience limited access to professional networks, lack of affordable childcare, or even unfamiliarity with online job platforms. Answering these questions made me think more deeply about those around me and what they may be experiencing. Participating in this study made me realize that the role of data isn’t just about the numbers you collect, rather how you can use that data to advocate for solutions whether it is school based or job readiness preparation. This project inspired me to be more committed to using research as a form of advocacy. We should all be working together to listen to people's needs, their experiences, and how we can change or help their lives.

Question 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?

Question 4 Response: This experience really strengthened my appreciation and belief on the power of community organizations in addressing complex issues like job searching, educational access, and navigating technology in daily life. Before becoming a part of the Chicago Education Advocacy Cooperative, I knew community organizations played an important role in filling institutional gaps but I now realize that they often function as critical lifelines for migrant and refugee families facing systemic barriers. It requires patience, cultural sensitivity and practical resourcefulness to thrive when participating in ChiEAC. In these moments, it is confirmed that these qualities are important to help those who are in need thrive. Well seeing more success among the community, at the same time I often noticed the limitations of nonprofit capacity. There was often a waitlist for those in need, burnout among staff, and reliance on inconsistent funding often slowed down impact. Nonetheless, there was still trust built throughout the entire process, whether it was through networks or single individuals, that change is possible if you just simply try to make a difference. This experience has changed my understanding of advocacy. It is not a charity, instead it is a long term commitment to equity. Where community organizations serve not just as service providers, but instead advocates for systemic change.

Question 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?

Question 5 Response: Looking back, my time with ChiEAC has significantly shaped my personal goals and clarified my sense of purpose. This is particularly on equity in education and community which is a centered policy work. Before I took on this role, I knew a little about social justice, but working directly with my professor to help migrant and refugee families has helped me see how structural inequities play out in people's daily lives. This includes how they are in schools, job applications, or even accessing a school enrollment form online. I feel more involved now in my commitment to the community so that their voices can be heard. I hope to carry my communication skills and involvement forward so that I can keep supporting immigrant rights and education reform for those in need. More importantly, I have learned to listen with humility and am now able to collaborate more with others. As I more forward, I hope to stay connected to mutual aid and advocacy networks so that I can help in any way I can. These actions should not be a one-time act, but something more as a continuous effort with those hopes of achieving trust, accountability, and shared goals with those in your community.