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SOC 103-004

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Dr. Benjamin Drury

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.**

This experience made me so much more aware just how privileged I am. When I was gathering up my clothes and choosing which of them, I was willing to donate, I was surprised at how easy it was for me to let go of those items. Meanwhile there are families that could barely afford clothes let alone other assets such as housing and education. I was humbled by that realization. This experience taught me not to take my privilege for granted, because it is a privilege that not everyone has. Refugees often feel disoriented with the new environment, having left their homes without a choice must have been difficult. I as an immigrant can sympathize with this. many days where I feel homesick and long for the presence of my friends. I can imagine how hard it must be for them.

1. **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?**

I think the most interesting thing that I’ve realized is how even the smallest gesture of kindness goes a long way. Professor Drury emphasized this by celebrating even the smallest wins, saying “we have raised 40 dollars since yesterday, that’s 40 more dollars we previously didn’t have.” To me, 40 dollars doesn’t seem that much, it could barely buy a T-shirt from Zara, but I realized that that 40 dollars could buy someone a hot meal even just for a day. The clothes I gave away which I took for granted could benefit those that couldn’t afford it. I used to think that in order to truly help someone you must make big grand gestures, so I never tried to help at all thinking “my 20 dollars wont help anyone” but in reality, if many people gave even just the smallest amount of kindness, be it monetary or goods, it would compound and help someone in a big way.

1. **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?**

Of the three research studies I contributed to the one that resonated with me the most was the one where we collected data exploring the public perceptions of the value of a college degree, particularly within first generation immigrant families. This survey asked many interesting questions which challenged me to reflect upon myself and how I personally value education. Being a first-generation immigrant and first-generation college student, the questions in the survey challenged my views and feelings about college and made me think about how other people like me feel about it too. In the little way I contributed to this study, by sharing it with people I know, I how that in some way, I may have helped in contributing to a deeper understanding of the topic.

1. **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?**

I believe community organizations impact the lives of many people in a big way. Community organizations actually meet the people they are trying to help, getting to know them, their struggles, their need, and their identity as a community, this way, community organizations are typically niched into the specific community they serve, instead of giving them general aid, they give them specific help that are catered to their specific needs. They have a deep understanding of the community that large institutions and organizations don’t. This very reason is why I believe community organizations have a larger, longer lasting impact on communities. However, community organizations can only go so far. They often are understaffed and underfunded, which can restrict the extent of their efforts. I think that in order to resolve this issue, larger institutions should invest and support community-based action and community organizations in order to reach their full potential in serving the communities they serve.

1. **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?**

As an aspiring urban planner, I eventually would like to work in public policy, working with communities to help build safer, better, livable spaces for them. I am confident that this will require me to work with social organizations like ChiEAC, to gain a better understanding of how to serve communities better and to actually know what they need. I’ve personally never met the people I donated the money or the clothes to, but the experience taught me that I can help them regardless. I have to let go of my perfectionist mindset where I believe “If I cant help people in the best way possible, then I shouldn’t help at all” this is a flawed way of thinking which prevents me from being able to be of service to people, if I am to be an effective and compassionate urban planner, I need to curb this mindset and try to help the best way I can, not the best possible way. In the future, I would like to help build communities where your zip code no longer matters, that where you live is a hinderance to what you can achieve.