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Newsletter, September 2010: Progression Through Partnerships

ALIVE Center, Western Kentucky University

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Through WKU campus and community partnerships, nearly 5,000 items were collected for local food pantries this year. Learn more on page 9.
The study abroad flyer read, “Spend the Summer Making a Difference.” On June 7, 2010, six Western Kentucky University students, one alumni and one Northern Kentucky University student left for Ghana, West Africa to fulfill that promise.

On the very first day, students knew this would be an adventure. Kristen Gunn explained, “I am used to running to the mall or going in Wal-Mart where everything is organized, in its place, and marked with a price. Ghana shopping was totally different. It’s all about bargaining. But after that initial shock, I got the hang of it and got some pretty good deals.”

Bargaining offered but one new experience. One adventure took us to Kakum National Rain Forest. Imagine being hundreds of feet above the ground walking on a swinging bridge way above the tree canopy. “Scary but exhilarating,” International Affairs major, Ashton Elmore, said. “As I walked out of this amazing rainforest a neat sign caught my eye, ‘Leave Nothing but Footprints.’

What a time to be in Ghana especially for WKU soccer player, Kaylyn Pratt (Exercise Science). For her, “it was really neat to see Ghana play Serbia. We went to a Shell gas station where they set up a big screen television for everyone in town to watch World Cup matches. Everyone was so into it!”

Ghana, the ancestral home of many African Americans, played a significant role in the trafficking of African slaves. Thousands of enslaved Africans were imprisoned in slave dungeons before being shipped to Europe, the Caribbean and the Americas. We toured the Cape Coast Slave Castle. Student Affairs graduate student, Crystal Hardeman reflected, “it was the most eye opening, emotional experience of my life. I tried to hold back the tears but they kept coming.”

How did we spend the summer making a difference? The purpose of our trip to Ghana was to complete a “$100 Solution” service-learning project in Sanka Village, Elmina. The “Solution” empowers students to turn $100 into a world of change. It is the idea that one person can use a small amount of money to promote positive growth. Students asked the question, “With $100, what can we do to enhance the quality of life in your community?” Working with the elders of the Village, students used the money to paint the village daycare, buy material and hire a seamstress for 78 student uniforms, provide food for hot lunches for the daycare for a year, buy books and school supplies for the school, and purchase personal items and clothes for children. The group also pooled their money to buy three porcelain toilets and materials to install the first toilets in the Village.

The work was challenging to say the least, causing Ashton Elmore to wonder, “What good am I actually doing in the Sanka Village? It overwhelms me, however, the smiles on the children’s faces are good enough for me right now.”

For Biology graduate student, Cynthia Worcester, “There was a special bond that was formed between the villagers and our group when we worked together to fix the nursery school. That common goal united two seemingly different cultures, but as we worked and laughed together, I realized just how similar people really are, no matter their background.”
After months of email conversations and planning, the Western Kentucky University Chinese Flagship students finally conducted their service-learning project during the months of May and June in Chongqing, China at the Sichuan International Studies University (SISU). It all began with asking the students at SISU what kind of service project would best serve their needs. In China, and especially at colleges, people want to practice their conversational English skills. The students I collaborated with explained that although they have many participants at SISU’s twice-weekly English Corner event, they rarely or never get the opportunity to converse with a native English speaker. English Corner happens every Wednesday and Sunday evening and gives college students and community members the opportunity to gather together to practice their English speaking skills.

With the project idea finally solidified, WKU students were trained by Dr. Elizabeth Winkler of WKU’s English Department about appropriate and inappropriate conversational topics for Chinese culture. For example, students were asked to avoid topics dealing with politics, religion and the one-child policy. They were also given the tools that would help them segue from a taboo subject to one that could be discussed. WKU students were also required to write reflection pieces at the end of each English Corner session, recounting the topics discussed and what they learned about Chinese life and culture and themselves. Attired in bright yellow T-shirts with Chinese characters on the back asking, “Would you like to speak English?” the WKU Flagship students boldly entered the plaza where they were to conduct two-hour conversational sessions each Wednesday evening for the next two months.

By all accounts, the experience was a great success. Will Meredith, a Theatre and Dance major, said, “I really did enjoy it, and whenever we explained to the SISU students that we were doing it to give back to them for helping us speak Chinese, they were always impressed with our generosity. This definitely helped us be well-received by the SISU community.”

In addition, Nicholas Hummer, an Information Technology major, felt that, “this was one of the best things that I have had the ability to take part in to learn more about the university and the people that live here.”

Service-learning will continue to be a part of each Flagship session in China, whether it be conducting English Corners or assisting others in the community through various outreach projects.

If you would like more information about the Kentucky Chinese Flagship Program, please contact Ms. Melinda Farmer at melinda.farmer@wku.edu or at 270-745-2763.
Kimura Responds to Passionate Issues

By: Jane Wood

Western Kentucky University Junior, Alex Kimura, encourages others to “FeelGood” by doing good. Kimura transferred to WKU from Clemson University as a Sophomore and didn’t waste any time trying to get involved at WKU in a very new, and philanthropic way. She is the president of a newer club to campus, FeelGood; a student-run organization that sells grilled cheese sandwiches in exchange for donation. All proceeds go toward the Hunger Project and other organizations aimed at eradicating world hunger and creating “change makers,” while empowering people to become more self-sufficient.

“When I left Clemson and came to WKU, I really felt that this was a movement that could really catch on here because of the generous spirit and giving nature of everyone I came across on campus. Also, after I had learned more about hunger and how serious and complex of an issue it is, I couldn’t just continue on doing nothing about it,” Kimura said.

Kimura and her fellow FeelGood-ers couldn’t be happier with the positive response the club has received within the past year on campus, and they see nothing but blue skies ahead as far as the future of FeelGood is concerned. With possibilities for a benefit concert, an extended menu of gourmet grilled cheese sandwiches, and an expanded stand schedule for two days a week instead of one, FeelGood is going to continue to reach out to the campus and community of WKU and exchange education on chronic persistent hunger for yummy sandwiches.

Kimura is not only taking a stand against hunger, but she also is giving a voice to another issue so many people are unaware of; the lack of bone marrow donors on the bone marrow donor registry. An issue she herself was unaware of until her seventeen-year-old-sister was diagnosed with aplastic anemia, a very rare and deadly blood disorder and one of several other diseases that require bone marrow transplants to be cured.

“My sister Sam could not find a donor match out of our family and the seven million potential donors in the national registry. Fortunately, her disease is being maintained with immunotherapy treatments. However, there are thousands of people that die every day because they could not get their life-saving transplant.”

What did Kimura do with this newfound knowledge about the lack of marrow donors? She took action, of course. Kimura and her family took on the task of bringing awareness to this issue and organized several bone marrow testing drives in Louisville this summer, allowing them to register somewhere around 700 people thus far. Kimura is in the process of organizing a campus-wide bone marrow testing drive at WKU this fall and hopes to register just as many at that time.

Kimura’s passion for helping those that can’t help themselves inspired her to be proactive about making a difference. The concept for FeelGood may be simple, but the impact and the inspiration behind it is anything but. All it takes to get registered to be a bone marrow donor is a cheek swab and a consent form, and with that alone lives can be saved. Through her work with FeelGood and the bone marrow drives, Kimura continues to serve as a role model to others by encouraging them to get involved any way that they can. She truly lives by the words of the very organization she brought to WKU; to do good, is to feel good.
Building community; it happens all around us in Central Kentucky, exemplified here recently in Fort Knox, Kentucky.

The Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC, transformation at Fort Knox is expected to result in a net gain of 5,000 full-time civilian and permanent military personnel by the end of 2011, along with family members who will accompany them.

Initiatives signed into law in 2005 have led to major construction projects in Fort Knox, as the base is preparing for new military installations, as well as the consolidation of the U.S. Army’s human resources functions.

Many of the BRAC-related construction projects are finished, including the almost 900,000-square-foot Human Resource Center of Excellence, which opened May 27. Developers also are seizing the opportunity from the BRAC transformation with projects in the area surrounding the military base.

“Fort Knox long has provided a major economic driver in the area”, said Brad Richardson, Executive Director of One Knox, an agency created to help local communities prepare for the BRAC-related changes at Fort Knox. “And the BRAC changes are providing another boost”, he said.

As its name implies, the community-based organization, One Knox, serves as a hub in helping the communities of Kentucky’s Heartland to capitalize on the monumental growth at Fort Knox due to Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC).

Many collaborative efforts are already underway, such as the partnership with YMCA Louisville to bring YMCA programs to Hardin County. One Knox maintains a facebook page and website, highlighting ongoing developments of the BRAC project, as well as local opportunities to live, learn, play and work, as categorized on their website.

As this development continues in Fort Knox and surrounding communities, Western Kentucky University and its regional campuses in Elizabethtown, Fort Knox and Radcliff welcomes its role in this collaborative effort to develop quality of life for the new military families arriving every day.

Community individuals associated with the university, as well as Elizabethtown faculty and staff, have already expressed interest in partnering on community-based research projects. One such project idea includes the implementation of a school-based support curriculum for the families and children of our military. WKU hopes to partner with the many existing resources to develop impactful programs and initiatives.

Opportunities to connect and create impact for the Fort Knox community are being realized every day, and everyone has a part. If you would like more information on BRAC developments, visit www.oneknox.com, www.facebook.com/oneknox or call 270-352-1899. For more information on how to partner with WKU to serve in the BRAC expansion efforts, contact the WKU ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships at alivebg@wku.edu or call 270-782-0812.

Blessings Unleashed is enriching people’s lives, one dog at a time. Blessings Unleashed Foundation is a 501 (C)3 nonprofit organization that was founded in 2006. It is located in Glasgow, Kentucky, and they provide uniquely trained service dogs and companion dogs for children with autism.

Dana Emmit-Hall, Blessing Unleashed Foundation Director, knows first-hand the positive effect a service dog can have on a family and a child facing autism. In February of 2006, Emmit-Hall’s 18-month son was diagnosed with autism. Just like any loving mother would do, she committed herself to researching any type of intervention that may improve her son’s quality of life. It was through this research that she found information concerning autism service dogs. Her love for her son, dogs, and helping others is what lead her to create Blessings Unleashed Foundation.

“I love the fact that these dogs can make a huge difference in the lives of these individuals and provide them with an extra measure of security,” Emmit-Hall said.

Blessings Unleashed’s mission statement states that their commitment is to enrich the lives of individuals with autism by training and placing highly skilled service dogs. They accomplish this by properly training select puppies for their future individualized tasks and educating recipients to utilize and care for their service dogs. Blessing Unleashed is able to accomplish this task in the form of two types of dogs; service dogs and companion dogs.

Service dogs are allowed full public access anywhere an individual can go. The dog is specifically trained for the task to "assist" the individual with his/her disability. These dogs have passed a multitude of tests; a Puppy Aptitude Test, AKC Canine Good Citizenship Test, and an Assistance Dog International Inc. Public Access Test. After they have successfully passed all of those tests, they then undergo advanced training done by an experienced professional. This training is specific to the needs of the child and family they will be living with. Making every dog as unique as their owners and ensuring a perfect match and unbelievable bond.

“One little girl who is being paired with a service dog told her mother that her dog made her feel better. Another boy with an autism service dog
Nonprofit Spotlight

was quoted to say they they didn’t feel invisible anymore,” Emitt-Hall said. The difference these dogs are making in people’s lives is as indisputable as it is unfathomable.

Companion dogs are not allowed public access, but they are trained to assist their individual with one specific task. Although they do not have the same responsibilities as a service dog, their role in their family’s life is just as vital. They still have the power to improve the quality of life of the family and the child with autism, possibly improve a child’s communication skills and behavior, as well as calm the child and give them a better sense of themselves and their surroundings.

Another large aspect of Blessings Unleashed are puppy raisers. Puppies spend an entire year with their puppy raiser families, giving them time to be socialized and begin their training. Without these puppy raisers, Blessings Unleashed would not be possible.

Because Blessings Unleashed is a nonprofit organization, it depends solely on the generosity of individuals in the community. There are three ways to support Blessings Unleashed: donating through PayPal, using GoodSearch search engine, and by purchasing seeds from Botanical Interests online. GoodSearch is a search engine that donates 50-percent of its revenue to charities and schools designated by its users. A portion of an individual’s purchase through Botanical Unleashed Interests will be donated to Blessings Unleashed Foundation.

“Unfortunately the autism numbers are continuing to rise. The autism statistics are right now at 1 in 110 kids diagnosed with autism and as many as 1 in 56 boys,” Emmit-Hall said. Because of the rising need for service dogs, there is currently a waiting list for them at the foundation. Emmit-Hall is hopeful that with the support of the community, the need for this waiting list will soon disappear.

The commitment of all those involved with Blessing Unleashed Foundation continues to lead to improved lives of families and children with autism. The work being done by Blessings Unleashed truly epitomizes the age-old saying, “dog is man’s best friend.” These service dogs are more than a companion to the children and families that receive them; they are blessings.
The fall semester at WKU is steadily underway on the hill, as students settle in to their classes and residences. One such group of students at WKU’s Hill House, an ALIVE Center community development program, have begun the new semester charting out their plans for utilizing their graduate coursework to address local issues. Students in this graduate program live at 741 East 11th Street and combine their areas of study to address issues together and alongside community partners.

The benefits of this experiential living and learning environment are the reciprocal opportunities to teach and learn in a community setting. Such opportunities exist not only for the current individuals and organizations that make up the 11th Street neighborhood, but also for the incoming students who will also benefit from a democratic, community-building experience in growing their own community. Ideally, this is something that all parties will continue as a lifelong practice in the many communities in which they exist. It’s a domino effect.

Upon arrival to campus and their new home on the corner of 11th and High Streets, Hill House students attended a Community Organizing workshop hosted by WKU’s Institute for Citizenship & Social Responsibility, as well as participated in a team-building retreat to Foster Falls, Tennessee. During their initial time together, students have moved in and began getting to know each other through both structured activities and down time in their new residence. Planning meetings for the residents are also underway, as they plot their courses of action in working with neighbors to develop specific projects.

Neighborhood individuals and organizations are connected through an online “Neighborhood Network” developed by last year’s Hill House students. Students will administer this email exchange as one method of communicating with the public. Students will also continue to have one-to-one exchanges with neighbors and interested parties, as they work towards common goals. Sunday Dinners will continue this semester, as students will host a weekly potluck gathering for the sole purpose of bringing people together to share a meal. It’s opportunities like this that much of the exchange of ideas and neighborhood networking occurs.

Stop by and get to know the students. Find out how you can get plugged in, if this particular neighborhood development effort is of interest to you, or just come see and hear what the Hill House students are doing. As the semester unfolds and projects are underway, visit cehouse.blogspot.com to find out more. Welcome Hill House students of 2010-11!

Hilda Owusu
B.A. Psychology and Sociology, University of Ghana
Seeking Masters of Public Health at WKU

Christy Serafini
B.S. Social Work, Western Kentucky University
Seeking Masters in Social Work at WKU

Phuong Vu
B.A. Business English, Foreign Trade University, Hanoi, China
Seeking M.A. Communications at WKU

Mo Zhang
B.A. Management, Beijing Normal University/Zhuhai
Seeking M.A. Communications at WKU

For more information on Hill House graduate assistantship opportunities, call 270-782-0812.
I
n April 2010, the first CANstruct for a Cause event was held at Western Kentucky University, and three student organizations built canned structures representative of their organizations and combined efforts to bring about the “largest donation” of food in local food pantry, HOTEL INC, history.

Then, when the leaders from the Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints youth conference called the ALIVE Center to set up a project for 700 students, the opportunity to create lifelong learning seemed limitless by expanding the CANstruct into a four-part project created to allow students to think critically about an issue, serve generously, and act responsibly.

Western Kentucky University staff and student workers from the ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships and the Institute for Citizenship & Social Responsibility (ICSR) facilitated the two-hour service project that centered on local poverty. Divided into eight teams, 720 youth participated in the project, engaging in one of four exercises. The exercises consisted of 1) building structures with their donated canned food items 2) creating cards of encouragement for recipients of the food items 3) thinking critically to define poverty from their personal perspective as well as the perspective of someone in poverty and discussing the difference and 4) locating and interviewing individuals on campus about why they think poverty exists locally.

This idea of expanding volunteerism to bring about a method for involving students in impacting the community is part of the ALIVE Center mission to promote community development through campus and community partnerships. The idea also goes hand in hand with ICSR’s desire to encourage students to “think critically, serve generously, and act responsibly.” Through this partnership, the road to creating campus and community partnerships and developing communities has started with identifying needs and assets.

The last hour of the CANstruct project allowed youth participants to report their reflections from the critical thinking aspect of the project. One participant reported, “We found that nobody really knew about it (local poverty). There was a lack of awareness.”

This year the ALIVE Center in partnership with the ICSR is identifying needs and assets by creating an awareness of local interests and resources. By hosting three workshops around the idea of creating campus and community partnerships, the staff identified current partnerships and ideas for new partnerships with faculty, staff, nonprofit and faith-based organizations.

The spreading awareness continued with the start of M.A.S.T.E.R. Plan. First year students received the opportunity to take part in the Butterfly Effect canned food drive, as well as Big Red’s Blitz—a day of students providing service to countless local agencies.

After Big Red’s Blitz, the participating students identified their areas of interest and signed up to get continued information on providing public service. Project Affect (discussed on page 10) will provide other students the opportunity to identify their interests. Then, the staff will use the data from the list of student and workshop participant interest to assist in creating campus and community partnerships. Anyone interested in campus and community collaborations, can contact the Center at alivebg@wku.edu or 270-782-0082.
Around 20 campus and community organizations will gather in Western Kentucky University’s Centennial Mall from 11am-2pm on Thursday, September 16, 2010, to participate in a student engagement fair, Project Affect, aimed at increasing student involvement through volunteerism, service-learning, and community-based research.

Each organization participating will host its own booth at the event where they will have information regarding their organization’s services and how to get involved, giving students a chance to ask questions and learn more about what these service-based organizations do for the community of Bowling Green and WKU. Many of the organizations participating will also be hosting some type of service for students that visit their booth.

Holly Conley, Volunteer Recruiter for the Center for Courageous Kids in Scottsville, KY, is one of the not-for-profit organizations participating in Project Affect. “As a not-for-profit organization, we are always eager to welcome new faces into our camp family! We have various ways for students to volunteer and make an impact on the lives of some very brave children this fall and year-round!”

Project Affect will also be a great way to expose students to organizations that are somewhat new to campus such as, Eat So They Can, an organization aimed at eradicating world hunger and empowering those affected by poverty.

"I am very excited to offer the WKU and Bowling Green community the chance to partake in an international movement to overcome world poverty. I believe it is an exciting opportunity to encourage anyone who has a passion to make a difference in the world to learn more about getting involved," Eat So They Can Volunteer Ambassador, Kayla Clauson said.

The WKU ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships is partnering with WKU Housing and Residence Life and the Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility to put on Project Affect. The campus radio station, Revolution 91.7, will be providing music for the event and will also be hosting a table with some free items for those attending. In case of rain, Project Affect will take place on the following Tuesday, September the 21 in Centennial Mall from 11am-2pm.
Nonprofit Community Calendar
September-November

09/01 Warren County Library Art Exhibit by Myra Dwyer
09/03 American Red Cross Blood Drive
09/09 United Way Balloons, Tunes, and BBQ (runs through 09/12)
09/10 Kids on the Block of South Central Kentucky Festival of Sand
09/10 Alpha Theta Antique Show & Sale (runs through 09/12)
09/11 Multiple Sclerosis Society Walk MS
09/17 New Beginnings Therapeutic Riding Kentucky Downs Southern Nights Benefit
09/17 VISION Multi-Agency Council Meeting
09/18 Mayor’s Bike Ride Tour de Town
09/18 Alzheimer’s Association Memory Walk
09/19 Riverview at Hobson Grove Timeless Manners for Children
09/25 American Red Cross Food Drive
09/25 Bowling Green International Festival
10/04 A Voice for Animals monthly meeting
10/09 New Beginnings Therapeutic Riding The Mane Event
10/15 VISION Multi-Agency Council Meeting
10/23 The Medical Center 10k Classic
10/23 NAACP Freedom Fund Gala
10/30 WKU Homecoming
11/11 Mammoth Cave Fee Free Day
11/19 VISION Multi-Agency Council Meeting

For a full listing of nonprofit special events visit, www.wku.edu/alive/events.html
New Students Assist This Fall

This semester at the ALIVE Center, we are happy to welcome three new students into our office. Kayla Tyson is our new student worker, and Rebekah Garr and Alyssa Stephens are our new Communications and Marketing interns. This semester, they will be working on launching the new Student Advisory Board, updating the ALIVE Center blog, coordinating with the newly founded Institute for Citizenship & Social Responsibility, conducting community research, and updating the center’s social networking accounts, among other projects. We are very excited to have them with us, and we expect to have a great year.