

Serving Princeton

Issue #1, 2014

Princeton Human Services Commission

Princeton, NJ

Upcoming Events

5/5 Summer Youth Employment application deadline

5/17 Wheels Rodeo (**5/18** rain date)

Princeton's First Community Needs Assessment (CNA)

By Diana Alvarez, Research Consultant

Nine months ago I had recently arrived to Princeton and was looking for opportunities to volunteer in the human/social services field. Elisa Neira had just started as the Executive Director of Princeton Human Services and was looking for help with a Community Needs Assessment (CNA) Project in evaluating the use of existing services and in identifying service gaps that might exist within the town's lower income population. Given my experience in project management and research and working with communities in need in London, UK, this project was a perfect fit.

Since last July, we have been working tirelessly on Princeton's first CNA. The first 6 months were split between research and planning, and getting to know the community. The research involved interviews with community partners, organizations and leaders that specifically know and work with this population to determine areas of need. The information is being collected through a comprehensive survey that was developed with the help of the Princeton University Survey Research Center, and focus groups.

Beginning in January, we have held 9 events throughout Princeton to survey households that fit the criteria. The findings will be shared in a report, which will make recommendations on how to improve services for our community. This report is scheduled to be finalized by the summer.

This project has helped us understand the dynamics of Princeton and become aware of the unmet needs. I believe this project will make a positive impact in creating a more inclusive community and addressing the needs of our residents, in particular those who are the most vulnerable and lack resources.

Send Hunger Packing (SHUP)

In May 2013, the Princeton Human Services Commission began a program to bring awareness and help to the issue of "food insecurity" among our school-aged children. Almost 500 local children, 12% of the school population, qualify for free or subsidized school lunches during the week. But there is no help for them on the weekends. This striking need for supplemental food on the weekends led to the creation of "Send Hunger Packing" (SHUP) in Princeton.



SHUP is now a collaborative effort of the Princeton Human Services Commission, Mercer Street Friends, and the Princeton School District. It started as a volunteer initiative led by the Chair of the Human Services Commission. SHUP's mission is to provide child-friendly supplemental weekend food through community organization and financial support.

To launch the program, generous grants were first secured from Princeton University, Princeton Theological Seminary, private donors and funds raised during the film screening of "A Place at the Table" with a panel discussion, which was held at the Garden Theater on June 9, 2013. All proceeds from this sold-out event went to the startup of the program.

In September 2013, the Princeton Public Schools began to distribute weekend food backpacks to children in the Princeton schools (K-5 so far) and at the Princeton Nursery School. The parents were encouraged to enroll through an opt-in application process. To date, SHUP has distributed over 2800 meals in this way. To continue and expand this service, SHUP has recently established a volunteer board, which represents a cross section of concerned citizens as well as representation from the three partners. This board will oversee the program and support it with advocacy, fund raising, outreach, education and publicity. They hope to expand the program to more grades and more children.



Photo left:

Volunteers of CNA event at St. Paul's

Princeton Human Services, One Monument Hall , Princeton NJ 08540

Tel: 609-688-2055 website: princetonnj.gov

Our mission *Through advocacy, leadership, and collaboration, the Department of Human Services helps to improve the quality of life of individuals in our community who are vulnerable, economically disadvantaged, or otherwise in need.*

Our services General Assistance (welfare) • Emergency Assistance • Rental Assistance • NJSNAP (Food Stamps) • Summer Youth Employment Program • Back Pack and School Supplies Drive • Holiday Gift Drive • Wage Theft • Information and Referral.

Elisa's corner

**Executive Director of
Princeton Human Services**

In February, I was invited to speak at an Immigration Policy class at Rutgers University and was asked to speak about the role of local government and immigration matters. As I was preparing my presentation, I thought of the work the Human Services Department has done and the things I have been able to be a part of since I started back in June.



During my first few days at Princeton, SHUP, an initiative to provide supplemental food to children, was on the way to its first kick-off fundraising event. I witnessed right away the amazing response of the Princeton community to this cause. The event was sold out and raised enough funds for this program for two years.

This wasn't the only time I experienced the community response to programs organized by HS. During the summer and the fall, the department organized a back to school backpack and a Holiday gift drive to help children in need. This past year, the department with the help of many donors was able to provide school supplies and book bags to over 150 children and fulfill holiday wishes for over 200 children.

I have also been part of the development and planning of other important and ground-breaking initiatives to increase the department's efforts to help our community, especially for those who are most vulnerable.

The consolidation of Princeton has been a great opportunity to increase the potential and impact of Human Services. I'm very thankful I was given the opportunity to embark on this journey with the Commission. Working for Princeton has provided me with great opportunities for personal and professional development and growth. I look forward to the future to continue to serve the Princeton community.

In our next newsletter, I'll write about other services and programs offered through the Department of Human Services.

Elisa

Immigration

By John Heilner, Chair, Immigration Sub Committee

In 2013, in an effort to increase outreach with the immigrant population, the Princeton Human Services Commission formed an immigration subcommittee composed of commission members, community partners, and interested parties. This group took a proactive approach to make recommendations on how our town should handle immigrant issues and the challenges created by the lack of immigration federal policies that are affecting our community. The committee identified issues faced by the immigrant groups and has worked diligently with town officials, the local police department, and organizations such as Latin American Legal Defense Fund (LALDEF) and New Labor in order to better serve and protect this community.

The committee has primarily worked in three areas that significantly impact our immigrant community: helping clarify the role of our local police department in immigration law enforcement, wage theft, and advocacy for tuition equality.



The local police department requested HSC's assistance in revising an internal directive that clarified their relationship with Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE). The directive states that local police officers will not enforce federal immigration laws and will not cooperate with ICE operations such as raids due to the adverse effect it creates in community/police relations. In addition, the entire police force underwent training on immigration law and how they can help workers that have experienced wage theft, with the help of the committee and the leadership of the chief of police Captain Nicholas Sutter.

In the area of wage theft, Human Services, the local Police Department, and LALDEF worked together to streamline a process for workers to address wage theft issues, they can seek help at any of these agencies. The second phase of this initiative will include training day laborers and low wage workers on wage theft prevention, and health and safety at the workplace. Finally, members of the HSC lobbied NJ District 16 legislators, other lawmakers and the State Assembly Education Committee staff in support of the college tuition equality act, which passed last December. This legislation allowed undocumented students to access in-state tuition fees at public state universities and colleges. At one PHSC meeting one mother gave an emotional and tearful statement about the difficulties her undocumented children were experiencing when applying for higher education due to the out of state fees they were being charged in spite of the fact they had been NJ residents for a number of years.

The Immigration Subcommittee will continue its work to protect the rights and safety of our immigrant community.