FIRST YEAR BONNER SERVICE TRIP TO NEW ORLEANS

In January, First Year Bonner Community Scholars took part in an eight-day trip to New Orleans, LA for a service and enrichment experience that is a principal part of the TCNJ Bonner Scholars program. Students learned about Hurricane Katrina, the impact the hurricane had on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region, the government’s response to the natural disaster, and the rebuilding efforts that are still going on today, eight years after the storm.

The trip allows Bonners to relate their service work in Trenton with service work in other locations in the United States. It also serves as an opportunity for students to form a bond with their fellow classmates as well as develop a connection with the Bonner Corps as a whole. The Bonner Community Scholars stay with United Saints Recovery Project, a nonprofit organization in New Orleans dedicated to assisting communities that have suffered damage from natural disasters, helping residents return home, improving their quality of life and strengthening the community.

During the trip, the Scholars cohort worked with the St. Bernard Project, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to ensure that disaster-impacted communities recover in a prompt, efficient and predictable way. The SBP serves as a model for disaster...continued pg. 2

Mercer County Reentry Task Force

The Bonner Institute is involved with a new community action and policy network project with the Mercer County Reentry Task Force. The Task Force was originally founded in 2006 and became part of the Human Services Advisory Council in 2009. The Task Force is a collaboration of stakeholders from government, business, social services, and faith-based organizations that works to help formerly incarcerated individuals reenter the community.

The new effort builds on the success of the Trenton Prevention Policy Board model and requests for the College to help build the capacity of community networks. AmeriCorps VISTA members serving as capacity building network coordinators with the Bonner Institute are working with Perry Shaw, chair of the Task Force and Founder and Executive Director of A Better Way, to facilitate the collaborative effort. The VISTA members are helping the Task Force move from an information-sharing venue to a problem-solving network. The six working groups (Education & Training, Housing & Social Services, Community Support & Mentoring, Employment & Job......continued pg. 2
Bonner in NOLA continued…

rebuilding and affordable housing with clients throughout the Greater New Orleans areas. Working with the SBP, Bonners will help rebuild homes affected by Hurricane Katrina. Students also had the opportunity to participate in tours of the city and surrounding area to learn more about city and region as a whole.

The trip always serves as a key experience for Bonner students at TCNJ, and as Julia Livesey ’17 put it “the past week in NOLA has been the experience of a lifetime.” William Montero ’17 also observed the importance of the service The Bonner Scholars provide, despite the eight years that have gone by since the storm. “It is obvious that it means something to the people that we’re here helping to restore the community. It’s warming to know that we’re doing a service people appreciate.” You can read more about the Bonners’ experiences on their blog at http://www.tcnjbonnernola2014.blogspot.com

Reentry Task Force continued…

Creation, Health & Substance Abuse, and Justice & Corrections) have developed action plans for 2014. These include hosting education and training fairs, bringing Project PRIDE to Trenton, and looking into a needle exchange program based on the Philadelphia model.

By providing administrative support as well as academic resources and student interns, the VISTA workers are significantly building the capacity of the Task Force. Since the start of this partnership, Mr. Shaw noted seeing an increase in meeting frequency, greater attendance, and a surge in productivity. Academic interns have also been assigned to support working groups by providing research on best practices, model programs, and information on policies related to reentry.

The VISTA workers and TCNJ Community Engaged Learning staff will continue to work with Shaw and the Task Force to build its capacity and grow the network in order to provide evidence-based, community solutions to help formerly incarcerated individuals reenter the Mercer County.

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WE SHARE Solar Conference

Bonner Scholars Aman Gill and David Sanchez attended the WE SHARE Solar conference at Princeton University, as the first step in the process of gaining vital information regarding the assembly and maintenance of mobile solar units. A group of TCNJ students, including Aman and David, will participate in a six-week program to bring solar panels to Tanzania this summer.

The conference focused on the mechanics of solar panels, as well as shed some light on energy equity around the world. For many communities, access to vital resources such as electricity is unattainable. Professor Marla Jaksch of the Women and Gender Studies Department and TCNJ students have taken part in the WE SHARE project to bring access to solar power to many communities in Tanzania. The solar panels generate electricity for orphanages, maternal health wards, and other essential facilities. Now that the information on how this technology works and is sustained can be shared, these solar panels are becoming an integral part of life in rural Tanzania.

In addition to solar installation and education, Aman and David will be tasked with maintaining and updating a digital archive of maternal health and women's lives in rural Tanzania. WE SHARE Solar made a commitment to donating enough mobile solar units so that our Bonner Scholars and fellow TCNJ students may lead a STEM workshop in Tanzania. The workshop will welcome 60 Masaai girls, 10 teachers, and 10 other community leaders to take part in assembling the units and learning about this technology. In addition to the donation of solar units, WE SHARE Solar is subsidizing a portion of the cost for students and providing an additional workshop at TCNJ to prepare the campus community to teach these lessons abroad.

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