



HOPE
CommUnity Center
Building Community. Enriching Lives.

Spring 2018 Newsletter



(Top) Youth Group participants perform for their peers in collaboration with Orlando Repertory Theatre.
(Bottom) A MOMS class participant celebrates excellent attendance at the end of year ceremony.



"I want to offer children the tools to see a world in a way that reflects their views and their lived experiences through reading, math, science and teaching."

Lashae Copeland,
Community Organizer

HCC Freedom School Builds on Experience

This summer, Hope Community Center embarks on a new initiative to encourage South Apopka youth to learn, celebrate and engage in Afrocentric culture.

A small team, led by Hope's Community Organizer for South Apopka, Lashae Copeland, is organizing a Freedom School at Hope this summer for 5-10 year old South Apopka residents. Historically, Freedom Schools provided quality and relevant education to Black youth who were denied educational equity in the time of state-sponsored segregation. **Programs like the Freedom School are as needed now as they were in the 1960's.** There is still not equal access to education for all people and most curriculum content is Eurocentric.

Lashae says about the Freedom School; *"My philosophy behind this program is for people to be their **full authentic selves**. The Freedom School*

is an extension of that philosophy. I want to offer children the tools to see a world in a way that reflects their views and their lived experiences through reading, math, science and teaching."

Hope's Freedom school is dedicated to enhancing young children's development through community education, and seeks to build **strong, literate, and empowered children** who are prepared to make a difference in themselves, their families, communities, and the world today.

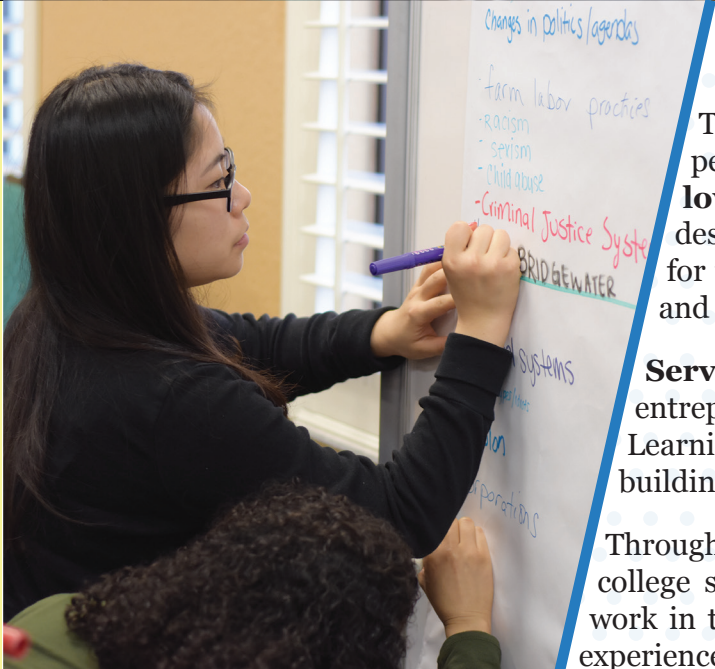
The Community Organizing team encourages you to sponsor a child this summer on their educational journey.

Here's how you can help:

- Although the two-week program is offered for free to South Apopka youth. It costs Hope \$60 to sponsor each child.
- You can offer in-kind field trip opportunities for parks and museums.
 - You can volunteer to teach a class during the camp.
 - You can provide arts and crafts to use during classes.

Please contact Lashae Copeland at lcopeland@hcc-offm.org to learn more about the Freedom School or Teresa Young at tyoung@hcc-offm.org to offer support.





Learning through Service

The core of HCC's work is building a sense of community where people are genuinely **connected, supported, valued and loved by one another**. All of Hope's programs and resources are designed to encourage people to dream of and pursue a better future for themselves and their families, ultimately developing the energy and passion to pursue those dreams.

Service Learning is core to Hope's mission. It is an entrepreneurial idea within a social justice construct. Hope's Service Learning immersions have been expanding minds and hearts and building diverse communities here at Hope for over forty years.

Through service learning, people from outside the community—often college students—come to Apopka. They live with immigrant families, work in the fields, meet community members and reflect on how these experiences **are changing the way they view themselves, their faith, their privilege, and their responsibility** to contribute to making a better, more just world. The participants leave Apopka knowing more about the struggles, remarkable perseverance, and resilience of the working poor immigrant communities in Central Florida. ***They become allies for life in the fight for human dignity and justice.***

Hope's immersion participants and host families are leaders in the social justice movements that are so desperately needed in the world today. One participant, Lance Rosa, came to Hope with a group from **Gonzaga High School in Washington, D.C.** He visited the *Sin Fronteras* Youth Group, whose meeting discussion focused on their recent spring break immersion to Immokalee, a rural farmworker community in Southwest Florida. Lance said about the youth group's reflection, *"After this conversation I'm going back to my host family and reflect a lot on how blessed I am and how much I have."*

Lance is one of 189 Service Learning participants from twelve schools since fall of 2017. All immersion students are encouraged to **"Bring Hope Home"** and begin to sow the seeds of equity in their own communities.

"After this conversation I'm going back to my host family and reflect a lot on how blessed I am and how much I have."



Helping Hands

A Fire that Won't Go Out

He came to Hope Community Center with a big secret that kept his world very small. She came to Hope feeling lost and that her life lacked direction. Neither knew the other nor anyone else at Hope before showing up in August 2014. But, sitting together in Hope's backyard gazebo on a gorgeous day in April 2018, both said they were absolutely sure **it was God who had brought them to Hope** and into one another's lives.

Clarence is married, father of five. For nearly 60 years, he kept secret the fact that he couldn't read. He kept it from friends and his own children. He even kept the secret from everyone at the pharmaceutical company where he worked for over 40 years. When encouraged to apply for supervisory positions, he said he wasn't interested. He hid his glasses in his back pocket and said he forgot them as an excuse not to read.

"I'm no liar," Clarence said, "but back in the days when I couldn't read, I had to lie every day."

Clarence and his brother had passed by Hope dozens of times and always wondered what went on inside. One day they decided to stop in and find out.

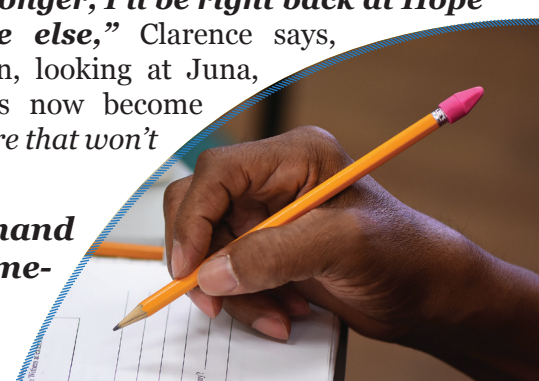
Juna Rocher was born in Haiti but lived most of her life in the US. She has a BS in molecular microbiology from UCF. **She was unsure about what career path to take after college.** Months before graduating in 2014, she looked online for volunteer opportunities, hoping to add experience to her resume. When she saw Hope, she thought it was a church and decided to check it out. The rest, as they say, is history.

Every week since August 2014, even in the months when Juna lived in Tampa, they have met at Hope. Juna says, *"I was never a reading teacher. I've been reading so long, I didn't remember the rules. I had to research them because Clarence needed to know them."* She smiles and singsongs, ***"When two vowels go-a-walking, the first vowel does the talking,"*** and they laugh as they recall how she used this rule to explain why the word "read" is pronounced the way it is.

They could be grandfather/granddaughter but asked if this describes their relationship, they say it does not. Juna says, *"He's like a cool uncle."* For Clarence, Juna is like a daughter. *"I'm so proud of her,"* he says with obvious paternal love and support.

Clarence and Juna still meet weekly to read, talk and be "daughter/cool uncle" together. **They say Hope feels like home to them.** Juna has added "reading tutor" to her resume but more important than that, she says, *"I'm learning to trust my instincts. Clarence gives me confidence. He supports me in anything I do."* When asked what he's reading these days, Clarence replies, "Malcolm X". Juna adds he also enjoys books about animals, history and biographies. ***"I'm branching out in my reading. Next week I start a computer class at the library; and when I'm stronger, I'll be right back at Hope helping someone else,"*** Clarence says, smiling easily. Then, looking at Juna, he states what has now become obvious: *"She lit a fire that won't go out."*

For sure God's hand was in there somewhere.





Open Minds

Bringing Hope to Brightwood

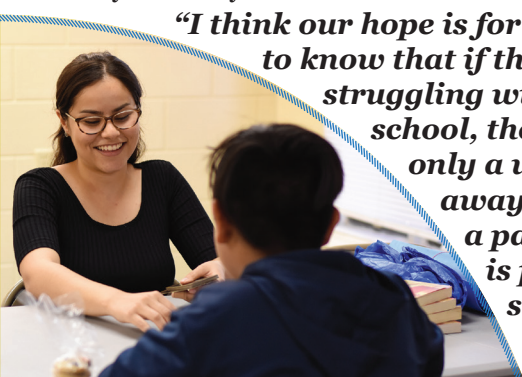
HCC's Eli Garcia is a former Zellwood Elementary Eagle whose family currently lives in Brightwood Manor, a rural mobile home community in North Apopka. Eli began organizing in Brightwood around immigrant rights and Know Your Rights campaigns. She soon discovered that **access to education was a primary concern** for most parents.

Eli says about her organizing role, *"When I came here to talk about Know Your Rights and immigration, parents expressed that their main concerns were centered on their children's education."*

Elementary school students living in Brightwood are bused to the relatively distant Zellwood Elementary. After-school tutoring is offered at the school, but transportation home is not. Many of the parents living in Brightwood do not have access to transportation due to various socioeconomic barriers that prevent them from purchasing a vehicle or obtaining a license. **Hope CommUnity Center sought to ease this barrier by offering tutoring in the neighborhood.**

Notre Dame Mission Volunteer AmeriCorps member Emily Baez says about the educational outreach initiative,

"I think our hope is for the students to know that if they're ever struggling with anything in school, they have support only a walking distance away. I'm proud to be a part of a team that is providing that support."



Emily also reflected on the unique opportunity to understand her students a little better. She says, ***"I believe Brightwood [tutoring] is important because it's something personal that we get to do with the community. Because we are close to the students' parents and families, we get to have a relationship with not only them as students, but also with their families."***

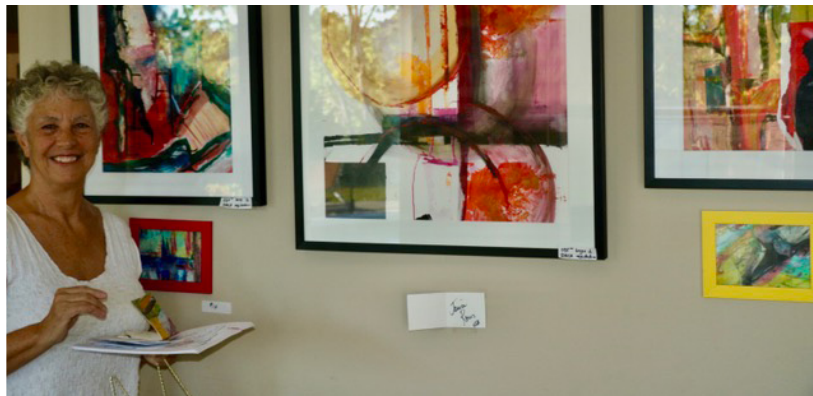
From the Community to the Community

Two of the tutors, Angie Aguilar and Odelia Hernandez, are seniors at Acceleration West. They live close to Brightwood Manor, and tutor elementary-age students. After graduation, Angie will attend Seminole State College to pursue a degree in Biology. Odelia will be going to Valencia to pursue medical and nursing.

Both tutors received tutoring themselves when they were younger. Both share the experience of kids sometimes getting a little wild during tutoring, but, as they pointed out, they are kids after all! Angie and Odelia tutor to get volunteer hours for school.

With this program, Hope provides educational services, community building, and support for elementary students, as well as a vision for a better educational pathway for students living in Brightwood.

If they're ever struggling with anything in school, they have support only a walking distance away.
-Emily Baez



Traditions Shared, Actions Offered

Stories and rituals celebrated—In response to the removal of DACA, the Orlando Havurah (Hebrew word for fellowship) organized a gathering at Hope Community Center to share Jewish rituals and to discuss the connection between their ancestors' migrations, adversities, and triumphs and those of the DREAMers.

Orlando Havurah is a fellowship of Jewish people who come together for prayer and social action. They wanted to hear stories that resonated with their own and their family's own. The gathering was deeply personal and included difficult conversations about family members disappearing, stories about those killed in the Holocaust and stories from Hope's DREAMers of families that still suffer today who work long hours, are separated in their migration, or lost to deportation.

Havurah member and friend of Hope, Marilyn Shapiro, reflected on the event, ***"The day was profoundly meaningful and inspiring. We all were grateful for the opportunity to connect and learn from the DREAMers and to renew our pledge to be allies and friends."***

To guide the conversation, the Havurah used traditional symbols to represent their history and journey. One such symbol was the Huppah (photo above), which is traditionally used at weddings as a sign of God's presence. Symbolically, the openness on all sides represents a welcoming to all visitors. The afternoon closed with two diverse communities gathering and embracing under the Huppah and chanting prayers. This day the Huppah symbolized the welcoming of communities under the love and protection of God. **SHALOM! PEACE!**

Art Supports Dreams— On March 17, 2018, longtime donor, trainer and supporter of Hope Community Center, Janice Rous, sponsored an art show in honor of DREAMers. The art show was hosted in Maitland, at the home of Dikla Yarmi and Isara Meitis, who provided an elegant setting, accompanied by a delicious array of food and drinks. Mary Carroll, Helen Alfirevich and Hank Wolf all played special roles in the set-up of the event.

Janice contributed major pieces of her artwork that were sold at the event. Included in the evening sale were also contributions from other artist friends of Janice. Community members Karla Martinez and Katherin Carrasco spoke to over fifty attendees at the event about their experiences as recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA. They included history of their journey from kids to college students and their dreams for the future. **Proceeds of over \$2000 dollars will benefit Hope Community Center's efforts to support DREAMers like Katherin and Karla.**

Hope is especially grateful to Janice for her art, time, feedback and pure heart of service to HCC that made this event happen.

Do you have a special interest group that meets already or a group of friends to gather who you'd like to introduce to Hope? Contact Teresa Young to plan this kind of gathering!
tyoung@hcc-offm.org | 407.880.4673 ext. 227



Not Your Average Citizenship Classes



Do you know who the current Chief Justice of the United States is? Or the year that the Constitution was written? Ask any of Hope's 150 current Citizenship class students who work tirelessly on Tuesdays and Saturdays to learn the answers to these and 98 other questions that may be asked during the citizenship interview process.

Hope's Citizenship classes consists of permanent residents from **29 different countries**. Their learning process goes beyond basic memorization and practice for the naturalization exam— though that is an important part of becoming a U.S. Citizen. Elizabeth Riebel, Director of Immigration Services at HCC, says her hope for the participants is to encourage community members on how to use their power to promote positive change

and affirm their and others' rights. She comments, *"The use of technology, interactive activities and games, and intensive interview practice make Hope's classes truly special. The genuine connectedness of Hope's Immigration Services members and volunteers to their students is vital in creating a safe yet challenging learning environment where our students can achieve their goals."*

All of this is possible because **Hope is the only U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)-supervised Citizenship program in Central Florida**. This is Hope's second time receiving the two-year USCIS grant. As part of the grant, HCC partners with Catholic Charities of Central Florida to provide legal services to community members.

Since the grant was renewed, 83 students have obtained their U.S. citizenship. Lourdes Duarte is one of those new citizens. She moved to the U.S. from Mexico as a permanent resident and was concerned that becoming a U.S. Citizen would mean she would lose her Mexican heritage. Lourdes is grateful that the volunteers at Hope helped her to become a U.S. Citizen while also reminding her of her roots in Mexico. She said when she began the process to become a citizen she didn't see *"the hope at the end of tunnel."* But thanks to everyone at HCC, she says, *"there is Hope at the end of the tunnel."*

Oh, and the answers to the questions at the beginning of this article (in case you were still wondering)... John G. Roberts, Jr. and 1787!



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Mission: Hope CommUnity Center is a service learning community dedicated to the empowerment of Central Florida's immigrant and working poor communities through education, advocacy, and spiritual growth.



If you are feeling discouraged about the state of our nation, especially as it pertains to immigration issues, I have a suggestion...spend some time talking with the college-bound and college-attending youth involved in the programs at Hope Community Center.

Recently, I had the pleasure of interviewing some of the young people applying for college scholarships. (Frankly, it is absolutely my favorite activity that I do as a board member). Just listening to them talk about their plans and dreams, as well as hearing their determination, would give even the worst cynic **a glimmer of hope for the future**. With all the struggles they have endured, both coming to the U.S. and learning a new culture and language, these bright, hard-working young students still strive to keep their grades up, help out at home, and volunteer at HCC. *And they all passionately want to make a*

positive difference and give back to Hope and their communities.

Besides **renewing my faith in the future**, they also reaffirm for me the profound, positive impact HCC's programs have on the youth and their belief in their power as individuals. Most of them never would have even considered college a possibility in their lives... until Hope. With the love and support they received through HCC's many dedicated staff, programs and organizations, they gained the confidence to know that they could, indeed, be successful.

None of us know what challenges the future holds, but I do believe that these young scholars will do good things and help make the future better for all of us.

-Linda Ley-Siemer, HCC Board Member



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