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Plaster Creek Stewards

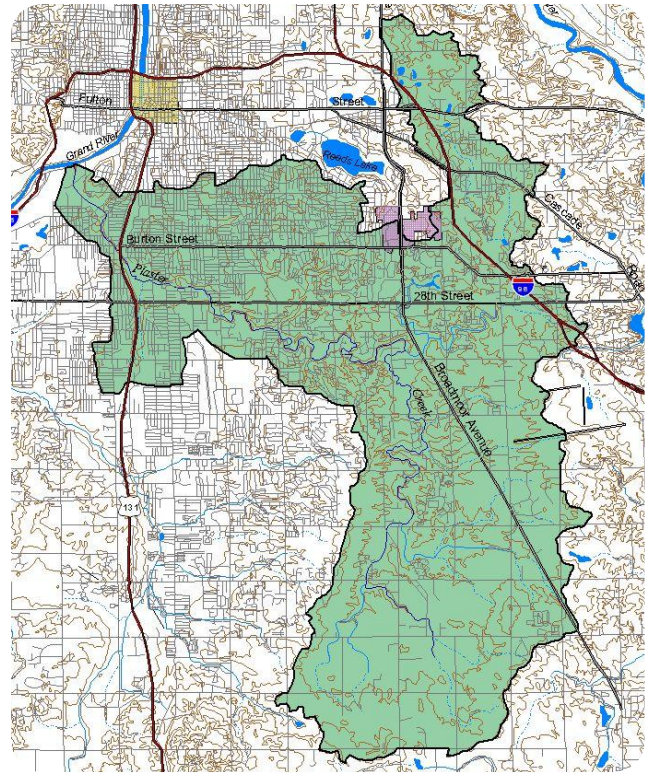
Hannah Bechtold, CPC Coordinator

As spring quietly attempted to usurp winter's lingering grasp, I sat down with Gail Heffner, Director of Community Engagement to learn more about Plaster Creek Stewards and how service-learning plays a role in this organization.

Plaster Creek Stewards is an organization dedicated to education, research and on-the-ground restoration work in the Plaster Creek Watershed. Heffner explained that a watershed is an area of land that drains into a common point as she pulled out a map of the Grand Rapids area that highlighted the Plaster Creek Watershed.

Most of Calvin's main campus, as well as areas where many faculty, students, and staff live, are within the Plaster Creek Watershed, which is recognized as the most degraded and polluted watershed in West Michigan.

The state of the watershed indicates how people are or are not caring for it. As Christians, Heffner believes that there is a clear Biblical call to care for creation and so wonders what it says about us who live in this watershed but do not take care of it. Plaster Creek Stewards was created to show that people, especially Christians, in the watershed do indeed care for the environment;



Learn more at <https://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/pcw/>.

and it is where the education and restoration pieces of their mission come together.

Education comes through various programming Plaster Creek Stewards facilitates in schools, churches and businesses. These programs alert the community to the problems and offer restorative solutions, such as rain gardens (which Plaster Creek Stewards will help create).

Many students participate in the Stewards' education and action days each semester and students who

take Biology 250: *Research and Methods* play a vital role in the Plaster Creek Stewards' research. The Plaster Creek Watershed becomes a lab as students collect, track, and analyze data year-to-year.

As we wrapped up our interview, Heffner shared that on-going restoration will eventually reveal itself through student research. "It took 50 years for [watershed degradation] to get this bad," she said, "so it will take a concerted effort to have it hold steady and then get better."

Connect with the SLC:

Web: calvin.edu/slc

Blog: servicehyphenlearning.blogspot.com





Grains of Hope: Refugee Experiences in West Michigan

Sarah Sherman, Communications Coordinator

Every year, West Michigan welcomes approximately 600 refugees from places such as Congo, Burma, and Bhutan. These refugees are only a fraction of the 45 million displaced people in the world, forced to leave their homes due to racial, religious, national, or political persecution.

Stephanie Sandberg, professor of Communication Arts and Sciences, has gathered the stories of 112 local refugees. Seven of them have become “Grains of Hope,” a documentary theater piece. The goal of this genre is “to take some sort of societal issue, problem, or challenge, turn it into a piece of research, then generate a script,” Sandberg said.

The refugee experience begins with individuals fleeing their homelands. They settle in camps in bordering countries where they endure what Sandberg calls “the trauma of boredom.” Not allowed to work and unable to move, refugees must wait to either return home or be permanently resettled.

Once relocated, finding jobs and learning English quickly become the biggest challenges. Many refugees start working 40 hours a week of hard labor after not working for 20 years. Once they have jobs, they are too tired to focus on learning English. “It’s difficult and people get depressed,” Sandberg said.

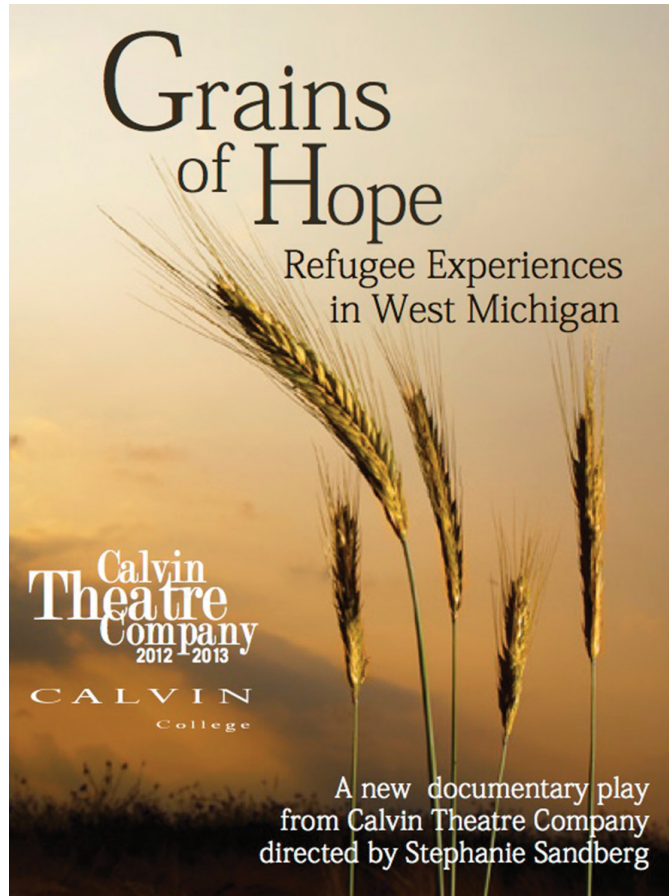


Some of the refugees’ stories are dark, others are hopeful. The title of the play comes from the story of a Sudanese man who was taken by the People’s Liberation Army, brain-

washed, and tortured. He remembers that “even though we didn’t know that was possible, we still had this grain of hope.”

Telling their stories has been powerful for many of the participants. “Narratives happen in these little fractured pieces and it takes a while to build up into story. But when they can piece it together and see that there’s a purpose and meaning to all of the suffering that happened, there is a huge empowerment.”

Sandberg has developed a friendship with the Iraqi woman whose story is in the play. She spends time each week teaching her citizenship material. Ultimately, she says this is what resettlement should be about: building relationships. They’re “what sustain people more than anything,” she said. “Service-learning is not just about the work, but it’s also about the relationships you build in the community.”



Upcoming Performances of Grains of Hope

May 5, 6:00pm:
Church of the Servant

May 8, 7:00pm:
Wealthy Theatre, sponsored by Bethany Christian Services

May 9, 7:00pm:
Wealthy Theatre, sponsored by Mars Hill Church

Blood Drive

Thank you to everyone who has participated our blood drives this year! A total of 145 pints were donated during our April drive - 435 potential lives saved!

Want to receive our newsletter electronically?
Send us an email at slc@calvin.edu.

Interview with a Service-Learner

Ashely Weikart, Refugee Mentor

Ashley spent time as a refugee mentor for a family of 8 from the Congo. She met with them for an hour or two each week, at times up to 6 hours.

What did you do with your family?

It was always an adventure. I would go to visit and they would insist on making a traditional Congolese dinner. Sometimes the food was amazing and other times I knew that God was using that as a way to stretch and humble me. After they had gotten settled we started to make trips to the library. They couldn't believe that books and videos were free! We would go for walks, play games, and many times just sit and share stories.



What did you learn?

I have always been a very talkative person, but this family taught me to sit back and listen to the wisdom they had to offer. The father of the family used to be a pastor in Rwanda, so his knowledge and different views on living were so insightful to me.

How did you see reciprocity?

When the father told me, "no matter what happens, whether you keep coming here every week or not, just know that you are always a part of this family. You have no idea what your time and friendship means to us. You were our first friend here and we will never forget you and the impact you have had on my kids and my family." At this point I knew God had placed me with this family for a reason, I would look forward to visiting them every week and seeing what new things we would do together.

Donating to the Service-Learning Center

Since 2003, the Service-Learning Center at Calvin College has been building an endowment of its own at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation. Begun with generous support from the State of Michigan, this fund enabled donors who wanted another way to support Calvin College. Thanks to your generous contributions, the endowment fund reached \$50,000 in 2012. We may now access usable interest which will contribute to the growth of vital Service-Learning Center programs.

What does this mean for you and for the Service-Learning Center? Your current and future gifts to the S-LC can now be made directly to Calvin College. Simply indicate you would like the gift to be designated the S-LC in the check memo line, or via online designation. These gifts will be added to the usable interest from the endowment fund to enable programs like StreetFest and Residence Hall Community Partnerships, as well as a wide variety of academically-based service-learning projects to flourish.

If you are interested in giving to the S-LC, please go to www.calvin.edu and select "Make a Gift" in the upper right-hand corner.



Service-Learning Center Named to President's Honor Roll

Matt Kucinski, Media Relations Manager, Calvin Communications and Marketing

Calvin College has been named to the 2013 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, the highest federal recognition a college or university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service-learning and civic engagement. This is Calvin's second time being so honored. (The college was recognized previously in 2009.)

"Receiving this award is another reminder, to ourselves, our partners, and the larger society, of what Calvin College values," said Jeff Bouman, director of Calvin's Service-Learning Center.

The Corporation for National and Community Service administers the annual honor roll award. Honorees were chosen based on a series of selection factors including the scope and innovation of service projects, the percentage of student participation in service activities, incentives for service and the extent to which the school offers academic service-learning courses.

Calvin College's Service-Learning Center reports that 2,200 students completed almost 4,000 service-learning opportunities during the 2011-2012 academic year. The total time logged by those students: more than 55,000 hours.

"At Calvin we are committed to more than the theoretical engagement with the surrounding community and world--we are committed to understanding, learning from, and participating in the world-changing that God is about in the cosmos all around us," said Bouman. "Service-learning, for nearly 50 years now has been an engine that enables theory to touch practice."

Fueling that engine are the long-standing community partnerships Calvin has maintained in the city of Grand Rapids. Since 1964, the college and Grand Rapids Public Schools have partnered to create tutoring and mentoring opportunities for Calvin students. For the past 15-plus years, Calvin's seven residence halls have maintained on-going partnerships with local nonprofit organizations. And, since 1993, Calvin has provided all first-year students with an introduction to service-learning and the city of Grand Rapids, through its annual StreetFest program.

Bouman says the college is partnering more and more with the growing Hispanic and Latino communities in Grand Rapids, through partnerships with Cook Library Center, the Hispanic Center of West Michigan, United Church Outreach Ministries, Cesar Chavez elementary school and Roosevelt Park Church, among others.

"I hear stories every day about how Calvin College students' learning has been enhanced through service-learning opportunities," said Bouman. "Their language learning; their nursing practice; their teaching skills; their ability to critically comprehend complex issues like immigration, wage theft, illiteracy, community development and organizing for change--all of these and many more are practical and theoretical skills that service-learning placements enable and encourage."

Bouman says that academically based service-learning is a hallmark of a Calvin education and it is something that in recent years has extended into Calvin's semester abroad programming. For example, in Ghana and Peru, a course in ethnography puts students in contact with service placements. And, in Budapest, Hungary, students are benefiting from 20 newly developed ESL placements.

"We may not, we must not, we do not exist in an ivory tower bubble," said Bouman of the Calvin College community. "Recognition like this award encourages us to continue creatively and effectively engaging with community partners, primarily in Grand Rapids, but also regionally with our spring break trips, as well as around the world on study abroad semester programs."



**Academically Based Service-Learning
Photo Contest Winner: Sara Utter,
Cook Library Center**

I was serving there to love and learn (for Spanish class). One St. Patrick's day we took a break from our homework and decorated cupcakes. We giggled, got frosting EVERYWHERE and had a blast in fellowship together.

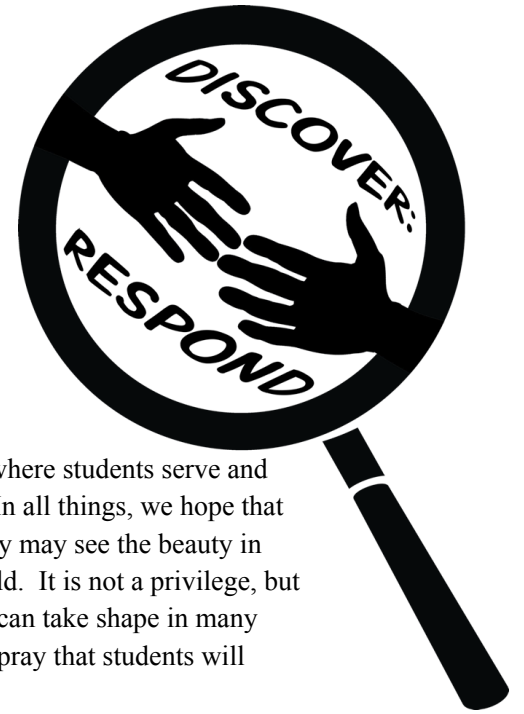
Visit

<http://www.calvin.edu/slc/resources/publications.html>

to view the Service-Learning Center's Statistical Report, which shows the extent of Calvin students' service in Grand Rapids.

Spring Break Trips

Nic Scobey, Spring Break Trips Coordinator



Most of the discovery during spring break trips is done among the communities where students serve and learn. Some care for nature and others develop relationships with other people. In all things, we hope that students will keep their eyes open to the world and people around them—that they may see the beauty in God’s creation and the joy that it is to be a part of the coming shalom for the world. It is not a privilege, but an honor to serve for a week. A Response must always follow a Discovery. This can take shape in many ways, such as choosing to remain ignorant or taking a stand against an issue. We pray that students will choose to respond in a way that glorifies God to the highest extent.



People’s Choice Photo Contest Winner:
Jovianus Hartopo, Houma, LA

Spring Break Photo Contest Winner: Ellie Hutchinson, Knoxville, TN
Our last night at the Florence Crittenton Agency we held a manicure party for the girls we met. We learned so much from them that week, I hope they learned something from us as well.



Serving in GR Neighborhoods

Creston CRC

By using my skills and passion for music to serve Creston CRC, I feel I am not hiding my talent in the ground, but using it to bring others closer to Christ through worship. From serving at Creston, I've decided that I want to continue to be involved in worship services wherever I go as long as there are opportunities. I'm learning that service should be routine and lifelong, not just something I do at Calvin.

-Brianna Mulder

Creston: Supper House

It's wonderful to see all the relationships that are built between the servers, those who are served, and the coordinator of Supper House. It's a beautiful thing to not only experience community within Calvin's campus, but experience community outside of the campus in the city of Grand Rapids.

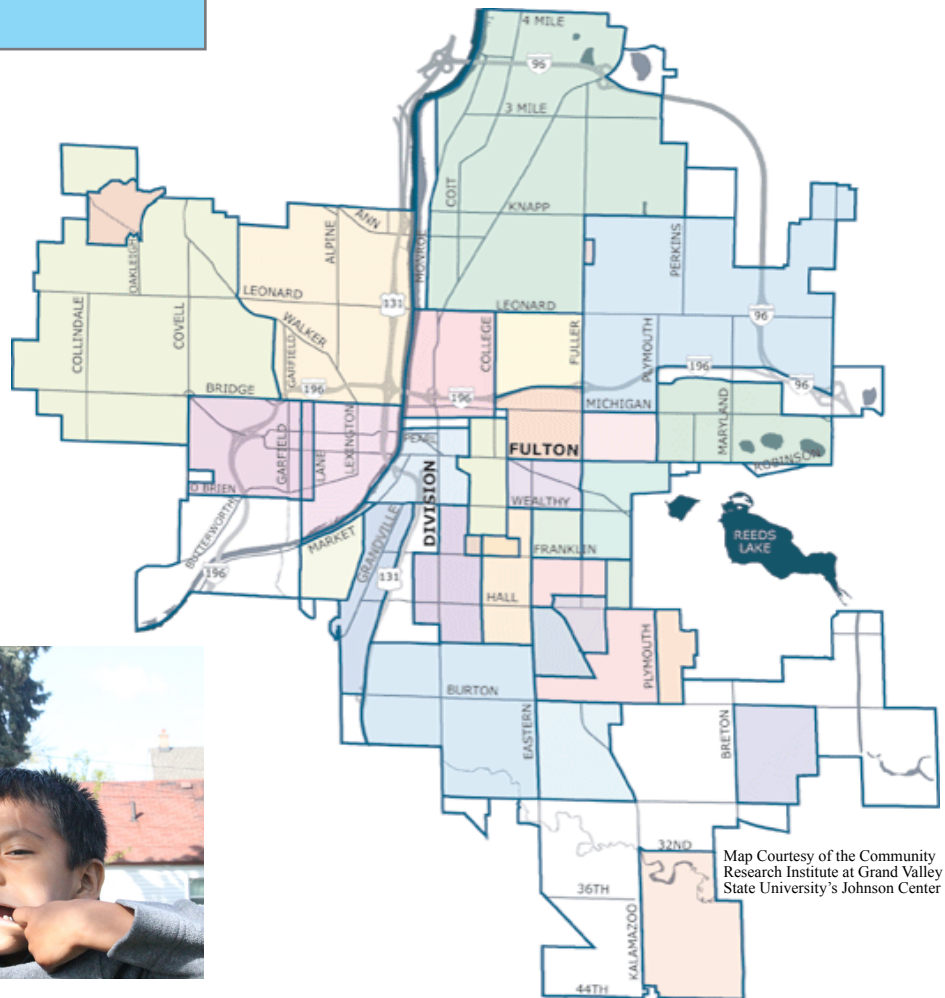
-Juliana Moore

Madison:

Madison Square Church

Madison Square's Youth Program is the most diverse as well as unified youth group that I have had the opportunity to serve at. As a small group leader for one group of the high school girls, I have learned about the faith it takes to be a servant heart. I've learned this servanthood from the other youth group leaders and from the testimonies of faith from the students.

-Krystal Flietstra



Map Courtesy of the Community Research Institute at Grand Valley State University's Johnson Center



Roosevelt Park: Cook Arts Center

I wear my college stuff and try to incorporate the college sense. I know a lot of the students need that encouragement and role model. To see it more often is better for them. To know their dreams and aspirations is great to hear. If my job allows me, I want to keep serving here.

-Noelle Babechenko

Garfield Park: Health Intervention Services

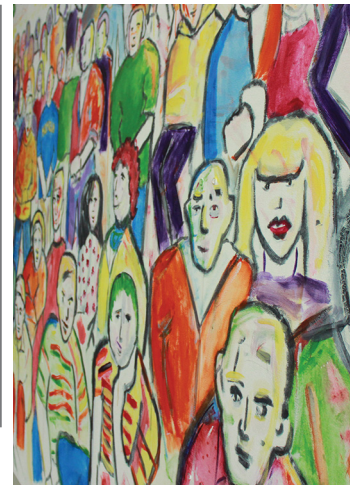
I've been privileged to work beside nurses, doctors, optometrists, and dentists who take the time out of their personal work schedules to spend time with a huge variety of patients from in town and out. Working at HIS is an amazing opportunity for anyone interested in learning about non-profit medicine, practicing Spanish, or just gaining experience serving in a community of incredibly caring individuals. Although I'm not able to go as often as I'd like, the community at HIS is a constant encouragement in my studies and goals with medicine, service, and cross-cultural communication.

-Evans Lodge



West Grand: Harrison Park Elementary School Transitions Streetfest 2013

Calvin has adopted the kindergarten hallway at Harrison Park. Throughout the year, students and staff have visited the school to read, play, and teach while encouraging students to think about college from a young age. In January, new transfer Calvin students spent “Transitions Streetfest” at Harrison Park, where they spent time in classrooms and learned about Challenge Scholars, a program that provides scholarships as well as social and academic support for college.



“Our partnership with Calvin College has been a blessing to our students and staff! What a wonderful way to introduce our children and their families to the college experience!”
-Harrison Park Teacher



**Oakdale:
Oakdale Neighbors**
Getting students into a community in Grand Rapids and teaching them about the people there, the community’s needs, and ways they can get connected is so important. It expands the student’s viewpoint to issues beyond Calvin’s campus.
-Kelsey Stark

Ridgemoor: Holland Home
I serve weekly by reading to and helping an elderly man in his apartment. I also spend a lot of time getting to know him. He has become a grandfather figure to me over the months, and I have really been blessed by him. When I signed up for this, I wasn’t expecting it to turn out like it did. It started out as volunteering, but now it’s like visiting a friend. God definitely put this opportunity in front of me for a reason.
-Abigail Fincel

**South East End: Friendship Ministries at
Plymouth Heights CRC**
These are people who are totally open and free to express who they are. There is lots of love and friendship. A lot of people here don’t have easy lives. Most of the friends are in group homes. There’s not a lot of consistency in their lives, so I like providing that consistency and love to them.
-Amanda Witte



CALVIN

Service-Learning Center

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Meet Nic Scobey, the 2013 StreetFest Coordinator!

Nic is a senior education major from Middleville, MI and the Spring Break Trips Coordinator in the SLC. He's excited to coordinate this year's StreetFest to learn about and work alongside organizations in the great city of Grand Rapids.

Streetfest will take place on **Thursday, August 29, 2013**. If your organization is interested in participating in StreetFest, check our website in June for information: www.calvin.edu/slc/programs/streetfest/

