

## **Service Learning Program Abstract**

**Grand Rapids Community College**  
143 Bostwick Avenue NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

### **Mentoring the Bilingual**

By Brandon Seng  
Michigan Nonprofit Association

Creating a connection is the first step necessary in developing any quality mentoring relationship. The Hispanic Student Organization (HSO) of Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) looks to develop this connection through the use of foreign language.

Bethany Children Services is home of a Refugee Mentoring Program, where GRCC students are planning to use their language capabilities to ease the transition of refugees entering the country. Elisa Perez-Arellano moved from Mexico five years ago. She is now the President of GRCC's Hispanic Student Organization and can relate to the Bethany refugees. Eliza tutors Spanish once a week GRCC, and looks forward to using her speaking abilities to serve as a mentor in this innovative program.

"When I arrived I knew nothing about the culture here," she recalls, "I can now help ease the suffering of transition that others are facing." Elisa went on to point out that the mentees' lives are now totally different. Having left behind friends, family, food and traditions, their new move can be extremely hard. She looks forward to meeting with native Spanish speakers, who she explained, would feel more comfortable talking to her because of her language ability. Elisa feels she can help others in learning English and provide them with a better connection to our foreign culture.

Developing these relationships could also prove beneficial to mentors. Speaking with refugees could help HSO members to better value their position, as they encounter more extreme and difficult situations. They will feel a stronger connection to their community, where they will experience the rewards of community service, and participate more.

Sarah Bolman of Bethany Children Services directs their Refugee Mentoring Program. According to Bolman, the program aims to pair monolingual refugees with mentors who have dual language capabilities. "The response from mentees is good," she said. They are confiding in their mentor, who provides them with opportunities not available otherwise."

As mentoring month will soon be over, MCC salutes the efforts of GRCC. They have shown a fine example of creatively using student talent to reach unique individuals. We estimate that almost 5,000 students, staff and faculty were mentoring throughout the past two academic years. In programs such as this, we have collectively served at least 7,586 Michigan residents.

*Story provided by Michigan Campus Compact, an affiliate of the Michigan Nonprofit Association*

#### **Disciplines/Courses Involved:**

Foreign Languages

**Community Partner(s):**  
Bethany Children Services

**Service Provided:**  
Refugee Mentoring

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