

SOUTH GEORGIA MIGRANT FARM WORKER CLINIC (JUNE 2006)

Fifteen MSW students from Valdosta State University volunteered with the South Georgia Migrant Farm Worker Clinic. Tom Himelick, Coordinator of Career Masters of Medical Science Program with Emory Physician Assistant Program began this project for his PA students several years ago. They travel throughout South Georgia providing migrant farm workers with medical care. This year they expanded and added social work students to their team in the Valdosta area. Many migrant workers have needs beyond healthcare that require professional social work services. The students were able to deal with a variety of needs ranging from basic case management needs for affordable medicine, referrals for further medical appointments, and educational materials to more advanced mental health needs such as substance abuse, depression and anxiety. Allison Curington, Director of Field Instruction for the MSW program coordinated this event for student volunteers. Ms. Carol Smith, Dr Mike Meacham, and Dr. Diane Holliman also volunteered to supervise student volunteers. Students who volunteered have expressed that this opportunity was more than just an educational experience to practice social work skills. Three MSW Students have provided their perceptions of the experience:



VSU Division of Social Work MSW student volunteers and MSW Field Director at South Georgia Migrant Farm Worker Clinic. (L to R) Betsy Burch, Allison Curington LMSW, and Melanie Gilmer

Betsy Burch

MSW Student

As an MSW student interested in the fields of health care and international social work, I jumped at the chance to participate in the Migrant Farm Worker Project. The setting was a large open field holding a three tiered tent just behind a small migrant clinic. Families were gathered next to a mobile lab unit waiting for the Emory University group to set up shop. Not knowing what to expect, I only brought with me a pen and a notebook full of Spanish vocabulary. Luckily, Allison Curington, VSU Coordinator, was prepared with coloring books, bubbles, camping chairs, and bug spray. We met families who were seeking help for toothaches, home sickness, and pregnancy related issues. Others gravitated towards the free clothes section of the tent where work gloves seemed to be among the items of choice. Although I speak Spanish and was able to communicate with the Migrant families, I noticed the children communicated with my classmates using the universal language of smiles and laughter. They loved playing with the bubbles. I am looking forward to participating again next year and would encourage other social work students to as well. The experience is *my interesante!*

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Shnequia Webb (MSW student) blows bubbles with a child at the Migrant Farm Worker Clinic.

Octavia Conaway

MSW Student

The Migrant Clinic which was held June 15-19, 2006 was an amazing opportunity for professional growth and development. The clinic is an outreach program that provides relief to migrant farmers currently residing in rural South Georgia. The clinic afforded students with the opportunity to aid in providing services to migrants, meet other professionals and to make people more aware of what social workers do. As many farmers are in need of medical attention, financial assistance, crisis intervention, and emotional

support, MSW students were available to network people with community resources that provide assistance to those in need. Master of Social Work students volunteered three days during what has proven to be one of the most captivating experiences of the MSW education yet. It is not everyday that we see this many socio-economic, health, and medical challenges at the same time in one place. Amidst the many lectures on ethics and law, it was nice to get field experience on diversity education, cultural competence, and economic disadvantages. Hopefully, this is only the beginning of many fascinating experiences to come.

Melanie Gilmer

MSW Student

Working at the migrant worker clinic was one of the best experiences of my college career. It was an amazing scene the first night - sweaty PA and MSW students spread out in a field under huge lights, arranged in lawn-chair dyads with migrant workers, translators, and mosquitoes swarming. It was like nothing I'd seen before and something I am excited and proud to have been a part of. I learned from the clinic that there is a great need for Spanish-speaking social workers, as Hispanic populations are greatly underserved. My work at the clinic also showed me how pervasively the politics surrounding this population impact many aspects of their lives here in the United States. On a more personal level, I learned that I want my social work education and career to be about more than my intellectual development or what may look good on my resume; I want to be a part of something I believe in, and to use my voice and efforts effectively to affect change in areas I care deeply about.



Sally Dykes (MSW student) helps in the children's area at the Migrant Farm Worker Clinic.

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