

## **Local College Students Serve Others**

By Jen Leslie

Published: Friday, January 1, 2010 3:15 PM EST

The Support Group for Ethnic and Racial Diversity (SERD) is a student-run organization in the Department of Clinical Psychology at Antioch University New England. SERD, an arm of the Multicultural Center for Research and Practice, encourages social activism and multiculturalism both within the University and in the surrounding community. Gargi Roysircar, Ph.D., founder and director of the Multicultural Center for Research and Practice, supervises and trains student volunteers who are dedicated and committed to community service. Shakti is the disaster outreach arm of SERD and has engaged in numerous outreach projects abroad.

SERD/Shakti's primary purpose is to promote multiculturalism in communities both locally and abroad. SERD/Shakti promotes multicultural sensitivity, community support, advocacy, education and social justice oriented outreach in communities for individuals and groups who come from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, class, and gender backgrounds. SERD and Shakti volunteers have taken part in a number of service projects throughout the years. Since 2004, SERD has participated in an ongoing community service project with Keene Education's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program.

Also, since 2005, disaster recovery outreach trips have been made to communities affected by disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina. Students have engaged in outreach programs during the regular academic sessions, the summer and academic breaks. Students are volunteers who bear their own travel expenses and receive marginal support from fundraising. Although little financial support is available, the students maintain an enthusiasm and interest in the work that they conduct.

For example, this past summer, students travelled to Costa Rica, Johannesburg, South Africa and Rwanda to assist, assess and reach out to underserved populations. Previous Shakti outreach projects have been to New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina and to Chennai, India following the tsunami disaster.

Prior to embarking on these tasks, students receive training about diversity, identity, social class, race and ethnicity as well as social justice issues of access, equity and unequal privilege. These conversations are self-referenced or framed on personal observations. SERD/Shakti strives to form connections with community leaders and local organizations that are committed to promoting diversity at systemic levels. In addition, advocacy is promoted through student service learning projects, coursework and volunteerism.

Previously, the group has developed partnerships with the University of New Orleans, the University of Florida, the Charter Nelson School of New Orleans and Hotel Monteleone of New Orleans to engage in the Hurricane Katrina relief work.

Programs have also focused on educating the public on prevention outreach through events, such as the SERD/Shakti's potluck gatherings, presentations at Keene State College's "Waging Peace" Conference and the Elm City Rotary Club of Keene, as well as presenting research at national professional conferences of the American Psychological Association and the Cross-Cultural Winter Roundtable hosted by Teacher's College at Columbia University.

SERD's Day of Service Committee has begun making contacts within the community to prepare for the Day of Service for Helping Others event. This committee is co-chaired by Amithea Love and Vincent Pignatiello. Both are third year students in the Clinical Psychology program at Antioch University New England.

This committee is also comprised of Jonathan Daniels scholars – students who have received scholarships for their past work and future interest in multicultural and social justice issues – as well as other graduate students from the same department.

They are working in conjunction with the City of Keene's Martin Luther King Jr./Jonathan Daniels Committee to organize and coordinate this event. They will act as liaisons to match community volunteers with service projects in Keene.

Volunteers will help serve social organizations, fellow Keene citizens and the local community. This is the first year for this event to take place; however, the students hope to make this an annual tradition. Volunteers can register for volunteer work at St. James Episcopal Church at 8:00 a.m. on January 18. At that time, they will be matched to a service project in the community.

Although not mandatory, volunteers are strongly encouraged to preregister by emailing Vincent Pignatiello or Amithea Love at [SERD.ane@antioch.edu](mailto:SERD.ane@antioch.edu). Those individuals who simply want to learn more about this event can also e-mail the two co-chairs at the same address.

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