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MCIRC MEETING OCTOBER 21, 2010: STUDENT SERVICE
LEARNING

Our guest speakers Pam Meador, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and Lucy Vitaliti, Montgomery College, shared information on “Student Service Learning” (SSL) programs at MCPS and Montgomery College, respectively. The meeting was hosted by Interages’ Montgomery County Intergenerational Resource Center.

Pam Meador began the presentation with some background on the MCPS student service learning requirement. The State of Maryland issued a mandate for student service learning as a graduation requirement, giving each county the latitude to implement student service learning in its own way. The intent of the mandate is that the students’ service will lead to a lifelong contribution to the community.

As of 2011, students are required to complete 75 hours. They may begin after Grade 5 and continue through senior year, if they choose. In the county there are approximately 76,000 students working on their service requirement at any given time. A total of 80 service learning coordinators are located in the county’s middle schools and high schools with Pam serving as the central coordinator.

SSL can take place in the community or in the schools (clubs, charitable events) IF the activity fits the requirement of the student service learning program. Community organizations seeking a match with a student must be approved for SSL and provide assurance of safety, adequate supervision, and meaningful work. The expectation for students is that they will share talents, acquire new skills, and develop responsibility toward the community. Students complete pre-service work to learn about the organization they will be working with as well as how to behave in a work environment. Following their service, they complete a reflection on what they learned and what they liked. Students completing SSL experiences have shown they have good self-esteem. The motto of the MCPS SSL program is “Give a Little Time, Make a Big Difference.”

Lucy Vitaliti spoke on the SSL program at Montgomery College. She stated that the SSL is NOT a requirement for graduation, but it is required for some courses. Faculty have the option to incorporate SSL into their courses. SSL assignments must relate directly to course objectives. As SSL coordinator, Lucy receives course curricula from faculty. For semester-long courses with SSL, the student must have at least 12 hours on site. Students completing SSL experience hand in journals, essays or other form of reflection on their experience. Students are encouraged to be “in” their service environment, to ask supervisors at their service site about jobs, to think about careers and to list their SSL experience as a job on their resumes.

Montgomery College scholarships are partly based on the student’s response to the question “What have you done for your community lately?” Organizations wishing to be matched with students should contact Pam Meador at MCPS or Lucy Vitaliti at Montgomery College.

--Mary Jane Kane, Coordinator Intergenerational Resource Center