

Problems face refugee children in Guilford County

SIMON KELLY | STAFF WRITER

Since the mid-1980s, Greensboro has undergone a dramatic demographic shift due to a steady influx of refugees from all parts of the globe. It has had a beleaguering effect on the Guilford County school system, thus compromising the educational benefits available to refugee children.

This has proven a challenge for the system, not only because of the number of children these refugee communities yield, but also their ethnic and linguistic diversity, with families from Mexico, the Sudan, Liberia, the Montagnard highlands of Vietnam and countless other places beset by political or social inequities.

An educational crisis has arisen in Guilford County, and as is often the case with public school systems, budget and faculty are spread too thin to be able to directly minister to the needs of these children.

"One of the problems is that the schools don't know who is going to show up at the door with ESOL needs," said Mary Anne Bush of the Center for New North Carolinians, an organization that operates in conjunction with AmeriCorps through UNCG.

"So if (the schools) put a budget in and they thought they'd only have 10 students, and then they get 45, the bud-

get doesn't catch up with them until the next year," Bush said. "So for a whole year, they are deficient in providing the service because they weren't anticipating it — that is a multi-layered problem."

Bush administers the Glenhaven Multicultural After School Tutorial program, which is situated within the Glenhaven Apartment Complex, where many of the refugee children who attend some of the surrounding schools such as Jesse Wharton Elementary, Mendenhall Middle and Page High, live with their families.

While the program tries to work closely with schools, there is almost as big a communication gap between them and Glenhaven as there is between teacher and student. This can be confounding for tutors, who come from both Guilford and UNCG to volunteer, only to find that the homework assigned to the children is fraught with instructional errors and typos. This makes for a frustrating experience for all parties.

"Often times the directions are challenging to the tutors as well as the students, making learning even harder, given that there is already a language barrier," said Clare Hyre, a Guilford College junior who serves as the Bonner Scholar project coordinator for the Glenhaven service site.

"We don't know what sort of instructions the kids get at school in order to

do their homework," Bush said. "These kids are certainly falling through the cracks."

This deficiency and of course the relatively limited linguistic range of ESOL teachers is another of the school system's biggest problems. For instance, within the Montagnard people, there are six different tribes, each with its own specific Malayo-Polynesian sub-dialect — something the schools were certainly not prepared for.

"I think, individually, ESOL teachers are fabulous," Bush said warmly. "They're in this because they care about the kids and they really go the extra 10 miles down the road beyond their academic needs. They are very sensitive to the financial needs and cultural imperatives that guide these families."

The bureaucracy at large is currently incapable of tending to these needs more effectively, because these children's situations are such that the conventional methods of assimilating new students don't work.

"The biggest disadvantage for the children is that they are placed in classrooms based on their chronological age, with absolutely no account of their educational background or learning disabilities," Bush said.

However, there may be hope for these refugees. Next year, a separate school for new arrivals is scheduled to open.

The school is intended to serve as a safe environment in which the newly arrived refugee students can adjust to their new cultural surroundings, while giving them a better foundation in English. It will also allow for the specific educational and developmental issues of each child to be addressed more effectively.

"A lot of the kids are expected to do work that is above and beyond what kids in a new culture should be expected to do. I'm glad that they are building the new arrival school," said Becca Spence, another longtime Bonner volunteer at Glenhaven.

ACLU guidelines stipulate that no child may be retained for longer than a year, however, and indeed, there is some criticism that claims this sort of institution is inherently separate, but not equal.

Others feel that the prime motives for the creation of this institution have less to do with the interests of refugee education and more to do with raising district standardized test scores. Regardless, there is little doubt that this school will ultimately result in a brighter future for these children.

Still, everyone seems to have their work cut out for them, and it will take time and patience to eliminate the system's educational inequities.

"It's a laborious and circuitous route to say the least," Bush said.

Student presentation raises concerns about Sodexho

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accounts and our understanding of what it means."

According to Judy Harvey, director of interdisciplinary leadership for social change, two of the students received independent study credit for their research, which began in the fall.

"These students weren't content with just being angry," Harvey said. "It is harder to be knowledgeable and prepared than just being angry."

The students addressed Sodexho's human rights record, including a Stop Hunger campaign to eliminate malnutrition in the United States and an \$80 million settlement in a class action lawsuit that Sodexho made in 2005 to over 3,400 black employees.

"This is important because most of our cafeteria workers are people of color," said sophomore Shaina Machlus during the presentation.

Students raised Sodexho's investment in overseas private prisons as a problematic issue. They also pointed out that Sodexho supports companies that are known for propagating human rights violations: Coca-Cola, known for its anti-union policies, and Starbucks.

"We don't take issue with

their policies; we take issue with how they translate into action," said first-year Eric Ginsberg.

Sodexho has a \$23 billion, 10-year contract with the U.S. Department of Defense that supports the military's activities in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"I'm torn between (being) so deeply impressed and thrilled with all the research, the academic excellence that I see here ... but also really angry, shocked, and amazed," said Cynthia Neerman, assistant professor of English and director of writing.

The presentation turned to a more localized focus with a discussion on the environment including the cafeteria's policy on composting waste and the CO2 emission from Sodexho trucks coming from Charlotte.

Sophomore Nathan Harel described how Sodexho subscribes to the Global Sullivan Principles of Social Responsibility before saying, "There is a dissonance between their rhetoric and their actions."

Sophomore and cafeteria worker Menemsha Milnor gave a presentation on Sodexho's racial discrimination both nationally and on campus.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that nepotism and wage discrimination exists," Milnor said.

Milnor said that many of the cafeteria workers do not speak out against discrimination for fear of losing their job.

"I don't think anyone cares about equality," said first-year Casey Thomas, reflecting on the presentation she helped to deliver. "Our culture doesn't set us up to care about equality, so why would people care in this context? You would think they would because it's so close to them, but summer is coming and people have finals, and drinking and whoring to do."

"The analysis and findings will be shared with Sodexho, Coca-Cola and Starbucks for their own reaction and analysis," Chabotar said. "As we discovered yet again earlier this semester, there are always two sides to every story and I intend to get both before reacting further."

The presentation ended with a discussion of the role of the cafeteria in the Guilford community.

"I hope that this will bring about more community involvement, more dialogue and a stronger bond between students and staff," Milnor said.

"I'm feeling inspired to make change happen," said senior Trae Middlebrooks.

Guilfordian wins ASPA's No. 1 paper

REID CRANFILL | STAFF WRITER

The Guilfordian won a first place in the American Scholastic Press Association's annual contest for the third year running. The contest rates college papers across the country based on content coverage, editing, creativity, art, general plan and page design. The Guilfordian scored a perfect 350 for content coverage and a perfect 55 in creativity, with a total raw score of 936 out of 1,000.

The Guilfordian tied for first with six other schools. Two of the co-winners were Point News of St. Mary's College, and The Observer of Fordham University. Taylor University's Echo and Norwich University's Norwich Guidon tied for second in The Guilfordian's division, which is based on college enrollment size.

Despite a shortage of photographers, The Guilfordian managed to score well in the art category.

CHARLIE CLAY/GUILFORDIAN



"For the majority of the year we only had two photographers," said photo editor Ben Lancaster. "But they knew their limitations and kept up the quality of their work."

"This was a challenging year, given campus events, said Dana Professor of English and Guilfordian faculty advisor Jeff Jeske. "But the staff rose to the occasion. They learned much and showed great professionalism."

With perfect scores in two categories, The Guilfordian hopes to be on its way to meeting the challenge by this year's editor-in-chief, Matt Haselton, to "receive a perfect 1,000 score."

Incoming editor-in-chief Josh Cohen, a junior, hopes to continue the tradition.

"I am looking forward to building on the foundation that my predecessor established," Cohen said. "I hope that we can outdo Haselton and earn that first place 'with distinction' that he was gunning for."