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Stop the Raids

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‘Stop the Raids’: An Example of Ethical Community Engagement

In their article, “Critically Engaged Civic Learning: A Comprehensive Restructuring of Service-Learning Approaches”, Cindy S. Vincent and her co-authors define ethical and effective community engagement as the shifting from “a student-centered pedagogy to an equity-based framework that views all constituent stakeholders as invested partners and is founded on redistributed power and authority to promote civic learning and social change” (108). Throughout the paper, Vincent details the principles of Critically Engaged Civic Learning (CECL), specifically the principle of social justice and community—which enables those participating in community engagement to create and implement programs that assist and benefit members of the community. Ultimately, this principle connects universities and their students to their communities. In 2007, students at Trinity College in Hartford, CT, founded ‘Stop the Raids’—an organization designed to protest U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids against immigrant communities in the greater Hartford area. This era of ICE raids in Hartford marked a tumultuous time, as undocumented immigrants constantly feared forced deportation. A group of eleven undocumented South American immigrants were arrested and turned over to ICE, after unknowingly accepting transportation from Danbury police officers posing as drivers. These illegal tactics were later coupled with the arrest and extended imprisonment of Mariano Cardoso Jr., an undocumented immigrant, who was arrested without a warrant in his home. The students who founded ‘Stop the Raids’ saw the injustices individuals in their neighborhood faced and recognized the necessity of using their privilege and platform to speak out. They worked with local organizations and community members to schedule public assemblies, protests, and marches—as well as create petitions—in Hartford against the federal and provincial governments to protest the arrests, trials, and deportations of undocumented immigrants. Through their work on the ‘Danbury 11’ Trial and Mariano Cardoso Jr’s arrest, the ‘Stop the Raids’ organization at Trinity College exemplified ethical and effective academic community engagement. The student-led organization challenged injustices in Hartford by aiding undocumented immigrants through

inclusive and collaborative work with local organizations. In the process, student members learned the importance of community and political engagement and to challenge systemic injustices.

‘Stop the Raids’ engaged in ethical community engagement through the use of speeches and protests, in support of the “Danbury 11”, when collaborating with Local Hartford Organizations: this engagement in ethical community engagement mutually benefited students and community members. According to the principles of CECL, working towards a common social justice goal “encourages stakeholders to critically engage with the world around them to address the social issues of our time” (Vincent 115). The ‘Stop the Raids’ student organization identified a cause of social injustice: the illegal arrests and subsequent deportation of undocumented immigrants. By examining the causes of this social issue, ‘Stop the Raids’ developed tactics to challenge the inequity. In the aftermath of the illegal arrests of the ‘Danbury 11,’ ‘Stop the Raids’ worked to draw attention to the brutal and often illegal tactics of ICE” (Gardiner 5) by participating in protests that were “attended by the usual core of activists” (Gardiner 5). In a Trinity College Center for Hartford Engagement and Research (CHER) blog post, ‘Stop the Raids’ collaborated with many local organizations, including *Campaign to Stop Raids in Danbury, Hartford Areas Rally Together*, and *Latin Americans Against the War* (Avignon). Vincent and her co-authors explain that, “college students learn to recognize themselves as part of a larger group focused on social change, forge connections to their community and to one another, and co-generate positive community change” (122). The students built meaningful and reciprocal relationships with these community members that helped them create beneficial change in the community. Student members worked together with these local organizations by attending their forums and showing up to rallies with signs. They contributed positively to the work of these other organizations and were exposed to important work local Hartford institutions were completing in the political sphere. ‘Stop the Raids’ increased self-awareness surrounding the problems impacting the Hartford community and highlighted the importance of political engagement by aiding the ‘Danbury 11.’

Additionally, ‘Stop the Raids’ engaged with and listened to community members facing societal injustices, to work collaboratively with them; through doing so, ‘Stop the Raids’ demonstrates their ethical community engagement. The guiding principle of community in CECL suggests, “community engagement should stem largely from organizational community partners and community members rather than the interests of educational institutions” (Vincent 115). After Mariano Cardoso Jr’s arrest in 2011, the protests and rallies which ‘Stop the Raids’ completed collaboratively, were based entirely on the needs of the community. Mr. Cardoso, an undocumented immigrant living in Hartford, was arrested without a warrant by ICE. He was held for a prolonged period with an expensive bail and was threatened with deportation. According to a *Hartford Courant* article, “Cardoso, by nature reluctant to draw attention to himself, eventually told his story to the Trinity College student group Stop the Raids” (Spencer). In doing so, ‘Stop the Raids’ was able to aid Mr. Cardoso along with the assistance of other local organizations. The student organization aligned itself with local associations to hold a rally in Downtown Hartford in support of Mr. Cardoso and “formed a picket line and made various speeches on immigration reform and immigrant rights” (Pickens 8). The student-led organization listened to Mr. Cardoso’s needs and responded by trying to serve his best interests by creating protests, rallies, and speeches. Rather than attempting to further their own or Trinity’s interests, as members of an influential higher education institution, these students utilized their access to greater and more effective resources to help Mr. Cardoso. By behaving in this manner, ‘Stop the Raids’ created an inclusive environment that helped them better understand the community they were interacting with. Members of ‘Stop the Raids’ completed hands-on work and activism with the local community, but also demonstrated to Hartford that Trinity College students are willing to engage with those off-campus and use the school’s resources to benefit the community it serves.

Trinity College’s student organization, ‘Stop the Raids,’ exemplified ethical and effective academic community engagement, as they worked cooperatively with local organizations to aid undocumented immigrants facing social injustices, and ultimately taught themselves the values of

community and civic awareness. ‘Stop the Raids’ set out “to better inform students and the community of Hartford of the issues revolving around the recent and widespread immigration raids” (*The Trinity Ivy*). However, the student organization also wanted “to foster a relationship and work with Hartford residents in raising awareness of how the immigration raids affect the local community” (*The Trinity Ivy*). These two founding goals of ‘Stop the Raids’ demonstrate ethical and effective academic community engagement. While working on both the ‘Danbury 11’ arrests and the Mariano Cardoso Jr. trial, these students showed how they took the guiding principles of Vincent’s Critically Engaged Civic Learning, specifically, social justice and community, and engaged in service learning that benefited all groups involved. Undocumented immigrants in Hartford gained a group of dedicated students committed to helping them, while local organizations whose work focused on assisting undocumented immigrants gained access to another well-equipped resource. The practices Trinity College and its students engaged in differed from other community learning, as they were willing to contribute their assistance while expecting nothing in return. The students involved in ‘Stop the Raids,’ were exposed to different mentalities and ideas when working with both undocumented immigrants and local organizations. Their work continues to have a lasting and broader impact for undocumented immigrants today, as ‘Stop the Raids’ was essential to the “passing [of] Hartford’s sanctuary city ordinance in 2008” (Avignon). Members ultimately gained a more realistic understanding of the community and city they lived in and acquired knowledge in activism and the role it plays in civic awareness.

‘Stop the Raids’ at Trinity College did exemplify ethical and effective academic community engagement, and the organization can be used as a model for future academic community engagement for other student-led groups. ‘Stop the Raids’ responded to the needs of its community struggling with the anti-immigration sentiment of the early 2000s. They made themselves available to the community, listened to those voices, and heard the pain and suffering of individuals struggling with social injustices. Students decided they could use their education status to work collaboratively with local organizations to attempt to address some of these social issues and assist in making change possible for local communities.

This framework that ‘Stop the Raids’ established are the successes Trinity should build upon today. When student-led organizations, and Trinity College itself, establish community engagement programs, they need to address the problems afflicting the communities of Hartford in that moment. Programs could be adjusted monthly to ensure the school’s resources and students’ abilities can be utilized in the best possible way to help Hartford’s people. Student organizations could work directly with local activists, just as ‘Stop the Raids’ did with Mr. Cardoso, which would enable community organizers to receive the maximum amount of assistance. Trinity College’s dedication to the people of Hartford makes the school unique, and in this current era of social change and constant of social injustices, now is the time for students to ethically engage with local individuals.

While ‘Stop the Raids’ is no longer an active student organization on the Trinity College campus, the work done by the organization demonstrated the overall success of college activism. Since the founding of ‘Stop the Raids’ in the mid-2000s, the political climate and culture surrounding immigration within Hartford have changed. As cities across America have become increasingly more open to the migration of immigrants over the course of the last decade, Hartford has become a safe space for undocumented communities, as leaders and officials continue to recognize problems and provide aid and reassurance. This monumental political, cultural, and societal shift could have possibly contributed to the disbanding of ‘Stop the Raids’, as there is less of a need for a student-led organization that helps marginalized communities when community members provide that assistance instead. However, by utilizing the tactics, motives, and strategies of ‘Stop the Raids’ over a decade ago, Trinity College can establish itself as a force for good in the community and use its resources to aid the people of Hartford. Students currently at Trinity College, regardless of their commitment to community engagement, need to recognize the importance of the larger Hartford community to their school and do their part to provide beneficial aid in whatever way they can.

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