



Common Ground High School's Voices of the Caribbean: Intergenerational History Project

High school students from Common Ground High School in New Haven connected their lessons in Spanish class to a service-learning project to meet and document brief histories of local immigrants from the Caribbean. Twenty-nine students interviewed residents living in Casa Otonal, an organization in New Haven that provides housing, social and cultural services to elders, families and children, with a focus on strengthening the Hispanic community.

The academic objectives of Common Ground's YES team were to learn more about the history of Caribbean immigrants in Connecticut, practice their Spanish listening and writing skills and make a social connection with seniors within the community. The needs addressed by the project were 1) the potential loss of life stories of older community residents, 2) the isolation of older community residents from youth, 3) the divisions between communities of different ethnicities and language backgrounds in New Haven and 4) authentic application of Spanish language skills. The service goals for the project were to act as companions and friends to elderly individuals, to share the stories of these elders with future generations and to build intergenerational connections between seniors and young people. The students reflected on their experiences before, during and after their service project.



Students from Common Ground High School with a Casa Otonal resident (March 2004)

The students traveled to Casa Otonal on three occasions to interview the seniors about their memories of the Caribbean, their experience in coming to the United States and life since arriving in this country. The students then drafted, revised and finalized both English- and Spanish-language histories of the seniors and prepared the stories for publication in a collected volume. During a final visit to Casa Otonal, the students presented their stories and celebrated with the seniors with games and food the students had prepared for the occasion. The students developed a bond with the seniors they interviewed. Several students expressed an interest in maintaining a relationship with the elder with whom they were paired.