“Community in Focus”  
By Deborah Rogal, Short-Term Co-Chair & Eliza Brink, S.O.S Board Chair

As part of Smith College’s continued effort to foster ties with the Northampton community, S.O.S, in collaboration with Dean of Religious Life Jennifer Walters, kicked off the first annual "Community in Focus" week on Saturday, March 29.

Running through Sunday, April 6, students, faculty and staff were invited to participate in a Week of Service. A Community in Focus Committee organized members of the Smith College community to volunteer at local not-for-profit agencies. The amount of time groups spent with agencies varied depending on the needs of the agency and the ability of the participants. Groups were headed by at least one member who had had previous long-term volunteer experience with local agencies.

Although a couple of the projects had to be cancelled due to weather, agencies such as Northampton Nursing Home and Jessie’s House were visited by Smith students and staff. “We hope that the project will grow in the future,” Community in Focus Committee member Deborah Rogal said. “I think that we all envision the project becoming a staple of the Smith and Northampton communities. In this way, it was a definite success.”

The "Community in Focus" was conceived as a way to give attention to existing community needs and members of the community who attempt to alleviate those needs, but also as an opportunity for participants and agency staff to connect or reconnect with people around them. Eliza Brink, SOS Chair and member of the Community in Focus Committee, said about the Week of Service, "I'm excited for the week of service because it will be a great

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opportunity for students and staff to become more engaged in the off-campus community. It will also provide support to some of the local agencies that have been hit hardest by the economic slump." Furthermore, the Week of Service was a time to take notice of the problems faced by local non-profit agencies and for people to witness first hand how those problems are manifested.

While "Community in Focus" was only a week-long program, it is important to note that the issues it addressed are ongoing and do not end at the closing ceremony. For this reason, we encourage participants to continue their connection and efforts within the community after the Week of Service ends.

Thanks to all of you who participated in the Week of Service!

Warm Weather to the Rescue
By Sarah Consoli, Agency Outreach Intern

Spring has finally arrived and the Interfaith Homeless Shelter will be closing its doors on April 30th until the next cold season beginning in November. The shelter runs during the six coldest months of the year and accommodates 20 homeless individuals each evening.

The shelter is a new S.O.S. agency and we are pleased that both staff and students have had opportunities to volunteer at the shelter. On two previous occasions, members of the Smith community have volunteered to perform a thorough cleaning of the shelter. Data and Support Assistant, James Snedeker commented after he helped clean up the shelter, “when you volunteer to help someone out, you’re left with a real sense of what it is to contribute to society, even if it’s in a small way.” Yvonne Freccero, president of the board of directors for the Cot Shelter, responded to the clean up efforts by saying, “the Management Committee of the Shelter has been thrilled with the work of the cleaning parties. Everyone comments on the hard work and enthusiasm.”

Some Smith students volunteered their time by being a backup to the shelter staff on certain evenings. Freccero wrote in a recent email, “the contribution made by the group of students who do the 7:30-9 p.m. shift most weekend evenings has been invaluable. We do hope to continue to rely on your support for next semester.”

The support that members of the Smith Community have given to the shelter is an important part of keeping it running. The shelter clearly appreciates the dedication of the Smith community and will count on it in the future.

Funds Near $3,000 Mark
By Alicia Kachmar, Fund Drive Co-Chair

The Fund Drive Co-Chairs are happy to report that we are nearing the $3,000 mark. This is quite an accomplishment considering the size of our campus and the current economy. Unlike past years where the money has been given to one organization that applied through a grant process, this year we have decided to donate the proceeds to more than three organizations, including the Northampton Survival Center, the Cot Shelter, and the Hilltown Churches Pantry. Because of the budget cuts that are affecting nearly every business, organization, and employee, making multiple donations will acknowledge the ubiquitous need for funds. Which agencies the money goes to will be based on the relationships we have had with organizations in the immediate community. Thank you to all who donated and helped with this year’s Fund Drive. Your efforts will make a significant, positive difference in the lives of many.

Fund Drive 2003
Community-Based Learning
By Susan Chun, Community Outreach Intern

Over the years, S.O.S and a number of Smith professors have teamed up to make community-based learning opportunities possible for Smith students. Two examples of courses at Smith that have a community-based learning component include Sociology 101: Introduction to Sociology and Sociology 249: AIDS and Society taught by Professor Libby Wheatley.

There are many reasons why community-based learning is a great supplement to coursework. One important reason for Professor Wheatley is that “there is so much to be learned about the social world, social relations, local cultures, and social life that can’t be appreciated, fully, in the classroom, at the library, or through books.”

Professor Wheatley explains that she carefully identifies “organizations in need that are, at the same time, great learning opportunities for students.”

Some of the experiences that students have include working for a needle exchange program (a division of Tapestry Health Systems), working at an activist organization in Springfield that is committed to AIDS prevention, tutoring homeless children in the Springfield Public Schools, and working in food pantries and at soup kitchens. Wheatley hopes that these experiences will create lasting impressions for her students.

Cristina Jacobs, a student enrolled in Professor Wheatley’s Introduction to Sociology course, confirms that the community-based learning component is a very powerful experience. “The most eye-opening part of the class has been the opportunity to take action on the issues that we are studying” shares Jacobs.

Jacobs works at Arise as part of an outreach team that brings harm reduction products to those who are in need, such as prostitutes and drug users in Springfield. Jacobs says, “While doing this work I have been able to see real manifestations of the power structures and social injustices that prevent these people from getting what they need.”

S.O.S hopes to continue this invaluable collaboration in future.

First Link Pre-Orientation Program
By Eliza Brink, S.O.S Board Chairwoman

As S.O.S, in collaboration with Student Affairs and the College Chaplains, prepares for its fourth annual First Link pre-orientation program, I have been reflecting on what a huge impact First Link had on my experience here at Smith.

Always very passionate about community service, I first heard about First Link at the end of my first year and was thrilled to have the opportunity to be a team facilitator for the program.

During its inception in August of 2000, my group picked tomatoes and melons at the Food Bank Farm. It was so beautiful and relaxing that it gave the first-years a perfect chance to unwind and talk about their expectations and uncertainties about Smith. It also gave the first-years an early introduction to S.O.S, and many of them are still very involved. I remember Kasha Ho, our upcoming 03-04 Board Chair, as an excited participant in the very first First Link program.

This past summer, I came back to Smith after being away from campus for over a year, having spent most of that time in Spain. I shrugged off my culture shock as much as I could and immediately threw myself into First Link. I was surprised to see how much the program had come together in just two years. It was bigger with new and interesting projects. Once again, the connections that I made with the other team leaders and with the first-years, and the connections that they made with each other, made me feel completely at home back at Smith.

Now, as I prepare to graduate, I know that one of the things I’ll miss most is being able to meet a new group of people every August in such a fun and fulfilling way. I feel lucky, as I’m sure others do, to have had First Link help deepen my connections with the community, both on and off campus.
SOS Spotlight would like to acknowledge the great work done by community and student organizations that go above and beyond.

SOS Spotlight
Volunteer Recognition Dinner
By Desiree Diste, Fund Drive Co-Chair

On Tuesday, April 15, 2003 the S.O.S. Board took the opportunity to recognize those who have volunteered throughout the academic year at the annual Volunteer Recognition Dinner. Each year, the S.O.S. Board holds this event to show their support and appreciation for our volunteers.

Present at the event were Smith students who have been committed to service in our community through both long and short-term projects.

Volunteering here at Smith not only builds bridges of communication between the Smith College Campus and the outside community, but it also encourages learning outside of the classroom. While providing an invaluable service to the community, volunteers are able to gain the knowledge to continue making a positive difference throughout the world in the future. To the volunteers of Smith, we would like to thank you for your service and commitment.

We're on the Web!
www.smith.edu/sos