

## Focus on Migrant Education

### "LITTLE WILLIE"

Today I graded Little Willie's creative assignment. He and the rest of the students in my second Migrant Education Summer School class have to do one of these exercises in creativity daily. The directions for today's assignment were to write five sentences and to draw a picture that symbolized how each of them felt about themselves. Little Willie wrote "I feel tired and sometimes the world makes me feel stupid. I am stupid!" These words struck my heart with the intensity of a stray bullet from an all too familiar gun. How could a child so young and so full of life make such a strong, negative statement? These words sounded too grown up to be coming from such a little boy. After much thought and consideration today, I realize that Willie is a little 'grown-up' living in a world that treats him as if his agricultural way of life is a mockery of the American dream. Living under such a huge umbrella made him feel tired and stupid - where is the respect for America's children these days? How can we have a future if our little stars, like Willie, are feeling stupid and

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### What You Need to Know about Migrant Education:

- The "average" migrant child may be in three different schools in a year. For many children it takes roughly three years (for them) to advance one grade level (*MEMO*, September/October 1994).
- Migrant farmworker children are essential in the migrant family economy. Many drop out of school to help support their families or care for younger brothers and sisters. According to Bell et al., "by the time the migrant child is 12 he or she may be working from 16 to 18 hours per week" (*MEMO*, September/October 1994).
- Migrant workers typically complete 7.7 years of schooling, compared with 12.5 years for the general population (*MEMO*, September/October 1994).
- Well over 50% of migrant children do not finish high school and therefore usually find few alternatives to farmwork. The highest school grade completed by farmworker children is half the U.S. average (*FLOC Support Bulletin*, October 24, 1994).
- Migrant students who do achieve in high school indicate that the single most important factor in contributing to their success was an adult who cared (*Rethinking Migrant Education*, 1992, p. 15).

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## SAF Mission:

*To bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers, and build diverse coalitions working for social change.*

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The next issue of **From The Ground UP** will focus on *farmworker women*. Please send articles and photos to the SAF office by March 1, 1995.

**Editor:** Felice Anaïs James

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## WHO'S WHO IN THE SAF OFFICE

*Margaret Horn*, the executive director of SAF, is originally from Talladega, Alabama. Margaret graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1989 with degrees in Anthropology and Sociology. She received a Masters of Arts degree in Medical Anthropology from UNC-CH in 1993. Her graduate research in Mexico focused on migrant and refugee health. While at UNC-CH, Margaret was a Teaching Fellow. Before graduate school, Margaret worked as Director of the Appalachian Student Health Coalition at Vanderbilt University Medical School. She was also very involved in the Alternative Spring Break Program at Vanderbilt University.

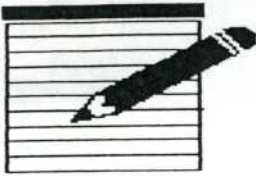
*Melinda Wiggins*, the program director of SAF, is a former SAF intern and special projects coordinator. While interning with SAF, Melinda worked in Newton Grove, North Carolina, with both the Episcopal Farmworker Ministry and Church Women United. Melinda received a degree in Political Science at Millsaps College in her home state of Mississippi, as well as a Masters of Theological Studies degree at Duke University. Melinda has had experience organizing students on campuses, interning with legislative agencies in Mississippi and Washington, D.C., and working with homeless populations.

Originally from Ypsilanti, Michigan, *Juanita Chenault* has come to work in the SAF Office through the Public Allies Americorps Program. Juanita decided to leave her senior year at Eastern Michigan University to do direct service in North Carolina. At SAF, Juanita coordinates both the Intern Referral Service and Project LEVANTE. After her apprenticeship with Public Allies, Juanita plans to finish her undergraduate studies; then attend graduate and law school to study family therapy and advocacy.

*Laura Neish*, the education coordinator of SAF, is a senior History major at Duke University. She participated in SAF's ITF program in 1993. As an intern she worked at St. Martin's Migrant Head Start in Newton Grove, NC and the Johnston County Migrant Summer School program. At SAF, Laura organizes the resource center and researches new educational material.

*Felice Anaïs James* is a Junior at Duke University who plans to attend medical school upon completion of her undergraduate degree. She was a SAF intern the summer of 1993 and worked for East Coast Migrant Health in her hometown of Marion, South Carolina, this past summer. Felice works in the SAF office as the newsletter editor.





## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

### NC STATE STUDENTS SEEK MIGRANT SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Last spring, Student Action with Farmworkers recruited four North Carolina State University (NCSU) students to participate in the *Into the Fields* summer internship. It was an excellent opportunity for the students to learn from and assist the migrant population of North Carolina. The students have committed themselves to ensuring that other students from NCSU will have an opportunity to learn more about the hard-working migrant population in this state. In order to accomplish this, the students have formed a Student Action with Farmworkers chapter at their university. Although membership is currently small, the organization has a lot of potential to grow. The organization has already hosted two guest speakers on the campus and has plans for several more throughout the year. Already, students at the university are more aware of the challenges that migrant farmworkers and their families face.

The NCSU-SAF chapter would like to see more children from migrant backgrounds attending North Carolina State. Currently there are no migrant students at the university. This is unfortunate, as the university has so many opportunities to offer. Aside from educating their classmates and professors, one of the goals of the SAF chapter is to

establish a scholarship fund for migrant students. Migrant children are at a disadvantage in school. One of their primary problems is hurdling a language barrier. Often students come from homes where only Spanish is spoken. The few books, newspapers and magazines in their homes are written in Spanish. Then these children are thrown into an English-speaking school; they are expected to "sink or swim".

Furthermore, being that they are migratory, the children tend to have poor attendance rates. Once settled into a particular school district, the children often continue to miss school, citing excuses such as taking care of sick siblings and working in the fields to provide additional income for their families. In all, these factors lead to poor grades, with some of the students being two to three years behind their English-speaking classmates. In addition, many students do not graduate from high school and even fewer attend college.

Often money is a problem for those students who are eligible to attend college. Sources say that the average migrant worker in North Carolina earns \$6000 a year. However, the cost of attending a public university in North Carolina is roughly \$5000 a year. Furthermore, only United

States citizens or legal residents are eligible to receive federal financial aid. Thus, a large number of migrant students who are qualified to attend college are unable to without financial assistance.

Attending college provides a wonderful opportunity for students to explore various career options. Anyone who wants to attend college should be given the opportunity to do so in spite of their parents' income or their citizenship status. There are many students from migrant families who have tremendous potential to succeed. Why should they be denied this opportunity?

In order to establish this scholarship fund, SAF-NCSU plans to fundraise in the community. Also they will solicit donations from the NCSU Student Senate, the NCSU financial Aid Office, and philanthropic organizations. If you have ideas which could be helpful in establishing this fund or would like to make a financial contribution, please contact:

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by **Mike Seguin**  
1994 SAF Intern



## PROJECT LEVANTE

*You know, it is not easy being a migrant. Sometimes my friends ask me how it feels to be a migrant. Great! To leave school early, enroll late, have a tutor, take night classes, Saturday classes, and sometimes correspondence classes. Great! I want to be a migrant!... You say you are bored with school, that you are tired of writing? Here I do not get bored, I do not have time. Yes, I get tired. My back hurts from bending over, and at the end of the day I feel that I will not be able to straighten up... You want to be a migrant? I invite you to come with me for a year.*

Trevino, Sandra, "Articulate Teens Tell How it Feels to be a Migrant," *MEMO*, Jan/Feb. 1993.

When Sandra Trevino spoke these words, she was speaking the words of over a million migrant children in the United States. Migrant youth have the highest drop-out rates in the country. Their life is one of constant movement from state to state and from school to school. Often children from farmworker families drop out of school to add to the family income by working in the fields. A new SAF program encourages migrant students to realize that they can complete high school and attain higher educational goals.

Developed out of SAF's *Into the Fields* program, Project LEVANTE addresses the needs of migrant youth as they struggle to finish high school and explore future career and educational options. LEVANTE, which means to "rise up" in Spanish, is the acronym for *Let's Encourage Victories Achieved Now Through Education* or *La Educacion Vale Algo...*

*Nosotros Tenemos Empeno.*

Project LEVANTE stems from a 1993 initiative called *College Connections*; it gained significance this past summer when interns presented the play *College: Me* to youth and their families at North Carolina migrant summer schools, as well as at the statewide Action, Motivation, and Inspiration (AIM) Migrant Education Conference. *College: ME*, which was written by the director of the California State at Fresno's College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), focuses on the difficulties migrant youth face when entering college. Project LEVANTE also offered an opportunity for migrant students and ITF interns to become pen pals.

This year SAF plans to place six ITF interns in three regions of North Carolina to work with existing migrant education programs and local AIM Chapters. Interns will coordinate programs, field trips, and a retreat for the participants. Students will have the opportunity to present plays and artistic performances at the retreat to their family and friends. The interns will also provide both students and their families a manual on the transition from high school to college. The manual will give students the tools needed to prepare, research, and fund their education.

SAF is very excited about Project LEVANTE and its future success. We hope that endeavors like this can help students like Sandra to pursue their dreams.

by **Juanita P. Chenault**



*Photo by  
David Thomas,  
SAF Board Member*

