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Inside: Children of Migrant Workers,
Career Ladder Program, Medical Issues,
Dropouts, and Working Partnerships

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Harvest of Hope

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One of the most powerful words in the English language is *hope*. It is the pinnacle of many dreams and the promise of things not yet seen or experienced. *Webster's* (1983) defines hope as "a desire with expectation of fulfillment; an expectation of success." For the migrant and seasonal farmworker, hope is an elusive word—one far out of reach.

Plight of the Migrant Worker

Statistics regarding the plight of the migrant worker are startling. Studies conducted by the Migrant Legal Action Program, Inc., paint a grim picture of the migrant situation (Satchell, 1982). The average life expectancy of the migrant farmworker is only 49 years compared to the national average of 73. The median family income for a migrant family of six is \$3,900 per year with children often doing migrant work in the fields with their parents to sustain this income level. With the national poverty level at \$9,287 a year and the average family income reaching \$22,388, the migrant worker's standard of living is hardly conducive to survival. Migrant and seasonal farmworkers have no collective bargaining power or overtime provisions since they are not covered by the National Labor Relations Act. The migrant and seasonal farmworker must also endure lower unemployment benefits and limited workmen's compensation. Poor living conditions, deficiencies in diet, and primitive sanitation promote diarrhea, parasitic infections, and tuberculosis. According to the Food and Drug Administration, several hundred workers die each year from pesticide poisoning. Tens of thousands are injured. Primitive living arrangements coupled with an adverse work environment keep many of the nation's migrant farmworkers "locked in economic bondage" (Satchell, 1982). Why, then, do families continue to migrate and how are their lives affected by this style of life?

Often termed "stoop labor," migrant farmwork is a part of our nation's history. Historically, migration to this country was both voluntary and involuntary. Some sought religious or political freedom in addition to the economic opportunities awaiting them in America.

Various cultural, ethnic, and racial groups were brought together by common bonds, interests, and needs. Once in this country, the "migrants from abroad" dispersed to a multitude of geographic regions. The onset of the Industrial Revolution caused an increasing intranational migration which eventually was responsible for the steady urbanization of the United States. The gradual increase in migrant farmwork transformed the nation from one that was over 95

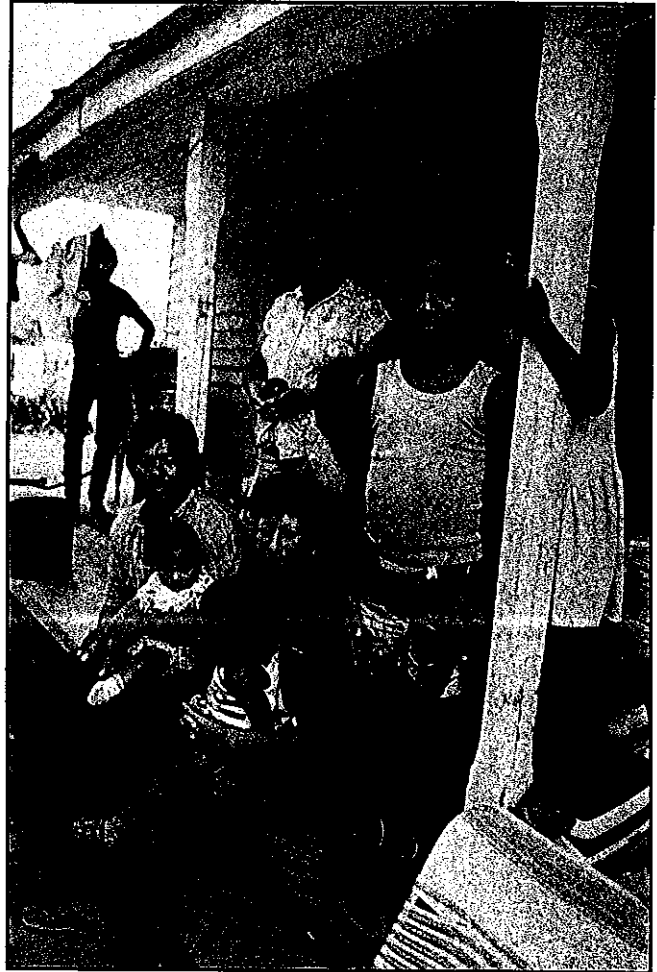


Photo by J. Miles Cary

Miguel and Alma Bernal, seated, with some of their family in migrant housing.

percent rural in 1790 to one that is well over 73 percent urban today (Day, 1975). Then, as now, migrant and seasonal farmworkers have been an invisible group to most of society (Ford, 1988). Families on the move rarely have the time or inclination to establish community contacts.

Educationally Disadvantaged Group

"As we have carried forth our grand experiment in universal free public education, we have largely fashioned a system that serves well those who are white, middle- to upper-income, well-motivated, and from relatively stable families. As students have deviated more and more from that norm, the system has served them less and less well" (Jibrell, 1987). Life in the migrant stream is not conducive to education. Migrant and seasonal farmworkers are perhaps the most educationally disadvantaged group in our society (Hodgkinson, 1985; Dement, 1985). Research has shown that mobility has a negative effect on school achievement, especially among low-income minority students. The problems caused by mobility are compounded by language and cultural differences experienced at each end of the migration stream. Interruption of the education process often leads to confusion and frustration and to a feeling of alienation. This fragmentation becomes a major factor in the students becoming school dropouts. On the average, migrants 25 years of age and older have no more than a sixth-grade education. Hodgkinson (1985) indicated that over 70 percent of migrants had not completed high school and that 15 percent were functionally illiterate. Children of migrant workers also suffer educationally. Patterns of educational deprivation are perpetuated with migrant students lagging far behind their counterparts in achievement and by grade levels. By the time they reach the fourth grade, migrant students typically fall eighteen months or more below the grade level for their age groups. Dement (1985) indicated that roughly three years were required for the average migrant student in some states to advance one grade level. The average migrant student has only a "40 percent chance of entering 9th grade, an 11 percent chance of entering 12th grade, and fewer than 10 percent will graduate from high school" (Johnson, et al., 1985). Dropout rates for migrant students far exceed the rates for the remainder of the public school population. Inadequate mastery of basic skills combined with poverty or minority group membership forms a "deadly combination that leads to dropping out among migrant children" (Jibrell, 1987). Deficiencies in basic skills provide one of the strongest predictors of migrant students dropping out of the educational system.

Those students who are retained to correct academic deficiencies are also at risk. According to Jibrell, retaining the migrant student one grade level increases the risk of dropping out from 40 to 50 percent; being retained two grade levels increases the risk to 90 percent.

Adaptation Difficulties

Because of their extensive mobility, migrant students are often not accepted by their non-migrant cohorts and seldom participate in the school's extra-curricular activities. Non-migrant students are often unwilling to accept the migrant student and his/her way of life. This alienation leads to chronic absenteeism in many cases.

Other stumbling blocks for migrant students include credit deficiencies and failure to successfully pass competency or proficiency exams (Johnson, et al., 1985). Often, the migrant student is unaware of the prerequisites for graduation and is unable to complete known requirements due to the nature of migrant and seasonal farmwork. Achievement on proficiency tests is dependent upon several factors such as high reading comprehension and adequate writing skills which are difficult areas for migrants who speak little English and are unfamiliar with testing scenarios.

Migrant families are in search of fields—not the finest schools. School and health records seldom move with the migrant student. As a result, school personnel have difficulty placing students in appropriate grades. By the time placement is determined, the student has again moved with his family to follow the fields.

Towards a Solution

The problems of the migrant child are many; the solutions are difficult (U.S. Department of Education, 1982). In an effort to alleviate many of the educational barriers the migrant student must overcome, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 included educational provisions for migrant children with the passage of amendments to Public Law 89-10 and the enactment of Public Law 89-750. The formation of a Migrant Education Program hinged upon the migrant population meeting the criteria of the disadvantaged. According to Bertoglio (1985), six major differences distinguish migrant students from others:

1. Migrant students have a high incidence of mobility;
2. School districts view migrant students as non-resident children and, therefore, do not assume responsibility for them;

3. The regular school year (183 days) and related curriculum do not provide short units of instruction for limited attendance of non-resident migrant students;

4. There is no continuity of instruction from school district to school district or from state to state;

5. Health and academic records are sparse with no system for transferring secondary school credits to meet graduation requirements; and

6. The erratic cycle of agricultural activity and subsequent school attendance need to be considered in determining the entitlement entity. In short, flexibility for shifting funds has to be feasible in order for the money to follow the migrant student.

With the recognition of these differences, the plight of the migrant student was gradually brought to light. The beacon which followed began to open "realistic" doors for the high-risk migrant child. Research conducted on the educational achievement patterns among disadvantaged populations indicates that students from low-income and minority backgrounds are significantly less likely to complete high school and some college than any others in the educational system (Interstate Migrant Secondary Services Project, 1985). The most "educationally deprived group of children in the nation" were finally being considered (Celebreeze, 1982). In 1967, Title III of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was amended to provide the necessary financial resources to remedy, as much as possible, the gaps and educational disparity the migrant student had faced for years. The Migrant Division of the Office of Economic Opportunity created the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) that same year.

Evolution of HEP/CAMP Programs

HEP was designed to prepare the migrant drop-out with the skills necessary to obtain the high school equivalency diploma. Career counseling and effective placement services were included in the plan to provide the migrant youth with meaningful placement in postsecondary institutions or employment. With the program in place, the first HEP pilot project was started at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. With the implementation of the High School Equivalency Program, attainment of career goals could be emphasized and postsecondary education could be encouraged.

Although the birth of HEP paved the way for the migrant drop-out to complete a secondary education, statistics revealed that the average migrant high school graduate could not compete in a college environment with students of other backgrounds (Celebreeze,

1982). For this reason, the Office of Economic Opportunity created a program designed to assist the migrant student in successfully completing the first academic year of college. Thus, three years after the creation of the High School Equivalency Program (HEP), the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) was born. By 1970, HEP and CAMP were the principal providers of secondary and postsecondary education to migrant and seasonal students with CAMP being the first program of its kind to promote a college assistance program for "high risk" students (*Migrant Education*, 1987). Students who enroll in the College Assistance Migrant Program are still members of a population "at severe risk" of failure in achieving conventional educational goals and objectives.

When they were created, CAMP projects faced many challenges, not the least of which was the low level of academic achievement of the typical migrant student. In 1972, shortly after the implementation of CAMP, only one of every 100 migrant students had completed a four-year degree. As first generation college students, the migrant youth had no tradition of success in college (Walsh, 1982). Educational aspirations were either low or non-existent. Students were virtually unaware of opportunities open to them. Federal and state systems of financial aid for college were detrimental to the migrant student since parents were required to complete applications and income tax forms and most migrant parents had never before completed an application form or filed for income tax. Life on campus was, and still is, a foreign and intimidating environment for the migrant student. Even now, acclimation to college life is difficult at best.

At its conception, CAMP began to overcome the barriers which had blocked the migrant student's chance of succeeding at the college level and now can point to the success of the programs over the past several years. It is estimated that 1.5 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers are eligible under Federal guidelines to participate in HEP and CAMP programs. Although only 3 percent of the known eligible population has been served, both programs are among the most effective of all federally and state-sponsored educational projects (Riley, 1985). In spite of this, the cry for increased minority enrollment falls on deaf ears at many institutions of higher education.

In addition to forming a large part of the migrant population, Hispanics represent the fastest growing minority group in the United States. It is imperative that American higher education focus its attention on the group that it has long ignored (Burgos-Sasscer, 1987). CAMP "empowers" the Hispanic and minority student, but not without difficulty. Before a student can partici-

pate in CAMP, the tedious process of university admission must be completed. More than half of the Hispanic and migrant population cannot meet admissions requirements due to underpreparedness at the secondary level of education. A significant number of minority students benefited from an open admissions policy in the late sixties and early seventies; however, interest in educational equity diminished and the enrollment of minorities has since declined (Astin, 1982; Duran, 1983). In 1977, a greater proportion of Hispanics (21%) than non-Hispanics (19.8%) who had graduated from high school continued on to college when the open admissions policy was in effect (Duran, 1983). Burgos-Sasscer (1987) stated that:

an important phenomenon that has not received the attention it deserves is that, if given the opportunity, Hispanic high school graduates may be more likely than any other group (including white non-Hispanics) to enroll in college. (p. 25)

Minority students still face tough admissions requirements and are often denied the opportunity to attend four-year institutions. These statistics indicate that higher education is important to this population and that institutions of higher education should stand up and take notice of them.

The migrant population, a large proportion of which is Hispanic and black, also experiences frustration after being admitted to college. Because of their nomadic style of life, many migrant students claim no particular state as their home residence. These students are "slapped" with out-of-state tuition fees which are substantially more than the in-state tuition that most non-migrants enjoy. Why, then, cannot institutions of higher education claim these students and provide them the opportunity to declare in-state status?

CAMP projects can only be as effective as their supporting institutions. Our educational systems must "anticipate needs and respond in time to avert major failure" (Hodgkinson, 1985). Joint cooperation can not only boost minority recruitment and enrollment, but can foster retention of the high risk student as well. According to Thomas and Andes (1987), there are four "unique" groups of freshmen whose needs must be addressed and met in any higher education recruitment effort:

Persisters and dropouts must be encouraged to persevere. Dropouts and leavers need understanding and support in this time of transition (p. 338).

Today, CAMP provides retention of minority

students through intensive tutoring and counseling, academic monitoring of progress, and financial assistance to students in their first year of a four-year degree program. Students are gradually "weaned" from the program throughout the freshman year. As sophomores, students are not directly served by CAMP but leave the program with the benefits of long-range financial and career planning. A national study conducted in 1986 by California State University found that of all students who participated in CAMP during 1980 through 1984, more than 90 percent completed the first year of college (*Migrant Education*, 1987). Two-thirds of the students originally enrolled in CAMP remained in school with 56 percent earning a baccalaureate degree by 1985. By contrast, national estimates indicate that only 38 of every 100 first-time freshmen complete baccalaureate degrees (Riley, 1985).

Hope and Opportunity

These data indicate the promise of programs such as CAMP as well as other programs designed for the general population. Many higher education institutions have done little to accommodate the minority student. David Hornbeck presented the situation in this light: "The critical mass of at-risk children and youth has grown so large that it now threatens the entire system. Instead of blaming the students for not fitting the system, we must restructure the system to provide appropriate educational services to those at greatest risk" (Jibrell, 1987, p. 3). It is paramount that projects such as HEP and CAMP remain a stable presence in academia and that institutions of higher education foster the growth and preservation of such projects. The United States Department of Labor predicts that by the year 2000 more than one-fifth of the nation's work force will be composed of blacks and Hispanics and that by 2015 members of minority groups will outnumber whites (Johnson, 1988), and migrants will be part of this larger situation. Education of the highest quality supplemented by program support services may be the greatest hope for eliminating the perpetual cycle of illiteracy and despair too often found in the migrant stream.

Hope. It is a word upon which many potential migrant and seasonal farmworker students thrive. *Opportunity* is a word that we, as educators, must provide if we are to "reap the social and economic rewards of a talented and informed citizenry" (Hodgkinson, 1985). The CAMP program at The University of Tennessee is one of four university projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education to bring the word *hope* alive for the migrant and seasonal farmworker who wants to get a college degree.

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