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## An excerpt from the fall 2008 issue of **THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL NEWS**

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# TIS grad helps Latinos in crisis

The lineups at Portland's Northeast Emergency Food Program start at 10am even though doors don't open for another three hours, according to Kia Greene, Class of 2007 graduate from The International School.

The Ecumenical Ministries program meets the urgent food needs of Portland's North and Northeast residents who are living on the brink of crisis – many of them Latino immigrants. Last summer Kia volunteered for the food program to help people in need and to practice her Spanish. The experience was a great success both for her and for those she helped.

The Northeast Emergency Food Program has two paid staff members and relies heavily on donations and volunteer support. Kia worked with clients who came for food assistance. She had to understand their needs, then bring them through the hallways to select proteins, carbohydrates, fruit and vegetables that met guidelines for each family.

"At first the clients didn't talk much," Kia said. "But once they realized I could speak Spanish, they would wait to work with me each time they came in. Then they would talk and talk and talk. You start to know them, you're talking to them, and you feel bad that you can't give them more food."

There were many times when Kia

was the only Spanish-speaking worker. She saw that "other volunteers would get really frustrated when they couldn't communicate, and that would make the clients frustrated too. I felt good to be able to communicate with the Spanish-speaking families, but I also felt bad because they couldn't converse with anyone else."

"Kia is one of the brightest, most confident and fearless young people I have met in years," said Jennifer A Broussard, Program Assistant at the Northeast Emergency Food Program. "She had no reservations about introducing herself to anyone: young, old, English speaker or not. It was very helpful to have a fluent Spanish speaker here, not only to help us get the information we needed but also to help the Hispanic community feel more at home. We all loved having Kia with us, and we hope to see her again in the future."

Now that Kia is back in middle school at NW Academy, she wants to volunteer at the Food Program on weekends. For now, she is using her Spanish mostly at school. After completing high school Spanish as a sixth grader last year, she is now getting school credit for being a teaching assistant in Spanish Level I. "Sometimes it feels weird because I'm younger than students in the class," she says with a smile. "They try to whisper to me, but I



say, 'hey, you can't do that, I'm grading your homework!'"

When Kia looks back at her International School experience, her Capstone Academic trip to Spain stands out as a highlight. "I thought (the class trip) wouldn't be so good because I had already been to Spain, but we each saw something different when we were there for Capstone. I still talk to the friends I made in Spain every day."

Kia's advice to current fourth and fifth graders? "Enjoy your last years at TIS, because when you leave, everything is totally different. I loved TIS because it was a community. I miss it, but I don't want to leave NW Academy."

