Residence Life Area Coordinator’s Office Valuable Resource for International Student Families

Part of IUB’s Department of Residence Life, the office of Area Coordinator Erna Rosenfeld is a vital feature of family student housing. The office, responsible for the family housing units of Tulip Tree, Campus View, Evermann, BBHN/Rowe, Redbud, East and West University Apartments, and Hillcrest, is located in Campus View Lobby. The busy, accessible office provides a broad range of services to family housing residents that includes orientation, counseling and crisis intervention, information and referral, programming, education, and outreach. While the office serves the needs of all family housing residents, international student families find it an especially valuable resource.

Rosenfeld first became committed to a program sensitive to the needs of international students and spouses during the late 1970s, while working as a volunteer English instructor for spouses of international students. In teaching these classes, she recalls, “the classroom increasingly became a problem-solving site, focusing less on English and more on the practical aspects of the women’s lives and how to make things easier for them here.” Rosenfeld’s efforts to assist her students in dealing with the basic needs of family student life in the U.S. resulted in the creation of a support group called the Association for Spouses of International Students (ASiSt).

In 1980, Rosenfeld’s volunteer activities for international student families received institutional support from the Vice President’s office through the creation of a half-time position, in which she worked in close association with the International Programs office. Indiana University’s recognition of the benefits of such a program for all family housing residents led to the 1985 establishment of the Residence Life Coordinator’s Office, within IUB’s Residence Life department. While Rosenfeld’s full-time position directing the new Coordinator’s Office involved an expansion of services to all family housing residents, she found that international student families continued to comprise a significant percentage of the office’s clientele.

Rosenfeld attributes the large number of international student families served by her office to several factors. First, more than half of IUB’s family student housing population are international families, and “being new and unfamiliar with all the resources available,” she observes, “it seems natural that more internationals come to our office for a variety of concerns and requests.” Through working with international student families, Rosenfeld has also found that while “both international and American students are very burdened by educational requirements and family responsibilities,” international student parents often face additional constraints by being separated from their extended families and home countries. For most international student families, campus housing remains their only home throughout their U.S. stay, with many international families not having the resources to take even vacation breaks away from the close quarters of student housing. Rosenfeld says that student families’ child care needs are enormous—her office receives three to four inquiries weekly concerning affordable day care, and there is a long waiting list for the IU programs. IUB’s present facilities are very good, she says, but are inadequate to meet the university community’s child care needs.

The Residence Life Coordinator’s Office reaches out to campus housing families through various means—providing new residents with orientation, and ongoing news and information through the biweekly newsletter, Update. By working cooperatively with an expansive network of campus service/programming units and community agencies, the office sponsors such popular family housing programs as adult English classes, PHNA Well Child Clinics, an Extended Day after-school program for elementary school students, “Y” preschool outreach classes, and ASiSt programming for international student spouses. In addition to the main Campus View office, six Coordinator Assistants live on-site at Tulip Tree, BBHN/Rowe, and Redbud. In the future, Rosenfeld hopes to expand this on-site, around-the-clock presence to all family housing units. She attributes the active, successful record of her office to many sources—among them, “a terrific staff,” and the strong support of the Residence Life department, the Halls of Residence, and the Office of International Services. “I love my job—the pleasure of our work is that it’s so diverse, and this diversity is so enriching.”