

[HB 56 panel talks about law's impact](#)

in [Campus, News](#) / by [Judah Martin](#) / on September 20, 2012 at 12:00 AM /



Alabama Appleseed, a non-profit legal advocacy organization based in Montgomery, collaborated with The University of Alabama Womens' Resource Center on Wednesday afternoon for a event titled, "Effects of HB 56: One Year Later."

Alabama Appleseed is home to Welcoming Alabama, the state affiliate of Welcoming America, a national organization that seeks to promote unity between American-born citizens and immigrants.

To kick off its Welcoming Week, the organization teamed up with the WRC to host the immigration related event in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. The panel was the WRC's first celebration event since the launch of their "Women Who Dared" poster campaign, a month-long celebration of accomplished Latina women, on Monday.

The Effects of HB 56 panel was led by Shay Farley, the legal director of Alabama Appleseed, and Zayne Smith, an Immigration Policy Fellow for the Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice. The Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice is a group created by Alabama Appleseed and 60 additional community partners that aims to ensure social, legal and civic rights for immigrants in Alabama.

"The ultimate goal was to get people talking about their perception of immigrants in their community," Smith said. "I think it went well because people were honest."

People in attendance were invited to participate by watching a video of individuals holding pro-immigration signs. Afterward, they were asked to participate in a group discussion and provide information about their own racial background.

"I was kind of pleasantly surprised to find that it was a discussion," said Bethany Womack, a Ph.D student in the department of social work. "This is probably the most diverse group of people I've had the opportunity to participate in a discussion with [at the University.] I think it helps me understand a little more about the context of the community and some of the opportunities and challenges that social agencies have in providing service."

Wanda Burton, the peer education coordinator for the WRC, feels that Appleseed's most important goals were accomplished during the panel.

"I definitely feel this accomplished our goal because we wanted to open a discussion about the immigration policy but we wanted to also educate," Burton said.

Farley said Appleseed plans to make stops in Birmingham and Auburn before concluding its Welcoming Week.

The group's focus is on providing service events along with arts, culture and dialogue sessions.

“What we want to do now is to engage more targeted discussions about people's perceptions and beliefs and opinions about immigration and immigrants,” Farley said. “Our main thing is just to help communities start talking because we believe that once you start breaking down barriers, only then can we fully appreciate one another.”

Farley also said she thought it was a beautiful thing when people respected and trusted each other enough to open up about what they believe.

On Friday, Sept. 21, Alabama Appleseed will work with Somos Tuscaloosa and the UA Law School to host Pantry Stock 2012 to collect food items and other supplies. The event will take place from 5 to 7 p.m. at Snow Hinton Park.

“People can come by, drop off some food, help out victims of natural disaster, and share in a sense of community,” Smith said.