

SERVE WISCONSIN

Annual Member Reflections

2015



Table of Contents

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|---|----|
| Table of Contents..... | 1 |
| Boys & Girls Clubs of Barron County AmeriCorps MAPP Program | 2 |
| Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee..... | 4 |
| College Possible Milwaukee..... | 7 |
| Partners for After School Success AmeriCorps | 9 |
| Easter Seals Wisconsin AmeriCorps..... | 11 |
| Indianhead Community Action Agency- Rusk County Wisconsin Fresh Start..... | 13 |
| Marshfield Clinic AmeriCorps Afterschool | 15 |
| Marshfield Clinic AmeriCorps Coalition | 17 |
| Marshfield Clinic AmeriCorps Volunteer Wisconsin..... | 19 |
| Milwaukee Christian Center YouthBuild AmeriCorps Program | 21 |
| Urban Education Fellows Program..... | 23 |
| NCCAP AmeriCorps Team – Greater Wausau Area | 25 |
| Public Allies Milwaukee..... | 27 |
| Renewal Unlimited Inc. Portage Fresh Start..... | 29 |
| Teach For America – Milwaukee | 31 |
| United Way of Dane County Achievement Connections..... | 33 |
| United Way of Dane County Schools of Hope AmeriCorps Project | 35 |
| University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Early Childhood Literacy Intervention Program, Services and Evaluation | 37 |
| University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Vet Corps | 39 |
| Western Dairyland Fresh Start | 41 |
| Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services, Direct Service Outreach to Runaways | 43 |
| Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Wisconsin Farm to School Program | 45 |
| Wisconsin Emergency Management ReadyWisconsin AmeriCorps Program..... | 47 |
| Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association, Wisconsin HealthCorps | 49 |

Boys & Girls Clubs of Barron County AmeriCorps MAPP Program



The Boys & Girls Clubs of Barron County AmeriCorps program focuses on improving math and literacy skills for Club members, as well as promoting healthy futures. AmeriCorps members track Club members through a case management system and tailor the experience of the Club to the needs of the youth. 200 youth in clubhouses across the county have had Member Afterschool Plan Portfolios (MAPPs) created and maintained weekly by AmeriCorps members. This MAPP allows the member to track the progress and needs of the targeted youth.

The Important Role We Play

Paul M. Baribeau

Boys & Girls Club Barron County AmeriCorps Program
7th Congressional District
7th State Assembly District
25 State Senate District

Working at the Boys and Girls Club has shown me how important it is for kids to have positive role models in their lives, and that's what we as AmeriCorps members are to our Club members. This position is more than just a job as we have an extremely important role to play as we are positive role models in these kids' lives. If it was not for the positive role models in my life, I could not tell you where I would be today. In December of 1995, I faced something that no 7 year old boy should ever have to go through, the loss of a parent.

On December 1995, my father, also a police officer, was killed in the line of duty. A boy's father is someone special, at that age he is a superhero, a friend, a mentor, an authority figure, a provider, a man who teaches his son the ways of life and right vs. wrong, and on December 19th 1995, it seemed like all that disappeared for me. Growing up I saw dad's take their sons fishing, being a mentor to their sons, and teaching them the important lessons in life. All I could think of where was that for me, where was that positive influence to do those things with? It wasn't long before my mother got me into the performing arts where I met older teens who would take me under their wing and not only broaden my appreciation for the arts, but where there to teach me those life lessons, throw the football with me, help me with homework, teach me how to drive. If it was not for those positive role models and influences in my life, who came into my life after tragedy, I know I would not be where I am today, or be the man I am today. I do thank my dad for planting those positive role models in my life every single day.

As AmeriCorps members and staff at the Boys & Girls Club we are to be positive role models in these young kids' lives, to show them their worth, and help the kids lead positive lives. Because of my story, I know how important and influential our role as Boys & Girls Staff is. Kids come to the club with all sorts of backgrounds, some like mine, and some completely different; but everyone needs a positive influence in their lives and that's what we as staff are. The duty we are asked to do is more than just a temp job as what we do as positive mentors and role models can have a lasting positive impact on these kids' lives. If I can touch just one kid's life by being a mentor & role model while they attend the club, and lead them in a positive direction the way my life was touched by my mentors and role models then I can call my time here a success.

Paul was born and raised in Rice Lake, Wisconsin. He graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Wisconsin Superior in May 2012.

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee



SPARK: AmeriCorps members serving as part of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee's Spheres of Proud Achievement in Reading for Kids (SPARK) Early Literacy Program will work both during and after school in ten club/school partnership sites. Members will work with students in Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades who have been identified by their classroom teachers as struggling readers. AmeriCorps members will implement the SPARK Program by providing one-on-one and/or small group reading activities and initiate fun literacy games/activities that build students' phonemic awareness, phonic skills, reading fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.

Camp Whitcomb/Mason: Owned and operated by Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, Camp is a year-round facility located near Hartland, WI, approximately 35 miles northwest of Milwaukee, on beautiful Lake Keesus.

Situated on 306 acres of hills, fields, wetlands, and forests, Whitcomb/Mason provides campers with a variety of natural experiences. One full-time member will play a critical role at Camp Whitcomb/Mason year-round, and 20 quarter-time members will serve with an increased concentration during the summer months. Members will create, implement, and lead youth through environmental education lessons and activities in the areas of: archaeology, agriculture, athletics, cultural studies, nature, arts & crafts, outdoor living skills, Wisconsin forest history, and organic farming.

Arts Initiative: In an educational environment where arts programming is often the first eliminated, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee fills a critical need for the youth of the city. Member service includes program development, management, and implementation in a comprehensive art program, serving youth ages 6-18 in visual and performing arts in after school Club facilities in the Greater Milwaukee area.



A Journey Through Tutor-hood

Amber Anderson

SPARK Early Literacy Program Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee
 Alexander Mitchell Integrated Arts School
 4th U.S. Congressional District
 State Assembly District 8
 State Senate District 3

Although I have only been a member of AmeriCorps since September of 2014, the impact it has had on my life has been strong and everlasting. I would compare my time with AmeriCorps to another short-lived, and for lack of a better word, meaningful experience that I have been blessed to undertake in my life, becoming a mother. While being a SPARK tutor may not be the demanding, 24/7, lifelong commitment that becoming a parent is – it does require many of the same qualities. For me, it also represents a similar journey to figuring out what works, what doesn't, and just what it means to be a child's tutor. I remember my first day at SPARK. I was nervous and apprehensive. I had so many questions: How would I teach them? Do I even know the sounds the short vowels make? What if they don't like me? I used to think asking questions was one of the number one signs a person doesn't know what he or she is doing. While that may be true to an extent, it does also mean one other important thing – that you care.

As time passed, I eventually got the hang of things; however, it wasn't until quite recently when I was in danger of losing my job that I realized just how much I loved this opportunity and my students that come with it. It was the first time I thought about what would happen to my students if I was no longer their tutor. How long would it take for them to get a new tutor? Who would be their new tutor? Would that tutor know that Oscar learns best through repetition and games? Or that Esteban is most productive when his lessons are made into a competition? And Nevaeh, who just lost her last tutor in October, will she think she is doing something wrong? I realized how much I had learned about each of my students. I knew their strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes, and I could recognize an off day when I saw it. For the first

time, I realized just what it meant to be a child's tutor.

Like parents, SPARK tutors play many different roles: Mentor, teacher, drill sergeant, circus clown, and counselor are just a few of the many hats we wear. While you will always see us in our fancy blue shirts and vests, rest assured there is always some invisible hat we are wearing; one our child needs that day. I am thankful that SPARK and AmeriCorps have given me the opportunity to experience what it means to be a child's tutor.

Amber is currently a junior at UW-Milwaukee on track to graduate in 2017 with a bachelor's degree in science education. Teaching has always been a passion of hers and science a personal, important value. She looks forward to helping mold the next generation of curious minds to have fun, ask questions, and enjoy learning.

College Possible Milwaukee



College Possible makes college admission and success possible for low-income students through an intensive curriculum of coaching and support. We do this by providing: (1) Academic support through ACT/SAT test preparation; (2) College application assistance; (3) Financial aid consulting; (4) Guidance in the college transition; and, (5) Comprehensive support toward college degree completion. Through access to education, we are working to help low-income students break the cycle of poverty and create better futures for themselves and the community.

Since our launch in Milwaukee in 2008, we have grown from serving 60 students in three high schools to serving nearly 700 students at 13 high schools this year. We are also supporting 800 college students who are attending over 300 colleges nationwide.

And Then...

Shannon Strombom

College Possible

Milwaukee

Wisconsin's 4th Congressional District16th State Assembly District6th State Senate District

One arrest. One expulsion. One early graduation (and college applications completed in under month). More than a few intensely personal family complications. And multiple suspensions. The common thread? Exceptional challenges in the life of a College Possible Junior Coach. One might point out that all of these circumstances seem to be anything but positive. To these individuals I would respond, yes, they are very trying and in many cases, heart-wrenching. But I would also tell them that, above all, these situations have been educational and in that way much more inspirational than expected.

Prior to beginning my term of service, I never viewed myself as someone dedicated to any particular cause. What I knew of social issues came from news reports and the opinions of those around me. I cared about and believed in the potential for change, but I can't claim to have been personally invested in making such change happen; however, since joining the College Possible corps and personally witnessing prevalent social concerns and the educational and cultural systems that encourage them, my outlook has shifted. For many of my students, their daily life is defined by the ways in which society works against them – widespread application of lax course and graduation requirements, advice that encourages a future path far from their best interests, violence in school, unequal distribution of disciplinary action, and authorities in their lives telling them it's likely they'll amount to very little, among countless others. Hearing their stories, combined with the personal connections that form out of proximity, make the stories I could only imagine before so much more tangible. It's nearly impossible not to become passionate about a cause when students you know and care about face unthinkable struggles. I have been frustrated this year. I've been irrationally excited. I've felt proud. I've felt accomplished. I've felt stuck, and I've felt angry when I want to do something about a situation but first have to knock down strong barriers to get things done. But most of all, I've started to truly care and understand the necessity for service and the change it creates.

I have always heard that service changes your life, and if I'm being perfectly honest, I never believed it. And then College Possible happened.

Shannon went to Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin and majored in psychology. She currently is serving with College Possible as a junior coach at Pulaski High School in Milwaukee. Travelling is her passion, and she's been to 23 countries so far.

Partners for After School Success AmeriCorps



Partners for After School Success (PASS) is a collaborative, multi-site program between the Dane County Department of Human Services and host site agencies that provide youth development programming throughout rural and urban Dane County, Wisconsin.

PASS responds to the Education Corps call to service by placing AmeriCorps members at host sites in predominantly low-income or resource scarce communities. The goal of PASS is to enhance the academic achievement and school engagement of middle and high school youth through positive relationships and the following member activities:

- Literacy tutoring and academic support
- Youth development after school programming that promotes school engagement, social and life skills
- Youth engagement in community service and volunteer opportunities

PASS is committed to providing members with challenging opportunities for professional development.

When asked, “What’s PASS?”

Answer: “PASS is a multi-site AmeriCorps program that enhances youth academic achievement through tutoring, youth development programming and community service.”

Craigslist Changed My Life

David Presser
PASS AmeriCorps
U.S. Congressional District 2
State Assembly District 76
State Senate District 26

I wasn't looking for a new job. I wasn't looking for a new direction in life. I wasn't looking for a way to help others. I was looking for a new guitar. Yep, that's why I checked craigslist last year, to buy myself something new. What I found and where that has lead me has changed my entire purpose in life and caused a growth in me that I am incredibly grateful for. I never got that guitar, but I am a lucky man for what I got instead.

Truthfully, I didn't know much about AmeriCorps when I stumbled across a job description on Craigslist. For whatever reason; fate, dumb luck, boredom, my finger slipped and clicked the mouse, I really don't remember but after I read the position description I felt like PASS was something I needed to look into. After applying I interviewed at Vera Court Neighborhood Center, was offered the position a day later and promptly accepted. Logically, joining AmeriCorps made no sense. At the time I made good money polishing steel, was going to school in hopes of becoming a firefighter and had exactly zero experience working with youth. Needless to say I was breaking what had been a linear progression in my life and venturing into unknown territory... and it felt great.

Within two weeks of serving at Vera Court, I had very little interest in further pursuing firefighting. That is not to say I don't consider firefighting a very righteous career but simply put, I fell in love with youth work. Coming to work each day doesn't feel like a burden at all. In fact, I'm surprised they pay me to goof around and be a dork with amazing kids all day. That's not to say I don't take my service seriously. It's a privilege to be in a position to help shape the lives of young people and I don't take that responsibility lightly; however, I've realized I am in a unique position to make an impact not as a teacher or authority, but as a mentor who can cause change simply by showing love and empathy to youth who don't feel that enough.

The past six months have been an overwhelmingly positive experience for me. I'm hopeful that I have helped the youth I serve grow even a fraction of how much I have grown as a person. My life has been changed forever by joining AmeriCorps and I am so grateful I killed some time surfing the web last spring. I feel a call to work with youth and I have my experience working at Vera Court through PASS to thank for that.

David is a Sun Prairie native who is happy to serve the community of Vera Court. When off the job he enjoys spending time outside, reading, writing and playing guitar. He hopes to pursue a degree in psychology next year and continue working in the youth service field. Also, he is mildly obsessed with dogs and has been known to wrestle with a certain German Shorthair.

Easter Seals Wisconsin AmeriCorps



The mission of Easter Seals Wisconsin is to increase independence, maximize opportunities, minimize barriers, and enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities. AmeriCorps members serve over 400 families from areas where few or no respite services exist, providing programs and activities that are essential to the communities they serve. The majority of AC members will continue to serve as Respite Apprentices, providing intensive personal care and leading or facilitating therapeutic recreation activities for individuals with disabilities and their families at Easter Seals Wisconsin's Camp Wawbeek and Respite Camp in Wisconsin Dells. In addition to providing dynamic therapeutic recreation for campers with severe and/or multiple disabilities it also gives their caregivers much needed respite from the demands of caring for a loved one with a disability.

Around the state, members provide additional significant outreach activities for the camps. In the Madison office, additional members provide significant outreach activities for the yearly recreational/ therapeutic camps for veterans and their families and work to increase awareness about the inclusion of people with disabilities in the community. One full-time member works as the Volunteer Coordinator helping both camps' volunteer program including recruiting and training of volunteers.

Respite Rejuvenation

Alyssa Jameson

Easter Seals Wisconsin AmeriCorps Partnership
US Congressional District 6
State Assembly District 41
State Senate District 14

Easter Seals Wisconsin's Respite Camp weekends became something to look forward to in my life. I would look in my planner and see a highlighted weekend and my heart would smile.

Personally, I felt as though the time spent amongst our incredible campers and amazing staff members filled my soul. Sometimes the routine of life and school can drain you as a person. It is easy to lose sight of the things that matter most in life. After attending camp weekends I felt as though I had just come back from a weekend at a spa. I felt rejuvenated. As silly as that may sound, it is true. Sure, I was tired and could use a nap, but I am referring to the quality of my heart and soul. The connections I have built with campers over the many weekends are what make my heart soar.

There is nothing as warm and familiar as a room filled with campers smiling, dancing, and calling each other by name. Camp is a safe haven. It is where our campers know they are appreciated and loved. It's where the staff makes sure to tell the campers, if you want to do it- you can do it. We will make it happen. We do not limit our camper's abilities at camp. I think it is the most beautiful thing when we do.

One of my favorite instances is when one of our campers wanted to swing. The swing was elevated and this camper would have had a very difficult time adjusting herself into the swing. So instead, without hesitation, four staff members transferred her onto the swing. She was absolutely ecstatic. She swung for almost an hour with a grin on her face from ear to ear. I do not think she thought she was going to swing that day, but she certainly did. It may seem like a miniscule thing but it makes all of the difference, especially to our campers.

I have gained so much from serving as an AmeriCorps member. I have a deep passion and admiration for our campers and the line of work we do. I have built personal skills that I will be able to utilize in future careers and I think, most importantly, I have learned the value of each and every individual. Everyone has something to give to the world. There is a great deal of variety in this life, and aren't we lucky to experience that variety. I would not trade this experience for anything. I have learned a great deal about myself as a person and a great deal about our campers. I feel incredibly blessed to have served as an AmeriCorps member.

Alyssa Jameson is a junior at UW-La Crosse with a therapeutic recreation major, minoring in psychology. Someday, she hopes to be an occupational therapist.

Indianhead Community Action Agency- Rusk County Wisconsin Fresh Start



Two crews of ICAA Wisconsin Fresh Start AmeriCorps members build new, affordable, energy-efficient homes according to ENERGY STAR standards in two rural Northwestern counties. Homes are sold or rented to first-time, lower income individuals or families. Members are also involved in other community service and environmental conservation projects in Rusk and Sawyer Counties and on the LCO Ojibwe Reservation. High school diploma, HSED instruction/completion and basic skills instruction are services available to members. AmeriCorps members also work to develop career goals, learn adult living skills, and develop a sense of community through service and learning.

My next chapter

Breanna Merrill

ICAA- Wisconsin Fresh Start

7th Congressional District29th Senate District87th State Assembly District

Hello my name is Bree. I am certainly a member of Wisconsin Fresh Start in Weyerhaeuser, WI. This program has changed my life so much in just the five months I have been in serving. This is truly a wonderful program that gives people like me a second chance at life. I don't know where I would be without Chad or "Carly," now Heather. They could not have chosen better people to run the program.

Before I started I had no job skills. I was a meth addict on probation that just played the system to continue my drug use. Chad and Heather gave me hope. I had a reason to want to get clean and go back to school and do right.

Now that I'm in Fresh Start I've been staying clean, and learning how to take on my problems more efficiently. I now feel like there is hope for me. But my hopes for myself once I leave the program are to have a part time job that I can be successful at and be going to school to become a cop.

But anyways you probably want to know what Fresh Start is all about! Fresh Start is a program that helps non-graduates and or people how have a criminal back ground find more resource. You also can go to school and get your HSED or GED if needed. After your term with Fresh Start is completed, you receive an education award. The really cool thing is that you will love you service site even if you don't like construction because we do a lot of other fun stuff. Last fall we went around and pick up trash in local parks and campgrounds. This winter we also went and volunteered at the soup kitchen, but most of the time we are on site building the triplex!

I cannot express this enough: if you are just joining this program to screw the system or make your probation officer and family happy, and you are not doing it because you want to better yourself and your life, don't waste their time. Because when you are doing it for someone other than yourself, you won't care as much and won't succeed. You will act like this place is just a joke. What the people who don't think of what this program is try to play them, don't show up, and don't really care about what they are doing. You will regret it when you do want to better your life for you. What I'm saying is don't join this if you are not ready, you will regret it. This is such a wonderful program with the most awesome, caring, and kind people you will meet who truly care about if you are bettering your life

Breanna is a self-proclaimed addict who is looking to better her life. She recently finished a jail term and is living with her grandparents. Her grandpa is very sick. Currently she enjoys hanging out with her boyfriend and his son. They spend a lot of time together as a family. She is staying clean and working on her high school diploma through Ladysmith high school.

Marshfield Clinic AmeriCorps Afterschool



Marshfield Clinic AmeriCorps Afterschool AmeriCorps members will be placed with afterschool programs that have committed to a case management process that promotes academic success, personal/social development and healthy active living for youth ages 8-18. Members will be working directly with children as part of case management. Members will support and enhance healthy active living programs, personal and social development, provide academic assistance in schools and recruit and mobilize volunteers. Host sites are available across north and northwestern Wisconsin.

Making an Impact

Max King

Marshfield Clinic AmeriCorps Afterschool
Mead Elementary Charter School
U.S. Congressional District 3
State Assembly District 72
State Senate District 24

I'm sure most Marshfield Clinic AmeriCorps Afterschool AmeriCorps members can attest that getting paperwork from parents can be one of the most challenging part of service. I had one parent in particular who I was not able to get paperwork back from for a long time, and I had heard from teachers that they had the same problem ever getting anything returned. One day I was working with the child whose parent wasn't returning the paperwork, and I suddenly see this very large man walking my way. It was the child's father. He asked if I was Mr. Max, and I hesitantly said yes knowing that I had just sent something home telling him that I need the paperwork completed immediately. Afraid that he was going to tell me that he wasn't going to fill out that paperwork and that it was a waste of his time, he instead thanked me. He thanked me for working with his kids and said my name had come up at home and the kids talked highly of me. He then told me that he would get that paperwork to me within the next couple of days.

A couple weeks went by and I still hadn't received the forms. Then a month went by. It took five weeks from our initial interaction with a few reminders to get the paperwork back. When I got it, I was relieved and quickly looked it over to make sure that everything was completed. On the optional questions on the form, one of the questions asked if there was any family drama. The father then described how this child had been taken away from his mother who had left them at home by himself when he was just an infant, and that the mother had been dealing drugs out of the house while the house often didn't have running water or electricity. The father had then taken custody of this child and his brother. After that section, there was a line written across the page and underneath the parent said that I was a hero at a time of need in his son's life just by being myself and that I was something that was really helping and a real extra support for him. Once reading those words, I knew that my service was worth it because I had positively affected the life of someone who needed it.

Max King graduated from Beloit College in the spring of 2015 with a double major in psychology and public health. He is from the Stevens Point area and is looking to further his education in the upcoming years and to become a school psychologist.

Marshfield Clinic AmeriCorps Coalition



Twenty AmeriCorps members will be placed to strengthen the capacity of coalitions and youth serving organizations to achieve positive outcomes related to substance abuse prevention. Members will work with coalitions to implement Parent Networks and support the Guiding Good Choices learning event. Members will also assist in efforts to recruit, mobilize and recognize volunteers. Host sites are available across north and northwestern Wisconsin.

I Do

Jessica Mullikin
 Marshfield Clinic AmeriCorps Coalition
 Barron High School
 U.S. Congressional District 7
 State Assembly District 75
 State Senate District 25

Can you imagine living in a world where you feel like you're fending for yourself with nobody supporting you? You truly feel like nobody even knows you exist. Can you imagine this being your life at the age of 17?

I am serving a high school for my year as an AmeriCorps member. One of my responsibilities is to talk to seniors about their plans after graduation. I have met students that want to go onto medical school to a student that wants to go into the workforce right away. Most of the time these planning conferences happen with a supportive parent, while other times the student doesn't have that support behind them. A particular student has a family that has written him off.

The uninterested student sits in my office, after some discussion we find a career and a college that he is interested in. I explain the application process, and he briefly tells me that he is alone; he pays his own bills and wouldn't have the money to pay for this but will try to work extra hours to get an extra \$30. How heart breaking for this 17-year-old to have such a responsibility on his shoulder. After talking to the student, I find that his only support he has is a sibling that lives in a different state. He works a full-time job and still gets good grades.

I explained to my site supervisor how the meeting went and how he couldn't afford to pay \$30. My site supervisor informed me that there were funds for this and she filled out the appropriate paperwork. The following week I was handed an envelope with a check for the application fee. Excitedly, I found the student during homeroom and pulled him out. I gave him the check, and even though his reaction wasn't what I was expecting, I was happy for him.

During lunch the student walked up to me and said, "Why did you do this for me?" I said "Because I believe in you. You work hard when you are in high school, if you continue to work hard in life, doors will open for you." He smiled at me and said, "Most people don't care about me." I responded with a simple "I do." His response was, "thank you...truly thank you."

I hope that one day this student will look back and think of me, not my name, not my face, but I hope he remembers that someone believed in him. Maybe one day, he will share this story with someone in his life and maybe one day, he will be able to do this for someone else that needs a little boost in life.

I feel very thankful for my position here at the school. I wish I could share everything I have experienced here. I look forward to what this year will bring!

Jessica grew up in the town she is currently serving in. She is the proud mom of two and married her high school sweetheart. She is enjoying the journey of life and look forward to what the future will bring.

Marshfield Clinic AmeriCorps Volunteer Wisconsin



The Volunteer Wisconsin AmeriCorps program is administered by Marshfield Clinic in partnership with the Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee. The program was developed on behalf of Volunteer Wisconsin, a coalition of local, regional and state organizations committed to serving as the state umbrella organization dedicated to volunteerism.

Volunteer Wisconsin AmeriCorps will place forty-eight full-time AmeriCorps members to support the development of nonprofit organizational capacity to engage volunteers. Members will support volunteer recruitment and management.

Staff from Marshfield Clinic and the Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee will provide training at AmeriCorps orientation to prepare members for their term of service. Topics at orientation will include administrative processing, benefits, rules and regulations and intensive training in volunteer management practices and team building.

After orientation, members will be ready to begin serving at their host site. Members will serve 35-40 hours per week, providing direct support to the development and management of the volunteer program of their host site.

Pushing Through to Measurable Success

Lynelle LaVenture
 Volunteer Wisconsin AmeriCorps
 Interfaith Caregivers of Polk County
 U.S. Congressional District 7
 State Assembly District 28
 State Senate District 10

Do you know that uncomfortable feeling when you're being pushed outside your comfort zone? You WANT to do it – to learn, to grow, to go beyond what you've imagined – except there's a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach; that familiar feeling of dread typically stops you. Then, you do *it*, and you feel braver, stronger, smarter and more resilient.until the next time. This is what my experience has been with AmeriCorps. A rollercoaster ride of "I-CAN'T-DO-THAT!" to "I-CAN-DO- IT! I-DID-IT!" over and over again.

It all started with an ELEVEN-PAGE application. Next was the FOUR-DAY orientation. (I-can't-do-that! & I-DID-IT!) Then came all the important stuff we learned at orientation. MY LAST CLASS WAS 23 YEARS AGO! (I-can't-do-that! & I-DID-IT!) Write press releases. Write stories for newsletters. (I-can't-do-that! & I-DID-IT!) Revise volunteer descriptions / brochure / application / handbook. Hold volunteer orientation. (I-can't-do-that! & I-DID-IT!) Help plan a regional training. Promote Webinars. (I-can't-do-that! & I-DID-IT!) Make and *use* an elevator speech. Attend a community volunteer fair. (I-can't-do-that! & I-DID-IT!) In addition to this was a learning curve for the day-to-day operations that come with a new position. It's been quite the ride and I am a better person for it.

My position of a Volunteer Wisconsin AmeriCorps member serving Interfaith Caregivers of Polk County as Volunteer Resource Specialist is a mouthful, and my goal is building volunteer capacity through recruitment and retention. A family of three was recruited from my piece in Interfaith Caregivers' quarterly newsletter. In **two months** they have made a difference in the lives of a dozen senior citizens and disabled adults by volunteering 115 hours and driving 700 miles! Mrs. Smith, from the family of three, said, "Volunteering gives you a greater sense of the world around you." She can relate to one of the services Interfaith Caregivers of Polk County provides clients - coordinating volunteers to deliver boxes of food and commodities. "When I was a little girl, about 5 or 6 years old, I can remember this big box of food on our kitchen table. I stood on a chair to look at all of it. Someone from the community dropped it off for my family. We were poor, didn't have much money. I was one of nine kids. That food meant A LOT to our family! And now I am the person who is delivering the boxes of food to other people who need it." This volunteer assignment is the Smith's favorite. They have also been a godsend to Interfaith Caregivers by accepting driving assignments when our volunteer pool was at its all-time low – winter. The majority of volunteers are retired, and many go south for winter. For those who remain, there are some who succumb to colds or flu or those who don't want to brave the road conditions, and this leaves a very small pool of volunteers available. So the impact of this family to our program is large, perhaps even as large as their hearts.

Lynelle LaVenture was entrenched in an average, middle aged, Midwestern lifestyle prior to serving in AmeriCorps. Whilst in between career positions, she received a call asking if she was interested in AmeriCorps. Her gut (and God), said "YES!"

Milwaukee Christian Center YouthBuild AmeriCorps Program



The Youthbuild/AmeriCorps program at the Milwaukee Christian Center is a workforce development program that provides low-income, at-risk youth and young adults, ages 18 to 24, with comprehensive training and employment services in order to help them lead responsible lives. Participants receive academic assistance so they can earn their GEDs, as well as hands-on construction skills through the building or rehabilitation of houses. These houses are then marketed to low-income, first time home buyers, thereby also improving the housing stock in the city's central district. Youth also serve the community by participating in various service projects.

Joshua's Journey

Joshua Dailey

Milwaukee Christian Center – AmeriCorps/YouthBuild

4th Congressional District8th State Assembly District3rd State Senate District

Riding down National Avenue I didn't know what to expect. Cramped in the back of a Ford Taurus, I only had one objective in mind, and that was to get a job. An acquaintance told me about the overview and gave a ride. As we got closer to our destination, anxiety hit me. High as the clouds, surrounded by black and mild smoke, music bumping loud in the background, I realized that nothing was guaranteed. I was desperate for change. All I could think was, "I need a break." Little did I know, I was taking the first step in the direction of a bright future.

My friends didn't make it into the program, but I was accepted. It scared me. I kept myself and my thoughts in a bubble, not wanting to let anyone in, until I met Thomas Gordon. He helped me break my bubble with his ability to be himself and shine positively no matter what the situation. I started to let others into my life. Joe and Cooper gave me motivation. Derrick was the OG; he gave me the heads up on what the program was about. Ronnie was like me: quiet and intellectual, I was able to relate to him and his sense of calmness. Marcus, one look at him and I could tell he's gone through just as much as I went through in life, and I related. Xavier could cheer me up with a good laugh or a simple eating competition. Shaniqua inspired me with her hard work and motivation to get through the program. Ariel, the closest thing I ever had to a big brother, helped me with everyday challenges and lead with an intellect that motivates me endlessly. Melonie, Andrea, and Sarah have opened my eyes to new ideas. Lois, John, Floyd, John Southern, and Tim, forever have a spot in my heart for the opportunities they have given me.

In these 7 months I've been able to build ramps and be a part of building a house for a family to live in and love. I've volunteered in the food pantry and neighborhood clean ups. I've volunteered to read to little kids. I am certified in OSHA 10, OSHA 40 HAZWOPER, forklift, and First Aid.

YouthBuild/AmeriCorps has turned me from a frightened little black boy with no hope, into a confident young man with a positive sense of direction. I've developed skills and turned them into tools to last a lifetime. I still deal with some of the same struggles I did before, but I'm so much more hopeful than I was seven months ago.

To any lost person out there who believes there is no such thing as change or open hearted people who want to help make the world a better place. Come take a ride down to MCC on 14th and National and be amazed.

Joshua is 21 years old, and he's looking forward to completing his college education.

Urban Education Fellows Program



Mount Mary University and Alverno College are collaborating sponsors of UAFP. As a teaching fellows program, the UAFP provides professional development through accelerated and non-accelerated components. In the accelerated two-year component, members teach full-time while completing their program requirements. In the non-accelerated component, members fill teacher shortages and may have been granted emergency licensure or are unlicensed teachers while completing coursework and fieldwork requirements to meet new certification and/or master's degree requirements. All members integrate service learning into their curriculum which helps improve the overall skills of their students, teaches civic responsibility, and positively affects their community.

The Change We See When We Change

Thomas Kauer
 Urban Education Fellows Program
 U.S. Congressional District 4
 State Assembly District 4
 State Senate District 3

I struggle with the idea of offering “validity” to one’s life. After all, if I claim added value to my life through service, I am in tandem suggesting that those who don’t serve have less value. But humanity and validity go hand in hand. We are all valid because we all are.

Certainly, though, we have been made stewards of our spheres of influence. What I have been given through service is the opportunity to add validity to that stewardship, to add hope to that small kingdom.

As I traveled with my 20 students to “The Gathering Place”—a soup kitchen in southern Milwaukee—I wondered about the kingdom. Was this enough? Was I furnishing it with modest tapestries and wooden frames? Or was I; were we, on the verge of a noble action? Certainly, serving in a soup kitchen sounds kind and diligent—but as you serve 110 slices of pizza, 110 dixie cups of milks, 110 plates and 110 pastries: the nobility begins to wane.

We came, we served, and we cleaned. “Thank yous” and “goodbyes” were exchanged and no sooner than had we arrived, it seemed, we left. It felt good, but I knew that tomorrow we would be replaced by 40 other hands completing the same task: come, serve, clean.

At school the next day I had my 20 young men reflect on what they had learned. I was touched by their thoughtfulness and caring, with some students even asking if they could go back again. But if I were truly honest with you, I was still underwhelmed. Is the fleeting passion of these young men what I build my kingdom on?

After school, I scurried into my car (seemingly blue because of the cold), pushed the key into the ignition, and blasted the heat. As I drove, I pondered, and a song a dear friend once introduced to me came into my head. It went like this:

“I was raised up believing I was somehow unique
 Like a snowflake distinct among snowflakes, unique in each way you can see
 And now after some thinking, I’d say I’d rather be
 A functioning cog in some great machinery serving something beyond”
 -*The Helplessness Blues*, Fleet Foxes

And therein lies, I think, at least a semblance of an answer. The value added to my kingdom was humility. The value added was smallness. Perhaps in an ironic twist considering the theme of this essay (impactful stories); the value added was an opportunity to worry less and less about my own value.

Thomas Kauer is the son of a farmer and teacher from northern Wisconsin where the bovine population far surpasses that of the people. Perhaps his draw to urban environments sprang from the contrast of his heritage. That said, at the end of the day he lives for mercy and people. The city needs, and has, both of these.

NCCAP AmeriCorps Team – Greater Wausau Area



NCCAP AmeriCorps Team – Greater Wausau Area members serve at seven different host sites that include two school districts and a variety of local non-profit organizations. Focusing on educational opportunities, positive interactions, and outreach to underserved populations, AmeriCorps members provide direct services to youth and their families as mentors and tutors during and after school. Students served include pre-K, elementary, middle school, high school and adult learners. Participation for members includes monthly member meetings and quarterly training sessions. Members will also be engaged in planning and serving at community service projects throughout the year.

Three Letters

Kou Vang

NCCAP AmeriCorps Team – Greater Wausau Area

DPI WEOP / GEAR UP

7th U.S. Congressional District85th State Assembly District29th State Senate District

I started by saying a very simple word. Yes.

Every day, I woke up and said yes. I said yes to myself, to accomplishing something, to pushing myself out of my comfort zone.

It is unbelievably easy to say no. People say no all of the time. It's one of the first words that babies learn. No, I don't want to. No, I don't feel like it. No, I don't have the time. No, I don't want to try it.

I'll let you in on a secret. The more you say no, the more you say no.

The reverse holds true, also. The more you say yes, the more you say yes.

This year, I said yes to listening. Without it, I can't imagine I would have been able to learn all of my students' names and many of their stories.

There is a student of mine that whispers all of the time. If I never listened, he would never talk. I found out that one of my older students has a poet's voice and though she struggles with expressing herself in conversation, her written words could make Walt Whitman weep. I met a boy who dreamed of designing video games, who just wanted someone to listen. He showed me his three-year project that he began when he was 11. I met a bus driver who is completely Irish and from Milwaukee. His family is on the paleo-diet and he really misses eating bread. I listened to a teacher who cares so much about his school and his community that he's lost the ability to say no. It's just not in his vocabulary anymore.

I have said yes to accepting that what I do with AmeriCorps is a giant, yelling from the mountaintops, no reservations YES to that idealistic self that I buried beneath the realist I pretend to be. You know what I found out? I discovered that I am great at teaching, that the community I work in is supportive and that I haven't even come close to my limits. I am capable of so much more.

AmeriCorps members are links thrown out into the world. We link our community together. It is hard and oftentimes feels like we're stringing together the elements, like we're trying to rein in the chaos of racism and disparity, teaching the importance of service when we struggle to believe in it ourselves. The reality is that our role is not to fix or change or get rid of something, but simply to say yes. Yes, we will try to make a difference. Yes, we will help. Yes, we will push ourselves to be better and hope for the same in the world around us.

It is a very simple word. Three letters. Your turn. Go for it.

Kou Vang is a second term NCCAP AmeriCorps member. She graduated from UW-Madison in 2012 with a BA in Japanese and a BA in Asian studies. "Through AmeriCorps, I have discovered the joys and challenges of being a teacher and feel privileged to have such a strong team to support me."

Public Allies Milwaukee



Public Allies' mission is to advance new leadership to strengthen communities, nonprofits and civic participation. Public Allies is changing the face and practice of leadership in communities across the country by demonstrating our conviction that everyone *can* lead, and that lasting social change results when citizens of all backgrounds step up, take responsibility, and work together.

A Mother's Dream

Tonda N. Thompson
 Public Allies Milwaukee
 United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County
 U.S. Congressional District 4
 State Assembly District 17
 State Senate District 6

"Hey, Momma! GET UP!" There's not one person in the room, everyone is asleep, and it was just me. It was 3:00am; the stars are bright as the moon as it shines through my window. Ever spend a night in tears, mourning the loss of a child, your child? I just knew that was his voice that startled me out of my sleep. There I was finally asleep, only to be awakened from him, the cute little angel that I call my son. It was hard to sleep. When I did sleep it wasn't peaceful. Knowing that I was a mother without her child kept me up all night and disconnected from the world. Just 17 hours after he was born, he was gone. I wasn't able to be what I dreamed of being for 10 months. There I was months later, sleeping on my mom's floor on a toddler bed that she had in her guest room. That mattress was a blessing, considering that I had lost everything. Who am I kidding, that mattress sucked! I am a 5'9 woman; my feet hung over the foot of the mattress. Of course, I am thankful for my mom and her help but that was a dull feeling. I desired to "get up" from depression as my son divinely asked me to. Hearing Terrell's voice was amazing but getting up felt like little ole' me, trying to push Mt. Everest.

Unfortunately, it was a full year that I spent down on that floor, feeling hopeless and unsure of my future. Knowing that there were so many parents like me in the City of Milwaukee, I really wanted to do something that would help me get up as well as pull others up along the way. I just didn't know how to. A good friend suggested that I check out this leadership program called Public Allies. By this time, I was at my lowest point. Any job or prosperous idea would to be taken into consideration. So I accepted the thought and applied. That was the start of my transition. Months later, I was placed in the Milwaukee LIHF collaborative with the United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County. By the grace of God, I was placed in a department where I work with the city with finding ways to bring awareness to infant mortality in Milwaukee. I was given a great opportunity when I had nothing left. Imagine lying on the floor of a large hallway full of closed doors, in darkness, then suddenly a door opens, bursting with sunshine. Apparently, those prayers, when I had no one to talk to, were heard and answered. Even with a slow start, I slowly began to rise. Each day became easier to fight. Our weekly ally trainings helped erase those negative thoughts that I had and replaced them with my divine purpose. As I continue to rise, I know that Terrell, finally seeing me get up is my motivation. My dream is to be a good mother to him. Public Allies paved the way to seeing that dream come true. IT FEELS GOOD TO GET UP!

Tonda Thompson is a Community Health Ambassador with United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County.

Renewal Unlimited Inc. Portage Fresh Start



The Renewal Unlimited Fresh Start Program will enroll 36 youth between the ages of 17 and 24. The majority of these youth will be high school dropouts, or if they have graduated from High School, they will be deficient in one or two grade levels in either numeracy or literacy skills. The youth will work in crews and each crew will construct a single family home consisting of three bedrooms that, upon completion, will be sold to a low to moderate income family. As youth are enrolled into the program, they will be assessed to determine their need levels in the areas of basic educational skills, pre-employment skills, job specific skills, independent living skills, health and nutrition, and leadership development skills.

Nick Suchomel
Renewal Unlimited, Inc. – Fresh Start Program
Portage, WI
US Congressional District 2
State Assembly District 81 and 42
State Senate District 14

My name is Nick my experience at AmeriCorps has been very beneficial to my life in many ways. I am making progress towards my high school diploma, I am learning new things on the job site, and I am learning to work with others and helping put time and effort into helping the community.

In high school I was short on credits and thought I had no chance of graduating high school. When I came to Fresh Start I realized how easy self-learning really is if you put forth the effort and have good help in the classroom. In normal school, they don't focus on the individual kids and there is a lot of room for failure. At Fresh Start they focus on the individuals and strive to see them succeed.

My dad worked construction, so I always saw myself doing something in the construction field. And when I came here I really saw that become a reality. I learn new things every day while helping build the houses and learn to be patient and do things right the first time. Working with Jim and Chris on site has been a very fun and productive experience. They are patient and understanding and take time to make sure things are done the right way. They don't worry about how fast things are getting done they just care that it's done right.

Working at Fresh Start is a very special experience you wouldn't normally find for someone like me and I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with these people and prove myself.

Teach For America – Milwaukee



Teach For America's mission is to build the movement to eliminate educational inequity by enlisting our nation's most promising future leaders in the effort. This school year more than 10,000 corps members are teaching in 46 urban and rural regions across the nation, reaching more than 660,000 students.

Since 2009, Teach For America-Milwaukee has been a leading teacher recruitment and development partner for hard-to-staff, high-poverty schools across all school sectors in Milwaukee. Over the last six years, TFA-Milwaukee has grown from 38 AmeriCorps members serving in schools throughout Milwaukee to having 133 AmeriCorps members teaching and over 200 alumni who call Milwaukee home. This year in Milwaukee, our AmeriCorps members are standing before over 8,000 students across the city.

A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Marian Pintar

Teach For America - Milwaukee

Milwaukee College Prep: Lloyd

U.S. Congressional District 4

State Assembly District 11

State Senate District 4

Eight days. It took eight days before Jokari Washington would make eye contact with me. He wasn't defiant or deliberately rude, he simply shook my hand complacently in the morning as though his shoes were of paramount importance to him. He sat diligently at his desk, eyes on the board or his paper, but never on me.

It was another two weeks before I heard him speak, and even then I had no idea what his voice sounded like because he had whispered whatever it was that he said so quietly that I wouldn't have noticed he was talking at all had I not been staring directly at him at the time. When I tried to strike up conversation outside, he merely shook his head to answer. If my question required more than the binary "yes" or "no" nod, he would simply shrug his shoulders. But I knew his secret.

Jokari was brilliant. This seven-year-old could use the word "flabbergasted," and spell it correctly. I looked closely at the books he was reading. Chapter books. Chapter books with hundreds of pages and seventh grade reading levels. Every spare moment, he pulled out his book and buried himself in its story. I talked to his first grade teacher from the year before, and I found out that he loved Aesop's Fables because he could really appreciate the depth and humor. Bingo.

So one afternoon, when he'd written something else amazing on an exit ticket, I held him back on his way to lunch. I took out his work and told him how impressed I was with what he'd written. Jokari stared at his shoes. I told him that I thought he was a leader. Not the noisy, pushing-and-shoving-to-be-first-in-line kind of leader, but the kind of leader with wisdom. Jokari stared at his shoes. I told him that next week, we were going to start reading fables. Jokari's eyes flashed up at mine. I told him that we were going to be dissecting some of the fables that he'd read last year, and that I wanted to challenge him to share the wisdom he had with his classmates. I asked if he thought he could try raising his hand to share. He gave me two quick nods and then scurried to lunch.

The following week we read fable after fable, picking apart character traits and embedded culture. Still no hand from Jokari. We read "Tortoise and the Hare" and "The Crow and the Pitcher." Still no hand from Jokari. Then we got to the skill of identifying the moral in a fable. We read "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing," and I asked, "What lesson do you think the author is trying to teach us?" Jokari's hand shot into the air. I called on him immediately, dying of excitement on the inside. He thought for a moment. Then, with utter seriousness he said, "Never trust an animal who wears clothes." I always knew he'd teach me something I didn't know.

Marian Pintar graduated from Marquette University where she majored in communication studies and minored in entrepreneurship. Marian currently works as a 2nd grade teacher at Milwaukee College Prep: Lloyd, and she is a 2nd year corps member of Teach For America-Milwaukee.

United Way of Dane County Achievement Connections



The Achievement Connections High School Math Tutoring Program provides students with individualized tutoring and mentoring in order to improve student academic performance in high school and readiness for college and career. The program is aimed at high school students in algebra or geometry that would benefit from extended learning opportunities. Our goal is to increase the number of students passing algebra by 10th grade with a grade "C" or higher. Completion of algebra by 10th grade is one of the leading indicators that a student will graduate from high school.

The Meaning of Service

Amy Mayer

Achievement Connections Math Tutoring Program

Middleton High School

2nd U.S. Congressional District

State Assembly District 79

State Senate District 27

To me, to volunteer for something means to put yourself in a position for a season of time without the expectation of reward. Service, then, takes it a step further. I used to think service was merely something you did, or a duty to be completed. Now, I would say that I see service as providing a mechanism to solve the needs of others. Service in this context requires constantly developing new mindsets for yourself and inspiring those in others, new strategies to empower others, and the challenge to continue service even at personal cost. I think our jobs, more than teaching math, are to provide hope and encouragement to students that they might learn, dream, and experience success. I find myself battling with the idea that I will have no impact, and have needed to constantly take it on faith that I do. We don't often get to see the fruit of our labor until much further down the line.

I had started tutoring a student who was failing and who had internalized the belief that she couldn't do math. We met for sessions, and day in and day out, I would reassure her that she was capable. Every time she said she couldn't, I would immediately respond that I knew she could and I had faith in her even if she didn't, and made it a point to praise the effort she put forth. It kept her working, and this continued for a few months. She started showing exponential, consistent improvement in her conceptual learning and ended up acing her next exam. She was incredibly happy and found a new sense of confidence. She is now moving to a different school, but feels confident, rather than worried, that she will succeed.

I have also been worried about missing opportunities. One time when I went to go get a student from his class for tutoring, his class was returning from a human rights week presentation on homelessness, but he was nowhere to be found. When I asked his teacher where he was, I was told he went to student services. I later discovered that there had been a family situation that had left him homeless recently. Needless to say, we did not tutor that day. Later, however, his guidance counselor shared with us that of all the things he was worried about, he felt confident that he was going to pass Algebra, despite failing earlier in the year, because of the support he had received from his tutor. I realized that he was carrying a level of hope that he wouldn't be without tutoring. I also realized that rather than worrying about missing an opportunity, I should focus on whatever opportunities I can and trust those who are working with me to catch the opportunities I miss. I am very grateful for the tutor that worked with him so consistently, and that we as a team could play a small role in his story.

Amy has a passion for helping students to learn, serving her community, and empowering her community to provide people-focused solutions to its own current challenges. She is a UW-Madison graduate with a BA in economics and mathematics and is currently serving as the tutor liaison for Achievement Connections Math Tutoring Program at Middleton High School in Dane County, WI.

United Way of Dane County Schools of Hope AmeriCorps Project



As the first and original “Schools of Hope” (SOH) Project, this dynamic community partnership in the CNCS focus area of Education has refined an evidence-based model of tutoring intervention fueled by impassioned AmeriCorps members and committed community volunteers. SOH began in 1995 as a civic journalism project that developed into a unique collaboration of the United Way of Dane County, Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), and Centro Hispano with support from the Sun Prairie Area and Middleton-Cross Plains Area school districts. Its mission is to align community volunteers and other resources to improve the academic achievement of low-performing pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students from a range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and low-income families. Since 1998 Schools of Hope has received funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service, first as an AmeriCorps*VISTA project and since 2007 as an AmeriCorps program. In 2014-15, 19 AmeriCorps members serve 40 elementary school sites in Madison, Middleton, and Sun Prairie. Members serve as tutor coordinators in designated high-need schools, directing their considerable energy and talent toward advancing literacy achievement by matching skilled volunteers with students, providing direct tutoring service themselves, and helping low-income families build home library collections.

A Reflection on a Year in AmeriCorps

Deborah Elsas

Schools of Hope AmeriCorps Project
 Falk Elementary School and Muir Elementary School
 2nd U.S. Congressional District
 77th State Assembly District
 26th State Senate District

I retired from my career at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health Department of Ophthalmology last April. The timing was not my choice and took me by surprise. I didn't have a plan. I thought retirement would be enjoyable after working pretty much constantly at various careers for the last 40 years. I was wrong. Retirement is boring when you are unprepared for it and when you still have something to accomplish.

Then Elementary Schools of Hope and AmeriCorps entered my consciousness. Thank goodness! I needed a place where I could feel useful, appreciated, like I was making a positive difference in people's lives. My reflection on the past nine months is heavy on gratitude and relief. In SOH I found a place where I feel at home and needed. Most AmeriCorps reflections will focus primarily on the people served, and mine does too, but it's not just the children tutored that have made this service a positive and memorable experience.

Yes, the kids. I tutor about 12 hours every week which comes to about 24 students from kindergarten to 4th grade. I laugh often and am entertained by them. They give me hope. They show me that they are unafraid and that they are willing to tackle anything that comes along. They want to learn and they deserve our commitment.

But I also have the tutors. Some have been coming to their neighborhood schools to help out for decades and they refuse to slow down or give up. Some are brand new and are energized knowing the need is great and that they can help. They range in age across all generations and they show up. I admire them all and I get hope from them as well.

Then there are the teachers. What a yeoman's job they do. There is no similar job to theirs. They commit 24/7 to their profession with little in the way of compensation and with too little support. They are grateful for Schools of Hope and for the tutors who both show them that they are not alone in their challenging work.

Finally, there is the team and our coordinators. How lucky I am to be part of a team full of ambitious, funny, high energy, noble, and generous people, mostly young but not all. The coordinators could not be better. They are supportive and nurturing in addition to being absolutely on task and organized. I am lucky to know the team and the cords and to consider them friends. This is what a great retirement looks like!

Deb Elsas is a retired former employee of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health Department of Ophthalmology where she worked for 10 years prior to joining AmeriCorps. She is the mother of two grown sons, ages 27 and 23. She plans to continue AmeriCorps Elementary Schools of Hope for a second year before joining the officially retired-from-full-time-work force.

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Early Childhood Literacy Intervention Program, Services and Evaluation



Early Childhood Literacy Intervention Program, Services and Evaluation (ECLIPSE) provides intervention in the areas of language, literacy, social interaction, and initiative skills to 3 to 5 year old children who are at-risk, and/or from families with low- income. ECLIPSE members provide children who have been identified through screening with intense one to one intervention sessions during the school year through partnerships with Head Start programs and other child care programs serving at-risk populations. Sessions include opportunities for one to one and small group reading and a literacy rich environment to allow children the opportunity for exploration with supportive corps members. Members also provide additional support to the classroom teachers during regular class to improve the teacher child ratio at the centers.

One School Year

Emily Lukens

ECLIPSE

Truax Head Start

U.S. Congressional District 3

State Assembly District 93

State Senate District 31

One School Year.

That's how long the opportunity was for.

It would fit with my class schedule and I already had a few friends doing it. Just play with kids for a few hours a week? I could do that. I needed a job and this was an easy way to have something similar. It was with this mindset that I entered my first term with ECLIPSE, and looking back now, I had no idea what I was getting myself into; I was unaware of things that I didn't even know I was unaware of. I didn't know that I would build a relationship with a child so strong that when I think about having to leave her at the end of the school year, it would physically hurt my heart. I did not know that I would form friendships within a team of individuals that will last a lifetime. I did not know that I would learn skills and gain knowledge that I will be using in my career and life as I go forth. I was not aware that I would be exposed to so many situations that I had never encountered before; so many things I did not experience in the upper-middle class suburb from which I came from. These things that I entered my term so oblivious to were just a small handful of the things that my term with ECLIPSE has taught me. I was affected by my experiences with ECLIPSE in more ways than I could count. I know that the things I have learned don't end here, and I will be realizing things ECLIPSE has taught me for years to come.

One School Year.

That's how long it took ECLIPSE to change my life.

Emily is a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. She is studying special education and hopes to specialize in learning, cognitive, and emotional and behavioral disorders with plans to teach in secondary education. In her free time she enjoys singing, playing volleyball, and napping.

University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Vet Corps



The Vet Corps program exists to benefit both veterans and their families as well as the local community by helping veterans return to the civilian work force. Eligible veteran college students fulfill quarter-time positions at various service sites throughout the community. Aside from required training and service, these members also conduct massive veteran outreach programs throughout the Fox Valley area to include the area's veterans in community service. Program members engage in community efforts involving life-skills training, veteran college education, refugee aid, and many more.

Reflection

Brian J. Regal

University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh AmeriCorps

World Relief

8th U.S. Congressional District

3rd WI Assembly District

1ST WI Senate District

AmeriCorps through Vet Corps has introduced to me an organization dedicated to helping refugees. This premier organization is called World Relief. At World Relief, I work closely with employment and resettlement specialists. Helping the clients who are refugees obtain employment and resettle into life locally here in the Fox Valley and nationally in the United States. It is such a humbling feeling to know that what you do is making somebody's quality of life better.

The first day I reported to duty with World Relief, I met a client with a big smile on his face only to say thank you for the United States letting him to escape conflict in Africa. This experience has truly touched me and coincidentally it was my first experience at World Relief. Just imagine your community has been overrun by armed rebels and you're the innocent bystander caught in the middle of it all. Then finding your way to a safe camp, waiting to see if a country will sponsor you to start over in that land. Next you arrive in this foreign land with just what's in your carry on to start a new life; a new life where everything is very strange and not in a familiar language. You now have to learn how to navigate this new society. That's where the team at World Relief comes in. We help integrate these displaced persons into their new home. Whether it is health care, government benefits, housing or employment the team at World Relief is there to support each Client and their families' transition.

I recently helped to orchestrate a fingerprinting event so clients can apply for their "Green Card." I am grateful I was able to get these people on track starting their new lives here in the United States of America.

Brian J. Regal USAF Veteran is currently working towards his BAS fire & emergency response management & BSN at UW Oshkosh. This is my first time term of service with AmeriCorps.

Western Dairyland Fresh Start



The Western Dairyland Fresh Start program, in collaboration with the Wausau Area Hmong Mutual Association, provides at risk youth with essential social, educational, employment, community service and life skills training. While constructing a new home for income-eligible families in the local communities and doing owner-occupied rehab, the young adults work on achieving high school diplomas/HSEDs, developing career goals, improving self-esteem and alleviating barriers to economic self-sufficiency. The achievement of AmeriCorps education awards provide members with funding for post-secondary school training. Members emerge from the program as renewed young adults, prepared to enter the workforce or college as responsible citizens.

Reflection

Tony Yang

Wausau Fresh Start

7th US Congressional District

State Assembly District 85

State Senate District 29

My time in Fresh Start and AmeriCorps has helped me a lot to change a few things in life. I learned new ways to helping the community and learned new skills in carpentry. This program gave me a job and a second chance in starting a new life and a new me. If it weren't for this program I would have had nowhere to go. This place has given me new friends and a new start of becoming a better me. It's been a blast here at Fresh Start. I have a lot of fun and laugh with everyone. If I were to rate Fresh Start on a scale of 1 to 10, it would be a 10. The fact is because it is an astounding place to learn and shows me what it really means to be out there and what potentials I have in life. After I'm done with Fresh Start I plan on going to college and use the education money. I thought I wouldn't even go to college but I want to now..."rather die chasing dreams than die not chasing anything".

Tony enjoys fishing a lot, especially when it's bass season. Tony also likes to dance and rap to help relieve stress.

Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services, Direct Service Outreach to Runaways



Runaway programs have seen major increases in homeless youth. These youth, who live "on the street", are in very high risk situations, with few resources and virtually no support system. As a response to this phenomenon, the Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services, in collaboration with the Wisconsin National and Community Service Board, provides a team of AmeriCorps members to provide street outreach services and response to referrals from police departments, schools, and other youth serving agencies.

The AmeriCorps members are available to youth who are homeless, runaways or in crisis and are therefore "on the street". Members frequent areas in the community where youth congregate, such as parks, malls, convenience stores, etc. Youth are provided with hygiene packets, food vouchers, transportation vouchers, clothes, educational materials, and, most importantly, referral services to provide them with safe alternatives to the street. The members also are available to police and school personnel, by responding directly to referrals. In addition, some members provide services in shelters for runaway and homeless youth or homeless pregnant and/or parenting teens. Twenty five AmeriCorps members provide these services in 36 counties, ensuring runaway, homeless, and youth in crisis have a strong support system and alternatives to the street.

AmeriCorps: The Journey

Emily Christenson

Wisconsin Association of Homeless and Runaway Services
The Youth and Family Project, Inc.
U.S. Congressional District 5
State Assembly District 58
State Senate District 20

As I reflect on my service with AmeriCorps and try to “cement my service footprint,” I find I am struggling. How do I put the work I am doing into words? Often I feel that very little is *concrete* in the work that I do with the Runaway Program other than the highways I take to get there; however, I can say this: Serving with AmeriCorps will take you on a journey. At times you are the leader on this journey and others you’re just trying to make it through the fog safely. There are also times, when you are just along for the ride on someone else’s journey and who knows who is driving?

In the Crossroads Runaway Program of the Youth and Family Project, I provide one-on-one, group, and family counseling support to at-risk adolescents. Week to week I meet with young people at their schools and they invite me on their journeys. They share stories of grief, struggles, depression, abandonment, abuse, anger, and hurt as well as happiness, accomplishments, pride, success, love, and growth. I have the pleasure of witnessing the whole gamut of human emotion within these teenagers. Unfortunately, I hear the stories of woe far more frequently and there are no happy endings. Frankly, there are no endings, period. Although the time I spend with youth may come to an end, their journey is not over. They still have a lifetime of emotions to experience. It is my mission and task to help these youth recognize their strengths and develop positive ways to cope with all these emotions. It is my hope that our time together helps them find a little light in the darkness and illuminate their path. I cannot change their journeys. I cannot fix their broken families. I cannot erase their pasts. I am merely a lamppost on the road, providing a space to slow down, think, and *choose* their paths.

Meanwhile, I am still on my own journey. As I experience my own joys and sorrows, I am learning. I am learning how I can provide better services to youth, but I am also learning from those youth. They are also a beacon of light in my life, providing me with illumination to see my life in perspective. In summation, AmeriCorps is contributing not only to the betterment of the community, but to the betterment of community members. You do not come out of your service without both contributing to change, and being changed yourself. Although my service with AmeriCorps is coming to an end, my journey is not complete. There are no endings, just the question: What path do I choose next?

Emily Christenson is serving her second term as an AmeriCorps member with the Wisconsin Association of Homeless and Runaway Services. She received her master’s degree in art therapy and counseling and is working toward her licensure as a professional counselor. Following her AmeriCorps service, she will accept a full-time position at her placement site.

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Wisconsin Farm to School Program



The AmeriCorps Farm to School program gives communities the capacity to build and extend Farm to School activities through the work of AmeriCorps members. Our members work hard to provide nutrition education, build school gardens, connect farmers to school systems through procurement and farmer visits to the classroom, and developing community advocate groups to continue the important work of implementing Farm to School. Our members are diligent workers and passionate about serving their communities to create access to healthy whole foods and connect local food systems to the community. They are creative in spirit and approach in all that they do.

The Garden Through A Child's Eyes

Jasmyn Schmidt
Americorps Farm to School
Northland Pines School District
Congressional District 7
State Assembly District 35
State Senate District 12

He looks, but doesn't speak.
Big, green, bright. Small steps, he hesitates. Looks, this way, and that.
Down one row, and up the next.
An unfamiliar world.
He reaches out toward the squash with it's prickly, stickly stems.
One fingertip grazes the new surface, eyebrows raise.
A few steps more, to the woolly thyme, fingers outstretched, more willingly.
This time a smile, he pulls some leaves, and rubs them on his face.
Fragrance spreads through the air, warm sweet, spicy.
He is handed a tomato.
Small, red, shiny. He pops it in his mouth.
Bites, it squirts, seeds on his little chin.
Smiles again, and laughs.
A memory is made, he likes this place.

Jasmyn Schmidt is an educator, master gardener volunteer and mother of three sons in Eagle River, Wisconsin. She shares her love of local foods and home growing with children through the Farm to School program and Community Gardening.

Wisconsin Emergency Management ReadyWisconsin AmeriCorps Program



When disasters hit, we know that families, businesses, and communities are more resilient if they have taken steps to prepare and plan beforehand. We also know that engaging and managing large numbers of volunteers is an important part of disaster recovery. The AmeriCorps ReadyWisconsin program is a 14-member part-time (900 hours annually) service program designed to increase community resilience by providing preparedness outreach and education to community organizations, businesses, and local governments. AmeriCorps ReadyWisconsin will also assist communities with developing emergency volunteer management plans, volunteer recruitment, and disaster relief services when needed.

Lasting Impact

Katie Kosiboski

ReadyWisconsin AmeriCorps
Milwaukee County Emergency Management
U.S. Congressional District 4
State Assembly District 8
State Senate District 3

A large portion of my AmeriCorps program has been working to expand the American Red Cross' Pillowcase Project into Southeastern Wisconsin. I've been in more schools than I can count, and I've talked with more students than anyone could possibly count. Although every classroom I've been in has had its own unique students, one class in particular stands out to me.

I entered a rambunctious classroom on a Friday morning. Because of cold weather, the students had indoor recess *all* week; it was evident that they needed to get some energy out. Almost immediately, I heard whispers from a small group of students, "the pillowcase project..." The kids had been looking forward to the Pillowcase Project for a while—since a few weeks prior when I presented to the classroom next door. I was astounded by the level of pure excitement that filled the room. The kids were eager to answer questions and share their knowledge. The biggest, most important part of the Pillowcase Project is the decorating of the pillowcase. Again, the students had indoor recess. When given the choice to play basketball or continue coloring, they unanimously chose to color their pillowcases. I was surprised by the decision. I would have never guessed that fourth graders would rather color than play basketball. As I walked around the room and talked with each student, it was clear that I'd made some sort of difference. The idea of being prepared was fresh on each students' mind. I got all sorts of questions: "What if I'm in the shower when there's a tornado?" "How do I help my baby brother?" "What about grandma?" "Where is your meeting spot outside?" All are valid questions. They're questions I would ask someone. I was impressed by the fourth graders' minds really going to work. About a week after the presentation, I received an email from the teacher. She expressed thanks for my presentation—and told me that her students were *still* talking about the Pillowcase Project. Having a lasting impact on youth in my community is incredibly cool. Not many people my age can say that they've made a difference, but I can.

Katie Kosiboski is a senior at Mount Mary University, majoring in business administration. Upon completion of her term of service, she plans on having a career in business development with a non-profit organization in the Milwaukee area.

Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association, Wisconsin HealthCorps



Wisconsin HealthCorps is a joint program between the Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association and the Wisconsin Public Health Association, which places AmeriCorps members in Community Health Centers, Public Health Departments, and health focused non-profits to provide health education and increase access to primary care for Wisconsinites. Members will serve in several capacities: as patient navigators, assisting patients to work their way through the health care system by providing information on obtaining health care coverage, access to care, benefits, and call-backs; as health educators, preparing materials for both individual patients and communities, teaching healthy lifestyles, eating habits, chronic disease maintenance, and public health concepts; and as community outreach specialists, working with several local organizations to improve the quality of care and resources available to patients.

Smiles All Around

Alexandria Ceranske
Wisconsin HealthCorps
Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin
1st Congressional District
State Assembly District 13
State Senate District 5

A portion of my time serving at the Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin is dedicated to the Oral Health initiative and the Seal A Smile program (SAS). Specifically, I help manage the online database that stores the necessary information for the state to maintain the program, as well as conduct site visits to answer questions and ensure programs are running smoothly and efficiently. Recently, I was in a SAS school in the southeastern part of the state. Upon arrival I climbed up three flights of stairs of an old school building that serves as a gym and theater. Once I reached the top, I felt a little uneasy for a brief moment and then the feeling faded. I eventually noticed the floor was slanted because the space had once been theater box seating (hence my body's slight initial uneasiness). Located in this area were three mobile dental chairs and all of the materials to perform sealant-based care. The hygienists and assistants were not in the least deterred by the space. That's the exciting thing about public health and those dedicated to service; a closet can suffice as an office or a mobile dental clinic. Public health workers work with what they have and keep their minds on the outcomes, not the aesthetics. After I went through checking the dental materials and answered a few technical questions, the children arrived. And let me tell you, we were aware when they arrived! Imagine two-hundred little pairs of shoes running in and around a gym, while screams and giggles ensued. The gym, and thus the balcony, was loud and full of life. It was so loud that you could only hear a person talking if they were within a foot of you. To say the least, the children were excited! They were excited to see the dentist and pick out a new colored toothbrush. Indirectly, the SAS program made it possible for them to be excited about their health. In that old balcony on a chilly, noisy morning were two hygienists, two dental assistants, a community health center director, a SAS school staff advocate, the statewide manager of SAS, a Wisconsin HealthCorps member, and the students! I was part of the cohesive collaboration that is absolutely necessary to make a public health driven program possible, and for that I am truly grateful.