

Service Impact Awards

Corporation for
NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE 

Service Impact Awards

2012

Dear Service Leader,

Each year, the Corporation for National and Community Service engages millions of citizens in service to the Nation. They come from all walks of life, and serve in different ways through distinct service and volunteer programs, but they are united in their desire to make an impact.



The Service Impact Awards shine a spotlight on these citizens in action. They showcase our dynamic national service field, and give us a big-picture view of what is working on the ground and how service is helping achieve real outcomes for people and communities across America. Most important, the Service Impact Awards highlight the incredible individuals, grantees, and partners making their mark on the Nation through service.

This year, more than 250 service participants, project leaders, and programs answered the call for nominations. Together, they tell an amazing story about what happens when citizens step up to be a part of the solution. Through AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, the Social Innovation Fund, and National Days of Service, the 2012 Service Impact Award nominees are expanding opportunities for others to serve; building the capacity of individuals, nonprofits, and communities; and encouraging innovative approaches to solving problems. They exemplify national and community service at its best.

The 2012 Service Impact Awardees rose to the top as outstanding examples of how service makes a difference in our six priority issue areas: Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families. And for the first time, the American public weighed in and voted for their pick – “The People’s Choice.” You can learn more about the Awards, the winners, and the nominees at <http://2012serviceimpact.challenge.gov/>.

We can never thank national service participants, volunteers, grantees, and partners enough for their service; but we must always lift them up, share their story, and replicate what is working, far and wide.

Congratulations, and keep up the great work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Wendy Spencer'.

Wendy Spencer
Chief Executive Officer
Corporation for National and Community Service

DISASTER SERVICES AWARD

AmeriCorps St. Louis Emergency Response Team *St. Louis, Missouri*



The St. Louis Safety Service Corps, commonly known as the Emergency Response Team (ERT), answered the call time and time again after natural disasters scarred communities across the Midwest in 2011. From the record-setting devastation of the EF-5 tornado that struck Joplin, to the massive floods that covered southeast Missouri and flowed into surrounding states, the 35 full-time AmeriCorps members traveled across the state and region to come to the aid of those in the path of these destructive forces of nature.

In times of disaster, members of the ERT have developed strong partnerships with faith-based and voluntary organizations, local and state emergency managers, as well as agencies like FEMA and the United Way. Together they have joined first responders to reach out to aid citizens who have been left homeless, distraught, devastated, or grieving the loss of loved ones.

Some ERT members initially focus on critical life safety needs assisting with search and rescue, distribution of life-sustaining supplies, and outreach to special needs families. At the same time, other members collaborate with community leaders to effectively manage volunteers, coordinate donations, and develop an effective approach for recovery.

In Joplin alone, ERT members have coordinated more than 75,000 volunteers to complete 2,200 homeowner requests. The ERT has deployed to disasters in more than 60 Missouri counties and 30 states. As good “guests” in these communities, they strive to represent a set of values that reflects the needs of those in trouble; serving courteously, professionally, and with empathy.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AWARD

Christopher Gonzales

Sacramento Area Emergency Housing Center

Sacramento, California



Many homeless people face significant barriers to employment, including lack of work-appropriate clothing, limited access to computers or computer skills, and transportation issues. The dilemma is that these challenges are tough to surmount when people with a strong desire to work can't access the practical tools they need to find and maintain long-term employment.

Christopher Gonzales, a dedicated AmeriCorps VISTA at the Sacramento Area Emergency Housing Center (SAEHC), has developed a program to eliminate many of these barriers.

The SAEHC'S new Resource Center is an all-encompassing program with three departments: a Donations Center to give clients access to no-cost clothing and basic household items; a Computer Resource Center to provide access to technology and improve computer literacy, and a Transportation Program that offers access to employment services and health resources.

While this program has been in operation only six months, more than 650 clients have been served, and more than 2,000 donated items have been distributed. Since the first two quarters of the fiscal year, Gonzales has formed 31 essential partnerships with local organizations, and recruited two volunteer program managers and 156 volunteers to sustain the program.

EDUCATION AWARD

National College Advising Corps *Nationwide*



Utilizing the energy and enthusiasm of recent college grads from partner universities to serve as full-time advisers in underserved schools, the National College Advising Corps works to improve the prospects of economically disadvantaged students for post-secondary success.

Many well-qualified students are discouraged by barriers to higher education, such as lack of information about college admission and financial aid, while guidance counselor caseloads are approaching 500 students per counselor nationwide. Advising Corps members work one-on-one with students to provide the advice and encouragement to help students make their dreams come true.

The program, which receives support from the Social Innovation Fund and AmeriCorps, engages with 327 advisers—including many AmeriCorps members – that serve more than 117,000 students in 14 states. Advising Corps members assist with the completion of admissions and financial aid applications, access test prep and college application fee waivers, and ensure that students take the final steps to complete the college enrollment process.

The results are encouraging: Students are 76 percent more likely to attend a financial aid workshop, 25 percent more likely to apply to college, 20 percent more likely to be accepted to college, and 34 percent more likely to be accepted to a four-year institution. The advisers benefit as well, with 99 percent intending to attend graduate school and 37 percent having plans to pursue studies in education.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AWARD

Coulee Region RSVP

La Crosse, Wisconsin



The Coulee Region RSVP in La Crosse, Wisconsin, collaborates with Gundersen Lutheran Health System's environmental stewardship program to mitigate some of the waste that was being sent to the county's landfill and reuse the material to help others in the hospital.

Every day, a material known as "blue wrap" is used at Gundersen Lutheran's facilities to wrap surgical instrument trays for the operating rooms. Following the sterilization of the trays, they are unwrapped and the blue wrap is thrown away. This material, which, is responsible for 19 percent of the waste generated from surgical services nationwide, can only be used once before it is discarded.

Thanks to the Coulee Region RSVP, surgical wrap that once would have made its way to the landfill is being repurposed and used as aprons for adult and pediatric oncology patients as they participate in healing arts activities, as bedrail bags for patients during long-term stays, as tote bags for educational materials, as wheelchair/walker bags for rehab and therapy patients, as personal item caddies, and as breast cancer patient care bags.

Since the program's inception in August 2011, 20 volunteers have saved more than 575 pounds of material from the local landfill by creating 932 items currently being used at Gundersen Lutheran.

HEALTHY FUTURES AWARD

Philadelphia Health Corps

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Rising health care costs continue to hit extra hard for people with chronic illnesses who are uninsured or living on fixed incomes. Philadelphia Health Corps AmeriCorps members serve in the city's District Health Centers to help these patients gain access to medications through drug company prescription assistance programs.

Philadelphia's network of eight health centers provide comprehensive primary care to more than 80,000 people each year, 57 percent of whom have no health insurance. When uninsured people become patients at the city health centers, the city is responsible for subsidizing care, including their prescription medications.

Without Philadelphia Health Corps members helping patients navigate through the complicated system of prescription assistance programs, it could be very difficult for the city to afford the tremendous cost burden and patients would go without needed medications. For AmeriCorps members, this program is a great way to learn about the healthcare system, where many of them hope to have future careers as physicians and other health specialties.

The effort began with two AmeriCorps members in 2006 and has expanded to 16 members serving in eight health centers. During the past six years, this program has helped more than 12,646 patients gain free access to medications, saving the City of Philadelphia over \$8.5 million. The Philadelphia Health Corps, based at the Health Federation of Philadelphia, is an operating site of the National Health Corps AmeriCorps program.

VETERANS & MILITARY FAMILIES EMPLOYMENT AWARD

**Heather Hays – Conservation Corps
Veteran Green Corps
California**



Recently discharged veterans shouldn't have to struggle to find work when they return home from service, but they often do. AmeriCorps VISTA Heather Hays is helping vets make the most of a program that lets them serve their country in a new way while placing them on a pathway to permanent employment.

The California Conservation Corps (CCC), a program to preserve natural resources and provide emergency response services, in partnership with the United States Forest Service, runs the Veterans Green Corps (VGC) as a way to help former military members make the transition to civilian work. The program places vets in an instructional work environment, and connects them with support services and career development resources.

Hays gets involved with veterans even before they enter the VGC as she sits in on recruitment sessions to assess their individual needs. She then follows the vets throughout their term to determine career goals, perfect resumes and cover letters, and navigate the application and interview process as they prepare to leave the VGC.

In the time Hays has worked with veterans, she has seen one promoted to crew leader at the CCC, three work through the hiring process with the U.S. Forest Service, and 15 land civilian jobs at the California State Parks, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

VETERANS & MILITARY FAMILIES EDUCATION AWARD

Waynesville R-VI School District

Waynesville, Missouri



The transient nature of military life can make life difficult for students in military families, and many are stationed at Fort Leonard Wood for less than two years or experience parental deployment. They often have challenges with making new friends, fitting into social groups, and connecting with the community.

The rural Waynesville School District in Missouri encompasses the Fort Leonard Wood Military Installation, a training facility, seventy percent of its students are military impacted families and in some schools, more than 50 percent of the student population changes annually. AmeriCorps and VISTA teams have partnered with Learn and Serve America to create a comprehensive afterschool program for Waynesville schools to help the students stay on course academically.

The program continues during the summer, as students receive individualized assistance through the summer school program. Forty VISTA Summer Associates and AmeriCorps NCCC members partner with yearlong AmeriCorps members to offer tutoring during school and to provide unique educational enrichment opportunities after school including camping, interactive science experiments, museum trips, leadership camps, fitness activities, and service-learning projects.

AmeriCorps members provide tutoring and academic support to 1,696 students throughout the school day and lead more than 400 students in afterschool programs. Meanwhile, VISTA members work behind the scenes to assess the needs of each program, establish clubs, create workshops for parents and students, and secure grant funding.

VETERANS & MILITARY FAMILIES WELLNESS AWARD

Operation Military Kids University of Arizona 4-H *Tucson, Arizona*



Repeated military deployments have impacted our military families. For National Guard and Reserve troops, the emotional strain hits children left behind especially hard.

Operation: Military Kids (OMK) is a national initiative funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Department of Defense, and delivered through a grant received by the University of Arizona 4-H Youth Development. OMK supports military youth age 5-18 with outreach programs that enhance deployment cycle resilience through life skill development. OMK program components developed by AmeriCorps and VISTA members help military youth cope with the stresses of being away from their parents serving far from home.

One is the Digital Speak Out Military Kids program that helps military youth learn how to share their stories of a loved one being deployed through the use photography, video, and podcasting while emphasizing digital storytelling and resilience skill development. Another is the OMK Career Pathfinders Summer Camp, where teens participate in a residential summer camp on the University of Arizona campus and get the opportunity to explore a variety of post-high school career options and life skills.

Recently, the OMK Digital Speak Out Military Kids program and OMK Career Pathfinders Summer Camp were recognized as “best practices” during the 2011 and 2012 National 4-H Military Liaisons and OMK Project Directors Meeting. The programs were also recognized during the 2010 Children Youth & Family At Risk National Conference for their continued impact and deployment support for military youth.

PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD

Habitat for Humanity Vet Corps

Nationwide



For some veterans, it feels like another battle begins when they return home from serving their country – getting a place to call home.

Habitat for Humanity's Vet Corps works to ensure those who served their country get the support they have earned to avoid homelessness and poverty, and reintegrate into their communities when they leave military service.

Habitat's Vet Corps played a critical role in the rollout of the Habitat for Humanity Repair Corps, Habitat's first national program designed exclusively for veterans. Habitat partnered with the Home Depot Foundation to launch this critical home repair program, offering veterans anything from roof repairs to ease-of-access modifications like railing and ramps to home weatherization. Often other veterans, active duty military personnel, and Home Depot associates are enlisted to work alongside veteran partner families as they repair their homes.

The Vet Corps program works with Habitat affiliates, volunteers, and partner organizations to identify housing, employment, and volunteer opportunities for veterans; support veterans as they make the transition from military to civilian life; and raise public awareness of the full scope of veteran housing needs and solutions.

The Vet Corps initiative has placed 11 AmeriCorps VISTAs at Habitat affiliates across the nation, enabling Habitat to provide more than 300 housing solutions to veterans and military families, recruit veterans as Habitat employees and national service members, and engage veterans as volunteers.

DISASTER SERVICES FINALIST

Evacuteer.org

New Orleans, Louisiana

In 2007, Robert Fogarty began his VISTA term with the "Volunteers in Government" program at New Orleans City Hall. During the 2008 Hurricane Gustav evacuation, Robert helped recruit and coordinate more than 400 volunteers to augment city and state employees assisting in the evacuation of 19,000 residents lacking access to private transportation. Following his volunteer efforts, Robert founded Evacuteer.org, an organization committed to training and mobilizing volunteers to assist citizens without reliable transportation, in the event of a mandatory city-wide hurricane evacuation.

Rapido-Disaster Relief Housing

Cameron County, Texas

Rapido-Disaster Relief Housing is the result of a pilot program of the Texas Natural Disaster Housing Reconstruction Committee and the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs. AmeriCorps VISTAs designed and led the Rapido project in the Lower Rio Grande Valley to enable residents to assist in identifying and prioritizing immediate housing needs after a disaster. The program now serves as a prototype for the deployment process in the event of a natural disaster.

Penny Beeman—Citizen Corps VISTA

Greenville, Michigan

As a VISTA serving the United Way in 2008, Penny Beeman was tasked with capacity building efforts for the Montcalm County Medical Reserve Corps (MRC). The main goal was to increase volunteer participation in Montcalm County and spread Citizen Corps programs to Ionia County. Since the start of her VISTA position in December 2008, Penny has helped to merge the Montcalm MRC into the Montcalm-Ionia MRC, nearly doubling the number of volunteers participating in meetings, exercises, and community events.

Timberly Williams—AmeriCorps VISTA

Cullman, Alabama

Timberly Williams, an AmeriCorps VISTA, has worked tirelessly with special-needs populations to prepare hundreds of Alabamians before disaster strikes. As a current volunteer for CERT in Montgomery, Alabama, she speaks to community groups about the importance of disaster preparedness and response. Last year, Timberly single-handedly trained more than 4,000 volunteers on how to safely remove debris and clean up tornado impacted areas.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FINALISTS

Allison Maluchnik—United Way of Mason County Asset Building Coalition Mason County, Washington

Allison Maluchnik individually distributed FamilyWise discount cards to county schools and more than a 100 agencies, clinics and businesses, saving Mason County residents over \$32,000 in 2011. Alison raised awareness to the community about their eligibility for Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) and free tax preparation sites, while facilitating free Living Well financial literacy classes.

Moriah Nelson—AmeriCorps Member Lowell, Massachusetts

Moriah Nelson, an AmeriCorps standout, has promoted and increased language access for low-income residents in Massachusetts during the past two years. Through her efforts leading a state-wide initiative, Moriah has helped people who often encounter restricted access to legal rights and services because of their inability or limited ability to speak English to have increased language access.

Building Skills Partnership Los Angeles, California

Building Skills Partnership (BSP) provides low-wage workers, primarily immigrants from Latin America, with Vocational ESL (VESL) training. In addition, BSP provides computer literacy, citizenship, vocational training, parent education, health and wellness, and literacy. Through a collaborative team effort, VISTA members have secured \$1,138,299 in foundation grants, on top of \$31,368 in non-cash contributions.

EDUCATION FINALISTS

Minnesota Reading Corps

Minnesota

The Minnesota Reading Corps combines the power of AmeriCorps with the science of how children learn to read and has a proven track record of transforming literacy outcomes for struggling students.

Lisa Johnson: Mentors & Meals (M&Ms) for Better Education

Woodford County, Kentucky

Directed by Lisa Johnson, the Mentors & Meals (M&Ms) RSVP program enhances academic achievement by providing mentoring/homework assistance and hot meals to middle school students. Thirty-six out of 40 student participants showed a 90% improvement in their overall grade point average (GPA) and the average GPA rose from 2.4 to 2.7 in just eight weeks.

Campus Corps: Therapeutic Mentoring for At-Risk Youth

Fort Collins, Colorado

Campus Corps is an innovative campus-based mentoring program developed to decrease youth involvement in the juvenile justice system. Campus Corps youth show improved grades, attendance, attitudes about school, reduced substance use and delinquent behaviors, improved future orientation, stronger self-efficacy, and more positive social interactions with family and peers.

AmeriCorps Super Star Nominees: Carolyn Lynn, Duval Reads!

Jacksonville, Florida

Carolyn Lynn, the director of AmeriCorps Duval Reads!, runs a program that provides reading services to students performing below grade level. Under Carolyn's leadership, AmeriCorps Duval Reads! has become the largest literacy program of its kind in Florida, serving more than 6,000 students in 25 schools annually.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP FINALIST

Whitney Gaskill, AmeriCorps VISTA Silverton, Colorado

AmeriCorps VISTA member Whitney Gaskill was instrumental in developing a pioneering program that adapts service-learning concepts to the needs of rural K-12 students in Silverton, CO. Whitney, who serves with the Mountain Studies Institute, has leveraged \$14,500 in funding from four funders, \$3,750 in in-kind donation from businesses, and involved 110 community volunteers. Recognizing the real impact students can have, Whitney focused the education program on projects that benefit the Animas River Trail, Silverton's fledgling trail system.

ENLACE Cano Martin Pena San Juan, Puerto Rico

The mission of ENLACE Caño Martin Peña is to rehabilitate the Martin Peña Canal and its bordering communities by building partnerships between the communities and the public and private sector. The organization used Reggaeton (an urban music form) to unite schools and children, and increase environmental awareness. Under the leadership of VISTA Roberto, the Caño Reggaetón Contest (CRC) has become a series of projects and workshops that include partnerships among multiple government agencies and environmental NGOs that bring popular environmental education to each of the district's elementary schools.

Power Plus, Congo Street Energy Initiative Dallas, Texas

The Power Plus program, developed, initiated, and implemented by AmeriCorps VISTA Adam Kerechanin, helps lower-income households reduce their energy consumption. This program has engaged every family member of each household, a total of 19 individuals. Two households have completed the program and two are currently in progress. On average, each household has saved almost 10% on their energy bill each month.

Fort Madison Community Garden Fort Madison, Iowa

The Fort Madison Community Gardens were developed with the help of the City of Fort Madison and RSVP, as well as the North Lee County Community Foundation and The Home Depot, to address hunger and to teach sustainability to the economically disadvantaged. This project teaches lessons about healthy food and the importance of diversity within the community, allowing people from all backgrounds and ethnicities to have a common ground to meet and learn from one another.

HEALTHY FUTURES

Christopher Leet, Kyle Davis, and Shakira Davis—AmeriCorps Members Omaha, Nebraska

AmeriCorps members Christopher Leet, Kyle Davis, and Shakira Davis, offer invaluable insight into the needs of the homeless they serve at Finding a Voice, a program that celebrates dignity, promotes wellness, and creates a safe community for homeless participants by helping them find a voice through creative expression, interaction, and self-reflection. The project strives to enhance awareness about homelessness among students and the broader Omaha community. Formally homeless, these three AmeriCorps members have a true understanding of the homeless population they serve.

Impact Alabama's FocusFirst Initiative Birmingham, Alabama

Impact Alabama's FocusFirst Initiative, a nationally unique vision care program, partners with college students to provide vision screenings to more than 30,000 low-income preschool-age children at over 1,000 daycare sites in Alabama each year. Under the supervision of Impact Alabama AmeriCorps members, undergraduate and graduate students provide free vision screenings to children ages 6 months to 5 years in Head Starts and lower-income daycares using high-tech photo optic scan cameras. During the last eight years, FocusFirst has screened more than 140,000 children in all 67 Alabama counties, with approximately 11% of the children failing the screenings and receiving free follow-up care as necessary.

Jose Hernandez—Senior Companion Tucson, Arizona

Senior Companion Jose Hernandez is a true leader as well as an indispensable bridge to our local Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui communities. Hernandez started with host agency, Our Family Services, in 2009 as a VISTA volunteer with the Senior Companion program. He helped establish the first Senior Companions station in Sells on the Tohono O'odham Nation and was also tasked with making the necessary contacts to build a new Pascua Yaqui station. Persistence in recruiting paid off, as he established a roster of 10 volunteers and opened a station there in 2009. This vibrant station now has 12 volunteers. When his VISTA project came to an end, Hernandez decided to stay on as a Senior Companion and has since risen as a leader in the group. He helps train new Senior Companions and continues to open doors between the greater Tucson area and the surrounding Native American Nations.

VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

AMVETS Career Center Columbus, Ohio

AMVETS Career Center's AmeriCorps program serves the career and employment needs of Ohio's veterans and their families. Now midway through its second program year, AMVETS/AmeriCorps has helped over 1,500 veterans and their families and encouraged hundreds of employers to accept the challenge to be a veteran-friendly employer. The AMVETS Career Center offers a full-range of employment services, including coaching and career skills workshops.

Washington Department of Veterans Affairs Vet Corps Olympia, Washington

As the first program in the nation to engage veterans in AmeriCorps national service programs, the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs Vet Corps is blazing a trail in the national service arena. In the two and a half years it has been operating, the Washington Vet Corps has provided services to more than 7,000 veterans, active duty military members, and their families, helping them to navigate the higher education system and maximize the use of their G.I. Bill benefits.

Operation Desert Home Tucson, Arizona

Operation Desert Home is an innovative, public-private coalition in southern Arizona, bringing the community together to address employment issues faced by veterans and military families. Since its inception in October 2012, Operation Desert Home, an AmeriCorps program, in collaboration with other coalition members, has served more than 15,000 military, veteran, and military family members.



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