

# REVIEW

*A Publication of AmeriCorps VISTA*

## *THE ROLE OF AMERICORPS VISTA IN LONG-TERM DISASTER RECOVERY*





Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE**

Since 1965, AmeriCorps VISTA members (Volunteers in Service to America) have brought their passion and perseverance where the need is greatest: to organizations that help alleviate poverty. Today, over 8,000 AmeriCorps VISTA members are serving as catalysts for change, living and working alongside community members to advance local solutions.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

My Second Mission	3
Career Corner	5
National Service Responds Photo Essay	6
After the Cameras Stop Rolling	8
Opioid Crisis	10
8 Reasons to Love AmeriCorps VISTA	12
News Bulletin	13
Finding Strength in Service	15

## QUESTIONS OR CONTRIBUTIONS

✉ [vistaoutreach@cns.gov](mailto:vistaoutreach@cns.gov)    🌐 Visit our website at [AmeriCorps.gov/VISTA](http://AmeriCorps.gov/VISTA)

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## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Sum up your AmeriCorps VISTA story in 6 words or less and you could be published in our next issue.

Submit to [vistaoutreach@cns.gov](mailto:vistaoutreach@cns.gov) or post on social media using **#myservicein6**.

# MY SECOND MISSION

Q&A with AmeriCorps VISTA Alumna, Leader, and Afghan War Veteran

By Allyson Snell  
Marketing and Recruitment Director, AmeriCorps VISTA

*This Veterans Day we are proud to spotlight Vanessa Moore, AmeriCorps VISTA member and Military Veteran who is using her national service experience to improve the lives of her fellow veterans. Vanessa was most recently the recipient of the 2017 Colorado Governor's Award for "Outstanding AmeriCorps VISTA Member."*

## **You served as a Medic in the Army National Guard. What brought you to AmeriCorps VISTA?**

Many of my family members have served in the military, but it was nothing I had considered for my own career at first. Eight weeks in to medic training, I found out I was to be deployed to Afghanistan with an all-male company. Throughout the pre-mobilization period, I was told many times that I would never succeed in combat as a woman, and that it wasn't my place. Being told that I couldn't do something because I am a woman gave me the fire to prove everyone wrong. I am a medic, I am capable, and I am strong. I worked hard throughout my deployment to show that as a woman, I can do all the same things as the men.



## **What was your transition like back to civilian life?**

I came home and went straight into college in Iowa. Here I was, going from being shot at every day to coming back to my hometown and trying to fit in as a regular 19 year-old. I ended up dropping out of college and moved to southern Colorado with some friends, where I enrolled in college again, at Adams State University. Even with the change of scenery, my struggles continued and the transition triggered for me all the invisible wounds I carried from service, such as depression and anxiety. I felt I had lost my purpose in life. On top of this, going back to school was a financial struggle. Due to the timing of my deployment, it was impossible to get my GI bill reconciled at my university, and I was relying on friends and family for financial support, which was very hard for me. Eventually I managed to

secure a job in the registrar's office, where I later learned that there was a veteran's center on campus. This infuriated me - I could barely afford being at school and struggled for two semesters before learning about the veterans center on campus!

### **How did you learn about AmeriCorps VISTA?**

While working with the registrar's office, I learned about the VISTA SECond Mission program. The project was brand-new and geared at providing access to services for student veterans on campus. When I was accepted to the program I was thrilled to serve, and it gave me a renewed purpose in life. I can't state enough how important having this purpose was to my well-being, it literally saved my life. I had lost a couple of my friends from deployment due to suicide, and coupled with my own depression and difficulties, I was aware that I had to do something to keep going. The accomplishments I made during service helped me to heal, and I saw that I could help others like me in the process.



### **What was your biggest accomplishment as a VISTA member?**

Given my own challenges in obtaining my GI bill and how this delay put me into a very tough situation, I was determined to ensure that no other veterans entering school would face the same challenges. I learned that the state of Colorado had passed a bill

in 2009 ensuring that all veterans receive in-state tuition, regardless of their home of record. I was able to work with the school to implement this opportunity for veterans, which significantly helps reservists like myself, who have complicated GI bill calculations. Finally, people were seeing the problems that veterans on campus faced, and I was a part of the solution. I loved doing what I was doing. So many of our veterans support efforts gained momentum after this. We completely reimaged services to vets on campus and did significant outreach to ensure all incoming veterans knew what resources were readily available.

### **So what is next for you?**

I graduated last year with my degree in English and Secondary Education, and now I am serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA Leader with my organization because I love this program. I know so many combat vets like me deal with addiction, depression, and reintegration struggles. It is so encouraging to see colleges that provide these great resources directly to vets such as helping with the GI bill, mentorship programs, and internships. Our military veterans are so much more likely to get into school and stay in school if they are supported. Eventually, I want to be a teacher at the secondary level and also teach yoga to veterans as a path to healing.

### **Any advice for other veterans?**

AmeriCorps VISTA is such a good way to give back and gain professional development. I have grown as a young professional and found the sense of purpose I lost after returning home from Afghanistan. I have put my passion for student veteran success into action, and created actual reform in an area that serves many veterans.

## Ace Your Next Job Interview

### Before

- **Research** the employer from the inside out.
- **Read** the organization's website thoroughly.
- Is the organization financially stable? Use [guidestar.org](http://guidestar.org) to find out for nonprofits and the Better Business Bureau for corporations.
- Use **LinkedIn** to learn more about your interviewers and company staff.
- Has the organization been **featured** in the media? If so, what for?
- Does the organization have a connection to **national service**?
- Make sure you can **connect your service** experience to the company's mission and/or culture.

### During

- Be prepared for **scenarios**. Practice answering various scenarios, such as, "You have just been asked to complete three different assignments that have the same deadline. How do you prioritize your tasks?"

Remember, employers ask questions because they want an insight into your **thought process**. Do you crack under pressure, or can you handle multiple deadlines? Past behavior is indicative of future behavior.

Most AmeriCorps VISTA members have numerous responsibilities, often answering to different parts of the same organization. Have some examples ready of how you managed **multiple projects and deadlines**.

### After

- **Mind your manners!** Send a thank you email within 24-48 hours.
- Keep it **short and simple**: acknowledge the individual(s) you interviewed with, reiterate something you like about the company, and remind the employer why your skills and experiences are uniquely suited for the job.
- Remind them that serving with AmeriCorps VISTA instills certain qualities; for example:

*"Serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA member for the past year has taught me how to be resourceful and flexible in my work assignments. I would love to bring my passion for [helping veterans] along with these attributes to your organization."*



TX



PR



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## PHOTO ESSAY

# NATIONAL SERVICE RESPONDS

*to Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and California*



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PR



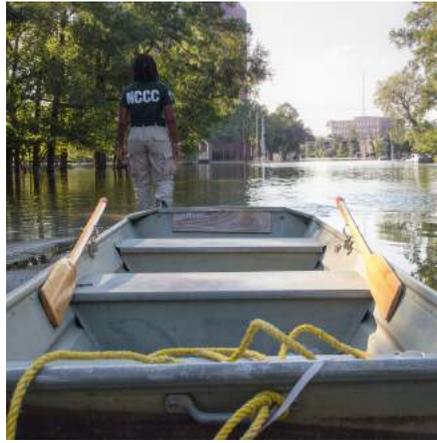
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# AFTER THE CAMERAS STOP ROLLING



## AmeriCorps VISTA's Role in Disaster

By **Eileen Conoboy**, *Acting Director of AmeriCorps VISTA*  
*AmeriCorps VISTA Alumna 1992-1993, North Dakota*

When disaster strikes, national service members mobilize quickly to help communities in need. AmeriCorps members are perhaps most known for their immediate remediation efforts such as debris removal, muck and gut operations, community outreach, damage assessments, volunteer and donation management, and disaster survivor assistance. More than 40,000 AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members were deployed in response to Hurricane Katrina. In the decade since, AmeriCorps teams have provided critical support after numerous disasters, including Hurricane Sandy, the 2013 floods in Colorado, tornadoes in Joplin, Missouri, and many more. Today, more than 2,000 AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members have responded to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, and the number grows by the day.

Following a disaster, national service acts as a force multiplier by providing key resources and significantly expanding the capacity of existing organizations on the ground. While often operating behind the scenes, AmeriCorps VISTA members provide critical assistance to communities impacted by disasters long after the news cameras stop rolling.



In 2012, New Jersey shoreline communities were devastated in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. Many local volunteer centers lost FEMA funding after 90 days and could not keep up with the demand to organize volunteers. Remarkably, Bergen County was able to recruit and place a significant number of volunteers into action, and their home repair statistics rivaled the rest of the state's combined numbers. This was all

possible due to a highly successful outreach strategy developed and executed by their AmeriCorps VISTA member. Using FEMA data, the VISTA member identified heavily impacted areas and created a multipronged outreach approach involving email, direct mail, social media, information fairs, and special events to connect with hard-to-reach populations (e.g., the elderly and geographically isolated). The VISTA member led the charge to develop procedures that enabled Bergen County to harness every available resource and make sure staff, volunteers, partners, and other stakeholders were working together at their fullest capacity.



In June of 2016, West Virginia experienced one of the deadliest flooding episodes in its history, killing 23 people and destroying over 1,200 homes. The ten local AmeriCorps VISTA members serving at the time responded to this disaster by setting up response shelters, writing grants for long-term recovery efforts, organizing food and supply drives, and managing a large influx of volunteers. Today, 14 VISTA members continue to work in affected areas, advancing West Virginia's long term disaster recovery efforts. True to the mission of AmeriCorps VISTA, the capacity-building services increased in the year following the disaster.



Not all disasters are acts of nature, as evidenced by the lead contamination crisis in Flint, Michigan. After the news broke regarding the contaminated water, VISTA members serving in Flint regrouped to assist a community in crisis. In addition to fulfilling the requirements of their regular service experience, AmeriCorps VISTA members in Flint mobilized to educate local families on the dangers of lead poisoning and how to access testing sites. For many VISTA members, this crisis was personal, and they worked tirelessly to distribute water and nutritious food to the most vulnerable members of the community: the children, elderly, and disabled. AmeriCorps VISTA members continue to work alongside local community organizations, mobilizing resources to assist people impacted by this tragedy.

From the early stages of response to the longer term recovery and community rebuilding, members of the national service family are there to help. We are stronger when we work together. Our hearts are with our neighbors in Puerto Rico, Texas, Florida, U.S. Virgin Islands, Louisiana, and California impacted by recent disasters. If you or someone you know is interested in serving or sponsoring a national service member to assist in disaster recovery, please visit [nationalservice.gov](http://nationalservice.gov).

*-Eileen*

# RIO ARRIBA COUNTY TO RECEIVE NEW FEDERAL HELP WITH OPIOID CRISIS

BY MEGAN BENNETT, ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

*Reprinted with permission*

**SANTA FE, N.M.** — Rio Arriba County will soon have new federal support to combat its ongoing addiction epidemic through AmeriCorps' Volunteers in Service to America's first opioid-centric program in New Mexico.

According to a news release, a grant from VISTA — a program that places teams within communities who then work alongside local organizations to address specific issues — will provide seven volunteer positions annually over the next five years to work with county-based organizations that are combating effects of opioid addiction.

The VISTA group will receive living expense stipends and future scholarships following completion of service and each year about \$170,000 from the grant program will go toward those items. AmeriCorps is operated through the Corporation for National and Community Service federal agency.

From 2011-15, the county had the highest drug overdose rate in the state. According to the New Mexico Department of Health website, Rio Arriba had a rate of 85.8 drug overdose deaths per 100,000 citizens. In 2015, New Mexico's total rate was 24.8/100,000 and the country's was 16.3. During 2010-14, 53 percent of statewide



drug overdoses were from prescription drugs, the website states.

The VISTA members will be stationed at Hoy Recovery Center and Las Cumbres Community Services, and one will “float” between several network providers helping recovering residents through the county’s Behavioral Health Investment Zone, according to Rio Arriba Department of Health and Human Services Director, Lauren Reichelt.

They will assist staff members already on site and help facilitate services for people entering transitional housing and looking for work following opioid treatment. Also slated for help are grandparents who are taking care of children whose parents are unable to do so due to substance abuse.

Reichelt says the VISTA members will also assist with forming benefits enrollment teams to help grandparents receive additional resources to take care of the children. She also mentioned ideas such as literacy programming for children.

The grant application estimated the program would impact 700 county residents directly affected by opioid addiction, approximately 50 grandparents raising grandchildren, and help at least 1,000 senior citizens expected to receive proper benefits packages, though Samantha Jo Warfield, Corporation for National and Community Service spokesperson, said those figures tend to be conservative.

Reichelt said she is confident about the program, but referred to it as an “experiment” for the state. Other states that have tried similar programming include Arizona, Maryland and New Hampshire, said Warfield.

“It’s a really interesting model and, if we pull it off, it’s something other communities can emulate,” said Reichelt.

Rex Davidson, executive director of Las Cumbres Community Services, said his organization also may utilize the volunteers to help create grandparent support groups. However, it is difficult to know what they will ask the volunteers to work on until they are chosen and their experience level is known. Many of the people his organization works with are young parents seeking assistance, grandparents raising grandchildren because of the impact of opioid addiction and young children who are growing up around substance abuse.

While his organization does not directly deal with people battling substance abuse, their children and the grandparents raising them need support for there to be a positive “ripple effect” on future generations, he said.

“In Rio Arriba County, it’s not simplistically just treating the addict, we’re really looking at the tentacles that go out from that,” said Davidson.

**NEW** [CLICK HERE FOR RESOURCES TO SUPPORT OPIOID PROGRAMMING](#)

# 8 REASONS TO ❤️ AMERICORPS VISTA

A program of the Corporation for National & Community Service

MORE THAN  
**220,000**  
AMERICANS HAVE SERVED



  
LEVERAGED  
**\$178M**  
IN OUTSIDE RESOURCES  
LAST YEAR

**8,000**  
MEMBERS SERVE  
**EVERY YEAR**

**MOBILIZING**  
**900,000+**  
VOLUNTEERS

FIGHTING   
**POVERTY**  
WITH PEOPLE POWER  
SINCE 1965



  
**3,000+**  
LOCATIONS  
TACKLING PROBLEMS  
WITH LOCAL SOLUTIONS

**79%**  
OF ALUMS PLAN TO BE  
ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN  
THEIR COMMUNITY



  
PATHWAY TO  
EMPLOYMENT

**\$380 MILLION**

  
SCHOLARSHIPS EARNED

[AmeriCorps.gov/VISTA](https://AmeriCorps.gov/VISTA)

#AMERICORPSWORKS #IAMVISTA

WHAT DO  
**YOU**  
❤️ ABOUT  
**VISTA?**

SHARE OUR GRAPHIC

and

*Submit what you love at*

[VISTAOUTREACH@CNS.GOV](mailto:VISTAOUTREACH@CNS.GOV)

*or post on social media using #IAMVISTA*

# Two AmeriCorps VISTA members receive **The Harkin Award**

Two AmeriCorps VISTA members were recently honored as 2017 Tom Harkin Award Winners. Created in 2014, the Tom Harkin Excellence in AmeriCorps Awards pays tribute to Senator Tom Harkin's lifelong support for national service, while recognizing the outstanding and innovative AmeriCorps programs and members that are tackling the nation's most pressing challenges.



*Left to right: Acting CNCS CEO Kim Mansaray; AmeriCorps Director Chester Spellman; Kristina Kofoot; Acting AmeriCorps VISTA Director Eileen Conoboy*

## **Kristina Kofoot**

**Kristina Kofoot** of Cedar Falls, IA was honored with the award for "most compelling member experience in either building an ethic of civic responsibility or having positive change in her life." While pursuing her master's degree in Leisure Youth and Human Services, Kristina Kofoot served through the University of Northern Iowa's (UNI) AmeriCorps VISTA program. Her service was vital to the creation of service-learning courses, student service projects, and development of new partnerships. Among her many accomplishments, Kristina was instrumental in developing the University's Service-Learning Institute (SLI). Through partnerships made possible by Kristina, community partners and faculty developed new service learning courses to help students gain experience and learn about civic responsibility. UNI faculty describe the SLI as transformational and credit Kristina's dedication for making it possible.



*Left to right: AmeriCorps Director Chester Spellman; Acting CNCS CEO Kim Mansaray; Michael Stocker; Theresa Clay; Acting AmeriCorps NCCC Director Gina Cross; Acting AmeriCorps VISTA Director Eileen Conoboy*

## Michael Stocker

**Michael Stocker** of Albuquerque, NM was awarded for "best new program design addressing a critical priority." During his service as an AmeriCorps VISTA, Michael Stocker launched a new program called Running Medicine, enrolling more than 200 participants. Formed as a program through the Native Health Initiative, the vision was to create a culture of wellness through a supportive community. Unlike costly fitness activities, Running Medicine is a low-cost program, engaging many low-income families and communities. Bringing his experience in leadership and coaching, Michael set the standard of excellence for the competitive adult running group, coordinating weekday and weekend practices and events for more than 640 participants. His intervention and activities addressed a critical priority by engaging the community physically, mentally, and socially to improve health and wellness.



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*Congratulations*  
**TO KRISTINA AND MICHAEL**

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Finding Strength in Service:

## MUNIRAH JINWRIGHT'S STORY

*Left to right: AmeriCorps VISTA Leader Munirah Jinwright (L) on the show "Houston Newsmakers," April 2017.*

When Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, TX in August of 2017, Munirah Jinwright was preparing to transition from her AmeriCorps VISTA service with Harris County Department of Education to serving as the Texas OneStar Foundation's VISTA Leader. By 7:00am on August 26th, the water surrounding Munirah's home had risen to over 3 feet. She watched with her neighbors as their cars were engulfed by flood waters. Over the next twelve hours, the water continued to rise, and Munirah's neighborhood was declared a catastrophic flood zone. Munirah watched boats pass full of passengers and despite her own worries and fears, kept a level head for the sake of her children. "It was, survive or die in my head, and we were surviving," Munirah said. It was after 7:00pm when Munirah and her family were picked up and ferried to dry land by some good Samaritans from Huntsville, TX.

Even in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, Munirah successfully completed her VISTA service and began the transition into her VISTA Leader role. She attended and presented at an in-person training for VISTA

members shortly after Harvey made landfall. As a VISTA Leader, Munirah has already been a great source of support for OneStar VISTA members. At a time when many may have felt overwhelmed by the challenges presented by Harvey, Munirah embraced it as an opportunity to find strength in her service.

"It has been difficult, but Harvey has pushed me to serve from a place of peace. I literally floated away from my home, but I floated away alive. I have the opportunity to show my children what humility looks like. To teach them to embrace life, to value family not things, to serve others, to model good character, and to show them that life is so much more meaningful when you stand tall and embrace peace. Harvey took so much from us but we've also gained so much. People from all walks of life have offered support to our family. The kindness and selflessness of others have allowed us to bounce back. I am now a giver who has learned how to receive. I am an AmeriCorps VISTA Leader, I will lead with strength and without expectation to receive."

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