

## AmeriCorps VISTA

AmeriCorps VISTA member Brian Richardson helps Youth Advocates of Sitka (YAS), Inc. provide comprehensive behavioral mental health services for youth and their families in the Sitka community. During his tenure, Richardson created a youth-run business employment training program for low-income youth who suffer from emotional and behavioral disorders. He first organized a panel of students who helped determine that the youth-run business will be a mobile smoothie truck, and then developed a business plan for a smoothie truck, where youth will work with YAS staff to practice vocational skills and earn a stipend. Richardson also raised more than \$27,000 to support youth in developing job skills and finding and maintaining permanent employment in the community. He created a Pre-Employment Life Skills class to help develop the skills necessary for finding and securing a job and collaborated with the local alternative Pacific High School and the Sitka Tribe of Alaska to provide this class, which began in fall 2014.

The Innovation Lab at Loussac Library is an interesting place to visit, thanks to the effort of the staff and AmeriCorps VISTA member Darla Hane, the Lab coordinator. Hane has helped secure more than \$21,000 to renovate and sustain Lab, a community-driven center for education and exploration. Visit the Lab and you may find Hane hanging art and sipping coffee with graffiti-style artists, on the phone with the FBI scheduling an informational workshop, entertaining the Mexican Consulate staff with her very limited Spanish as they collaborate on a financial literacy workshop, or a meeting with refugees who need help creating resumes. Along with rotating monthly art exhibits, the Lab hosts workshops in resume writing, grants and small business loans, and several other classes and discussions geared toward job skills and creative entrepreneurship. Hane collaborated with the city's burgeoning, creative-industry entrepreneurs to host a Global Entrepreneurship Week at the Lab and helped organize the Anchorage Mini-Maker Faire at the library to showcase what people are inventing, creating, and learning. Makers ranged from tech enthusiasts to crafters to homesteaders to scientists to garage tinkerers. Hane also helped create Fashion August, a series of workshops and lectures on how to dress for and act on a job interview that culminated in a runway show on interview clothing. To assure that educational experiences in the Lab remain high quality and unique, Hane is currently establishing partnerships with 65 nonprofits and community organizations, recruiting workshop speakers and teachers, and helping to secure additional funds to make the Lab sustainable.

## AmeriCorps NCCC

An AmeriCorps NCCC team served the Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment, which provides science and environmental education to all age groups, resources for learning, and support for scientific research. The primary purpose of AmeriCorps NCCC's service was environmental stewardship; through trail building, invasive species removal, and other maintenance projects. Through their service with the Wrangell Institute, the team leveled a hiking trail for construction, placed gravel on the trail, and removed 50 trees to begin trail construction. The team also cleared brush and constructed an anchor bridge. The team also had the opportunity to serve other organizations while in Alaska, including the Bureau of Land Management, the Wellwood Nature Preserve, the United States Forest Service, and the Copper River Watershed Project. While serving with the Bureau of Land Management, corps members removed over four tons of trash and brush and constructed and outhouse. The Copper River Watershed Project built 70 feet of new creek bank, planted 1,800 plant shoots at the creek bed, removed trash, replanted native plants, and restored an acre of wildlife habitat.

An AmeriCorps NCCC team served with Ketchikan Youth Initiatives, an organization whose mission is to meet the needs of youth and young adults in the Ketchikan community who suffer from the burdens of poverty and addictions to alcohol and other drugs. During their service, the team built an outdoor paintball park. In order to create the park, the team cut down trees, built a trail leading to the park, and cleared the ground to prepare for construction. The team also painted a storage shed and informational signs at Ketchikan Youth Initiatives. In addition to their service with Ketchikan Youth Initiatives, corps members served with the Tongass National Forest, where they restored trail and cleared campgrounds of 400 pounds of underbrush. The team also assisted the Southeast Alaska Independent Living (SAIL), where they supported recreational programming by facilitating recreational activities for developmentally disabled individuals. The team also provided volunteer support at the annual Fools Only Run at Midnight 5k.

## Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

This semester, the Elder Mentors/Foster Grandparents of New Stuyahok village have been working with high school students to share Yup'ik language skills and culture. Students have learned to make fishing gear out of bone and wood and have engraved both their English and Yup'ik names in the material. They have also learned how to clean and prepare beaver meat, which is shared with the community Elders as part of Yup'ik tradition. The students prepared speeches and presented their projects to the local School Board, and shared in a meal of beaver which was prepared by the class. Elder Sacally Wonhola, Sr. states "It's good so the students won't lose their native language." As one student said, "We can pass the Yup'ik language on to the next generation." The Elders Mentors/Foster Grandparents provide a critical role helping keep high school students engaged in school and committed to their academics. In rural Alaska's tribal villages, the stakes are high – learning these skills is about food security and survival. Having a relevant training program and an elder presence increases their chances for success.

## Social Innovation Fund

The Social Innovation Fund transforms lives and communities using limited federal investment as a catalyst to grow the impact of nonprofits with evidence of strong results. It harnesses the expertise of grantmaking intermediaries to identify, evaluate and expand effective nonprofits and engages funding partners to contribute nearly three dollars to every one federal dollar invested. As the Social Innovation Fund network grows programs that work in Alaska, more people are able to overcome their most pressing challenges in the areas of economic opportunity, health, and youth development. The Social Innovation Fund is investing \$146,753 in Mat-Su Health Services, a nonprofit implementing the IMPACT model of depression treatment through community health clinics serving low-income, rural communities in Alaska.