

AmeriCorps State

The Iowa Reading Corps AmeriCorps Program is a statewide initiative of United Ways of Iowa to help ensure that all Iowa students are on track to read at grade level by the end of third grade. The program places AmeriCorps members, trained as Elementary Literacy Tutors, at schools across Iowa to implement prescribed literacy interventions for students who are just below proficiency in reading. Each day, members meet individually with students to conduct 20-minute tutoring sessions that focus upon building students' literacy skills and follow a Response to Intervention model. With a goal of strengthening the connection between schools and communities, Iowa Reading Corps AmeriCorps members also partner with local United Ways to conduct summer programming and volunteer recruitment initiatives based upon local need.

Green Iowa AmeriCorps strives to actively improve energy conservation in Iowa communities. AmeriCorps members provide energy education, weatherization, and outreach services throughout Black Hawk, Linn, Winneshiek, Dubuque, Jefferson and Polk counties with hopes to reach communities across the state in the near future. This program engages Iowans of all ages through energy awareness activities, projects, presentations, and workshops. The members work in teams to implement a successful home weatherization program that significantly reduces air infiltration, and saves homeowners \$50-\$350 annually on utility bills. Additionally, the teams facilitate weatherization workshops that recruit and train volunteers in the techniques and benefits of home weatherization. While enrolled in Green Iowa AmeriCorps, members build a comprehensive energy knowledge base. Trainings incorporate presentations, on-site field trips, and hands-on skills development. Although members primarily work in teams, they also have the opportunity to act as leaders and plan independent projects. Green Iowa AmeriCorps members frequently cooperate with local partners to effectively serve as a community resource.

AmeriCorps VISTA

Six AmeriCorps VISTAs are supporting the efforts of Outreach, Inc. to increase the impact of its meal-packaging events with the Outreach Hunger-Free Iowa Initiative. The effort strives to eliminate hunger in Iowa by providing local leadership teams the opportunity to collaborate around ending hunger in their community. VISTA members work with community stakeholders to engage more people in the fight against hunger by assessing hunger statistics, fostering community partnerships, and bringing awareness to the Hunger-Free Iowa events. These events include Hunger Dialogues (discussions about hunger in the community: causes, trends, and local solutions) and County-wide Resource Packaging Fairs (thousands of volunteers packaging meals that stay in their community). VISTA members are working toward scheduling Hunger-Free Iowa events in all of Iowa's 99 counties and will expand their efforts as two new VISTA members and a VISTA Leader join the Outreach VISTA team in November of 2014.

Formed in 2012, the Meskwaki Food Sovereignty Initiative is now in its third year of rebuilding the Meskwaki Nation's local food system. This initiative has succeeded in great part due to its enrollment in the AmeriCorps VISTA program. Four full time AmeriCorps VISTA positions were created in 2012 to build capacity and empower the community to solve issues related to health and the environment. VISTA members have supported the creation and maintenance of two community gardens that grow food for the Tribe's Senior Center and school cafeteria. More than 20 classes, workshops, and events are held throughout the year to educate and build the community's capacity to sustain itself. Educational topics include gardening, foraging, and preserving food. Events range from a food film festival to traditional community meals. A 40-acre organic produce farm was launched in 2013 as part of economic development programming. Community farm plots are also available and function as incubator space for market gardens. All Meskwaki Food Sovereignty Initiative programming is based upon community need and input in a way that celebrates Meskwaki culture and community.

AmeriCorps NCCC

Greater Des Moines Habitat for Humanity (GDM Habitat) requested the help of an AmeriCorps NCCC team in building and renovating homes in the Des Moines area as well as support the AmeriCorps Build-a-Thon which was held the week of May 18. Approximately 150 AmeriCorps and VISTA members participated. Corps members performed a diverse set of tasks for the GDM Habitat. Members landscaped the yards of two homes, installed insulation in two single story homes, helped to shingle an entire roof, cut and lay down plywood on another roof, and painted two 2-story homes. Additionally, members built over 35 interior and exterior walls that will be used in future Habitat homes. Members also worked with Rock the Block during the Build-A-Thon event to paint an entire 2-story home, clear two alley ways, and plant 41 trees. Finally, members' power washed three homes and cleared one vacant lot. The work that NCCC did helped revitalize the neighborhood and made it a more livable and welcoming space to not only the people that live there, but the Greater Des Moines area as well.

The Mid America Museum of Aviation and Transportation requested an AmeriCorps NCCC team to help put together exhibits that will be two major focal points for the museum. The museum was established in 1989 to preserve Sioux City's rich aviation and transportation history. The NCCC team prepared exhibits for the museum, deep cleaned the interior of the museum, and gutted out the inside of a Boeing 727 airplane. Corps members gutted a Boeing 727 airplane so the space can be used as a multimedia education center for the museum. Furthermore, the team disassembled, cleaned, moved, and reassembled a 3994 square foot World War II exhibit within the museum. Additionally, team members prepped and painted a 629 square foot wall for the Flight 232 memorial display. Members of the team built three display cabinets for the Flight 232 exhibit. Corps members sanded a Beech 18 airplane in preparation for painting, and cleaned the interior of a Jetway Airplane. Finally, members deep cleaned the interior of the museum. Through this work the NCCC team helped the museum create a safer environment for patrons, upheld the mission of the museum and helped memorialize and educate patrons on the Flight 232 crash.

Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

For a 75 year old retired bus driver and father of two, the decision to volunteer was an easy one. "I wanted to stay active and make a difference in the community," says Don Brammer. Grandpa Don, as he is called at College View Elementary in Council Bluffs, IA, is a Foster Grandparent through the Senior Corps Programs sponsored by Connections, the Area Agency on Aging in Southwest Iowa. He has been with the program for three years, and is the agency's mascot for "The Power of Aging" campaign of 2013. Grandpa Don volunteers 24 hours each week during the school year. He also volunteers during the summer at the Boys and Girls Club. "When my children were growing up, I missed a lot of time with them because I had a job that required travel, so this is kind of my way to give back." He reads with the kids, helps them with homework, and provides mentoring to children in need of a grandfather /male role model. According to Principal Sue Rice, "Grandpa Don brings an emotional element to the kids. He has a lot of love and dedication for them, and they feel that." Ms. Rice also says that the staff and parents love Grandpa Don. "He is somewhat of a celebrity here at the school."

Senior Corps RSVP

Through a growing partnership between the Iowa Department on Aging and CNCS, the Iowa State Office of Long-Term Care Ombudsman approached RSVP Directors about partnering in the new Volunteer Ombudsman Program. RSVP of North Central Iowa, with strong backing from its Advisory Council, eagerly agreed to support the need for resident advocacy. RSVP volunteers in the program are making unannounced visits to living facilities; observing and interacting with residents identifying concerns; aiding residents to resolve concerns; observing the general conditions of facility; referring complaints to the state office; conducting initial inquiries regarding complaints; monitoring progress on cases; providing general information to residents and families, and attending Resident and Family Council meetings.

Senior Corps Senior Companion Program

Months after retiring from her job of 37 years, 68 year-old Mary found it difficult to get out of bed in the morning. "I just couldn't find a reason to get up. I really had no purpose, and I was depressed." Mary related she feels closest to her client, Doris, whose family and friends have all passed away. "Doris used to be a very social person just like me and then she could not drive, lost all her family, and felt completely alone." "Each week I get her out of the house. We go to the grocery store. The little things make her so happy." Mary related that the stipend money allows her to continue to live in her own home. "The stipend allows me to pay my taxes and make repairs that help keep my home up. "I don't know what I'd do if I had to move somewhere else especially since so many places won't allow my pets." Joining the Senior Companion Program through Visiting Nurse Services in Des Moines, IA, replaced Mary's symptoms of depression with a greater sense of purpose. Through her service to others, Mary receives boost in self-esteem and resources to continue living in her own home.

Volunteer Generation Fund

The United Way of Wapello County Volunteer Center in Ottumwa, a Volunteer Generation Fund grantee, has mobilized more than 200 volunteers in 1,000 hours of service to address the issues of hunger and access to healthy food in their community. The organization hosts a corporate community garden whose plots are sponsored by corporations and community groups. The garden is also supported with skill based volunteer positions including Spanish language interpreters, Master Gardeners, and soil quality experts. Volunteers helped clear the lot, repair raised beds, till the soil, and plant the produce, and regularly mow, weed, pick produce and tend bee hives. Volunteers also constructed pallet benches for the garden and elevated beds for use at the YMCA, Salvation Army and other area nonprofits. The over 2,000 pounds of produce grown this year was donated to local food pantries and meal sites. Neighborhood-based community gardens have also been organized, and are rented out on an income-adjusted basis to local residents. Volunteers express satisfaction in getting outside and giving back, and community members benefit from healthy fresh produce.