

AmeriCorps State

The Maine Conservation Corps AmeriCorps program improves public property for the increased use and enjoyment of the public, provides conservation education, promotes and manages volunteer opportunities related to natural resources, and helps public and nonprofit organizations with projects that serve a valid public purpose. Maine Conservation Corps' 76 AmeriCorps members serve all of Maine's counties, focusing on community outreach, volunteer coordination and education through projects like watershed surveys, classroom activities and ecological studies as well as constructing and rehabilitating recreational trails. National Service through the Maine Conservation Corps provides the opportunity for work experience while instilling an ethic of volunteerism. The Maine Conservation Corps supports Maine's economy with jobs and with "green infrastructure" bringing prosperity to rural areas through nature-based tourism and quality of place. In 2014, the Maine Conservation Corps recruited and trained 769 community volunteers, supported nine veterans among their members, constructed 12 miles of new trail, renovated another 186 miles, including 697 bridges, 950 stone steps and 4066 feet of bog bridges.

Twenty REAL School AmeriCorps members work to engage 115 low-income, at-risk 7-12 grade students from 10 southern Maine towns in active, ongoing service-learning projects at three school sites. REAL School students learn best through tasks that are authentic and make a tangible impact in the community. AmeriCorps members are ideal partners to engage hard-to-reach students in need of direction and role models. Given the intense, multi-faceted needs of REAL School students, a strong and resilient volunteer force is required. AmeriCorps members are the only ones who have ever been able to make a significant impact at the school due to their deep commitment to national service and the strong network of support they have. REAL School delivers academic curricula through service-learning projects of all types. AmeriCorps members are the primary facilitators of projects that are both helpful to the communities served and meaningful and engaging to REAL School students. These projects are designed to address real issues in surrounding communities including environmental issues and issues of poverty and access in Southern Maine.

AmeriCorps VISTA

The Maine AmeriCorps VISTA Project offers members a variety of opportunities to fight poverty in positions that build capacity and sustainability in local organizations. This 34-member state-wide project is sponsored by the Maine Commission for Community Service. Over the past year, members recruited 221 volunteers that gave 33,245 hours of service and raised \$266,184 in cash resources for local non-profit organizations. The VISTA member serving at Pine Tree Legal Services in Portland, focused on increasing the agency's capacity to address legal needs of Maine veterans and their families in need. This past year, 20 attorneys and advocates were trained to provide civil legal assistance to veterans through training organized by VISTA member Daniel Dube. He also helped establish a Veterans Law Section within the Maine State Bar Association with a membership that includes 33 attorneys. To sustain this training program, VISTA member partnered with the Maine State Bar Association to establish a Veterans Law Section and provide Continuing Legal Education (CLE) on veterans' issues. Daniel's ground work translated into \$20,850 of donated legal services to Veterans and their families.

Phaeng Southisombath, an AmeriCorps VISTA serving as volunteer coordinator at Community Financial Literacy in Portland, recruited more than 400 volunteers. These volunteers conducted financial workshops to the immigrant, refugee, and asylee communities in Androscoggin and Cumberland counties. The immigrants and refugees represented more than 21 different countries. Southisombath recruited three marketing volunteers that enhanced CFL's grant database and research capability, and he also established an annual fundraiser that attracted more than 100 donors. CFL's overall mission is to empower refugee and immigrant communities by providing them with financial skills for a better future. Over the past several years, VISTA members have helped CFL reach more than 1,600 individuals through financial workshops. More than 1,700 individuals and families received financial counseling.

AmeriCorps NCCC

An AmeriCorps NCCC team served at the Wells Reserve, a National Estuarine Research Reserve in Wells, Maine, which is responsible for the upkeep and improvement of the farm buildings, campus grounds, the trails, boardwalks, the Maine Coastal Ecology Center, the Forest Learning Shelter, and the Alheim Commons. The Wells Reserve operates programs in coastal research and monitoring, environmental learning and decision-maker training, and land and water resource management. Members supported the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve mission by performing several tasks. Corps members removed invasive species, transplanted bushes and trees to create a visual buffer along entryway road, and rototilled a large Master Gardiner garden. The team also supported the efforts of the rabbit habitat restoration project with the Wells Reserve and the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Center. During their stay in Maine the team assisted with the marking and maintenance of trails throughout the area and repaired and painted many of Wells Reserve's historic buildings and structures. The team also participated in the United Way Day of Caring, where the team led volunteers to help build a playground.

AmeriCorps NCCC Cont'd

The mission of the University of Maine 4-H Camp and Learning Center at Bryant Pond is to educate and inspire people of all ages and backgrounds toward social, economic, and environmental sustainability and conservation through affordable, experiential learning. AmeriCorps NCCC team members assisted with gardening, trail improvement, and cabin and housing improvements. The team built raised beds that will serve the "Harvest for Hunger" program which serves families in need with fresh garden produce; complete three cabins that were built by the Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School's Tech School by painting, staining, sealing the cabins; and contribute to maintaining and improving trails, keeping them presentable, accessible and safe. The work the team accomplished will lead to enhanced capacity, safety, and aesthetics at the camp. Finalizing the building and finishing of cabins will lead to increased capacity for residential programming in the future. With safe and well-maintained trails, a clean lake, and a bountiful garden, 4-H will be able to provide the community and youth visitors with many memorable natural experiences.

Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

The Penquis Community Action Foster Grandparent program serves children and youth in 14-counties across Maine. The children served by Foster Grandparents in elementary schools are coming to school with delayed social and cognitive skills including low proficiency in reading and math. Foster Grandparents build meaningful relationships with at-risk children enabling them to build confidence, self-esteem, and improved social skills. This relationship, along with regular tutoring, acceptance, and positive reinforcement by the Foster Grandparents, enable students to reach their academic goals. Over the past year, 475 elementary students received individual support in academic areas from 58 Foster Grandparents that led to improved participation in reading, math, and other assignments. One hundred percent of teachers surveyed reported that all of the students working with Foster Grandparents demonstrated improved academic skills. This program is a blessing for children and older people, wrote Juanita Davis, Foster Grand Parent in East Machias, "I feel younger in body as well as at heart. Being a Foster Grandparent is a very important part of my life. What would I do without it"?

Senior Corps RSVP

Maine ranks first in New England in terms of child and senior food insecurity and second in New England in terms of overall food insecurity. The total population that is food insecure in Knox, Lincoln, and Waldo counties totals 16,460 people of which 5,090 are children. Local organizations that provide food assistance depend heavily on volunteers for food collection, preparation, and distribution. Over the past year, the Penquis Community Action RSVP Program in Bangor engaged 90 RSVP volunteers who donated 12,000 hours of service to address food security issues. RSVP volunteers provided 1,086 food insecure individuals with food through Meals on Wheels, food pantries, and other programs. All RSVP volunteers reported increase food security and nutrition for beneficiaries. The 175 Penquis RSVP volunteers also provided 18,259 hours of service in the areas of independent living for seniors and school readiness for children.

Senior Corps Senior Companion Program

Maine is the fifth oldest state in the nation. More than 50 percent of Maine's elders live in rural areas, twice the national average. Rural elders face unique challenges including lack of transportation and limited availability of services. Rural elders and elders who live alone need support to maintain or regain their independence. Connectedness is a necessary component of successful aging, and isolation is one risk factor for poor health. Elders who live alone often need greater community support, and are less satisfied with life and more depressed. Elders who live alone have a strong need for companionship and support. To address this issue, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Senior Companion Program engages 113 Senior Companion volunteers in providing companionship to 424 home bound elderly clients over the past year. Eighty percent of volunteer station supervisors reported that they observed a reduction in loneliness or isolation of their clients as a result of the Senior Companion Program. One Senior Companion shared that on some days she gets to sit and listen to her 105 year old client play her piano. "Treasured gifts come in all types of packages."

Volunteer Generation Fund

United Way of York (UWYC) expanded volunteer center activities to increase the number of youth and young adults and individuals 55 and older in addressing local needs related to energy conservation or consumption, increased high school graduation rates, and pursuit of post-secondary education. During 2014, 1,918 youth/young adults and 55+ volunteers served 54,489 hours and more than 90 agencies participated in trainings or received technical assistance on effective volunteer management practices. UWYC and the Maine Commission for Community Service implemented the Service Enterprise Initiative which serves to strengthen the capacity of nonprofits to fundamentally leverage volunteers and their skills to address community needs. Six nonprofits completed the self-assessment tool, required training sessions, and developed action plans for national certification. Two nonprofits are certified Service Enterprises and others are working on certification. Research demonstrates Service Enterprises outperform peer organizations on all measures of organizational capacity thereby allowing these nonprofits to more effectively address community needs and operate at almost half the median budget.