

## State Commission

Serve Alaska currently manages a portfolio of three AmeriCorps State programs with 43 AmeriCorps members serving in both urban and remote rural villages across Alaska addressing critical needs in the areas of education, healthy futures, economic opportunity, and capacity building. In the 2014-2015 program year, the remote rural Native Survivors program started with just two youth and is now up to 53. The group's focus is stopping suicide amongst the village residents. Another program locally promotes environmental education by implementing energy conservation and encouraging recycling and waste reduction by fostering community involvement in area-wide cleanup efforts. Additional Serve Alaska programs included a first time Volunteer Summit attended by 50 nonprofits. The attendees were introduced to the First Lady Donna Walker and reviewed the landscape of nonprofits in Alaska. Serve Alaska will follow up with additional meetings in 2016. Alaska moved to #8 in the Volunteering and Civic Life in America rankings. Another first for Serve Alaska was the training of 27 AmeriCorps members in a FEMA class on how to set up and manage a Volunteer Reception Center in case of disasters, part of Serve Alaska's goal to build a cadre of trained AmeriCorps members ready to respond to disasters.

## AmeriCorps State

The Rural Alaska Village Environmental Network (RAVEN) Youth Development AmeriCorps program serves rural Alaskan communities by promoting environmental education, implementing energy conservation, encouraging recycling and waste reduction, and fostering community involvement in area-wide clean-up efforts. RAVEN AmeriCorps members improve environmental conditions across rural Alaska. Locally-recruited RAVEN AmeriCorps members partner with tribal environmental programs, faith-based organizations, community schools, and tribal and city councils. Members recruit volunteers in their communities, lead community-wide clean-ups; start and improve recycling and waste reduction programs; design and implement solid waste management plans, provide community education on household hazardous wastes; collect used oil for re-use; remove lead/acid batteries, abandoned vehicles and other hazardous wastes from their villages; and improve community waste disposal and removal systems. Members also host healthy activities for youth. They organize youth events, provide volunteer opportunities for youth, and serve as role models as they address local environmental issues. The RAVEN AmeriCorps program is generously funded by the Alaska State Community Service Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the State of Alaska's Department of Health and Human Services. In 2015, 20 RAVEN AmeriCorps members diverted 42,000 pounds of materials either through recycling or backhaul from rural dumpsites; managed 17 grants through a partnership with the Yukon Kuskokwim Coastal Association to address solid waste management priorities in several Yukon Kuskokwim regional communities, and improved 2,305 acres in rural communities.

## AmeriCorps National

Sarah, a Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest AmeriCorps member, served with the Sitka Conservation Society for the past year. Together with community partners, she developed and coordinated programs and activities to teach youth and young adults about their surrounding ecosystem and connect them to it. While she served in Sitka, Sarah taught about growing local food and how to process, preserve, and cook it – important skills for living in harmony with the land and building community. One of her capacity-building projects included the creation of a binder with instructions on how to prepare a garden bed and use local food resources. Her project expanded upon the 4-H Wild Edibles Foods program; she added new recipes and included gardening tips and how to prepare a garden for winter. The guide is specific to Sitka's local habitat and food supply. Besides directions for processing, preserving, and cooking local foods, this AmeriCorps member included information about the place-based importance of the resources. The recipes aim to appeal to Sitka's youth and can be easily taught to 4-H members.

## AmeriCorps VISTA

In 1999, the public library shut its doors in Kake, a small town on Kupreanof Island. Though it still ostensibly served as the high school's library, the lack of a librarian reduced it to little more than a dusty book warehouse. After sixteen years of watching the library fall further into disarray, the community of Kake partnered with the Alaska State Library's "Libraries Build Communities" AmeriCorps VISTA project. In February, VISTA Lindsey Bennet arrived in Kake and began coordination of the renovation of the abandoned library. She assisted with recruiting volunteers and facilitation of Library Board meetings, drafted library policies, and wrote a Public Library Assistance grant. On June 8, 2015, the renovated library opened to the public for the first time since its closure sixteen years ago. Community members now come to read, study, and use the Internet for free, which is especially important in a place where staying connected to the rest of the world can be a challenge. With the library now open, Lindsey has shifted her focus to creating community programs at the library. She's kicked off the year with a summer reading program, an early literacy reading group, and resume writing workshops.

Christy McDonald is the first AmeriCorps VISTA to serve with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, the largest tribal health organization in the country. The goal of her program is to improve rural resident respiratory health by improving indoor air quality. Rural Alaska is in the midst of a well-documented housing crisis. Overcrowding and deteriorating housing stock has led to pneumonia, and hospitalization rates for rural infants have climbed seven times higher than the national average. Christy is taking action to fight poverty by improving children's health outcomes through education. After visiting a handful of rural communities this summer, Christy collaborated with the National Tribal Water Center to create a children's book and accompanying coloring book that teaches prevention techniques and encourages rural kids to wash their hands, reducing disease. Christy also organized an educational video, shot in the Yup'ik language, to educate residents on proper ventilation to improve indoor air quality. These new resources are being distributed and shared widely to improve health outcomes for children in rural villages.

## AmeriCorps NCCC

An AmeriCorps NCCC team partnered with the Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment (WISE) to complete a variety of environmental restoration projects with numerous partners, including the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Copper River Watershed project. WISE's mission is to provide science and environmental education for all ages, resources for learning, and support for scientific research. They have been in operation for 12 years. They provide a variety of programs year round, including school-based outdoor learning days, summer camps and hikes, intensive programs for teenagers, science lecture series, hiring of research interns, and planning family recreational and educational days. While in Alaska, the AmeriCorps NCCC team removed more than 13,500 pounds of exotic vegetation, cleared more than 70 feet of streambeds, planted more than 1,800 native plants, and constructed two miles of new hiking trails. The team provided much-needed support to help protect and restore the environment in the Valdez-Cordova area.

## Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

Rural Community Action Program's Svyion Elder Mentor/Foster Grandparent Program places volunteers in communities large and small. In Anchorage, Manuel has been an Elder Mentor at the McLaughlin Youth Detention Center for more than 20 years. He mentors young men, teaches them how to play chess, and how much life and chess have in common. They learn that it's better to think before acting, and that there are consequences – both good and bad – of each action. According to his supervisor, Manuel's companionship has a powerful impact on the youth. He said "I know, when they leave here, they have learned some important lessons that will help them make better decisions." About 300 miles away, in New Stuyahok, ten Elder Mentors brings wisdom, culture, and life skills into the classroom. The Elders have helped their school raise the graduation rate by 21 percent and reduced the dropout rate from 8.2 to 1.6 percent. When the New Stuyahok principal recently transferred to Tuluksak, one of the state's poorest performing schools, one of her first acts was to request Foster Grandparents. Fourteen Elder Mentors have already signed up.

## Senior Corps RSVP

As the RSVP sponsor for the Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna service area, the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association RSVP program is providing support to 290 RSVP volunteers serving at more than 20 volunteer stations. Primary volunteer activities are focused on providing intergenerational opportunities for youth including culture camps and mentoring, assisting Elders in accessing health care and independent living services, serving veterans, and providing disaster preparedness and response support to local non-profits. The RSVP program promotes the ethic of service while utilizing the acquired skills of the Elder volunteers. The volunteers benefit from feeling connected while serving others and addressing community needs.

## Senior Corps Senior Companion Program

In September 2015, the Kenaitze Indian tribe was awarded a Senior Companion Program grant to support 40 Tribal Elders with an estimated 45 Senior Companions in partnership with the Kenai and Soldotna Senior Centers. The Senior Companion Program funding enables the tribe to expand support to homebound elders in the community who currently receive limited services and connection with the community. The Senior Companions assist their clients to age in place while participating in traditional activities such as subsistence dip net fishing, berry picking, and community gatherings. The Senior Companions are focusing on community-wide connectivity and re-engaging Elders within the larger framework of Dena'ina cultural traditions.

## Social Innovation Fund

The John A. Hartford Foundation Social Innovation Fund programs, including Mat-Su Health Services and Kodiak Area Native Association, are working towards improving the mental health of individuals living in rural communities and have served nearly 400 residents as of September 2015.