

# AmeriCorps Quarterly



Volume 2  
Issue 2

## AmeriCorps in Montana By The Numbers 2007-2008

### AmeriCorps State and National

- 777 members
- 7 sites

### AmeriCorps VISTA

- 106 members
- 44 sites

### AmeriCorps program funding

- \$3,979,191

### Segal Educational Awards

- \$1,881,732

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### Contributors

Rebecca Harbage

Jordan Lyons

Tina Maples

Silke Popp

Please send your photos,  
articles, excerpts and ideas,  
and opinions to:  
[spopp@mtlsa.org](mailto:spopp@mtlsa.org)

## Meet the latest ACMAC Council

The AmeriCorps Member Advisory Council met in February at Canyon Ferry Lake to welcome members and get the ball rolling on a new AmeriCorps year.



From right to left: Heather Haas, Silke Popp, Jack Hughes, Jordon Lyons, Rebecca Harbage, Ebony Carter, Ashley Stevick, Tina Maples. Not pictured are Emily Clark, Amanda Megyesi, and Julie Stevens.

## Higher Education and Community Service: ALIVE in Montana

By Jordan Lyons

There are many reasons Montana is the last best place for community service. Of course, mountains, rivers, lakes, and wildlife are among those. But AmeriCorps members in Montana also have access to unique programs, such as Academic Learning Integrated with Volunteer Experience (ALIVE).

ALIVE is a partnership of the Corporation for National and Community Service and the University of Montana's Office of Civic Engagement. It allows AmeriCorps members to enroll for graduate school credits during their service.

The credits can be earned through internships, service learning, and the university's online non-profit administration program. Members can even earn a credit for the Community Building Institute!

See **ALIVE** (continued on page 4)

## Montana Events Corner

*-A sampling of why we serve in Big Sky Country-*

- Starting April 26th through November - The Helena Farmer's Market is a great resource for us low-incomers and fantastic place to find fresh produce. Between Neil and West Placer on Fuller Avenue.
- May 5 through the Summer - Art Walk in Billings. This free event is a great way to see Montana artists and pick up a few refreshments along the way. <http://artwalkbillings.com/>
- May 3 through the Summer - Missoula Saturday Market. Missoula closes a downtown street for a Saturday craft and food market run by local artisans. <http://missoulasaturdaymarket.org>
- May 10-17 - International Wildlife Film Festival in Missoula. This event brings hundreds of the leading filmmakers, broadcasters, and film industry people to Missoula to celebrate and showcase the best in wildlife and natural history programming worldwide. <http://www.wildlifefilms.org/>
- May 15-18 - Miles City Bucking Horse Sale. The population of Miles city nearly doubles as it attracts visitors from throughout Montana, the United States and abroad for a 3-day "cowboy Mardi Gras." Don't miss it!
- May 23-26 - McCone County Wagon Train. Be a pioneer for a day (and night). Camp with a historical wagon train under the stars and experience life on the frontier. Wolf Point, MT 653-3555.
- May 25 through the Summer - Alive @ Five. A different downtown Helena block hosts the premier summer event. There's everything from Free live music, food, horse-drawn carriage rides and Free Trolley service downtown. <http://www.downtownhelena.com/>



Casey Riffe/Gazette Staff - Reprinted with permission of The Billings Gazette

### Project Homeless Connect

Miranda Dye, left, a VISTA with the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness in Billings, organized the second annual one-stop event that united 40 service providers and 120 volunteers to serve more than 350 people. Pictured right is Silke Popp, representing Montana Legal Services at the event.



Shan Cousrouf

## Global Youth Service Day

By Tina Maples

Mark your calendars! From April 25<sup>th</sup> through 28<sup>th</sup> millions of youth from around the world will participate in the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Global Youth Service day. There is bound to be an event going on in your town- so read on to learn more or go to [www.gysd.net](http://www.gysd.net) and get involved!

Global Youth Service Day is the **largest** service event in the **world**. It was developed to mobilize youth in order to address the needs of their communities, support other youth on a life-long path of service, and educate the public about the importance of service.

You may be asking- what actually goes on during the Global Youth Service Day weekend? The answer, my friends, is EVERYTHING and ANYTHING you can imagine! According to the GYSD website, "Projects are organized by youth, along with communities, schools, and local organizations. Projects cover issues including literacy, the environment, healthcare, nutrition, and poverty."

We are very fortunate to have many participating communities and organizations here in Montana and the types of service events offered are endless. The following are descriptions and contact information for just a few of the many GYSD projects going on across the state:

See **GYSD** (*continued on page 5*)

## AmeriCorps Week 101

AmeriCorps week is soon upon us, and here is the low-down on where to go, what to do, and how to do it.

**What:** A week-long recruitment and recognition event designed to bring more Americans into service, salute AmeriCorps members and alums for their powerful impact, and thank the community partners who make AmeriCorps possible.

**When:** May 11-18 2008

**Where:** The event is nation-wide, but is meant to engage your local community in learning about and participating in AmeriCorps. For more information, point your browser to:  
[www.americorpsweek.gov](http://www.americorpsweek.gov)

**Projects:** Members and alumni could make presentations to students or community groups. Grantees could stage an open house, service project, or volunteer fair. Local officials and leaders could be asked to serve as an AmeriCorps member for a day.

## What AmeriCorps Means to Us

By Rebecca Harbage

"It's national service."

"It's working to build capacity, to build sustainability."

"It's hard work in challenging conditions."

"It's throwing yourself into a new community and learning how to become a part of it."

"It's better than working a meaningless job for a year."

"It's fighting poverty while experiencing it first-hand."

"It's a government-funded volunteer service."

That's how most of my friends start to explain the program they have been working with for the past few months. As surprising as it is to AmeriCorps members, only a small handful of Americans have heard of the program. Even fewer actually understand what it is. Too often, we fall back on the better known cousin of AmeriCorps to explain, "It's like Peace Corps, but... not." Sound familiar? This usually gets a nod of recognition and some words of encouragement for doing such a selfless program. The only problem is that AmeriCorps isn't the Peace Corps.

The thing is, it's tough to explain exactly what AmeriCorps is and does without rambling on about this aspect or that. It's even confusing for those of us participating in the program. For example, you might hear an AmeriCorps member say he is a VISTA (Volunteer in Service to America) or explain that she is with the MCC (Montana Conservation Corps). Then again, you may meet someone who mentions AmeriCorps State or talks about doing a stint with NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps). All of these are part of the broad AmeriCorps program, but all have very different roles in the community.

Now I'm going to explain exactly what each different AmeriCorps program is and does. Just kidding, you can go online to [www.americorps.org](http://www.americorps.org) to read all the details. While you're there, you should also check out the statistics: Did you know that in 2007-2008, there were 1,163 AmeriCorps positions in Montana? I recently fielded questions from my brother, a college freshman in Pennsylvania, who is amazed that so many people serve with AmeriCorps.

His amazement comes from the fact that he, like many of us, didn't even know AmeriCorps existed until it ran into him. Most of my friends in AmeriCorps are doing it because they know somebody who did it. So how can we tell the country about AmeriCorps? Easy, let's make sure we are at least the friend of a friend of every American. The population of the United States is just under 304 million and there are somewhere around 75,000 AmeriCorps members, you do the math.

See **AmeriCorps** (continued on page 4)



**Spring Fever** Christopher Freeman, of Missoula Urban Demonstration, works on a soil mixing demonstration during a garden workshop series organized by MT Campus Compact member Meagen Rathjen of the Montana Food Bank Network.



**ALIVE** *(continued from page 1)*

The credits can be applied toward a master's in interdisciplinary studies, or earned as non-degree credits, up to nine of which can be transferred to another graduate program.

I enrolled in an internship this spring (which requires a monthly journal and a final reflective essay), an online grant-writing course for the summer, and I completed the reflective assignment for the Community Building Institute.

My participation has become a great asset: first of all, my position has required a lot of research, particularly about fund-raising, and I don't know where I would be without access to the university library. Because the program could contribute to service-related skills, your work site may be willing to assist with tuition, ask your supervisor!

ALIVE also relieves the quarter-life crisis I had when I began my service: by becoming a VISTA, I was putting off graduate school for another year, but by opting for the education award, I felt I was obligating myself to more school. ALIVE lets me serve and get started on a graduate degree (I plan on transferring my credits toward an MPA).

Most importantly, reading the course materials and writing about my experiences has allowed me deeper reflection on my service, and I believe it makes me a better, more conscientious VISTA and citizen.

I want to point out that there are a few administrative hoops to jump through on the way to enrollment. Residency is tricky. Admissions initially classified me as out-of-state, though I have lived and worked in Montana since 2006. And although there is a presidential loan that can be paid from an education award at the end of a service year, that doesn't mean payment is deferred.

While it probably won't take more than a week to be reimbursed, you will need to front the money temporarily, so don't enroll for classes that will cost more tuition than you have savings or credit. Also, the Community Building Institute and the non-profit program are conducted through the office of continuing education, so payment in-full will be required up-front, and the university offers no loan or other financial assistance.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that there are few of us ALIVE participants, so some administrators may not know what to do with us, or even be familiar with the program. The key to the whole process is tenacity. Keep calling until you speak with someone who knows what to do. **AND BE PATIENT!**

Despite minor hurdles and hiccups in the process, ALIVE is a great opportunity, and a rewarding experience. For more information, contact Jill Beauchesne in the Office of Civic Engagement, or visit the program's website: <http://www.dhc.umt.edu/oce/alive.html>

*Jordan Lyons is an MLSA VISTA serving at the Montana Justice Foundation in Missoula.*

**AmeriCorps** *(continued from page 3)*

Seriously though, the best way to educate people about this program to which you are committing so much time and energy, is just to get out there and tell them. We all know that AmeriCorps is an amazing opportunity to do work that really impacts American communities at a basic level. It's not some group of Washington policy-makers blindly trying to guess what would be good for America. We see the effects of our work, our neighbors see the effects, and our communities see the effects.

The only way to ensure that everyone we meet gets a good impression of AmeriCorps, is by being positive and enthusiastic ourselves. Speaking for all of ACMAC, we understand that AmeriCorps work can be frustrating. It's not meant to be easy, but it should be fulfilling and maybe even fun. We also understand that many of you probably have some great ideas about how to reform the program. Tell us, please! We exist to make AmeriCorps better for you (and, well, for ourselves at the same time).

**GYSD** (continued from page 2)

**Billings: Opportunity Fiesta** - Volunteers from around Billings will logistically support an event that provides information on jobs, credit, education, home ownership and health care to local residents. [3212 1st Ave S, Billings, MT](#)

**Bozeman: Poop for Paws** - Volunteers from around Bozeman will come together to clean up doggie-poop in local trails and parks. [600 Bridger Dr. Bozeman, MT 59715](#)

**Kalispell: Earth Day Clean-Up** - MCC and partners will host a city-wide clean up, Garbage Art show, poster contest and volunteer appreciation barbeque. [15 Depot Park #1, Kalispell, MT 59901](#)

**Helena: Activity Variety** - Volunteers will meet at Carroll College and break up into service projects that will include landscaping and clean up at the Helena Indian Alliance, trail work with the Prickly Pear Land Trust, and help with the 'Trash for Trees' recycling event. The day will end with a bonfire and concert. [1601 N. Benton Ave. Helena, MT 59625](#)

**Livingston: Park High Food Drive** - Park High School students in Livingston are participating in a school-wide food drive. Donations will be given to the local food pantry. [102 View Vista Drive. Livingston, MT 59047](#)

**Missoula: Randolph-Moon Homestead**- Sentential High School students, friends, and other community members plan to clean, restore and prepare homestead for the spring. [1515 Spurlock Road, Missoula, MT 59802](#)

**Sand Coulee: Minerpark/Trail Clean-Up**- Students will be cleaning up the trail that runs by the school and cleaning the park. [693 Stockett Rd. Sand Coulee, MT 59472](#)

The Global Youth Service Day website also offers some project ideas for communities that have not yet organized an event. Some great service ideas include helping to cook and/or serve a meal at a homeless shelter, donating produce to food shelf, visiting a nursing home, offering to pick up groceries for a senior citizen, painting a mural over graffiti, organizing a canned goods drive in conjunction with a school hand and donating the goods to a food shelf, cleaning up a vacant lot, or planting a garden or tree.

Not only is youth service helpful to communities across Montana, encouraging youth to participate in a service event in their community helps to spread awareness the mission of the AmeriCorps. Wouldn't it be nice if ever one grew up with the desire to commit themselves to a lifetime of service? Do your part to help spread this idea to the youth of our great state during Global Youth Service Day!

## AmeriCorps Resources

One of the central goals discussed at the last ACMAC meeting was the need for improved inter-AmeriCorps communication and networking. ACMAC's Ambassador committee is working to address this issue by compiling a contact directory that can be disseminated to all AmeriCorps members regardless of their specialty or sponsor.

One of the ideas discussed was using a Facebook group. Two groups currently exist, a Montana AmeriCorps groups and one specifically for Montana VISTAs. We are still looking for better ways to engage our fellow AmeriCorps members in discussion and networking, so if you have any suggestions, please send them to [spopp@mtlsa.org](mailto:spopp@mtlsa.org).

If you are on Facebook, please join the AmeriCorps group and start talking! Also, feel free to send in or post any other suggestions for all-member gatherings, networking opportunities, or training events. Life as an AmeriCorps member isn't always easy, so the more we can learn from each other and lend a hand when it's needed, the more we gain from our service experience.