

National Service: Transforming Lives and Communities



Everyday across America, citizens are finding solutions to local problems through national and community service. From increasing high school graduation rates and rebuilding communities struck by natural disasters to mentoring at-risk youth and helping veterans adjust to civilian life, these everyday heroes are strengthening their communities as they transform their own lives.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a federal agency, engages more than five million Americans in solving community problems each year through its AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America programs. These participants and volunteers serve through more than 70,000 community organizations - national nonprofits such as Habitat for Humanity and Boys and Girls Clubs, as well as thousands of small faith-based and community groups.

National service participants are as diverse as America - ranging from grade school students to retirees, living in rural areas and urban centers, coming from all different social and economic backgrounds. But all share a common goal: making a difference in their communities. Below are just a few examples of the many ways national service is transforming lives and communities across our nation.

Boosting Childhood Literacy Rates: The Minnesota Reading Corps engages trained AmeriCorps members to serve as reading tutors for struggling learners. Today there are 675 AmeriCorps members working with 18,000 children, age three to eight, in 286 sites across the state. Statewide, 74% of Reading Corps participants, all of whom were at significant risk for failure, passed Minnesota assessment tests, compared to the overall 78% pass rate for all Minnesota students. Given that 100% of Reading Corps participants were not reading at grade level, this pass rate demonstrates significant progress for children who might otherwise be left behind.

Preserving Natural Resources: Learn and Serve America students in Beatrice, Nebraska are helping conserve and protect the Big Blue River through water testing, bank cleanup, and bank restoration. Through service-learning classes, students gain academic and civic skills while they increase the economic and environmental sustainability of the Big Blue.

Fighting Fraud Against Seniors: Every year, seniors lose billions of dollars to scams and fraudulent telemarketers. To combat this, RSVP volunteers gather at the WISE Senior Fraud Prevention Call Center in Santa Monica, California, to call older adults who are at risk of elder fraud abuse to warn them about the many types of fraud, how to protect themselves, and how to report it. Last year, Fraud Fighters contacted more than 92,000 consumers.

Providing Financial Stability: Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellows provide pro bono legal assistance to thousands of low-income individuals, protecting the health and well-being of children, helping veterans gain basic benefits, and helping families maintain their homes by negotiating or obtaining stays of foreclosure and identifying predatory lending abuses.

Saving Energy through Weatherization: Through the Warm Hearts Warm Homes program, Montana Conservation Corps AmeriCorps members have weatherized more than 550 homes across the state by repairing, replacing and installing windows, doors, roofing, ducts, insulation, weather-stripping, lights, HVAC systems, energy-efficient appliances, water heaters, and photovoltaic panels.

Teaching in High-Need Schools: Teach For America engages more than 6,500 AmeriCorps members as full-time classroom teachers in low-income communities, where they help increase student achievement in high need school districts. Similarly, the University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education program engages 247 AmeriCorps members to serve as full-time teachers at 163 under-resourced elementary and secondary parochial schools across the United States.

Building Homes and Communities: AmeriCorps members are helping thousands of Americans achieve their dream of home ownership by serving with Habitat for Humanity, where they construct and rebuild homes, recruit and manage volunteers, and advise homeowners on settlement procedures and home repair. Since 1994, Habitat for Humanity AmeriCorps members have performed more than 5,000,000 hours of service, engaged more than one million volunteers, and helped build more than 10,000 Habitat homes throughout the United States.

Helping Displaced Workers Learn New Job Skills: AmeriCorps VISTA members helped the Fond du Lac Public Library (WI) create the Opportunity Center, providing library services to displaced workers and teaching Job Smart U classes to help individuals gain job search skills such as resume writing, interviewing, computer skills, and financial literacy.

Supporting People with Disabilities: A Nebraska Munroe-Meyer Institute AmeriCorps member with a disability created Sportsmen Assisting Nebraska's Disabled Sportsmen (SANDS), which pairs disabled and able-bodied hunters and anglers. Now in its sixth year, the organization has become national in scope and serves more than 500 people.

Advocating for Foster Youth: Responding to the growing methamphetamine crisis and its destructive impact on families, Colbert County (AL) RSVP volunteer Karen Snead organized the local affiliate of Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), a national program. She put together a Board of Directors, applied for nonprofit status, filed and received incorporation papers, trained other volunteers, and donated more than 3,300 hours to the program. Twenty-four foster children are now receiving mentoring and representation in the Colbert County Court system, which saves nearly \$700,000 annually in taxpayer dollars. While volunteer hours and tax savings are impressive measuring tools, the biggest impact is immeasurable—the potential of these children's future, and the children who come after them.

Bringing Fresh Produce to Food Banks: After more than three decades in the food distribution business, Gary Maxworthy signed up as an AmeriCorps VISTA at the San Francisco Food Bank. Gary quickly recognized two problems - that food banks rarely distribute fresh produce because of logistical concerns, and that farmers and distributors regularly destroy millions of pounds of perfectly healthy produce because it doesn't meet market standards for appearance. So Gary created Farm to Family - a system to directly connect fruit and vegetable growers to food banks. Today that program distributes 80,000,000 pounds of produce to California's three million residents at risk of hunger.

Helping At-Risk Youth Succeed: The Young Men's Academy for Academic and Civic Development at MacArthur South in Miami-Dade County is an alternative public Service Learning Academy for young men with repeated noncompliant behaviors in their "home" school. The school's mission is to address the critical needs of this challenging student population and their community using service learning strategies. The young men travel to various community sites and design service projects tied to academic curriculum. Over the past eight years, sites have included a homeless center, assisted living facility, Head Start program, and a school for severely disabled children. The result is elevated grades, test scores, a sense of civic responsibility and improved attendance for students.

January 2011