

Brief Encounters, Lifelong Inspiration

AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associate Program



VISTA
Volunteers In Service To America



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Seeding

An Invitation From the Director of AmeriCorps VISTA



In June 1967, VISTA fielded the first cadre of Summer Associates. Numbering 2,063, they were college students serving in a special 10-week VISTA program during their summer break from school. In projects from California to Massachusetts, they tackled the root causes of poverty in some of the nation's poorest neighborhoods.

That summer tradition of service continues today. The VISTA Summer Associate program has evolved to invite Americans from all walks of life to “fight poverty with passion” in the same manner as year-long VISTAs.

The Summer Associate program offers a short-term opportunity to supplement a VISTA sponsor's anti-poverty activities with an infusion of ‘hands-on volunteers.’ It is a prime opportunity to introduce individuals to national service, perhaps leading to their participation in year-long programs later. That was true for a number of Associates who took part in this year's summer program and decided to enlist in VISTA for a full year.

Blending enthusiasm, idealism, and willingness to work hard, 1,348 Associates served from late May through August in 82 local projects in 28 states across the nation. Many Associates carried out their assignments along side year-long VISTAs, who acted as mentors and coordinators for the Summer Associates.

Some Associates were college students who came from distant campuses, but others were community residents. Katie Colonna, a young mother in Green River, Utah, and Derek Douglas, a rural organizer from Tennessee, served in their own neighborhoods. Ranging in age from 18 to 88, Associates assisted in places as diverse as rural Bertie County in northeast North Carolina, Stockbridge-Munsee Nation reservation in northeastern Wisconsin, San Joaquin Valley in California, metropolitan Miami, and post-Katrina New Orleans.

With only a few weeks to accomplish their goals, Associates got right to work, many in direct service roles. Dave Thomas was one of the Summer Associates who constructed single-family homes in New Orleans' Musician's Village. Bryan Olejasz, Samir Doshi, and 29 other Associates restored watersheds and increased awareness about environmental issues in eight Appalachian states. Holly Kalemeris maintained a database of computer and Internet installations in low-income households for One Economy's Winston Salem office. Ashley Polucci, a registered nurse, administered medications and provided first aid and health care at a camp for developmentally disabled adults and underserved children. Others Summer Associates, like Marie Soria, who spent the summer restructuring a literacy program, assisted in capacity building. They

developed new programs, recruited clients, raised funds, and designed public relations programs.

In this book, you will meet Emily Savetwith, who persuaded children to trade their candy for carrots in a summer food program at the Mohican Family Center in northeastern Wisconsin. You will likely empathize with Jessica Broder who left camp one day crying after a six-year-old boy begged her to take him with her. “It ripped my heart out to walk them back to the shelter where they were temporarily staying,” said Broder, who organized recreational activities for young residents of homeless shelters and transitional housing in New Jersey.

As part of the special initiative of the Corporation for National and Community Service in 2007, New Orleans welcomed 130 Summer Associates to involve more youth, who are still dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, in summer educational and recreational activities. “With schools shut down and many summer programs not fully restored since the hurricanes, many children lacked access to constructive options during the summer,” said Janet Pace, the Louisiana Serve Commission’s director of volunteer outreach. “Summer Associates engaged in over 28,500 hours of volunteering in programs to provide needed activities.”

Purposeful and educational, VISTA Summer Associate projects not only meet community needs year after year, they also provide invaluable experience for Associates. The Associates get an introduction to the plight of the poor and increase their sensitivity to poverty-related issues. Perhaps, Kathleen Schreiner, supervisor of Summer Associates at a camp for homeless children, said it best: “Our



hope is that Summer Associates will bring their point of view to their friends and neighbors when the discussion turns to the need for affordable housing, adequate child care for single moms, and the problems of the working poor.”

The enormous scale of achievements in our summer programs cannot be fully measured, but highlighted in this book are ten notable examples. The projects profiled illustrate the broad scope of VISTA summer programs across the country and the collaborative work of Summer Associates with organizations and communities to combat poverty in new and creative ways.

I invite you to read these stories and, perhaps, I can welcome you as a Summer Associate or project sponsor next year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jean Whaley".

Jean Whaley
Director, AmeriCorps VISTA



**Economic
Development
Corporation serving
Fresno County
Fresno, CA**

Summertime Collaboration Leads to More Helping Hands

Marie Soria cares about kids. That is why she recently obtained her teaching credential, hoping to become a teacher with her own classroom some day. It is also why she spent her summer serving as a Summer Associate to help build local programs to give children the literacy skills they need to succeed in school.

At the Fresno Covenant Foundation (renamed Reading and Beyond in December 2007), in Fresno County, California, Soria worked with local community members to restructure the Foundation's tutoring program and develop a preschool and English language program. Most of the program's students were either Latino or of Hmong descent and children of migrant farm workers. Forty percent of them speak English as their second language.

"When students receive literacy tutoring after school, they become stronger readers and writers and

◀ Summer Associates planned activities and raised funds to provide t-shirts for the 88 children attending the Fun in the Sun summer day camp at Westside Youth, Inc. in Mendota, CA.

thus become stronger members of the community,” Soria said. Time and again, studies have also indicated that education is one of the surest ways out of poverty, especially for young people.

“The Summer Associate program is very important for communities, especially in Fresno, where there is so much concentrated poverty,” Soria said. “The program enables and supports various individuals with different backgrounds to go out into the community and help people.”

More than 60 percent of the county’s total population resides in the neighboring cities of Fresno and Clovis. Yet, Fresno County’s rural areas, which support a \$4 billion agricultural industry and include thousands of migrant farm workers and their families, are critical to the region. Unfortunately, Fresno County residents also face a high rate of poverty within their communities. In 2000, 19.8 percent of the population was below the poverty line compared to 13.2 percent across the state.

Almost one quarter of families with children under age 18 live below the poverty line. That number jumps to almost one-third of families with children under age five.

Soria’s commitment to serving her native Fresno community grew as the summer continued, especially when she saw the impact her work made for the youth from disadvantaged circumstances. “Seeing impoverished students who wore the same clothes every day strengthened my convictions about the Summer Associate program and how important it really is.”

Soria was not alone in her summer efforts helping a local organization more effectively bring



Associates Emily Johnson, Cassandra Lloyd, and Marie Soria organize the educational materials and supplies in the resource room at Fresno Covenant Foundation.

low-income communities out of poverty. She was one of 51 VISTA Summer Associates, sponsored by the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) serving Fresno County, committed to this important work. Twenty-four of the Summer Associates served at the Fresno Covenant Foundation.

The EDC, a nonprofit organization that assists the county in designing and implementing economic and community development opportunities, was the local sponsoring agency for the VISTA Summer Associate program. In this role, EDC served as an

intermediary to support several local organizations' efforts to use Summer Associates to expand their efforts to change outcomes for their region's low-income community. In addition to Fresno Covenant Foundation, the EDC sponsored Summer Associates at six other host sites: Westside Youth; Stone Soup of Fresno; House of Hope; Fresno West Coalition for Economic Development; Westside Tule Enterprise Community; and Tree Fresno.

Summer Associates participated in diverse activities to help these community organizations fight local poverty, including increasing tutoring and mentoring resources, managing various summer activities and support services for children and families, supporting job training programs for incarcerated juveniles, developing a community computer center to provide small business support and computer training for local communities, and planning for future VISTA members' efforts.

Summer Associates ... participated in diverse activities to help ... community organizations fight local poverty, including increasing tutoring and mentoring resources.

In its inaugural year, the VISTA Summer Associate program at EDC "definitely made an impact in our community," according to Devon Jones, EDC's community development coordinator and manager of the EDC Summer Associate project. "I know for one host site in particular, Westside Youth, that without



the Summer Associate program, they would not have been able to have a summer program for the youth they serve in Mendota," said Jones.

Westside Youth, Inc., has operated in Mendota, California, the fourth poorest city in the state, for more than 30 years. Westside Youth started a summer day camp 11 years ago, but the camp was dropped three years ago due to reduced funding. Then EDC provided seven VISTA Summer Associates to meet the needs of 88 underserved children. Thanks to the hard work of Summer Associates, a summer program was quickly organized, offering ample outdoor activities, arts and craft projects, special presentations, and free bag lunches provided by the EDC.

Many Summer Associates in Fresno County were college students or high school graduates who either previously volunteered with their organization placement or had been thinking about volunteering for that organization. "For many," explained Jones, "the additional duties and levels of involvement in these organizations were new to them. Having these additional responsibilities was exciting."

Soria emphasized the many skills she gained through her experience building literacy programs. “I learned how to present information to an advisory committee, set up activities for brainstorming, write a synopsis or a report, and how to critique and write new curriculum.”

Another important lesson for the Summer Associates was the power of citizen engagement to help others. “I learned that people work well together as a team and when they are motivated and they know that their work means something—that is significant,” Soria said.

The EDC qualified its efforts to sponsor the VISTA Summer Associate program in Fresno County as a certain success. “The EDC is proud of its ability to offer AmeriCorps VISTA resources to community organizations,” said Jones. “We fully appreciate the value of what AmeriCorps can offer communities and wish to continue to make sure that AmeriCorps VISTA has a strong presence here.”

Soria could not agree more about the strong impact on children that will come from her work. In fact, after completing her Summer Associate assignment, she continued to volunteer at the Fresno Covenant Foundation. “It is a program I believe in

“The [Summer Associate] program enables and supports various individuals with different backgrounds to go out into the community and help people.”

Marie Soria
Summer Associate

tremendously,” said Soria, who is now inspired to spend more than just the summer helping her community in ways that are “both challenging and that have a positive domino effect on the community.”





Assets, Capital, Community, Education, Saving, and Success



ACCESS Miami Miami, FL

In 2007, Summer Associate Emilio Campos played an important role in helping Miami Mayor Manny Diaz expand his anti-poverty initiative to reach thousands of poor residents across the city. Assigned to ACCESS Miami (**A**ssets, **C**apital, **C**ommunity, **E**ducation, **S**aving, and **S**uccess), Campos updated new employment opportunities on the ACCESS Miami's job Web site and notified job seekers about the postings.

A comprehensive empowerment program to increase residents' access to employment, government services, and financial tools and education, ACCESS Miami aspires to equip the entire community with

◀ Summer Associate Emilio Campos posts new employment opportunities to accessmiamijobs.com and sends email blasts to the database of job seekers.

the wealth-building tools necessary for economic self-sufficiency. The program is one of several far-reaching anti-poverty strategies, initiated by Mayor Diaz when he took office in 2001, to improve the quality of life and family financial stability for Miami's residents.

Through ACCESS Miami, Campos and two other Associates linked thousands of city residents to workforce development and training opportunities. They coordinated crucial components to the new Web site that helped Miami residents find the appropriate resources to locate, improve, or upgrade their employability skills with the end goal of improving their self-sustainability.

Dorcas Perez, community partnerships manager for the city of Miami and VISTA supervisor, is exited about the contributions of Campos and others at ACCESS Miami. "Summer Associates assisted with the



ACCESS Miami (accessmiamijobs.com): Summer Associates researched and coordinated the input of key pages into a new Web site and managed a database element with collaborative partners to ensure proper reporting. They linked thousands of city residents with established programs provided by the government.



Financial Literacy: Summer Associates linked residents and the small business entrepreneur with federal, state, and local government programs and services, such as: Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, employment, microloans, home ownership seminars, and basic money management (opening a bank account, establishing credit, etc.).

Serving Together



Summer Associates join full-year VISTAs in creating a time capsule for posterity.

day-to-day operations of the organization's programs and worked directly with community members. Summer Associates also assisted with programmatic development and improvements; thus, increasing the overall capacity and infrastructure of an organization."

Perez is also enthusiastic about the importance the VISTA program can play in each Associate's life. "Not only do they gain understanding of the social disparities surrounding many American communities, but they are also a part of the overall improvements VISTA has made in America—helping one person, one family, one community at a time," said Perez.

"Not only do they gain understanding of the social disparities surrounding many American communities, but they are also a part of the overall improvements VISTA has made in America—helping one person, one family, one community at a time."

Dorcas Perez
VISTA Supervisor, City of Miami



28,500 Hours Devoted to 7,125 Youth in New Orleans

"In the aftermath of Katrina and Rita, I declared 2007 the Year of Service to rekindle citizen service in Louisiana and harness the desire to build stronger communities. Through initiatives like this one, we are reaching that goal and providing needed programs for thousands of children in New Orleans."

Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu
Louisiana

As the Gulf Coast continues its struggle to recover from the 2005 storms, Louisiana Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu's declaration affirms that all people of Louisiana—including the young people of New Orleans—and the quality of their lives are at the center of the state's revitalization.

◀ Associates Jessica MaNais and Diana Nuon conduct a sound check before the debut of "Shining Lights," Tulane University Upward Bound program's first-ever talent show.



**Louisiana Serve
Commission
Baton Rouge, LA**

More than half of the nonprofit organizations did not reopen after the storms. Those that are providing services to youth are inundated with children wanting to participate. Responding to the challenge in New Orleans, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor Louisiana Serve Commission mobilized 134 Summer Associates to engage the city's youth in productive activities from June to August 2007.

The Summer Associates Special Initiative placed Associates with 16 local agencies to help provide enrichment programs, academic tutoring, and recreational activities for 7,125 children and youth in the metropolitan region.

"With schools shut down and many summer programs not fully restored since the hurricanes, many children lacked access to constructive options during the summer," said Janet Pace, the Commission's director of volunteer outreach. "Summer Associates engaged in over 28,500 hours of volunteering in programs to provide needed activities."

Many programs consisted of summer camps that offered art, music, recreation, field trips, and academic activities. Summer Associates served alongside and supervised volunteers from church groups, colleges, community centers, Foster Grandparents, and workforce development agencies. Some Associates served as GED teachers for at-risk older youth and one group of Associates taught at a facility for young offenders on probation. A few Summer Associates assisted as lifeguards at two urban state parks, allowing some of the most underserved youth in those communities access to supervised swimming pools.

Associate Francesca Mucciaccio, a rising junior at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, served at the Dryades YMCA, in the heart of New Orleans. She teamed with a teacher to help fourth graders prepare for the Louisiana state math test and worked with another teacher in an enrichment program that emphasized relationship building.

"Although we spent time reading, drawing, and playing games, the most significant part of the project was one-on-one conversations about life and morals that the kids and I had," Mucciaccio said. "I hope to have sufficiently encouraged the kids to seek answers and personal discovery. I hope to have aided in the growth process of this particular New Orleans generation, which is vital to this city's recovery."

Associate Diana Nuon, an artist from Long Beach, California, assisted with a writing class and directed the arts program at Tulane University's Upward Bound, a six-week summer curriculum that helps high school students from low-income families prepare for college by increasing their academic and motivational skills.

The infusion of Summer Associates enabled many of the 16 agencies to serve more children and youth. Summer camps were extended by three weeks, student achievement was enhanced, and agencies developed better relationships with the children and families being served.

“Our VISTA team was the backbone of the summer program. They cared and treated each child with respect and love.”

A VISTA Supervisor

“My hope is that the students enjoy writing a bit more, and that some of them will feel compelled to share their writings to heal themselves and the people around them,” Nuon said.

The infusion of Summer Associates enabled many of the 16 agencies to serve more children and youth. Summer camps were extended by three weeks, student achievement was enhanced, and agencies developed better relationships with the children and families being served. As one of the sites noted, “Our VISTA team was the backbone of the summer program. They cared and treated each child with respect and love.”

Pace has seen the success of the Summer Associate project and those involved: “It is challenging and at times hard, but the rewards of making a tangible impact in the lives of children and youth, of providing a consistent adult presence in the lives of these children is worth the challenge.”

Seven Summer Associates have continued working in the recovery efforts and are responding to such challenges. One Associate is teaching; three others joined AmeriCorps programs in New Orleans; and three signed on with the Tulane University Office of Service Learning VISTA Project.



Associate Diana Nuon completes an arts activity at the Tulane University Upward Bound program.



HomeFront Lawrenceville, NJ

“We Encourage the Children to Laugh and Play”

Don't let their beaming smiles and luminous brown eyes fool you. When their fun-filled, summer day of sports, theater, music, arts, and crafts at Camp Good Times came to an end, their destination was not a safe, secure home, but more likely an emergency shelter or transitional housing.

“It ripped my heart out to walk them back to the shelter,” said Jessica Broder, a Summer Associate and part-time college student, who has served as a counselor at Camp Good Times for the past two summers. “These children deserve so much more,” said the future school teacher, “and I realized every day how happy I was to know that their days were full of fun and laughter.”

Hosted by HomeFront, central New Jersey's leading agency for helping homeless children and their families, Camp Good Times gives more than 85 children in crisis a safe place to learn new skills and share in a lot of fun during the summer.

◀ Big smiles at Camp Good Times for Associate Dave Borek and campers Shaquinn, Breanna, and Michael.

For homeless families, the time between the end of school and Labor Day can be especially difficult. “I think the camp makes a huge impact on the families,” Broder continued. “The parents or guardians are able to continue working and provide for their families, and they need not worry about child care for the entire summer, and they do not have to leave their children alone during the day.”

HomeFront has been around more than 16 years, providing emergency food and shelter to homeless families with infants and children and helping parents find employment and permanent housing in the Trenton, New Jersey, area. For the children, the nonprofit organization also offers after-school tutoring, recreational activities, an award-winning preschool program, and field trips.

“We have become the premiere source of emergency shelter for homeless families in Mercer County,” said Kathleen Schreiner, HomeFront’s Human Resources Director. “On any given night we shelter 350 women and children in our programs and facilities. We care for 40 first-time pregnant women a year at our Hutchet House program. We own 50 units of permanent, affordable housing with supportive services.”

More than 900 people experience homelessness on any given day in Mercer County, and almost 50 percent are children. In fact, Trenton, the state capital and seat of Mercer County, has the second highest rate of family homelessness in the nation. More than 3,000 men, women, and children a year receive services in the homeless system.

Camp Good Times has been around almost as long as HomeFront. In the late 1990s, the camp was

Associates Kelly Dowd and Jessica Broder



the project of full-time VISTA Fontella Cawley, who was hired after her term of service and is still camp director. “I think this illustrates how much AmeriCorps VISTA has meant to our organization over the years,” Schreiner said.

When HomeFront opened a family shelter in 2003, the agency expanded its summer recreational program to serve the 100 or more children whose mothers live in its facilities or attend its work readiness and educational classes. “We needed committed young adults who had some background

in camping, recreation, athletics, art and education to provide a quality program,” said Schreiner, who also doubles as HomeFront’s VISTA supervisor.

VISTA’s Summer Associate program was a natural fit. “In 2005, we had our first group of Summer Associates, and they have strengthened our camp through their commitment and leadership skills,” said Schreiner. This year’s cadre of Summer Associates, recruited from local colleges and beyond, tutored the children in reading and math, taught them computer skills, and took them on field trips to museums in New York, Philadelphia, and Camden. “They broadened the horizons of many children who have spent their entire lives in the city limits of Trenton.”

“We needed committed young adults who had some background in camping, recreation, athletics, art and education to provide a quality program.”

Kathleen Schreiner
VISTA Supervisor, HomeFront

Summer Associates also taught the children social skills. “We modeled the basics and taught them everyday lessons about respect for others and themselves, attitude, and manners, and that they too have the power to make a difference,” said Summer Associate Dave Borek, a recent graduate from Rider University, who is currently pursuing a master’s degree in clinical psychology and plans to work with at-risk adolescents.

Borek, who was in transition to attend another university for graduate school and did not have a home of his own this past summer, empathized with the young campers. “I bounced around from friends’ couches and bedroom floors. It was a frustrating and uncomfortable experience to not have a place I called my own,” he said. “I learned the importance of having simple things, like a bed of my own, and a stable living environment. It was my choice to not have a permanent home for the summer; however, these children do not have the luxury of choosing.”

Many Associates experience culture shock when they compare the heart-breaking stories of the campers with their middle-class upbringing. “They will not soon forget the effect of poverty and homelessness on the health and well-being of children,” declared Schreiner. “When they think of the homeless, they will no longer have an image of the mentally ill or addicted street person. Our Summer Associates will remember the small child moving from place to place, with all of his belongings in a black plastic bag.”

Schreiner’s hope is that Summer Associates “will bring this point of view to their friends and neighbors when the discussion turns to the need for affordable housing, adequate child care for single moms, and the problems of the working poor.”



**One Economy
Corporation
Winston-Salem, NC**

Distressed Households Get Wired and Go Digital

Summer 2007 was One Economy's first time participating in the Summer Associate program. A global nonprofit organization that uses technology to help low-income people improve their lives and enter the economic mainstream, the One Economy Corporation placed five Associates in its offices and partner organizations in North Carolina.

"The Summer Associate program has allowed us to extend our effort in the community—allowing low-income people to have access to the Internet, training youth to use technology effectively, and informing low-income people about One Economy's online resources," said Laurie Williams, volunteer support manager and VISTA supervisor at One Economy.

Holly Kalemeris, one of two Summer Associates at One Economy's Winston-Salem office, helped build the capacity of the national AT&T AccessAll program, a three-year effort launched in 2006 to provide

◀ Summer Associates train volunteers how to install computers for Charlotte Habitat for Humanity homeowners.

Organizing Materials



Associates Holly Kalemeris and Kristina Hanely and a volunteer organize training materials.

technology packages, including a computer and Internet access, to 50,000 low-income households across America. Both Associates assisted partner affiliates with program support, volunteer recruitment, program evaluation, and computer installation support.

“I learned a great deal about the business aspect of nonprofits by completing assignments such as creating an audit, documenting One Economy’s computer and Internet installations, and working with the corporation’s online database,” said Kalemeris.

One Economy formed a partnership with local Habitat for Humanity affiliates to equip households with technology packages. Two Associates served in the Charlotte Habitat for Humanity, implementing the AT&T AccessAll program. They recruited 20 community volunteers to connect 32 families to the Internet.

Another Associate served at the Bertie County Family Resource, working with the Digital Connectors (youth technology volunteers) and coordinating a Technology Jamboree. The center, located in a rural, isolated, low-income community in northeast North Carolina, formed a partnership with One Economy to transform its facility into a community technology hub where residents receive training and encouragement to enter the new digital economy. The Digital Connectors teach computer classes to residents, install computers, and assist patrons who need help while using the free computer lab.

The Summer Associates’ biggest challenge was being immersed in a new organization and new program very quickly and having to take on responsibilities immediately. They had a significant amount of work to accomplish in a short time. Williams said Summer Associates met this challenge and surpassed expectations. She plans to place more Summer Associates next year. “We had no idea they would be such a resource for our organization and very easy to identify and recruit. We were even able to place full-term AmeriCorps VISTAs from our Summer Associates serving this summer.”

Kalemeris is one of those VISTAs. She enjoyed her Summer Associate experience so much she decided to continue her service. “I would highly suggest the Summer Associate position to anyone who wishes to put their organizational and management talents to use. There truly is no better way to learn about the professional side of nonprofits to help alleviate poverty. One Economy is a wonderful program, and serving was a rewarding experience.”



Computer Literacy, Home Ownership Take Hold in Rural South Carolina



**Community
Development
Corporation of
Marlboro County
Bennettsville, SC**

Jeneen Blue, a 19-year-old mathematics major at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, has spent the past two summers serving as a Summer Associate. Shalom Ministries, an initiative of The United Methodist Church dedicated to enhancing community assets and addressing community needs, hosted Jeneen and two other Summer Associates in the Shalom Summer Enrichment Program, which focuses on robotics and media literacy.

“The participants were introduced to career opportunities and preparing for interviews,” explained Blue. “The robotics and media literacy program included hands-on experience with using video equipment and writing and speaking skills.”

Northeastern Technical College in Cheraw, South Carolina, partnered with Shalom Ministries to offer two weeks of robotics classes to local youth, while exposing them to guest speakers and giving them the



opportunity to create a video about a challenge that teenagers face. According to Jeneen, the students did very well with the video project.

“I have made a positive impact in the community by teaching students lifelong skills,” Blue said. “Serving in the community has really helped me to grow as a person, and I have been able to use some of my skills along the way. I learned that I could teach a lot to the students.”

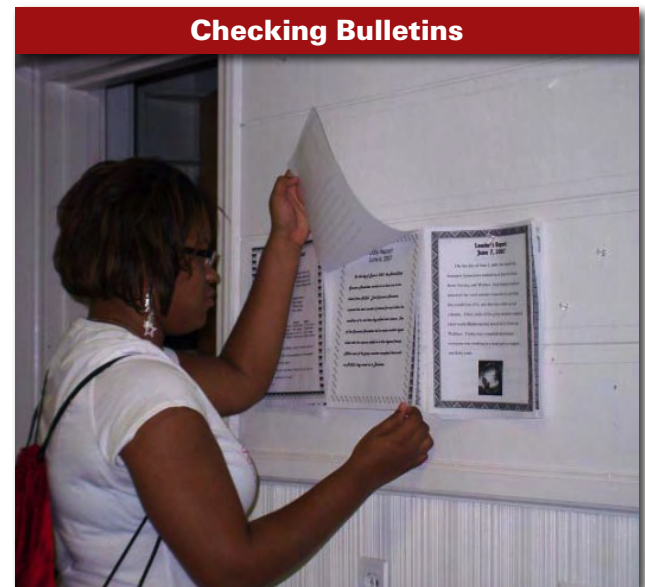
Shalom Ministries was one of seven projects in the 2007 Summer Associate program at the Community Development Corporation of Marlboro County (CDC), a nonprofit that creates housing, economic development, leadership, and educational opportunities for residents of Marlboro and five other northeastern South Carolina counties. The CDC of Marlboro County fielded 24 Summer Associates, who completed projects ranging from media literacy to asset mapping to adult education to summer camp.

Luke Johnakin, manager of planning and project development at CDC and Summer Associate supervisor, said this year’s program was a success and the Summer Associates benefited as well as the community.

“Surprising to many of the Summer Associates was the realization that, although growing up in the immediate area, many of the dire socioeconomic challenges never surfaced until they had experienced the actual hands-on engagements the Summer Associate project provided,” he said.

Nine Summer Associates served at CDC on the Asset Mapping and Resource Development project. The Associates conducted assessments of Bennettsville, McColl, Blenheim, Tatum, Clio and Wallace to evaluate each community’s eligibility for housing improvements.

“By having diversity among both staff and volunteers, CDC has been able to plan, develop, and coordinate local programming for Associates,” said Rev. Charles Malloy, CDC’s executive director. “We were able to expand the Summer Associate program and deliver more services.”





Reading, Riding, Rocking

Just as the rock ‘n’ roll movie of the same title, the “School of Rock” camp in Green River, Utah, had a bunch of 6-to-12-year-olds buzzing, dancing, and bopping up and down, while learning about rock and roll music. Unlike the movie, the summer camp also had participants examining the “real rocks” of geology, learning about safety, improving their reading skills, and studying cultures in different periods of history.

“School of Rock” was the theme of this summer’s day camp, sponsored annually by the Community Center/Boys & Girls Club of Green River. The 50 youth arrived each weekday for six weeks eager not only to learn about music, but also to create arts and crafts and go skateboarding and horseback riding. At the center of all the camp activity were four “great” Summer Associates. They planned projects, ran sporting events, and transported the campers on field trips.

“The VISTAs helped bring our community together by serving them,” said Joni Pace, executive director of the Green River Community Center and



**Green River
Community Center/
Boys & Girls Club
Green River, UT**

◀ Associate Katie Colonna helps youth clean the city baseball park.

“The Summer Associate program created a bond with the community that will endure for years to come.”

Joni Pace
VISTA Supervisor, Green River Community Center

Summer Associate supervisor. “The school and, most importantly, our entire community have seen the difference these volunteers are making”

Summer Associates also helped to recruit and organize community volunteers to teach and mentor children, prepare and deliver meals to seniors, organize school events, and supply other services in the rural, impoverished community. “The Summer Associate program created a bond with the community that will endure for years to come,” Pace said. “People who hadn’t been part of the center and its activities before are now active participants.”

Summer Associates coordinated service opportunities every Friday for the campers, in conjunction with the Corporation for National and Community Service’s Summer of Service initiative, a national campaign to engage more young people in service during the summer months. The Summer of Service initiative recognizes the potential of all youth to contribute meaningfully to their communities through volunteer service. The School of Rock youngsters contributed to their small, rural community by cleaning the town park’s baseball diamond, clearing weeds and refuse along the main street, and removing weeds at affordable housing complexes.

“I really got to work with the kids a lot, and that was really fun,” said Summer Associate Katie Colonna. “One child in particular is a good friend of my little boy. They’ve had tons of disciplinary issues with him, and I took time out everyday with him, and he really improved.”

Colonna has volunteered at the Green River Community Center before, but never full-time as she did as a Summer Associate. The experience made her more aware of poverty in the area and how many children lack exposure to adult role models and arts and culture.

“Most people in Green River are at or below the poverty level,” she said. “We did a lot of things the



Associate Adrian Lucero teaches basketball skills at School of Rock Camp.

kids wouldn't have seen otherwise. I realize how lucky my kids are."

As a Summer Associate and mother, Colonna said she and her children had an amazing summer experience. She was able to take her children to camp with her during her service and said her son now realizes that he has plenty compared to other children at the camp.

Colonna took a week after her service to reflect about her experience and let the emotion of it sink in. Although she said describing her Summer Associate service was difficult, Colonna revealed that she did not believe it when people told her she would get more out of her service than the community would. She now agrees.

"I think I grew as a person, a mother, and a wife this summer," she said. "Sometimes you don't realize how important you are to people. If I could be in AmeriCorps the rest of my life, I would make that my career."



Associate Danny Greenhalgh helps youth remove weeds at a senior citizens home.



A Week From Home Creates Fond Memories That Last a Lifetime



**Volunteers of America
Western Washington
Everett, WA**

For most kids, summer camp means swimming lessons, bottles of bug spray, and a week away from mom and dad. Nights are spent around the campfire roasting marshmallows and days are spent learning archery, horseback riding, and arts and crafts. Counselors aplenty keep an eye out on campers, bandaging their scrapes and bruises and turning their cabin lights out at night.

For the at-risk youth and children and adults with developmental disabilities who spend a week at Camp Volasuca in Sultan, Washington, summer camp means this and much more. The camp provides all campers recreational and outdoor opportunities that may not be available to them, or that they may be excluded from in their communities. The camp staff

◀ Children of Promise campers spend an afternoon at a Mariners baseball game. The camp is for children who have a parent in prison.

builds upon campers' strengths and helps them gain self-confidence.

Camp Volasuca hosts nine weeks of fun activities. Five weeks are dedicated to disabled adults. Two weeks are devoted to low-income youth, many of whom are foster children and children whose families are on assistance. One week is set aside for children who have a parent in prison, and another week is dedicated to children who suffer from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and their families.

Situated at the foothills of the Cascade Mountains, Camp Volasuca is operated by Volunteers of America Western Washington. The nonprofit organization serves eight Washington counties and is one of the region's most comprehensive human services organizations. It offers assistance in numerous service areas, including basic needs, family and children services, senior companionship, and community information and referral.

In 2007, Camp Volasuca welcomed eight Summer Associates to fill several critical roles to the camp's operation. Their presence dramatically increased the nonprofit's capacity to welcome more campers and offer them a wider range of activities, more personal attention, and a safer, healthier experience. In fact, the additional staff opened Camp Volasuca's doors to more than 270 campers—greater than a 30 percent increase in campers able to attend the camp than the year before.

"The Summer Associate program has had a profound affect on Camp Volasuca," said Dave Wood, director of Volunteers of America Sky Valley Services. "It has expanded our capacity as well as added depth to program offerings, and the quality of the Summer

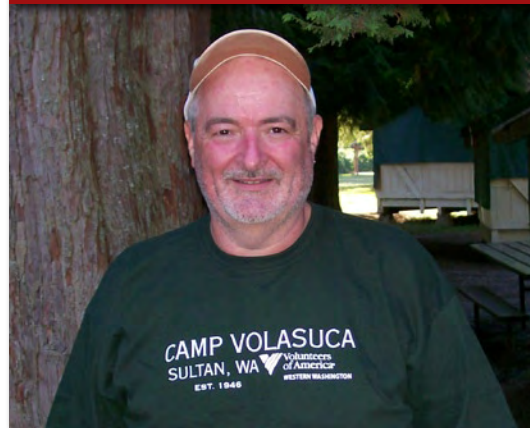
Associates is awesome. I highly recommend the program to anyone who has the need. I talk about the program whenever possible at Chamber events, service clubs, and with other nonprofits."

Recent high school graduate and Summer Associate Amber Crow was the arts and crafts director. "I knew that the people who would be attending the camp were people who just needed a positive atmosphere and environment, and I wanted to help," said Crow. "My work helped the kids find something simple and worthwhile to do instead of drugs and alcohol."

Thanks in part to her previous experience working with adults with disabilities, Crow knew that "working with them would give them a chance to work on their motor skills and show them that no matter what their disability was or what their life was like, there would always be something in life that they could accomplish."

Associate Ashley Polucci, a nurse with more than 30 years of experience, managed the many medication and medical situations at the camp.

Associate Ashley Polucci



Associate Amber Crow



The addition of the nurse played a huge role in the camp maintaining its American Camping Association membership.

“Dealing so closely with the different levels of disability has allowed me to know the campers on an individual basis, and I am amazed at the diversity of the clients,” said Polucci. “There were challenges on a daily basis for growth and learning.”

“It was clear that the campers laughed, played, swam, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves within the limits of their individual abilities,” Polucci said, noting that the caregivers for the campers looked forward to camp, both because the campers would be having fun and because they would be getting a week of respite from daily caregiving.

Wood offered another seasoned insight into the camp’s impact. “Camp helps campers grow skills

“The Summer Associates program has had a profound affect on Camp Volasuca. It has expanded our capacity as well as added depth to program offerings, and the quality of the Summer Associates is awesome.”

Dave Wood
Director, Volunteers of America Sky Valley Services

related to making better choices”—skills that help them to avoid dangerous and unhealthy behaviors. “All of these skills attack risk factors that can keep many of these kids in poverty. Camp Volasuca expands their life’s goals and ambitions to move hopefully into self-sufficiency and independence.”

Summer Associate Jason Engle saw firsthand the campers’ achievements and relishes the opportunity he had to foster them. “I’ve made an impact on the lives of many of the youth at camp, as well as the developmentally disabled campers.”

As a result, his own personal goals have changed as well. Before becoming a Summer Associate, Engle was a warehouse manager, who planned to attend community college and pursue a career in law enforcement. He now plans to become a full-time VISTA member. “Working here this summer has changed my life,” explained Engle. “I constantly found myself in new situations. I’ve built a lot of self-confidence, and I am now planning a career working with at-risk youth.”



**University of
Wisconsin Extension
Milwaukee, WI**

Trading Candy for Carrots

For Summer Associate Emily Savetwith, the simple act of eating carrots changed her summer. Emily was tasked with creating menus, cooking and serving meals, and keeping production records for the Mohican Family Center’s Summer Food Program on the Stockbridge-Munsee Nation reservation in Shawano County in northeastern Wisconsin.

“To tell the truth, I was a bit skeptical about the program at first,” she said. “I mean, why would the kids want to eat our milk and carrots when they have Kool-Aid and candy at home? Well, apparently the food wasn’t the only impact I had on these children—they really looked up to me. When they saw me eating carrots, they wanted to too.”

As part of the VISTA Summer Associate program through the University of Wisconsin Extension (UWEX), Savetwith and 33 other Summer Associates served in Tribal Land communities in 13 counties across the state. Summer projects focused on youth development, neighborhood revitalization, and sustainable agriculture. Contributing to the mission

◀ Associates Emily Savetwith and Nichole Merckes picnic in the Tribal Pow-Wow Grounds and Park in Wisconsin.

“UWEX provided me with many materials and resources to help jump-start the program, and from there I was able to reach out to the boys of the community.”

Jonathan Williams
Summer Associate

of UWEX, Summer Associates worked to extend the knowledge and resources of the university to the community, while bolstering preexisting assets within the community.

According to VISTA Supervisor Mary Thiry, “2007 was our second year in the Summer Associate program.” She added that UWEX made a concerted effort to seek out diversity among the Associates. “They brought with them a wealth of ideas from their cultural, age, educational, and economic backgrounds.” Most Associates were part of a team, which according to Thiry, provided a sense of community and reduced their anxiety. “This approach created a tremendous impact in a short time,” she said.

“For example, at the Stockbridge-Munsee Nation, Associate Nichole Merckes, a tribal member, was immediately able to identify a need for the youth to understand their culture and learn about health issues, while Associate Emily Savetwith, a non-Native, was able to view the issues from her background and provided another way of looking at how to address these needs. As a team, they were able to develop a new summer healthy food program.”

In addition, the team approach involved

committed communities, mentorship from trained UWEX supervisors, coaching from UWEX state staff, and guidance from the Corporation State Office. Full-time VISTAs helped Associates navigate within AmeriCorps VISTA and UWEX, saving time and allowing Associates to focus their energy for the tasks ahead. “An added benefit,” said Thiry, who has since retired, “was that one of the Summer Associates became a full-time VISTA.”

Summer Associates also served at the 21st Street School in Milwaukee (the city known for having the nation’s highest school dropout rate of African-American students), where they coordinated Boys 2 Men groups to teach boys about becoming healthy and responsible.

“UWEX provided me with many materials and resources to help jump-start the program, and from there I was able to reach out to the boys of the community,” said Jonathan Williams, a Summer Associate at the Boys 2 Men program. “I want the boys to transform into stronger individuals, and at the same time develop a brotherhood with the other boys of the group that will last a lifetime. We have struggled at times, but we have grown from those struggles to become better men.”

Other Associates at the 21st Street School worked with youth in school readiness and cultural awareness programming. Activities ranged from reviewing spelling words to swimming. A self-awareness segment encouraged youth to think about their strengths and goals, while a cultural-awareness segment exposed youth to people with different backgrounds.

“UW Extension is great for kids in this ever-changing world,” summed up Jessica Goodwin, an Associate this past summer at 21st Street School. She said the program helps kids understand “that if you want success, you need to put forth the effort, recognizing [your] faults and stepping up to the challenge of learning.”

Discussing the Stockbridge-Munsee Nation History





Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team Beckley, WV

Reclaiming Land and Waterways in Coal Country From the Ground Up

For some Summer Associates, the opportunity to volunteer means moving to a new location for the summer. For Derek Douglas, it meant seeing a project he had been hoping for happen in his hometown of Jellico, an economically and environmentally distressed town in northern Tennessee near the Kentucky border.

Douglas, a long time rural organizer, contacted the Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team (ACCWT) in December 2006 after seeing a VISTA position announcement for the organization. The ACCWT helps fight poverty and provides citizens with the assistance they need to make their own rural coal mining communities cleaner, healthier, and safer places to live and work. Founded in response to requests from watershed groups throughout coal country, ACCWT supports a growing movement that is quietly bringing a new strength and new hope to the Appalachian region.

◀ Associate Bryan Olejasz monitors the water quality of Deckers Creek in Dellslow, WV.

Douglas talked with the ACCWT about developing a project in his hometown that would help diverse and divided stakeholders find a common ground in cleaning up their watershed. Recognizing that providing a position for Douglas could help his community's watershed restoration project, the ACCWT placed him as a Summer Associate with the goal of bringing resources together to support a longer VISTA position in a resource-scarce economy.

"If an organization has the ability to house and supervise someone for eight to ten weeks and has defined projects that they would like to see carried out and simply do not have the staff capacity to do so, the Summer Associate program is a great resource," said ACCWT Coordinator Duncan Wilson.

The ACCWT also placed 31 Summer Associates with community watershed groups throughout Appalachian Coal Country to serve rural communities impoverished by environmental degradation and its many consequences. The Associates' responsibilities ranged from establishing volunteer water monitoring programs to leading campaigns and increasing membership of their sponsor site. Prior to their service, ACCWT trained the Associates in standard monitoring techniques, how to collect data, how to use data to obtain funding for remediation projections, and types of remediation. More than 10,000 hours of volunteering later, the Associates revamped water quality monitoring systems, developed new educational programs, and created a plethora of new partnerships throughout these communities.

"In eight weeks," Wilson explained, "a Summer Associate can begin a project and build community

support to continue the project after they are gone, or can work to bring new and lasting energy to a project that is already underway." Summer Associate Bryan Olejasz, assigned to Friends of Deckers Creek in Dellslow, West Virginia, accomplished much during his eight-week program. Olejasz increased awareness of water quality issues and taught community volunteers water sampling techniques by serving as a guest lecturer at the All Hands-On Deckers, a three-week watershed service-learning camp for local middle school boys. He also initiated partnerships with the local farmers' market, the Morgantown Boy Scout Troop, and a local newspaper



Associate Samir Doshi, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Vermont Rubenstein School of Ecology and Natural Resources, plants warm season grasses on abandoned mine land. Doshi served with the Powell River Project in Wise, VA.

Protecting



Associate Renee Stewart holds an endangered eastern hellbender salamander. Stewart served with the Little Beaver Creek Land Foundation in Lisbon, OH.

to help recruit volunteers to reconstruct stream corridors and trails.

The Summer Associate program presented an opportunity that Douglas had not expected: “Everyone was so supportive and encouraging [at ACCWT]. The training was intense, but necessary for helping me visualize a successful project.” After developing a partnership with the Clear Fork of the Cumberland Project in Newcomb, Tennessee, Douglas used his time as a Summer Associate to engage local youth in his work by blending watershed education with ongoing efforts to raise funds for a local skate park. Undertaking such community revitalization pursuits alongside their project activities is common

among the ACCWT Summer Associates. And they do not consider it an added burden. “When you have difficult conditions like we have, your rewards are great too,” Douglas explained. “When people have been oppressed for so long, seeing positive change is a really great feeling.”

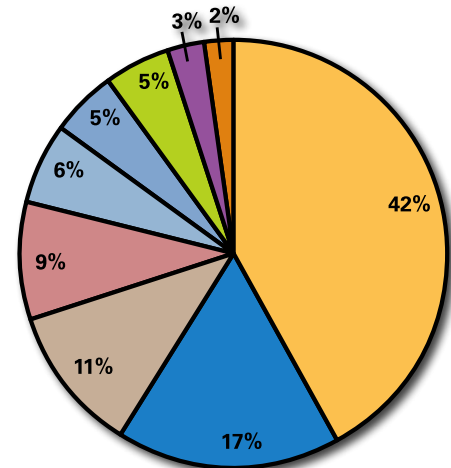
Monitoring



Associate Bryan Olejasz operates a flow meter as part of a water quality monitoring program. Bryan served at a nonprofit watershed group, Friends of Deckers Creek, in Dellslow, WV.



Issues Addressed by Summer Associates



-  Community Development
-  Disaster Response
-  Education
-  Environment
-  Health/Nutrition
-  Homeland Security
-  Housing
-  Human Needs
-  Public Health

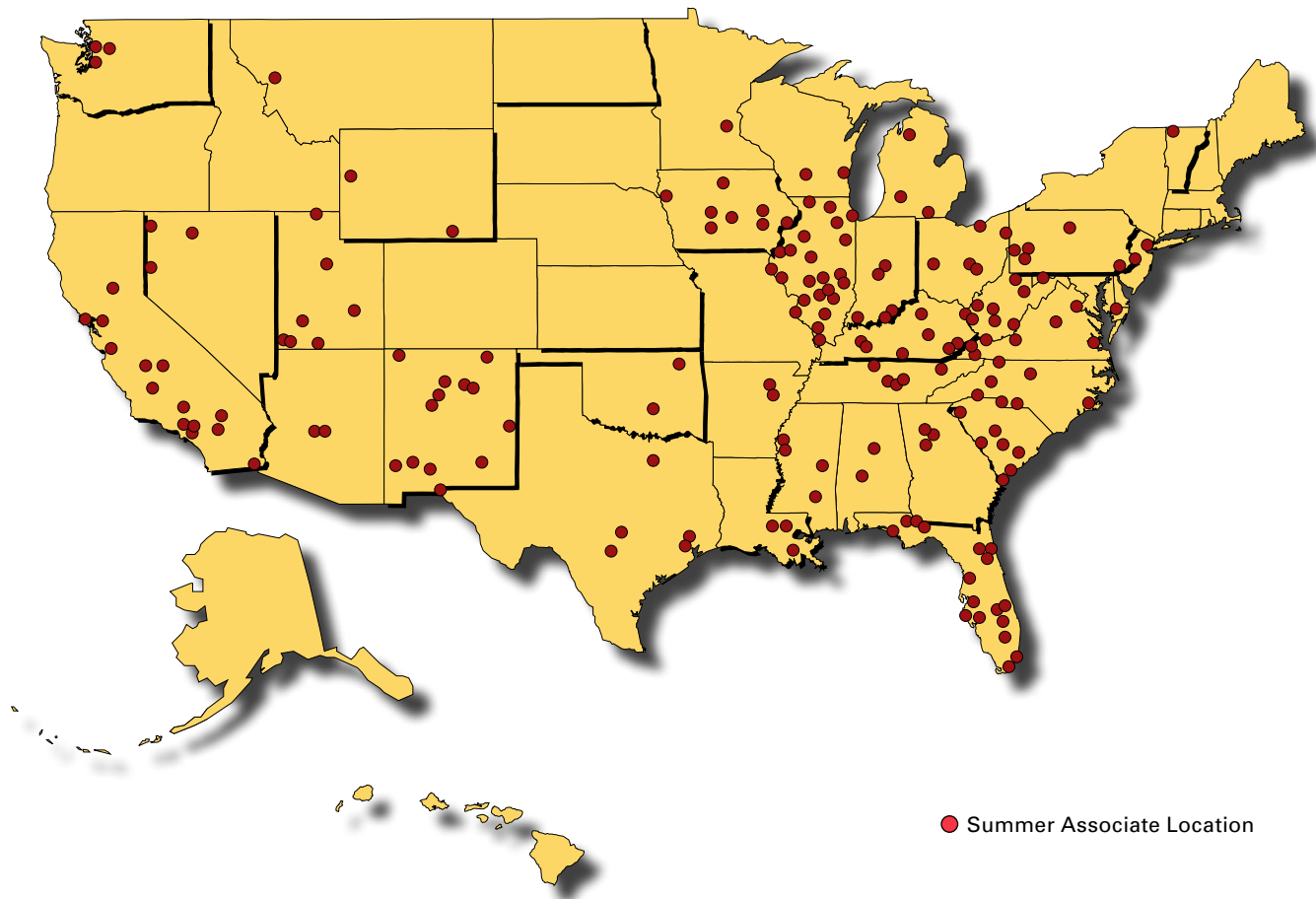


By the Numbers

◀ The 14 Summer Associates at New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity helped construct single family homes in Musicians' Village, located in the lower Ninth Ward.

Where Summer Associates Served

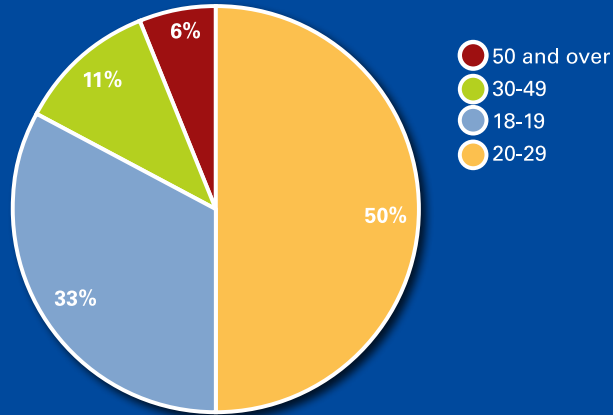
The VISTA Summer Associate program in 2007 had a presence in 28 states, including 82 projects and 1,348 Associates.*



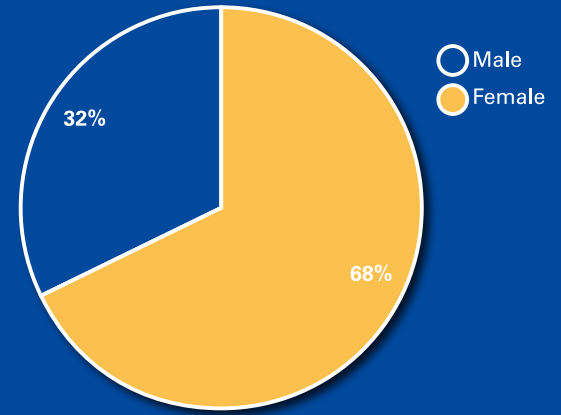
*See page 36 for a complete list of Summer Associate project sponsors.

Characteristics of Summer Associates

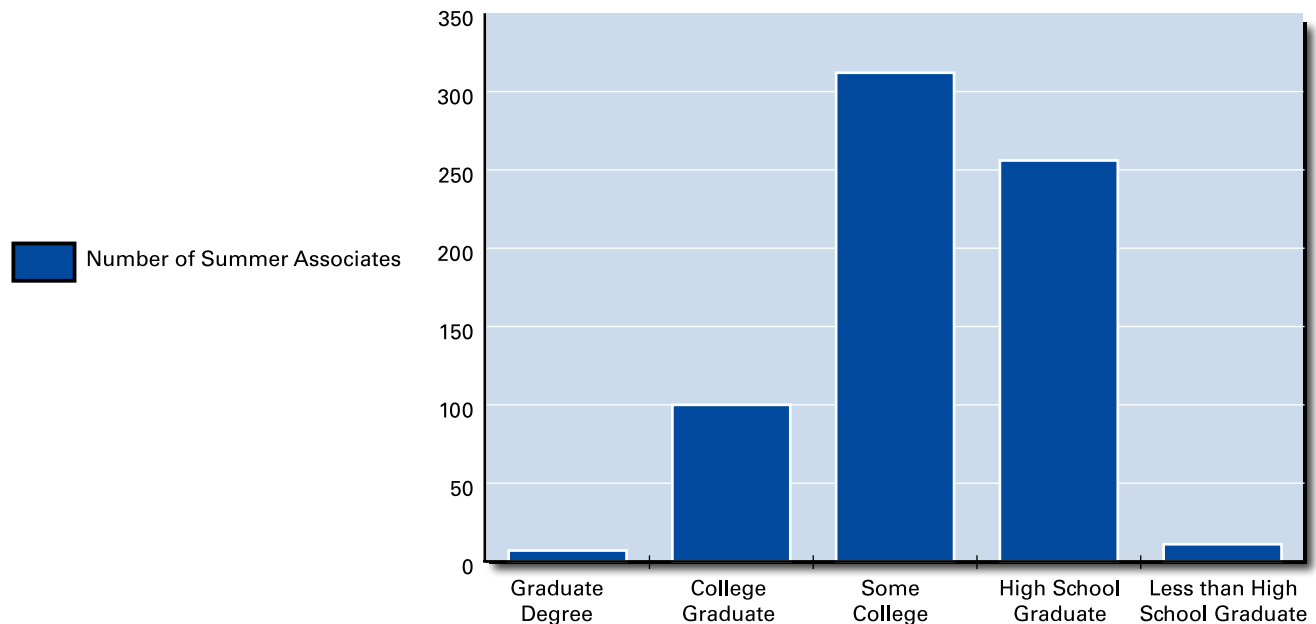
Summer Associates by Age



Summer Associates by Gender



Summer Associates by Education Level





Summer Associate Project Sponsors

Thanking Our Sponsors

VISTA thanks the following sponsors of Summer Associate projects in 2007.

Alabama

- ▶ CHASM (Caring, Helping, Aiding, Supporting, and Mentoring) Family Resource Center, Selma

Arkansas

- ▶ St. Francis County Community Development Corporation

California

- ▶ ARTScorpsLA, Los Angeles
- ▶ Children, Youth, and Family Collaborative, Los Angeles
- ▶ College Career Centers, Los Angeles
- ▶ CSUB (California State University Bakersfield) Academic Centers of Excellence, Bakersfield

◀ Summer Associates coordinated the work of volunteer groups at the Musicians' Village in New Orleans' lower Ninth Ward. The Ninth Ward was severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

-
- ▶ Economic Development Corporation serving Fresno County, Fresno
 - ▶ Habitat for Humanity, Alameda
 - ▶ National Farm Workers, Los Angeles
 - ▶ VISTAs for Center for Community Service Learning, Northridge
 - ▶ YES Center, San Bernardino
 - ▶ Youth Development Project, Rancho Cordova

Florida

- ▶ City of Miami
- ▶ Communities in School of Florida, Inc, Tallahassee
- ▶ Florida State University – Learn & Serve, Tallahassee
- ▶ Operation Community Focus, Belle Glade
- ▶ West Central Florida VISTA Recovery Project, Highland City

Georgia

- ▶ Changing Lives, One Program a at Time, College Park
- ▶ Hands On Atlanta, Atlanta

Iowa

- ▶ Habitat VISTA Project, Mason City
- ▶ Iowa American Red Cross Homeland Security Project, Marshalltown

- ▶ Oakridge Resident Engagement Initiative, Des Moines
- ▶ VISTA Neighborhood Assistance Project, Cedar Rapids

Illinois

- ▶ Homeland Security Disaster Liaisons, Chicago
- ▶ Illinois Coalition for Community Service, Springfield

Indiana

- ▶ Dads, Inc. of Indiana, Indianapolis

Kentucky

- ▶ Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville
- ▶ Mountain Missions Development Corporation, Berea
- ▶ South Louisville Community Ministries, Louisville

Louisiana

- ▶ Catholic Community Services, Baton Rouge
- ▶ Louisiana Serve Commission, Baton Rouge
- ▶ New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity, New Orleans
- ▶ Southern University and A & M College, Baton Rouge

Michigan

- ▶ Michigan Communities in Schools, Holland

Minnesota

- ▶ Minnesota Literacy Council, Saint Paul

Mississippi

- ▶ Mississippi Delta Service Corps/AmeriCorps VISTA, Cleveland
- ▶ University of Southern Mississippi Center for Adult Learning and Education, Hattiesburg
- ▶ Youth Excitement Team, Inc., Meridian

North Carolina

- ▶ Burlington Housing Authority, Burlington
- ▶ Habitat for Humanity International Multi-State, Apex
- ▶ One Economy Corporation, Winston-Salem

New Jersey

- ▶ HomeFront, Lawrenceville
- ▶ Pathways Out of Poverty/Family Success/Prisoner Reentry, Newark

New Mexico

- ▶ SER de New Mexico, Albuquerque

Nevada

- ▶ American Lung Association, Reno
- ▶ Nevada Outdoor School, Winnemucca

Ohio

- ▶ Cleveland Urban Minority Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Outreach, Cleveland
- ▶ Habitat for Humanity International, Oregon
- ▶ Rural Action, Inc., Trimble

Oklahoma

- ▶ Ada Regional United Way, Ada
- ▶ World Won Development Center, Tulsa

South Carolina

- ▶ Alpha Bora Comprehensive Services, Wadmalaw Island
- ▶ Building to Revitalize Communities, Pageland
- ▶ Community Development & Improvement Corporation, Aiken
- ▶ Community Development Corporation of Marlboro County, Bennettsville
- ▶ Community Improvement Plan, Holly Hill
- ▶ South Carolina Collaborative for Civic Engagement, Charleston

Tennessee

- ▶ Second Harvest Food Bank, Gray
- ▶ Tennessee's Community Assistance Corporation (TCAC) Community VISTA Program, Morristown
- ▶ Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability – State Health Insurance Program Medicare Part D, Nashville

Texas

- ▶ Center for Bilingual Development and Social Enterprise, El Paso
- ▶ International Rescue Committee, Dallas
- ▶ The First Tee of Greater Austin, Austin
- ▶ United Cerebral Palsy of Texas, Austin

Utah

- ▶ Green River Communities Center/Boys & Girls Club, Green River
- ▶ United Way of Utah County, Provo
- ▶ SPLORE Common Ground Empowerment Project, Salt Lake City
- ▶ Volunteer Connections, Salt Lake City

Virginia

- ▶ Beacon at the Crossroads, Hampton
- ▶ Beans and Rice, Radford

- ▶ Bragg Hill Family Life Center/Tower Ministries, Inc., Fredericksburg
- ▶ Charlottesville Abundant Life Ministries, Charlottesville
- ▶ Hand and Hand, Inc., Hampton

Washington

- ▶ Volunteers of America Western Washington, Everett
- ▶ Washington Service Corps, Olympia

Wisconsin

- ▶ University of Wisconsin-Extension, Milwaukee
- ▶ United Way of Dane County Preschools of Hope, Madison
- ▶ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction VISTA Project, Madison

West Virginia

- ▶ Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team, Beckley
- ▶ Step by Step, Inc., Charleston
- ▶ West Virginia University Extension Service, Morgantown

Wyoming

- ▶ Habitat for Humanity of the Greater Teton Area, Jackson



Become a VISTA Summer Associate

Summer Associates choose from projects throughout the country, based on their skills and interests, and serve 8 to 10 weeks during the summer with community-based organizations, working to overcome poverty. Assignments may involve academic tutoring; environmental education; camp counseling; recruiting and training community volunteers; teaching computer literacy skills; disaster preparation and recovery; establishing partnerships with local businesses, organizations, churches, and schools; planning community meetings; or handling public relations. Whatever the task or challenge, VISTA Summer Associates make a lasting difference for low-income communities in need.

Join the more than 177,000 individuals who have dedicated a summer or a year of their lives to fighting poverty in the United States. Join VISTA.

Find out more at americorps.gov

Or Call 800-942-2677

TTY 800-833-3722



Sponsor a VISTA Summer Associate Project

Any sponsor of a year-round VISTA project can apply to host a Summer Associate project. Develop a VISTA summer project and host Summer Associates as they work to expand your organization's capacity to solve community problems. VISTA Summer Associates help organizations like yours to create the sustainable infrastructure needed to fight poverty in their communities.

Contact your local Corporation State Office.

For a directory, go to: americorps.gov

202-606-5000

TTY 202-565-2799

Email: vista@americorps.gov



Become a VISTA Summer Associate

There are thousands of ways to make a difference.

Find out which opportunity is right for you.

Call 800-942-2677 (TTY 800-833-3722)

americorps.gov



AmeriCorps VISTA is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. VISTA offers service opportunities to individuals 18 or older without regard to race, color, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation or other nonmerit factors. Applicants must be U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals, or lawful permanent residents.

