

**Overcoming Poverty**

**Building Capacity**



**VISTA**

Volunteers In Service To America



# Overcoming Poverty

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## Building Capacity



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Volunteers In Service To America

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October 2008

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## Message From Director of AmeriCorps VISTA

Every day, throughout our nation, dedicated men and women are making a positive impact on the lives of poor Americans through VISTA, Volunteers In Service To America.

Our nationwide corps of VISTAs, nearly 7,000 strong, brings the skills and the passion to low-income communities that are committed to their own development and to building prosperity. Their partners are nonprofit, grassroots organizations and local government agencies—the mainstay of the anti-poverty mission of AmeriCorps VISTA.

Locally managed and locally focused, community organizations provide the impetus and customized service that empower local impoverished communities. The VISTA program recognizes the critical role of these organizations. It offers VISTAs as a resource to the organizations to build their capacity to carry out programs that fight poverty.

In this book, we point with pride to the record of our VISTAs and their projects to alleviate poverty and, as a result, change lives in tangible, meaningful, and sustainable ways.

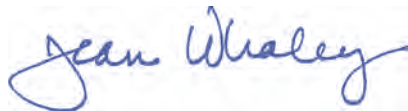
In this 43rd year of helping America's most vulnerable citizens, VISTAs served with nearly 1,000 local projects, generated \$172 million in cash and in-kind resources for their projects, and mobilized nearly 611,000 community volunteers, an average of 110 volunteers per VISTA.

The profiles of the projects in this book only begin to illustrate the successes realized by VISTAs in hundreds of schools, senior citizen programs, hospitals, prisons, shelters for homeless people, community organizations, and public agencies—wherever there is a need and a VISTA-affiliated project to address that need.

The book presents profiles of 52 VISTA projects—one for each state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Among the profiles are ten feature-length stories. The diversity of these projects demonstrates the determination of the VISTA program to meet the wide variety of needs of youth, families, and communities affected by poverty. We hope documenting their activities will promote an exchange of ideas and information, leverage technical and financial resources, and encourage partnerships, collaboration, and coordination among VISTA project sponsors.

I invite you to read about these projects and VISTAs' work with them. Their compelling efforts make strong contributions in the best way they can, and we are proud to showcase them.

VISTA is a national service of choice. We welcome you to join us and fight poverty with passion.



Jean Whaley  
Director, AmeriCorps VISTA







# VISTA

Volunteers In Service To America

## Core Principles

**Anti-Poverty Focus:** VISTA supports community efforts to overcome poverty. Any nonprofit organization, educational institution, or tribal or public agency with a project explicitly designed to alleviate poverty may sponsor a VISTA.

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**Community Empowerment:** VISTA values the inherent strengths and resources of the community. VISTA expects project sponsors to involve residents of the community in planning, developing, and implementing the VISTA project. This approach allows low-income individuals the freedom to speak for themselves in determining the projects that suit their specific needs.

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**Capacity Building:** VISTA expands the ability of sponsor organizations to fight poverty. Rather than providing services to low-income individuals and communities, VISTAs strengthen and support organizations by building infrastructure, expanding community partnerships, securing long-term resources, coordinating training for participants, and much more.

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**Sustainable Solutions:** VISTAs serve as a short-term resource to help sponsor organizations achieve lasting solutions to poverty.





# VISTA

Volunteers In Service To America

## National Statistics for 2007

VISTAs	6,852
Hours served by VISTAs	11.4 million
VISTA projects	943
Community volunteers mobilized	610,785
Community volunteers mobilized per VISTA	110
Hours served by community volunteers	7.4 million
Value of cash and in-kind resources raised	\$172 million
Cash and in-kind resources raised per VISTA	\$25,000

### Annual Budget

Fiscal year 2008	\$93.80 million
Fiscal year 2007	\$95.46 million
Fiscal year 2006	\$95.46 million
Fiscal year 2005	\$94.24 million
Fiscal year 2004	\$93.73 million

# Alabama

## VISTA in Alabama

**No. of VISTAs: 114**

**Projects: 19**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Alabama Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (2 VISTA projects)**

**Alabama A & M University Community Development Corporation**

**Alabama Department of Children's Affairs**

**Black Belt & Central Alabama Housing Authority**

**Calhoun County Commission**

**CHASM Family Resource Center**

**Habitat for Humanity International**

**Innovative Approach**

**Lauderdale Children's Policy Council**

**Legal Services of Alabama**

**Mobile Baykeeper**

**New Beginnings Foundation**

**Samford University**

**The Volunteer Center of Madison County**

**Tuskegee Human & Civil Rights Multicultural Center**

**United Way of Central Alabama**

**University of Alabama at Birmingham**

**Volunteer Mobile Inc.**



**Featured Project:** Impact: An Alabama Student Service Initiative

**Location:** Jefferson and Tuscaloosa Counties

**Project Sponsor:** University of Alabama at Birmingham

**Project Issue Area:** Health care

**VISTAs:** 6

Inside a pitch-black room, 15 preschoolers at the University Place Elementary School in Tuscaloosa sit patiently waiting to have their picture taken. The only light visible in the room is the flickering red dot on the camera. The specialized camera takes photos of the children's eyes.

According to the American Optometric Association, 14 percent of children younger than aged six are likely not to have had an eye and vision examination. According to local research, thousands of Alabama's children grow up in rural areas of the state, distant from any provider of eye care service, often with no means of transportation to obtain needed eye care.

In keeping with its mission, FocusFirst, a signature initiative of Impact, engages undergraduate and graduate students who strive to ensure children, aged six months to five years, are screened for vision problems and receive appropriate examination, diagnosis, and treatment in Head Start organizations and day care facilities for low-income families.

VISTAs help establish the initiative's sustainability throughout Alabama. Eight of the 14 partnering campuses that have student volunteering incorporate screenings into their curricula. During the 2007–2008 project years, VISTAs will collaborate with professors and administrators at the remaining six schools to implement service-learning courses, reaching out to new students.

Since the inception of FocusFirst, more than 600 students at 14 colleges and universities have helped provide vision screenings for more than 20,000 children in more than 50 counties throughout Alabama. Nearly 10.6 percent of children failed the vision screenings and were referred to the project's partner organization, Sight Savers of Alabama, for follow-up care.



# Alaska



**Featured Project:** JDHS CHOICE

**Location:** Juneau

**Project Sponsor:** Juneau-Douglas High School

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 1

The CHOICE Program (Choosing Healthy Options in Cooperative Education) focuses on improving the academic achievement of the 100 at-risk high school students in the program. VISTAs help the students develop a sense of belonging and ownership within CHOICE, the high school, and the community at large. VISTAs not only involve CHOICE students in the community, they also involve the community in the education and learning of the students.

VISTA Jenifer Knaggs recruited 42 community members to provide internships in state and local government offices, agencies, and local businesses. In conjunction with the National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependency, Knaggs helped facilitate three Alaska Teen Institute retreats. She also organized and coordinated the Beyond School program, in which six community volunteers teach small groups of high school freshmen a hands-on, real-life skill, such as native Tlingit carving; writing and producing radio public service announcements about healthy choices, including not smoking; creating short video biographies of tribal elders; and creating visual promotions of healthy choices within the school.

Knaggs actively pursues retention of all placements at the 42 community internships. In a small community such as Juneau, retention of internships is no small feat. Students report positive experiences at their internships and their hosts report strong student performance. Proud of their accomplishments, students have become more involved in their community.

## VISTA in Alaska

**No. of VISTAs:** 64

**Projects:** 18

**Project Sponsors:**

**Adult Learning Programs of Alaska, Inc.**

**Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice**

**Alaska Network on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault**

**Association of Village Council Presidents**

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Alaska**

**Boys & Girls Club of Greater Anchorage**

**Chugach Regional Resources Commission**

**Fairbanks North Star Borough**

**Habitat for Humanities Alaska**

**Juneau-Douglas High School CHOICE Program**

**Ketchikan Gateway Borough Schools**

**Ketchikan Youth Initiatives**

**Municipality of Anchorage**

**Older Persons Action Group**

**Rural Alaska Community Action Program**

**Southeast Alaska Independent Living Inc.**

**The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Juneau Affiliate**

**University of Alaska – Anchorage**

# Arizona

## VISTA in Arizona

**No. of VISTAs:** 95

**Projects:** 19

**Project Sponsors:**

**Arizona State University**

**Arizonans for Children, Inc.**

**Arts for All, Inc.**

**Camp Fire USA Greater Arizona Council**

**Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona**

**City of Phoenix**

**International Rescue Committee, Phoenix**

**International Rescue Committee, Tucson**

**Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest**

**Mesa Community Action Network, Inc.**

**National Farm Workers Service Center, Inc.**

**National Society for American Indian Elderly**

**Prescott College**

**Southwest Youth Corps**

**The Primavera Foundation, Inc.**

**Valley of the Sun Habitat for Humanity**

**Volunteer Center of Maricopa County**

**Volunteer Center of Southern Arizona**

**Youth Count**



**Featured Project:** School-Based Volunteer Development Project

**Location:** Tucson

**Project Sponsor:** Volunteer Center of Southern Arizona

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 5

According to the latest Kids Count report, Arizona ranks a dismal 41st in the nation on key indicators of child well-being. For example, 48 percent of fourth graders scored below the basic reading level. Children learn to read from kindergarten through third grade. From fourth grade on, they read to learn. If they cannot read well by then, they cannot learn.

Over the past two years, VISTAs have worked in collaboration to build volunteer programs at pilot schools, which will eventually be replicated across districts. Their work involves leveraging community volunteers and Experience Corps members to become tutors and mentors in before-, during-, and after-school programs at these schools to improve the academic skills of the students, particularly in reading. To build the sustainability of the programs, the VISTAs have also worked to develop important volunteer management policies and procedures, such as a volunteer handbook, volunteer coordinator manual, and a recruitment packet.

VISTAs leveraged 170 community literacy volunteers, created a Volunteer Literacy Tutor Resource Manual, designed 25 literacy-tutoring units, developed measurement tools to measure student performance and tutor satisfaction, and produced a volunteer handbook. Through these efforts, students made progress in reading, and tutors were better trained to serve their students.

# Arkansas



**Featured Project:** North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education

**Location:** Harrison

**Project Sponsor:** North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education

**Project Issue Areas:** Health education, job development, asset development

**VISTAs:** 19

## Healthier Lives, Healthier Communities

Research across the globe indicates that when adults live healthy lives they can expect to maintain employment, experience job advancement, and lead more productive lives. In northern Arkansas, thanks to the efforts of the VISTAs at the North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education (NAPHE), a nonprofit organization dedicated to professional and community health education, adults and children across the state are leading healthier lifestyles to improve their quality of life, their self-esteem, and their ability to escape poverty.

VISTA Elaine Fulton-Jones has seen results firsthand through her endeavor to connect a low-income family whose son badly needed diabetes medication to services. “The teen was really sick and his father had no way to pay for the insulin and other medications needed. It was a critical situation for this youth,” explained Fulton-Jones, who serves as a health community advocate in NAPHE’s Community Health Resource Center. By establishing partnerships to connect them to community resources, including prescription assistance, Fulton-Jones knows she made a positive impact on the boy’s health and his family’s financial stability.

A regional coalition that includes 60 participant organizations, NAPHE’s 19 VISTAs act in critical capacities to develop programs to increase awareness and access to health and wellness resources for thousands of rural Arkansans.

Dolly Garrison, in her second year as a VISTA at NAPHE, helps clients receive free medication and medical equipment, as well as access housing, transportation, and education services. “I have launched parenting classes, established a network of community health advocates, organized workshops for low-income people on how to apply for an IDA and the Career Pathways program at North Arkansas College,” Garrison said. IDAs (Individual Development Accounts) are special matched savings accounts designed to help those of modest means establish a pattern of regular savings and, ultimately, purchase a productive asset. Savings and match money may be used toward the purchase of a home, to start a small business, or to pursue further education.

## VISTA in Arkansas

**No. of VISTAs:** 142

**Projects:** 16

**Project Sponsors:**

**Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation**

**Arkansas Public Policy Panel**

**Arkansas State CASA Association**

**Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind, Inc.**

**Audubon Arkansas**

**Black Community Developers, Inc.**

**Future Builders, Inc.**

**Literacy Council of Jefferson County**

**North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education**

**Our House, Inc**

**Seniors In Poverty – Greater Texarkana (2 VISTA projects)**

**South Arkansas Regional Health Center, Inc.**

**St. Francis County Community Development Corporation**

**The Learning Center, Inc. of North Little Rock**

**The Stand Foundation**



**VISTA in Arkansas** *(continued)*

Little Rock  
North Little Rock  
VISTAs Tawana Manning and Holly Gillies (left to right) promote an array of community health education programs offered by the North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education.



VISTAs market NAPHE's array of programs, find resources, and build partnerships to support tobacco education and cessation, nursing assistant programs, and scholarship programs for low-income residents to gain the training, education, and support necessary to obtain employment in the health care field.

With the VISTAs' efforts, NAPHE and the communities it serves have seen tremendous results. VISTAs implemented a prescription drug assistance program that saved residents more than \$1.2 million in costly bills. VISTAs provided more than 300 programs on aging to more than 4,000 seniors across the region. VISTAs helped more than 1,100 people gain certification as nursing assistants and helped them find meaningful employment at a 98 percent placement rate. They also created a tobacco cessation program that resulted in 900 adults completing the program with a 25 percent one-year quit rate and a tobacco education program that, in only three years, resulted in a 30 percent decrease among children aged 13 and under who smoke.

"In fiscal year 2007 alone, the VISTA team recruited 2,009 volunteers who provided 16,000 service hours," said Dr. Rick Hinterthuer, NAPHE's executive director and VISTA supervisor. "VISTA 'power' gives us the

time, human resources, and the creative energy we need to develop our potential to be a national model for how rural communities can collectively address their health issues and provide more effective outreach to its citizens.”

VISTA Tawana Manning has seen plenty of seniors’ lives change through her facilitation of NAPHE’s chronic pain support group. Through a partnership between NAPHE and the Area Agency on Aging, she recently became a Master Trainer [leader of trainers] through the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program at Stanford University. “This program gave me the skills to educate local seniors on self-managing their chronic pain and keep them active in their lives,” stated Manning. “Education is a key factor for alleviating poverty.”

The rewards for the VISTAs serving at NAPHE are also great. Garrison has learned “you can make a difference in the outcome of individuals’ lives by reaching out to them, treating them with dignity, and really showing you sincerely care about them.”

VISTA Fulton-Jones, a recent retiree from Florida, agreed. “My experience as a VISTA volunteer has been positive all the way. Many of the people we reach have little to no available resources for this kind of help. People walk through our doors or call when they don’t know where to turn. We make every effort to get them the help they need.”



## VISTA in Arkansas *(continued)*

Elaine Fulton-Jones, a VISTA and retired public information officer, facilitates a healthy lifestyle course that aims to help Arkansans in the rural area of the Ozarks live longer, better, and healthier lives by reducing the burden of diabetes, overweight, obesity and asthma, and addressing three related risk factors—physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use.



# California

## VISTA in California

**No. of VISTAs:** 629

**Projects:** 72

**Project Sponsors:**

**ACCION San Diego**

**AnewAmerica Community Corporation**

**Apple Valley Unified School District (2 VISTA projects)**

**Aquatic Adventures Science Education Foundation**

**ARTScorpsLA**

**Bay Area Community Resources**

**Bureau of Land Management**

**California Farm Link**

**California Indian Manpower Consortium, Inc.**

**California State University Bakersfield**

**California State University, Fresno Foundation**

**CaliforniaVolunteers**

**Catholic Big Brothers Big Sisters**

**Children and Families Commission of Orange County**

**Children Youth and Family Collaborative**

**CIF of the San Francisco Foundation**

**City of Dinuba Fire Department**

**City of San Jose**

**City of Selma**

**Coalition of Homeless Service Providers**

**Colette's Children's Home**



**Featured Project:** Solar and Energy Efficiency Program

**Location:** San Francisco

**Project Sponsor:** GRID Alternatives

**Project Issue Areas:** Housing, energy efficiency

**VISTAs:** 2

## Energy Savers: Reducing Energy Costs in Low-Income Neighborhoods

Standing in a cul-de-sac surrounded by houses in various stages of construction, VISTA Tracie Troxler takes a moment to review logistics at the East Oakland site. She led several teams of corporate and community volunteers to install eight solar electric systems at this “solarthon.” The one-day event sponsored by GRID Alternatives raised \$40,000 and awareness for community solar power.

Troxler and the volunteers are from GRID Alternatives, a San Francisco-based nonprofit group that helps low-income homeowners throughout California install affordable solar systems and trains volunteers to do the hands-on work. The homeowners also supply “sweat equity” by working as part of the volunteer installation team.

“Many of these homeowners have and continue to live in areas that have been disproportionately impacted by the pollution of traditional power plants in their neighborhoods,” said Troxler. “They also have been hit the hardest by rising energy costs. So providing renewable energy solutions, such as solar power and energy efficiency services, help to reduce the cost of energy, educate more people about energy use, and at the same time benefit the local and global environment with clean energy.”

Like many solar volunteers, Troxler, a long-time weekend volunteer at GRID Alternatives before she became a VISTA there, is passionate about protecting the environment. At GRID Alternatives, she assists with development by cultivating relations with current supporters, establishing contacts with potential corporate and community benefactors, and coming up with new funding ideas.

“I love talking to people about the program for the first time,” she said. “Many people immediately want to offer support or get involved, and eventually give financial support,” continued Troxler. “I feel happy when I see results from the plans that I have created or when the details of an event come together and implementation is a success.”



VISTA Tracie Troxler reviews site logistics at a GRID Alternatives SOLARTHON fundraiser, where corporate and individual volunteers installed eight solar electric systems in one day. The event raised \$40,000 to support renewable energy for communities in need.

## VISTA in California *(continued)*

- Community Development Commission of the County of Los Angeles**
- Community Pride Project**
- Community Services Planning Council**
- Creating Economic Opportunities for Women, Inc.**
- Disney GOALS**
- Economic Development Corporation Fresno County**
- EVERYBODY WINS! Los Angeles**
- Folsom Cordova Community Partnership**
- Foundation for California Community Colleges**
- GRID Alternatives**
- Habitat for Humanity International Western Territory**
- Harbor Interfaith Services**
- I Have A Dream Foundation, San Francisco**
- International Rescue Committee San Diego**
- International Rescue Committee San Francisco**
- Juma Ventures**
- Legal Services of Northern California**
- Los Angeles County Office of Education**
- Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute**
- National Association of Community Health Centers, Inc.**
- Neighborhood House Association (2 VISTA projects)**
- Net Impact**
- One Economy Corporation**
- Outdoor Outreach**
- People's Community Partnership Federal Credit Union**



## VISTA in California *(continued)*

**Rebuilding Together Southern California Council**  
**Redwood Community Action Agency**  
**Sacramento ENRICHES**  
**Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services**  
**San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools**  
**San Diego County District Attorney's Office**  
**San Joaquin Paleontology Foundation**  
**Search to Involve Pilipino Americans**  
**St. John's Educational Thresholds Center**  
**Streetlights**  
**Survivors of Torture, International**  
**The Children's Clinic**  
**The Health Trust**  
**The Regents of the University of California**  
**The Salvation Army (2 VISTA projects)**  
**The University Corporation**  
**Toolworks Inc.**  
**Upwardly Global**  
**Watts Learning Center**  
**West Contra Costa Business Development Center**  
**Yosemite/Sequoia Resource Conservation & Development**  
**Youth Service California**  
**Yreka Community Resource Center**

VISTA Robert Batista inspects a completed solar electric array on a fourplex for low-income families in San Francisco's Mission District. This project was completed in partnership with Habitat for Humanity San Francisco.

"As our development associate, Tracie also focuses on expanding our online fund-raising activities and on building the image and reputation of GRID Alternatives within the broader community of funders," said Zach Franklin, VISTA supervisor and development director at GRID Alternatives.

A relatively new organization that is rapidly expanding, GRID Alternatives hosted its first VISTA, Robert Batista, in 2006-2007. Batista helped GRID exceed its annual goals, with the installation of 50 solar electric systems for low-income homeowners. He identified 12 new clients for the GRID's Solar Affordability program and helped to add 520 community volunteers, who contributed more than 10,000 hours. Batista streamlined the volunteer database to accommodate the dramatic rise in contacts and collaborated with a technical volunteer team to design and implement a new database system. Batista also played a key role in opening branch offices in Los Angeles and Fresno.

VISTAs are making a tremendous impact in increasing the capabilities of GRID Alternatives and its Solar Affordable Housing Program, as the organization expands rapidly throughout California. "In 2007," said Franklin, "we nearly tripled the number of low-income solar installations we completed, thanks in significant part to the capacity-building work from our VISTA program."

In 2008, GRID is expanding statewide and working with the California Public Utilities Commission to deploy a groundbreaking statewide funding source for low-income solar energy. "Our expanded VISTA program will continue to be crucial in giving GRID Alternatives the capacity to successfully take on these opportunities and deliver more energy savings to low-income families who need it most," Franklin said. "VISTAs are helping build capacity in a rapidly-growing program that leverages cutting-edge renewable energy technology to reduce low-income families' electric bills."





# Colorado



**Featured Project:** RSVP of Boulder and Broomfield Counties

**Location:** Boulder and Broomfield Counties

**Project Sponsor:** RSVP of Boulder and Broomfield Counties

**Project Issue Area:** Senior programs

**VISTAs:** 2

The first of 77 million baby boomers in the United States turn 61 in 2007. Rather than flood nursing homes, these seniors will eventually need services to support them in their own homes, including companionship and special transit services. Furthermore, boomers are more likely than their predecessors to survive into old age.

The population of Boulder and Broomfield is aging at a faster rate than the population in the rest of Colorado. By 2020, the number of residents aged 60 and up will more than double to 69,563 and represent 20 percent of the population. In addition, in 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau indicated there are almost 21,000 adults with disabilities living in the city. Nearly 8 percent (2,093) of local residents aged 55 and up are living on less than \$10,000 per year; another 11 percent (3,070) live on less than \$20,000 (U.S. Bureau Census, 1999). Special Transit, a private, nonprofit transportation and mobility service, is hard pressed to meet the community transportation needs of these low-income residents. It turns away about 1,400 riders per year.

VISTAs are strengthening RSVP's Companionship Services and helping to develop a Volunteer Driver program. They are researching other programs to gather information on best practices and challenges. In addition, they are developing a client outreach plan, a volunteer recruitment plan, an evaluation system for clients and volunteers, and a volunteer handbook; planning volunteer training; and conducting fund-raising activities.

In the project's first year, VISTAs increased RSVP's outreach, including participating in four health and human service fairs; conducted 10 presentations; developed training curricula for the Volunteer Driving program; increased the number of people served by the Volunteer Driving and Companionship programs; and developed volunteer recruitment and management materials for the new transportation program.

## VISTA in Colorado

**No. of VISTAs:** 48

**Projects:** 13

**Project Sponsors:**

**American Red Cross, Mile High Chapter**

**Centennial Board of Cooperative Educational Services**

**Cerebral Palsy of Colorado, Inc.**

**Christmas in April, Metropolitan Denver, Inc.**

**"I Have a Dream" Foundation of Boulder County**

**Mental Health Association of Colorado**

**One Economy Corporation**

**Regis University–Colorado Campus Compact**

**RSVP of Boulder and Broomfield Counties**

**Snowboard Outreach Society**

**Southwest Youth Corps**

**Trees, Water, and People**

**United Way of Weld County**

# Connecticut

## VISTA in Connecticut

**No. of VISTAs:** 31

**Projects:** 6

**Project Sponsors:**

**Connecticut College, Office of Volunteers for Community Service**

**Eastern Connecticut State University**

**Habitat for Humanity – Coastal Fairfield County**

**Hartford Area Habitat for Humanity**

**Independence Unlimited**

**Jumpstart for Young Children, Inc**



**Featured Project:** Connecticut College

**Location:** New London

**Project Sponsor:** Connecticut College, Office of Volunteers for Community Service

**Project Issue Areas:** Education, community service

**VISTAs:** 6

New London, based on its population's poverty level and low performance on the Connecticut State Mastery Tests, is a Priority School District. New London is the regional center for social services with hospitals, clinics, shelters, public housing, community meals programs, and youth development programs, many of which are underfunded and understaffed and need volunteers to address community service challenges and build service delivery capacity.

Through the Connecticut College Office of Volunteers for Community Service, three VISTAs coordinate training sessions, increase support services for college volunteers, establish and maintain working relationships with community-based organizations, and strengthen sustainable and expandable infrastructures between Connecticut College and community partners. The VISTAs are increasing outreach, recruitment, and placement of volunteers and increasing affordable housing, education, and health community service opportunities.

This past year, VISTAs recruited and placed more than 400 student volunteers, who gave 27,308 service hours. VISTAs generated \$13,000 in in-kind resources and \$37,500 in cash to support their projects. They provided after-school programs with teaching assistants and student volunteers; placed students in elementary, middle, and high schools as tutors and mentors; and established student coordinator positions for the VISTA-created programs. Given the many successes of its VISTA project, Connecticut College built one cost-share VISTA into its annual budget.

# Delaware



**Featured Project:** Delaware Center for Horticulture

**Location:** Wilmington

**Project Sponsor:** Delaware Center for Horticulture

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 1

Gardening and horticulture have a very real role in revitalizing urban areas and stabilizing neighborhoods. Research shows that residents living near green vegetation, such as tree-lined streets or neighborhood parks, have a greater sense of community, stronger social networks, lower levels of aggression and violence in the home, and positive patterns of life functioning. When vacant lots are transformed into community gardens, they become centers of positive grassroots civic activity. In addition, gardens beautify areas, build a sense of cooperation between neighbors, and abate criminal activity.

At the Delaware Center for Horticulture, a VISTA collaborates with Tree Program managers on urban tree projects in low-income neighborhoods. This model of collaboration serves as a process for developing and documenting community-driven tree projects. Collaboration includes communications with property owners, nurturing neighborhood collaborations, follow-up communications, project evaluation, and education programming in schools and the local women's correctional facility around community gardens.

The Delaware Center for Horticulture's community garden at the Ministry of Caring Preschool has reached more than 75 low-income children for 26 hours of group environmental education. The prison community vegetable garden and the accompanying educational programs won first place in the City Gardens Contest in 2005 and 2006. The VISTA at the Tree Program recruited 44 volunteers. Because of her success with the project, she was asked to work with the mayor's Beautification Committee, focusing on the city's park system and its use in low-income areas.

## VISTA in Delaware

**No. of VISTAs:** 3

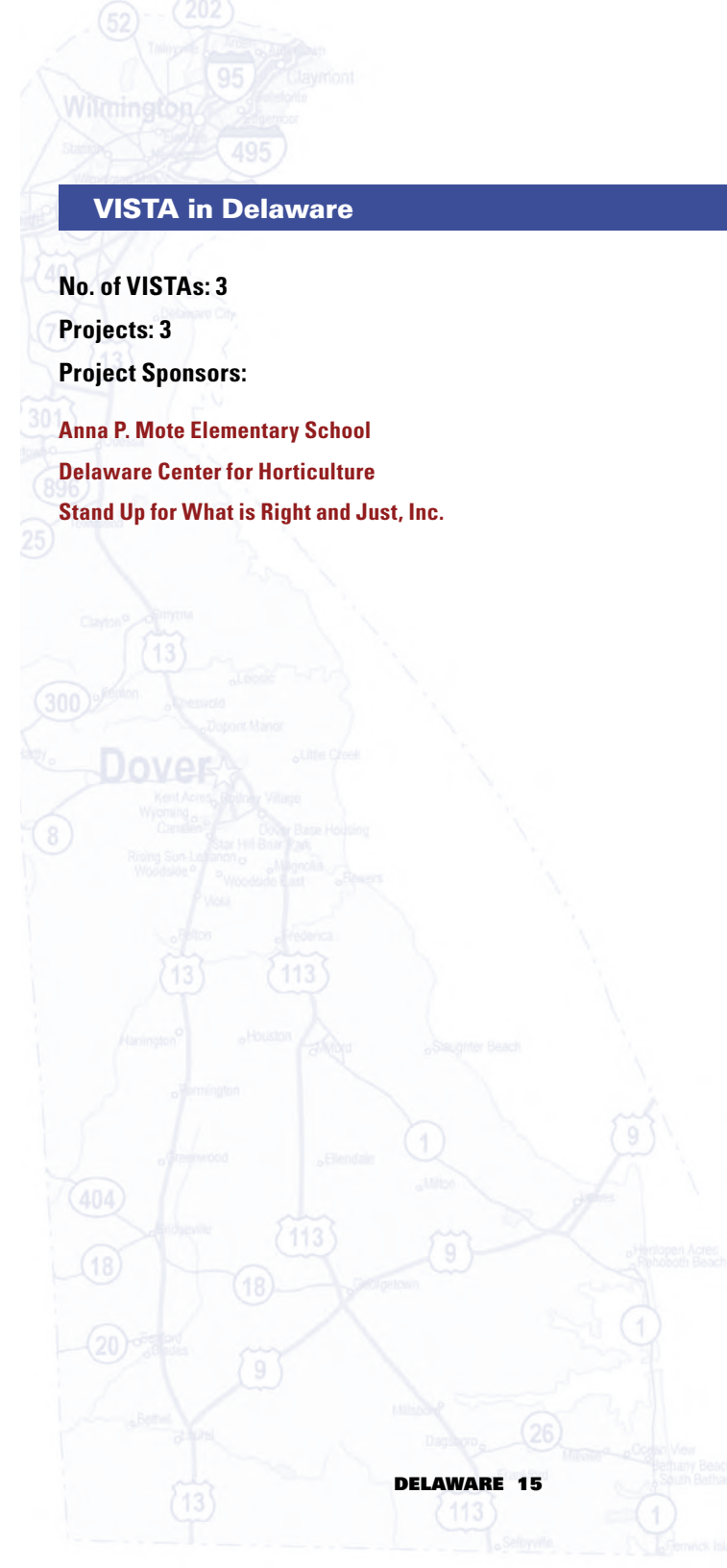
**Projects:** 3

**Project Sponsors:**

**Anna P. Mote Elementary School**

**Delaware Center for Horticulture**

**Stand Up for What is Right and Just, Inc.**



## VISTA in District of Columbia

**No. of VISTAs:** 47

**Projects:** 14

**Project Sponsors:**

**A Wider Circle**

**Asian American LEAD**

**Centro Nia**

**District of Columbia Commission on Community Service**

**For Love of Children**

**Horton's Kids**

**Little Lights Urban Ministries**

**National Coalition for the Homeless**

**National Student Partnership (2 VISTA projects)**

**One Economy**

**The Good Samaritan Foundation**

**Turning the Page**

**Youth Venture**

# District of Columbia



**Featured Project/Sponsor:** Turning the Page

**Location:** Washington, DC

**Project Sponsor:** Turning the Page

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 8

In 1998, a group of citizens concerned about the performance of public schools in the District of Columbia founded Turning the Page to link schools, families, and the community to ensure that students received every opportunity to succeed in school and in life. Principals and teachers, who were facing many challenges in their schools, often did not have the time or all the necessary skills to connect regularly and consistently with parents and community organizations.

VISTAs helped bring high quality educational resources to students in seven elementary schools and have enabled parents to become more effective educators, advocates, and leaders in their school community. Programs that involve VISTAs include:

- Community Nights, a series of parent workshops on such topics as reading development, saving for college, financial literacy, conflict resolution, and school leadership.
- Finding our Voice, which encourages parents to explore their creative sides through writing and journal-related activities
- Celebrating DC Community, which focuses on local neighborhood history and the completion of a service project
- Literacy through Photography, a program that enables students to take photographs representing themselves, their dreams, their communities, and their families while using their own writing to generate ideas for pictures
- A partnership with the Phillips Collection and the National Air and Space Museum to connect the District's resource-rich, world-class museums to the classroom.

Turning the Page's annual used book drive raised \$42,000 in 2007. The organization has distributed more than 50,000 books to families and schools, hosted more than 70 author visits, and held 700 parent classes during 420 Community Nights. Nearly 80 percent of parents reported using the books and skills they learned in workshops in the home. Parents organized several service projects, including a toy and clothing drive for a shelter and a food drive for a local pantry.



# Florida



**Featured Project:** Florida Alliance for Student Service AmeriCorps VISTA Initiative

**Location:** Tallahassee

**Project Sponsor:** Florida State University, Center for Leadership and Civic Education

**Project Issue Areas:** Education, service-learning

**VISTAs:** 21

The Florida Alliance for Student Service (FASS) connects educators, students, and community partners at all levels to improve education and address societal needs through service-learning, applied civic education, and engaged citizenship. To accomplish this goal, FASS provides training, support, resources, networking opportunities, and leadership to empower individuals and communities to engage in meaningful service.

The FASS VISTA Initiative places VISTAs at Learn and Serve and Campus Compact project sites and with community-based partners to match students with service-learning opportunities to address poverty-related issues such as hunger, diversity awareness, environmental stewardship, disaster response, HIV/AIDS, literacy, and education. The Initiative works to fulfill the Corporation for National and Community Service's strategic initiative around engaging students in service. The project's vision is for Florida's communities to embody a thriving civil society characterized by lasting education, community partnerships, active lifelong learning, informed youth leadership, and engagement in meaningful service.

Each year, FASS places VISTAs and Summer Associates to engage students, teachers, and college faculty in service-learning activities. VISTAs coordinate student youth corps programs, lead alternative spring break trips, raise community awareness, design service projects, and raise funds. They train teachers to infuse service-learning into their courses and develop learning opportunities for students. They also work directly to train students at conferences and to place them as interns with nonprofit organizations addressing community needs in low-income areas.

In 2007, VISTAs engaged 3,325 students from kindergarten through higher education and 738 community volunteers in service-learning projects. These students and volunteers contributed 35,375 service hours. VISTA initiated training for nearly 700 teachers and developed partnerships with more than 60 community agencies working to combat poverty. The partnerships generated \$14,450 in cash donations and grants and \$7,000 worth of in-kind donations.

## VISTA in Florida

**No. of VISTAs:** 224

**Projects:** 26

**Project Sponsors:**

**Abilities First**

**ACCION USA, Miami**

**Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Miami**

**Church World Service**

**City of Miami**

**Coalition to End Homelessness**

**Communities in Schools of Florida, Inc. (2 VISTA projects)**

**Destiny Foundation of Central Florida, Inc.**

**Florida Gulf Coast University (2 VISTA projects)**

**Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.**

**Florida State University (2 VISTA projects)**

**Habitat for Humanity International, Jacksonville**

**International Rescue Committee**

**Okaloosa-Walton Community College**

**Osceola County Council on Aging**

**Polk County Board of County Commissioners**

**Rebuild Polk After Disaster**

**Rolling Readers Space Coast**

**South Florida Urban Ministries, Inc.**

**The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast**

**United States Fellowship of Florida**

**Volunteer Florida**

**We Help Community Development Corporation**



# Georgia

## VISTA in Georgia

**No. of VISTAs: 66**

**Projects: 15**

**Project Sponsors:**

**ACCION USA, Atlanta**

**CAMP, INC.**

**Central Georgia Technical College – Adult Learning Center**

**Chattahoochee Technical College**

**Communities in Schools of Georgia**

**Fugees Family, Inc.**

**Georgia Center for Nonprofits**

**Habitat for Humanity International**

**Hands on Atlanta, Inc.**

**Life Enrichment Services**

**Refugee Family Services**

**The Single Parent Alliance & Resource Center, Inc.**

**United Way of the Central Savannah River Area, Inc.**

**Uplifting People, Inc.**

**Women’s Resource Center – Women Moving On**



**Featured Project:** Regional Nonprofits Capacity-Building Project

**Location:** Savannah and Brunswick

**Project Sponsor:** Georgia Center for Nonprofits

**Project Issue Area:** Engaging older adults in volunteer service

**VISTAs:** 3

Nonprofit agencies serving low-income, rural communities need access to capacity-building assistance to improve and enhance their service capacity.

VISTAs assist the Georgia Center for Nonprofits in promoting the regional satellite offices in Brunswick and Savannah. These satellite offices help nonprofit organizations in rural communities expand their knowledge, skills, and ability to provide services. The VISTAs were instrumental in helping coordinate, develop, and promote a range of workshops for nonprofit directors, staff, and board members.

Rural communities often have a high percentage of older residents, a valuable resource for nonprofits to use. VISTA Tonia Hamilton, serving with the Brunswick satellite office, helped develop and promote a workshop on “How to Increase Volunteering among Baby Boomers.” More than 25 participants attended the workshop, which focused not only on how to effectively attract, manage, and motivate Baby Boomer volunteers, but also on how to conduct value-based volunteer training for this group. The participants gain knowledge that will help them to tap into a valuable volunteer resource.

VISTAs have improved the management and operational skills of nonprofits serving low-income communities, thus enhancing their ability to recruit and utilize volunteers. VISTAs have also improved the organizational functionality of nonprofits, the identification of collaborative opportunities among agencies, and the management skills of nonprofit executive directors, board members, and staff.

# Hawaii



**Featured Project:** Habitat for Humanity

**Location:** Honolulu

**Project Sponsor:** Habitat for Humanity Western States

**Project Issue Area:** Housing

**VISTAs:** 3

Honolulu is one of the nation's most expensive housing markets. Many low-income residents struggle with escalating rents and appreciating home prices with higher tax levies. At least 5,000 homeless people live on Oahu. The most cited reason for homelessness is lack of affordable rentals. An estimated 44,190 new housing units will be needed statewide by 2009.

Honolulu Habitat for Humanity uses local resources, both labor and financial support, to develop affordable housing on Oahu. The organization builds simple, decent, and affordable houses on Oahu that are sold to families in need.

Honolulu Habitat for Humanity is in its second year of sponsoring a VISTA project. VISTAs have helped Honolulu Habitat for Humanity increase its capacity to provide housing by developing systems for furthering program development and by incorporating actions to promote long-term sustainability. In addition, VISTAs have worked with both the Family Support Committee and the Family Selection Committee to better define and further enhance the work of these committees to ensure long-term success.

VISTAs also developed several systems and guides for Honolulu Habitat for Humanity, including a volunteer recruitment plan, a volunteer training manual, a volunteer management procedure, a family support program sustainability plan, a community resources manual for partner families to find available resources in Oahu, and a Honolulu Habitat homeowner guide.

## VISTA in Hawaii

**No. of VISTAs:** 21

**Projects:** 5

**Project Sponsors:**

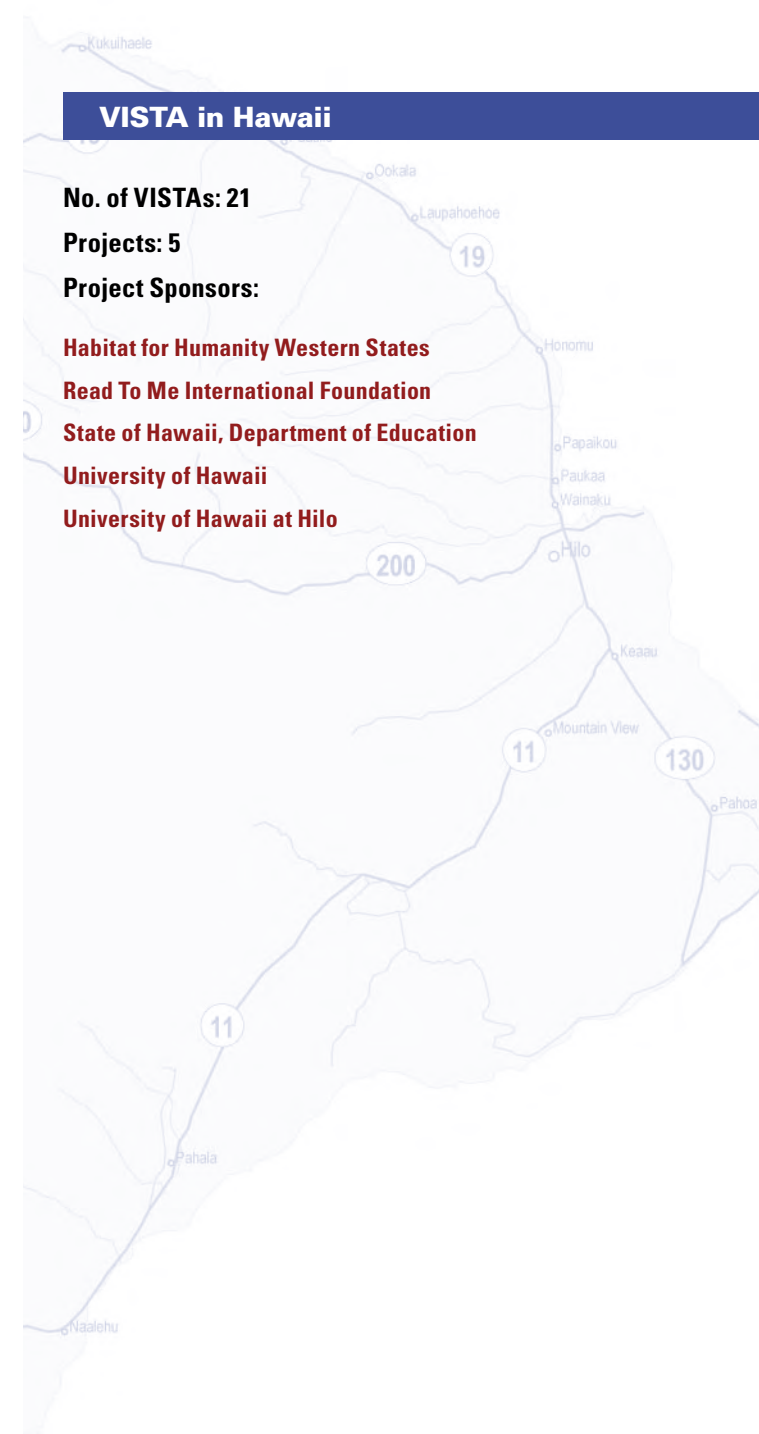
**Habitat for Humanity Western States**

**Read To Me International Foundation**

**State of Hawaii, Department of Education**

**University of Hawaii**

**University of Hawaii at Hilo**



# Idaho

## VISTA in Idaho

**No. of VISTAs:** 62

**Projects:** 11

**Project Sponsors:**

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Inland Northwest**

**Catholic Charities of Idaho**

**Cooperative Wilderness Handicapped Outdoor Group**

**Faith In Action of Boise, Inc.**

**Idaho 4-H Youth Programs**

**Idaho Association of Area Agencies on Aging**

**Idaho State Department of Education**

**Idaho State University Hispanic Health Project**

**Lewis-Clark State College**

**Mountain States Group Inc.**

**Planned Parenthood of Idaho**



**Featured Project:** Idaho Reads!

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsor:** Idaho State Department of Education

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 30

The Idaho Reads! VISTA project mobilizes and engages parents, volunteer tutors, and community partners in efforts to improve reading skills among K–3 children. Currently, far too many Idaho K–3 children are not reading proficiently at their grade level. Research has documented that learning to read and write is most important in the education of young children. Indeed, the ability to read and write is the foundation for subsequent learning. Children who do not read and write well are more likely than others to be unable to complete their school work, become discipline problems, and drop out of school. Assuring that all children will be able to read and write independently by the end of third grade contributes significantly toward solving several major social and civic problems.

In 2007, 30 VISTA members served in 29 elementary schools throughout Idaho to help improve the reading skills of children (K–3) who currently read below grade level. VISTAs recruited, trained, and coordinated part-time literacy volunteers; produced outreach materials for volunteer recruitment; promoted project sustainability; mobilized resources in and out of the school to support the project; built partnerships with local public and private sector organizations and businesses; solicited donations and other in-kind support for the project; organized and conducted a local book drive; organized and conducted family literacy and parent involvement activities; and helped organize and implement a summer reading program.

VISTAs mobilized more than 3,400 community volunteers who served more than 26,500 hours. They organized 114 family literacy events, in which 11,268 adults and 17,258 children participated. VISTAs assisted in the collection and distribution of 17,556 new books to low-income children and families and generated \$20,462 in monetary grants and in-kind donations worth \$119,270 to support school-based literacy efforts for K–3 children who read below grade level.



# Illinois



**Featured Project/Sponsor:** Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago

**Location:** Chicago and suburban Cook County

**Project Sponsor:** Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago

**Project Issue Areas:** Health care, housing, financial literacy

**VISTAs:** 10

## Legal Aid to Those in Need

In the words of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, “There can be no equal justice where the kind of trial a man gets depends on the amount of money he has.” These are words to live by for many VISTAs throughout the country who support legal aid programs such as the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF).

Meet Yeena Yoon, Scott Ibbotson, and Rebecca Sherman, VISTAs serving at LAF. They are building the program that helps Chicago and suburban Cook County residents who cannot afford legal counsel navigate the legal system and understand and safeguard their rights as a step toward achieving economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families.

Yoon, a recent graduate with both law and social work degrees, set up the day-to-day operations at the Micah Legal Aid Clinic, a new collaboration between the LAF and a church on the northwest side of Chicago. The Micah clinic serves clients with needs in the areas of family law, domestic violence, housing, employment, public benefits, auto repossession, and school expulsion and truancy. “It’s my responsibility to develop the means to recruit and coordinate volunteer attorneys and interpreters, prepare training materials, and provide support to volunteers with cases,” explained Yoon, who also conducts community outreach to raise awareness and improve the Legal Assistance Foundation’s profile in the community. “The goal is to make this a self-sustaining project,” said Richard Hess, LAF’s supervising attorney of the VISTA team.

For Ibbotson, VISTA offers an opportunity to explore the law as a career field and “to spend a year doing meaningful and fulfilling work.” Ibbotson helped develop LAF’s Public Benefits Hotline. He sets up methods to recruit, train, and support volunteers from corporate legal departments to advocate on behalf of clients who are denied food stamps or medical benefits. The hotline is a call-in service that dispenses free advice, administrative advocacy, and legal representation to applicants and recipients of public financial assistance.

## VISTA in Illinois

**No. of VISTAs:** 219

**Projects:** 32

**Project Sponsors:**

**ACCION Chicago, Inc.**

**American Red Cross, Chicago**

**Arab American Family Services**

**Anne’s Home**

**Bethel New Life, Inc. (2 VISTA projects)**

**Board of Trustees of Western Illinois University**

**Campaign For Better Health Care**

**Chicago Community Ventures**

**Chicago Public Schools Homeless Education Program**

**Chicago Rehab Network**

**Comprehensive Community Solutions**

**Goodcity NFP**

**Illinois Central College**

**Illinois Coalition For Community Service**

**Inspiration Cafe**

**Interfaith Refugee & Immigration Ministries**

**Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation**

**Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago**

**Lutheran Social Services of Illinois**

**Metropolitan Tenants Organization**

**National Center on Poverty Law**

**North Side Community Federal Credit Union**

## VISTA in Illinois *(continued)*

**Tax Assistance Program**

**The University of Chicago**

**The Youth Job Center of Evanston, Inc.**

**United Way of Metropolitan Chicago**

**University of Illinois – Chicago, College of Nursing**

**Volunteer Center of Northwest Suburban Chicago**

**Western Illinois Economic Development  
Partnership**

**Whiteside County Extension Office**

**Youth Conservation Corps, Inc.**

Yeena Yoon (standing, third from right), a VISTA attorney at the Micah Legal Aid, joins others volunteers for an “Appreciation Lunch.” Yoon coordinates the recruitment and management of volunteer attorneys and interpreters and conducts community outreach.

Micah Legal Aid is a partnership between New Community Covenant Church and the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago.

“By helping clients navigate the public benefits system, it allows them to redirect their energy from meeting their basic needs to pursuing goals that will alleviate their financial hardships,” said Ibbotson. He appreciates his role in helping LAF “improve our clients’ quality of life by restoring people’s control over their own lives.”

Sherman, a recent graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, assists a program that helps immigrant victims of domestic violence break free from physical and emotional abuse and apply for U.S. citizenship under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). “I recruit *pro bono* attorneys to assist clients in filing their VAWA applications,” explained Sherman. “After their VAWA petition is approved,” Sherman said, “our clients can legally work and become self-sufficient.”

For more than 40 years, the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago has provided free civil legal assistance to tens of thousands of low-income and elderly individuals in Chicago and suburban Cook





County. For those who are low-income, elderly, or disabled, legal assistance is often crucial for them to protect their homes, their employment, their public benefits, or to protect their constitutional or statutory rights. Almost one million of the most vulnerable residents of Cook County are eligible for LAF's services.

Through Yoon's VISTA experience, she is fulfilling her dream of working as a public interest attorney. "Knowledge is power and I hope to empower the poor by providing them with access to resources. For example, when connecting clients to legal resources, we can prevent homelessness by safeguarding tenants' rights when it comes to eviction."

Yoon, Ibbotson, and Sherman are among 10 VISTAs serving at LAF. These VISTAs are building programs that aid the most vulnerable in our society, including battered women, people with disabilities, public housing residents, applicants for and recipients of subsistence benefits and Medicaid, immigrants, children, the elderly, low-paid workers, nursing home residents, and people suffering from HIV-AIDS.

The VISTAs' hard work is paying off. In two years, VISTAs recruited nearly 250 volunteer attorneys who contributed 10,000 hours of legal services each year and helped more than 1,100 clients. "Some cases required a few hours of the *pro bono* attorney's time, while others took more than 40 hours to resolve," Hess said. "If their clients had to pay for this legal service, the estimated cost would have been at least \$2.5 million."



## VISTA in Illinois *(continued)*

# Indiana

## VISTA in Indiana

**No. of VISTAs: 102**

**Projects: 10**

**Project Sponsors:**

**American Red Cross of Greater Indianapolis**

**Dads, Inc. of Indiana**

**Economy One Corporation**

**Horizon House**

**Indiana Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives**

**Indiana State Department of Correction**

**Indiana State Department of Education**

**Indiana University**

**Monroe/Owen Counties RSVP**

**Starfish Initiative**



**Featured Project:** Starfish Initiative

**Location:** Indianapolis

**Project Sponsor:** Starfish, Inc.

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 2

## Making a Difference, One Scholar at a Time

Like the old man in the legend who saves starfish he finds on the beach by throwing them back into the sea, the Starfish Initiative works to impact the lives of individual students. In an effort to improve graduation rates and encourage more low-income students to attend college in Indianapolis, Joyce Johnson founded the Starfish Initiative, which provides one-on-one mentoring relationships and college preparatory programs.

“Only one in five boys graduates in Indianapolis,” said Johnson, explaining why Starfish Initiative exists. “The school system’s [graduation rate] as a whole is 40 percent. Most drop out because of peer pressures or other obligations or lack of hope, not because they’re not smart enough.”

In Indiana, low- and middle-income students who graduate from high school while registered in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars program, a state-sponsored education initiative, receive free college tuition from an Indiana college or university. Starfish Initiative identifies promising middle school students and ensures they register for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars to participate in the Starfish mentor program.

In 2007, Starfish Initiative hosted two VISTA Summer Associates and two full-time VISTAs. The VISTAs concentrate on resource development, program development, community relations, and communications.

“Their focus is absolutely capacity building for Starfish,” said Johnson. “With the VISTA program doubling our capacity, we can accomplish our goal to serve all these kids. We couldn’t have thought about doing that without these VISTAs.”

Bethany Warner is a VISTA who left her job as a political and education newspaper reporter in Wisconsin to serve at Starfish. A Canton native, Bethany has a master’s degree in journalism, with an emphasis on public affairs reporting, from the University of Illinois at Springfield. She came to Starfish to try her skills at grant writing and development while volunteering, which is an activity she could not do with her schedule and ethics code as a newspaper reporter.





## VISTA in Indiana *(continued)*

VISTAs at Starfish perform a variety of tasks from grant writing to developing a student curriculum to organizing outreach events for the community as a way to help Starfish combat poverty. Bethany Warner (left) has raised \$213,500 in grants to expand and improve opportunities for college bound high school students in Indiana. “Civic duty has always been important to me,” says VISTA Deandra Thompson (right). “As cliché as it may sound, I became a VISTA member to do my part in making the world a better place.”

“Before I came to Starfish as a VISTA, all this grant writing was on the plate of the executive director,” explained Warner. “By me taking over, she can make a greater impact. She can meet more people and champion our cause instead of staying in the office writing grants.”

Warner’s activities include identifying grant funders, individual donors, and corporate sponsors to help Starfish grow and serve more students each year. She also is working to increase communication with donors, including the creation of a newsletter. Her most memorable moment as a VISTA so far was the first check Starfish received for a grant she had written—she said her work was literally paying off.

“I see my work as a support role for alleviating poverty,” said Warner. “Starfish helps alleviate poverty by keeping kids in school and getting them educated. We can’t reach more students if we don’t have the funding to support the programs we’re doing. I’m making it possible for more students to be reached.”



## VISTA in Indiana *(continued)*

Deandra Thompson, a VISTA who engages in program development activities at Starfish, is an Indianapolis native and recent graduate with a bachelor's degree in public affairs from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. She became a VISTA as a way to bridge her interests in government and the nonprofit sector. She was drawn to Starfish's work since it was an opportunity to get experience in a grassroots nonprofit that had an interest in education policy on a local level.

"I think my role is creating a roadmap for our students," said Thompson, describing her programming role at Starfish. "Before I came, Starfish had different programs, but there wasn't really a path starting from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. My role first was to create a strategic path."

In an effort to create a four-year path for Starfish scholars to follow during high school to prepare for college, Thompson researched other college access programs around the country to help Starfish evaluate its programming while building partnerships with other nonprofits and schools. She coordinates the Leadership Academy, which teaches students about responsible citizenship and allows them to interact with legislators and work the polls. She also created partnerships with local colleges to provide the students with organized campus visit days, as well as increased financial aid should they choose to attend college in the future.

"It is really difficult to take a little piece of [programming] and make it stretch for four years," said Thompson, on the challenges she faces in creating new programs that will be sustainable once her VISTA term is complete. "Starfish has three programs, and I broke that up into different pieces and made it fit in a timeline with what students should be doing to think about college."

Starfish leadership was impressed with the timeline and programming Thompson developed and put it in place immediately.

The impact of the VISTAs is evident already, according to Johnson. More community members know about the Starfish program, and more partnerships have been formed with local schools, businesses, and organizations. Four times as many grant proposals are being submitted every month.

"Education is the key to overcoming barriers of poverty," said Johnson. "If we can get our kids to graduate and get a college education, then their kids won't live in poverty. Everything our VISTAs are doing contributes to that."



# Iowa



**Featured Project:** Neighborhood Assistance Project  
**Location:** Cedar Rapids  
**Project Sponsor:** Community Corrections Improvement Association  
**Project Issue Area:** Housing  
**VISTAs:** 11

In 2005, an extensive needs assessment survey of residents in the five high-crime, high-poverty neighborhoods in Cedar Rapids revealed the most significant concern was the revitalization and beautification of housing and building structures in the neighborhoods. From this survey came BRIGHTEN, a grass-roots effort to reverse the trend of deteriorating housing and restore neighborhood pride in property upkeep.

VISTAs and Summer Associates helped shape the BRIGHTEN program. They wrote grants, solicited in-kind and monetary donations, recruited and coordinated volunteers, as well as produced and distributed promotional materials to area organizations, churches, and businesses.

This past summer, volunteers worked to BRIGHTEN up nearly 60 properties. They painted and replaced address numbers on homes that did not meet city housing code requirements. VISTAs secured \$2,423 in in-kind donations and \$14,600 in monetary donations or grants. The project also brought together both neighbors and outsiders to build relationships, improve dilapidated housing, and restore the pride in the neighborhoods and property.

## VISTA in Iowa

**No. of VISTAs:** 121

**Projects:** 22

**Project Sponsors:**

**American Red Cross**

**Community Corrections Improvement Association**

**EVERYBODY WINS! Iowa**

**Family and Children's Council**

**Habitat for Humanity of Iowa, Inc.**

**Homes of Oakridge Human Services**

**Iowa Asian Alliance**

**Iowa Campus Compact**

**Iowa Civil Rights Commission**

**Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

**Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service**

**Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs**

**Iowa Division of Latino Affairs**

**Iowa Workforce Development**

**ISED Ventures**

**Lutheran Services of Iowa**

**Morningside College**

**Rock Valley Rotary Club Foundation**

**Shelby County Community Outreach**

**State Court Administrator's Office, Iowa Judicial Branch**

**The Abilities Fund**

**VanBuren Community School District**

# Kansas

## VISTA in Kansas

**No. of VISTAs: 15**

**Projects: 5**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Associated Youth Services**

**Kansas State University**

**KSDS, Inc.**

**Rice County Community Foundation**

**tiny-k Foundation**



**Featured Project:** Associated Youth Services

**Location:** Kansas City

**Project Sponsor:** Associated Youth Services

**Project Issue Areas:** Education, youth development

**VISTAs: 3**

Growing up is difficult. For underprivileged youth in crisis situations, growing up can be absolutely crushing. Associated Youth Services (AYS) helps young people through crises, such as homelessness, abusive homes, substance abuse, school suspensions, and gang involvement. Ultimately, AYS programs help the community's youth approach adulthood equipped with new tools, caring adults, and a renewed sense of hope.

During 2007, three VISTAs helped AYS create a three-year strategic plan, bolster its message through marketing, increase its fund-raising ability, and engage community volunteers in serving its mission.

The VISTAs have greatly elevated AYS' message, thereby gaining more exposure for the issue of youth in crisis. VISTAs helped AYS generate three articles in major Kansas City newspapers, launch a website and e-newsletter, create a foster parent recruitment plan, host a 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Open House that attracted elected officials and community leaders, raise more than \$30,000, and increase the volunteer program by 80 percent. In turn, these resources have helped AYS bolster its five core programs and reach nearly 8,000 youth during this period. Without AYS' unique programs, many of these youth would have remained underserved or not served at all.

# Kentucky



**Featured Project:** Kentucky CASA, Inc.

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsor:** Kentucky CASA, Inc.

**Project Issue Areas:** Children at risk, children in foster care

**VISTAs:** 5

## “A Powerful Voice in a Child’s Life”

In Kentucky, more than 17,000 children reside in foster care and other similar situations that are away from the care of their immediate family. VISTAs serving at Kentucky CASA, Inc. strive to ensure that the needs of these children are addressed.

Megan Roar, Amanda Townsell, and Geline Porter, along with two other VISTAs across the state, see results every day through their efforts to give many of these children, often abused and neglected, an effective voice in court through the Kentucky CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) program.

“There is a generational cycle of poverty in eastern Kentucky,” said Roar, a Kentucky native assigned to the CASA program in state’s northeastern region. “Most of the CASA families we serve either live at or below the poverty line. . . We can spend our time and money on children suffering now by offering them resources and hope, or we can spend time and money on them later, when as adults they follow in their family’s footsteps and either end up in jail or on welfare.”

Roar and the other VISTAs serve as “capacity builders” and grassroots organizers in CASA affiliates throughout the state. Their primary goal, according to Kentucky CASA Director Alex Blevins, is sustainability. The VISTAs recruit and help set up training for Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers who work in local juvenile and family courts and speak for the best interest of at-risk children in the court system.

The CASA volunteer, an extra set of eyes and ears for the courtroom, reports findings and makes recommendations to the judge. “Our volunteers are ordinary people who do extraordinary work,” Roar said. Last year, volunteer Advocates helped about 2,000 youth get into a stable, caring situation.

Retiree and VISTA Geline Porter spent her professional career in early childhood education and now chooses to spend her time encouraging others to be a powerful voice in a child’s life. “I have introduced many people to CASA and its need for volunteers” said Porter, who is in her second year as a VISTA at the CASA program in Bowling Green. An Advocate herself for nine years, she is well qualified to recruit and

## VISTA in Kentucky

**No. of VISTAs:** 151

**Projects:** 16

**Project Sponsors:**

**American Red Cross, Louisville Chapter**

**Americana Community Center**

**Audubon Area Community Services, Inc.**

**Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning**

**Gateway Community and Technical College**

**Habitat for Humanity International**

**Jefferson County Public Schools**

**Kentucky CASA, Inc.**

**Kentucky Commission on Community  
Volunteerism and Service**

**Kentucky Domestic Violence Association, Inc.**

**Mountain Missions Development Corporation  
(2 VISTA projects)**

**Northern Kentucky University Research  
Foundation**

**South Louisville Community Ministries**

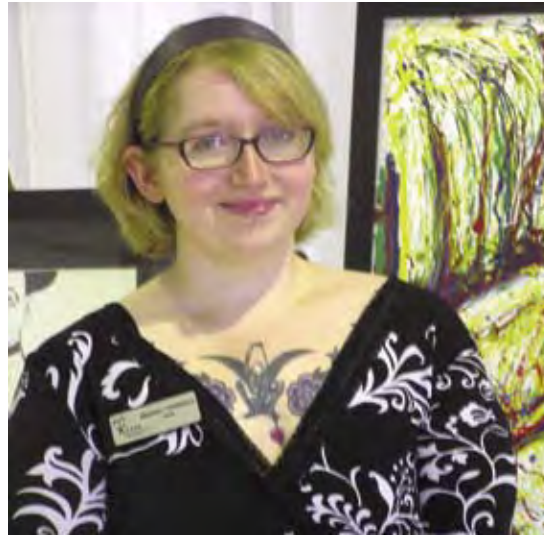
**United Way of Central Kentucky**

**United Way of Northeast Kentucky**



## VISTA in Kentucky *(continued)*

VISTA Amanda Townsell assists the Daviess County CASA Office with fundraising, volunteer recruitment and management, community awareness, and program sustainability. Last year she overhauled her site's annual fundraiser, an art auction. Using her contacts in the art community across the state, Townsell obtained high quality artwork from a variety of mediums and commitments from the giving artists for an annual gift. The auction netted \$15,000.



develop training for CASA volunteers. During the 30-hour training course conducted by the local CASA program, volunteers learn courtroom procedure and effective advocacy techniques for children and participate in seminars on topics ranging from child sexual abuse to early childhood development and adolescent behavior.

VISTAs in Kentucky also seek to establish a more secure funding base to help support the work of CASA affiliates. Since 2004, VISTAs have helped CASA affiliates raise nearly \$400,000 through grants, individual donations, and special events. “Without the help of [VISTAs], many of our rural programs would not have been sustained,” said Kentucky CASA Director and former VISTA Alex Blevins.

Blevins credits VISTAs' efforts for increasing the number of Kentucky's children served by the CASA program by about 500 youth each year. He is also enthusiastic about the lasting impacts VISTAs have created through sustainable fund-raising and volunteer recruitment efforts that are reflected in activities and events that will outlast them long after they leave the organization.

Blevins highlighted VISTA Amanda Townsell's achievement to “overhaul” an annual art auction, a fund-raising event of CASA of Ohio Valley in Owensboro. Townsell doubled the amount of art donated and solicited commitments from artists for an annual gift. In her first attempt, Amanda helped the event net nearly \$15,000 in donations.

“Seeing months of work and preparation come together really makes you proud,” Townsell said. “Poverty, homelessness, child abuse, substance abuse—these things are all connected. If you work on one of these things, you directly affect them all at some point.”

For Blevins and others the results are obvious. Recent research indicates that compared to Kentucky children without a CASA volunteer, children who have a CASA Advocate spend less time in the state's care and have fewer placements and fewer disruptions in those placements.

For the 500 youth helped by the efforts of VISTAs at Kentucky CASA, that amounts to a lifetime of gratitude, hope, and promise.



# Louisiana



**Featured Project:** Tulane University Center for Public Service

**Location:** New Orleans

**Project Sponsor:** Tulane University

**Project Issue Areas:** Health care, housing, job development, asset development, historical and cultural preservation

**VISTAs:** 16

Tulane University's Center for Public Service, created as part of the university's response to Hurricane Katrina, illustrates Tulane's commitment to merge academic inquiry with sustained civic engagement. Over three years, the center plans to marshal 1,500 students who will work in community-based programs every semester. This number is achievable in part due to the increased interest among students and to the institution of a public service graduation requirement by Tulane for all incoming students. This requirement ensures that partner agencies can rely on the university as a consistent resource in the future.

Given the widespread destruction from Hurricane Katrina, many of Tulane's 25 community partner agencies require assistance to become operational again. VISTAs are assigned to aid Tulane students, faculty, and staff as they assist community partners with capacity building in the coming years, as the city recovers from Hurricane Katrina. Each VISTA works with a community agency in the New Orleans area and serves as a liaison between Tulane and the VISTA's assigned agency. The agencies include local city entities, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, and health care organizations. Each VISTA has one permanently assigned community partner to ensure that the VISTA becomes knowledgeable about the agency, its needs, and the types of services Tulane students could provide.

VISTAs provide much needed help by first conducting a needs assessment analysis in conjunction with each of their assigned agencies, if the agency has not already done so. This information enables the Center for Public Service staff and the VISTA to identify specific ways to build capacity within local agencies and to design service projects for which university students can best assist. VISTAs spend much of their time at their assigned agency, but they also spend one day a week at Tulane University for training, reporting, and other duties. VISTAs work on capacity building tasks for the agencies as identified by their site supervising staff. In addition, VISTAs develop activities for the Tulane University service-learning students and interns placed at those sites.

VISTAs rebuilt the Hispanic Apostolate's English as a Second Language (ESL) program and secured permanent space at Tulane University to hold evening classes. They also created new ESL sites at Esperanza, a new charter school in New Orleans, and at a community center that caters to immigrant laborers. At the

## VISTA in Louisiana

**No. of VISTAs:** 275

**Projects:** 13

**Project Sponsors:**

**Catholic Community Services**

**Catholic Community Services Baton Rouge, Inc.**

**Father Lebeau Community Center**

**Habitat for Humanity – New Orleans Area**

**Habitat for Humanity St. Tammany West**

**Louisiana CASA Association**

**Louisiana Division of Administration, Office of  
Community Development**

**Louisiana Serve Commission**

**Northwest Louisiana Food Bank**

**Preservation Resource Center**

**Southern University and A & M College**

**Tulane University**

**Webster Habitat for Humanity**



## VISTA in Louisiana *(continued)*

Tulane University site, VISTAs built a program that utilizes at least 70 Tulane students to serve 300 adult learners every semester. The Tulane students, recruited primarily from the Latin American Studies and Spanish and Portuguese Departments, serve as assistant teachers, teachers, and site facilitators.

VISTAs have assisted in growing CITYBuild from an idea to a full-fledged nonprofit organization that brings in schools of architecture and design from around the country to work on community design and build projects. The only full-time “staff” at CITYBuild until this fall, VISTAs guided the organization’s application for nonprofit status and the recruitment of 21 member institutions from around the United States.

The VISTA assigned to the New Orleans Mayor’s Office of Public Advocacy worked to restart the Volunteers in Government program. The VISTA continues to redesign and re-brand the office to professionals in New Orleans as a way to effectively volunteer their time and have an impact on the city. The VISTA also worked to recruit and organize more than 400 volunteers for the Congress of Cities Conference, which hosted more than 4,000 mayors, council members, and legislators from across the country.

# Maine



**Featured Project:** Communities for Children and Youth

**Location:** Augusta

**Project Sponsor:** State Planning Office, Maine Executive Department

**Project Issue Areas:** Asset development, education

**VISTAs:** 32

A statewide initiative of the Maine's Children Cabinet, Communities for Children and Youth (C4CY) is designed to improve measurably the well being of children and increase their educational attainment levels. Maine's predominantly rural make-up, coupled with the high prevalence of multigenerational poverty, posed unique challenges and required a radical response. Realizing the breadth of the mission, C4CY partnered with VISTA and launched an effort to enhance the capacity of youth-serving organizations throughout the state.

Through its nine-year history, C4CY has recruited, trained, and placed more than 200 VISTAs at more than 135 organizations statewide. The diverse nature of, and approach to alleviating, impoverished circumstances for youth in Maine has led to an equally diverse crop of nonprofits and government agencies seeking to diminish the ill effects of poverty. VISTAs have helped establish a culture of asset development and high-quality programming for Maine's youth by engaging them and their communities in arts education; anti-bullying initiatives; leadership development; mentoring; academic support; health promotion; career education and social skill development; and alcohol, tobacco and drug prevention.

Since C4CY's inception in 1998, VISTAs have recruited, screened, trained, and supported more than 23,000 volunteers who served more than 340,000 hours. They have garnered greater than \$1 million in in-kind donations and nearly \$4.5 million in grants and other funds. Last year, more than 16,175 youth benefited from the efforts of Maine's dedicated group of VISTAs.

## VISTA in Maine

**No. of VISTAs:** 62

**Projects:** 5

**Project Sponsors:**

**Independent Transportation Network**

**Maine Commission for Community Service**

**Portland Time Bank**

**State Planning Office, Maine Executive  
Department**

**University of Maine**

# Maryland

## VISTA in Maryland

**No. of VISTAs: 101**

**Projects: 19**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Asian American LEAD**

**Barstow Acres Children's Center**

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Frederick County**

**Boys & Girls Clubs of Harford County**

**Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation, Inc.**

**Calvert Healthcare Solutions, Inc.**

**Civic Works, Inc.**

**ENABLE-Maryland, Center for Community Outreach**

**Frostburg State University**

**Greater Homewood Community Corporation**

**Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition**

**Maryland Association of Community Mediation Centers**

**Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development**

**Meeting Ground**

**National Council on the Aging**

**Office of Community Services**

**One Church, One Child of Maryland, Inc.**

**Students Sharing Coalition, Inc.**

**Volunteer Maryland**



**Featured Project:** Greater Homewood Community Corporation

**Location:** Baltimore

**Project/Sponsor:** Greater Homewood Community Corporation

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 12

The Greater Homewood Community Corporation (GHCC) serves Baltimore's young people in a variety of ways. The organization helps prepare young children to enter school and achieve academic success. GHCC also initiates and supervises programs in youth centers and coordinates youth agencies to improve the availability of services for at-risk youth.

The young people served by GHCC face a myriad of challenges. The immediate neighborhoods surrounding three of GHCC's partnership schools have juvenile arrests of 165 per 1,000 children, compared with the Baltimore City average of 140. At another school, 80 percent of the students have a parent or primary caregiver dealing with alcohol or drug abuse. Baltimore City was ranked among the four worst performing counties in terms of full school readiness, with below 40 percent of students prepared. Furthermore, children in Baltimore City come from disproportionately poor families. In 94 percent of Baltimore City elementary schools, at least 60 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-cost meals. In one GHCC neighborhood, more than two-thirds of the households have children being cared for by a grandparent, and nearly 56 percent of the households earn \$25,000 or less per year. The need exists in the GHCC service area to combat poverty and barriers to success for its youth in many ways.

Between 2005 and 2007, 12 VISTAs and VISTA Leaders served with GHCC. They worked in schools developing faith-based partnerships, recruiting and training tutors and mentors, helping to identify the medical and mental health needs of students and families, collaborating with school principals to determine program and volunteer needs, and assisting with the coordination of Experience Corps members, volunteers over age 55 who mentor elementary school students.

VISTAs contributed greatly to GHCC's capacity to serve Baltimore and its young people. As a result of their service, GHCC now manages the largest community-based education effort in the city. More than 200 volunteers have served over 3,600 students in 12 Baltimore City schools. The Youth Development Initiative has placed and managed 12 classes in art, music, dance, and nutrition in local youth centers, providing 24 hours a week of safe and engaging activity for more than 100 youth. Since January 2006, VISTAs have generated over \$144,637 in cash and in-kind resources to support the organization and community programs.



# Massachusetts



**Featured Project:** Generations Incorporated

**Location:** Boston

**Project Sponsor:** Generations Incorporated

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 15

Boston is undergoing a demographic revolution. The city now has more than 100,000 residents aged 55 or older. What does this statistic mean for Boston? Generations Incorporated believes it means better opportunities for local children from low-income communities. Local children need all the guidance they can get. Retirees have the time, experience, and desire to help. For 15 years, Generations Incorporated has connected older adults with the children who need them most.

The VISTAs who serve with Generations Incorporated and its partner organizations work toward establishing a sustainable foundation on which to expand. Collectively, the VISTAs focus on resource development, volunteer recruitment and training, program development, capacity building, and VISTA recruitment and training. They have increased the corps of community volunteers from 50 in 2002 to greater than 300 in 2007, and generated enough new revenue to enable the organization to hire two full-time development staff members.

The efforts of VISTAs have translated into an immediate impact on the communities they serve. More than 300 older adults (aged 55+) have joined the Experience Corps team hosted by Generations Incorporated. This past year, these senior corps members provided more than 55,000 hours of mentoring and tutoring to 2,290 children in weekly intervention sessions, and engaged 2,500 additional students and more than 400 parents in family outreach and community service activities.

## VISTA in Massachusetts

**No. of VISTAs:** 183

**Projects:** 29

**Project Sponsors:**

**ACCION USA**

**American Red Cross of Massachusetts Bay**

**Boston Affordable Housing Coalition**

**Boston Cares**

**Boston Local Development Corporation**

**Boston Rescue Mission**

**Center For Ecological Technology**

**Children's Law Center of Massachusetts**

**City of Boston – Elderly Affairs Commission**

**City of Pittsfield**

**Cradles to Crayons**

**Foster and Adoption Mentoring and Enrichment, Inc.**

**Friends of the Children Boston**

**Generations Incorporated**

**Greater Worcester Habitat for Humanity**

**Horizons for Homeless Children**

**Massachusetts 2020 Foundation**

**New Sector Alliance, Inc.**

**Northeastern University**

**Quincy Asian Resources Inc.**

**Share Our Strength Operation Frontline**

**TechMission, Inc.**

**Tenacity, Inc.**

**Tufts University/ Massachusetts Campus Compact**

**University of Massachusetts/Boston, College of  
Public and Community Service**

**Urban Ecology, Inc.**

**Wentworth Institute of Technology**

**Year Up, Inc.**

**Youth Advocacy Foundation**

# Michigan

## VISTA in Michigan

**No. of VISTAs: 263**

**Projects: 34**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Allen Neighborhood Center**

**Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living**

**Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services**

**Boys & Girls Club of Greater Flint**

**Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County**

**Child And Family Enrichment Council**

**City Year Detroit**

**ConnectMichigan Alliance**

**Creston Neighborhood Association**

**Detroit Parent Network**

**Detroit Safe Neighborhood Action Plan, Inc.**

**Genesee County Habitat for Humanity**

**Gladstone Area Schools**

**Growing Hope, Inc.**

**Habitat for Humanity of Michigan**

**Heart of West Michigan United Way**

**Ingham County Health Department**

**Literacy Partnership of Southeast Michigan**

**Looking Glass Community Services**

**Michigan Communities in Schools**

**Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency**

**Michigan Nonprofit Association (2 VISTA projects)**

**Michigan State University Extension North Region**

**4-H Programs**

**Mixed Greens**

**North Menominee County Community Schools**

**Oakland County Child Care Council**

**Points of Light Foundation**

**Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency**

**The Greening of Detroit**

**The Leaven Center**

**The Village Initiative**

**Upper Peninsula Health Access Coalition**

**Youth Empowerment Project**



**Featured Project:** Communities in Schools of Detroit, Inc.

**Location:** Detroit

**Project Sponsor:** Michigan Communities in Schools

**Project Issue Areas:** Children, youth, community, education, literacy

**VISTAs:** 30

Since the inception of Communities in Schools, VISTAs have served in more than 40 Detroit public schools. They have played a vital role in developing partnerships with businesses, organizations, and community leaders who support the project's mission to help children learn, stay in school, and prepare for life. Communities in Schools is conscious of the diverse needs of today's youth and how imperative it is to meet those needs. The organization has trained VISTAs to develop resources that meet the most essential and significant student needs.

VISTAs' partnerships make dreams come true. They secure uniforms and supplies for needy students, develop after-school programs, and recruit and support tutors and mentors. They established partnerships with the Gleaners Community Food Bank to provide after-school snacks and with Variety for Children's Charity to provide school uniforms and toys. VISTAs acquired books from Yes! Reading Foundation and FIRSTBOOK, as well as backpacks from Office Depot.

Through the involvement of VISTAs, participating schools have noticed an increase in parent participation. Educators have seen students become more excited about reading. Parents have commented that students' self-esteem and values have improved. Charles Anderson, chief executive officer of Communities in Schools of Detroit, frequently references the impact that VISTAs have had on the local affiliate, noting that the very foundation of Communities in Schools of Detroit is due to the work of its first VISTA, who developed partners for the first four schools that served 2,000 students. With VISTA's help today, 1,389 partners have an impact on 55,862 students in 101 schools.

# Minnesota



**Featured Project:** Habitat for Humanity of Minnesota VISTA Project

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsor:** Habitat for Humanity of Minnesota

**Project Issue Areas:** Housing, asset development

**VISTAs:** 12

Habitat for Humanity affiliates in Minnesota will need to contribute 15 percent of new low-income housing created by the public and philanthropic sectors, according to a statewide study by the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency. By 2010, the study estimates, nearly 81,000 low-income households with children below age 18 will spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing. These are the families Habitat for Humanity aims to serve.

The Habitat for Humanity of Minnesota VISTA program is dedicated to helping affiliates grow their capacity to reach the goal of contributing 15 percent of new low-income housing.

Habitat for Humanity of Minnesota places VISTAs with affiliates throughout the state. These VISTAs develop and implement programs and systems to secure community support and involvement in the affiliates' efforts to build more homes and serve more low-income families. VISTAs engage volunteers to serve on fund-raising, public relations, and volunteer committees. These volunteers play a vital role in securing the funding and additional volunteer resources needed to build affordable homes. VISTAs also mobilize construction volunteers and recruit volunteers to staff and support Habitat's ReStore program, which diverts usable building materials from local landfills. A new VISTA initiative engaged youth, aged 5–25, to construct and raise sponsorship funds for the first Youth United Habitat for Humanity home in Minnesota.

During the 2006–2007 program year, VISTAs mobilized more than 3,000 volunteers who contributed 24,000 service hours. These volunteers included more than 870 baby boomers who contributed valuable skills and experience as committee members and construction and ReStore volunteers. Minnesota Habitat affiliates hosting VISTAs completed 105 homes and provided decent, affordable housing to nearly 420 people with incomes at or below 50 percent of the median income.

## VISTA in Minnesota

**No. of VISTAs:** 268

**Projects:** 31

**Project Sponsors:**

**Admission Possible**

**City of St. Paul**

**Commonbond**

**Duluth Public Schools**

**Employment Action Center**

**Habitat for Humanity of Minnesota**

**Habitat for Humanity of South Central Minnesota**

**Homeline**

**Hope Community, Inc.**

**Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota**

**Initiative Foundation**

**Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance**

**Minnesota Association for Volunteer  
Administration**

**Minnesota Conservation Corps**

**Minnesota Council of Churches**

**Minnesota Council on Crime and Justice**

**Minnesota Housing Partnership**

**Minnesota Literacy Council**

**Minneapolis Public Housing Authority**

**Minneapolis Public Schools**

**Minnesota Senior Federation**

**National Youth Leadership Council**

**PEACE Foundation**

**Project Fine**

**Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services, Inc.**

**St. Stephen's Human Services**

**The Harambee Project**

**Twin Cities RISE!**

**United Way of Minneapolis**

**University of Minnesota Extension**

**Youth Venture**



# Mississippi

## VISTA in Mississippi

**No. of VISTAs: 148**

**Projects: 8**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Mississippi**

**Center for Community Development, Delta State University (2 VISTA projects)**

**Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service**

**Mississippi Department of Human Services,  
Division of Aging and Adult Services**

**National Council of Black Mayors, Inc.**

**University of Southern Mississippi**

**Youth Excitement Team, Inc.**



**Featured Project:** Center for Community and Economic Development

**Location:** Mississippi Delta – Bolivar County

**Project Sponsor:** Center for Community Development, Delta State University

**Project Issue Area:** Health

**VISTAs: 12**

Mississippi has the third highest breast cancer mortality rate in the nation. Of the more than 1,600 Mississippians diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007, 450 will eventually die from the disease. Mississippians are losing their lives to breast cancer at a phenomenal rate, and a mammogram can cut the death rate by as much as one-third.

Women in the Mississippi Delta, the second poorest district in the United States, are particularly hard hit by breast cancer because of lack of access to early detection. In January 2007, the Center for Community and Economic Development, in conjunction with VISTA and several local partners, established the Project B.E.E.P. (Breast Education and Early Detection Program) to educate Delta communities about breast cancer and early detection. Thirteen VISTAs created and implemented an Awareness Week with help from 20 planning committee members, 35 community volunteers, and five partners/sponsors. The VISTAs raised nearly \$9,000 to cover the costs of mammograms and breast exams for the needy.

During Awareness Week, 35 community volunteers contributed 300 service hours; 457 individuals were educated on breast cancer and given factual materials. Participants received free mammograms, free breast exams, and transportation stipends.

# Missouri



**Featured Project:** Expanding Horizons

**Location:** St. Louis

**Project Sponsor:** South Grand Senior Ministry

**Project Issue Area:** Independent living

**VISTAs:** 4

The goal of South Grand Senior Ministry (SGSM) is to promote productive aging by supporting low-income seniors to live safely in their own homes. Productive aging is a concept developed to promote ways that older Americans can remain healthy and active within their communities well after retirement.

SGSM helps seniors lead a physically and spiritually active life and remain socially engaged in their community. The VISTA project supports this goal by identifying and implementing business models that will generate resources to keep the ministry sustainable and no longer dependent solely on grants to continue to provide vital services to seniors in the St. Louis area.

VISTAs engage in a variety of activities that help SGSM ensure that seniors stay healthy and safe in their homes. The project provides basic services seniors cannot afford or do not have access to for various reasons. Services include transportation, friendly calls, exercise classes, social events, home repairs, and meeting many other basic, but life-sustaining, needs. VISTAs coordinate the programs, recruit volunteers, and leverage resources. They have written a business plan to expand the project. South Grand Senior Ministry currently hosts four VISTAs and plans to recruit four VISTAs as part of its expansion in the project's second year.

As a result of the support provided by VISTAs in the past year, 97 community volunteers provided housing assistance to seniors' homes. Social activities were coordinated for more than 600 seniors. Sixty-four drivers and two coordinators provided transportation services to 238 senior riders. In 2008, SGSM began a new venture, Metropolitan Older Adult Resources for Life (MOAR for Life), to provide even more social services to meet the needs of the elderly population in St. Louis.

## VISTA in Missouri

**No. of VISTAs:** 57

**Projects:** 13

**Project Sponsors:**

**Butler County Community Resource Council**

**Curators of the University of Missouri (2 VISTA projects)**

**Girl Scouts of Dogwood Trails Council, Inc.**

**Missouri River Communities Network**

**Missouri State University**

**Pettis County Community Partnership**

**South Grand Senior Ministry**

**St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition**

**The University of Missouri-Kansas City**

**Veterans Affairs Medical Center**

**Washington County Community 2000 Partnership**

**YMCA**

# Montana

## VISTA in Montana

**No. of VISTAs: 105**

**Projects: 5**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services**

**Montana Legal Services Association**

**Richland County Health Department**

**University of Montana – Montana Campus Compact (2 VISTA projects)**



**Featured Project:** Rural Dynamics, Inc.

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsor:** Montana Legal Services Association

**Project Issue Areas:** Asset development, individual development accounts, financial literacy

**VISTAs: 10**

Nearly 15 percent of Montana residents were living at or below the poverty level in 2006. In some Montana counties, the population living in poverty was as high as 30 percent. VISTAs at Rural Dynamics undertake research and develop asset-creation strategies that address the unique needs of Montana's rural poor. The overall project's goal is to develop innovative programs that increase assets among low-income Montanans.

During the past two years, Rural Dynamics, Inc. hosted 10 VISTAs, who worked on the W.K. Kellogg Plains Talk Initiative, which assesses and examines ways to lessen the effects of extreme poverty in the Great Plains region, as well as develops programs and initiatives to promote economic growth. VISTAs analyze regional and community needs, contact potential partners, establish a program framework, and initiate the implementation of wealth creation programs. VISTAs also develop strategies to increase resources available to the Native American population in Montana.

Major accomplishments include: the creation of two Individual Development Account (IDA) programs for home ownership and education, and two others in development, including one that will support the Chief Dullknife Community College on the Crow Reservation; the development of a Biz Camp, which focused on teaching entrepreneurial skills to Native American Youth, aged 12 and 13; the development, coordination, and expansion of 27 Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites serving more than 6,000 low-income families and the recruitment of 78 volunteers; a \$16,995 award to expand VITA into three more counties; the coordination of the Rural Dynamics Family Economic Security Project; and the collaboration with the Governor of Montana on policy and legislation to increase assets for the indigent in Montana.



# Nebraska



**Featured Project:** Mosaic Community Development

**Location:** Omaha

**Project Sponsor:** Mosaic Community Development

**Project Issue Area:** Community development

**VISTAs:** 6

Mosaic Community Development (MCD) is a nonprofit organization started in November 2001 to empower the impoverished communities of urban Omaha. MCD sponsors several programs for the benefit of the community. These include the Creative Educational Center, an after-school tutoring and mentoring program for kids in grades 1–6; Life on the Brick, a relationship building program that serves meals to the homeless; and Life Transitions, a holistic transitional program for those trying to break the cycles of poverty.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census for the area, 12.3 percent of families live below the poverty level (3.1% more than the national average), and 17.4 percent of individuals (5% more than the national average) are below the poverty level. A faith-based organization, MCD is largely financed through private donations and churches, as well as an occasional grant.

VISTAs help to ensure the sustainability of MCD's work in several ways. They are taking inventory of current community volunteer participation, and developing a sustainable system of recruitment that meets MCD's community volunteer needs. Through the work of the VISTAs, MCD has begun to establish financial stability through community partnerships and has expanded fund-raising and grant writing. VISTAs also support the work of the organization through community outreach, and the development of new community development centers in response to local needs.

## VISTA in Nebraska

**No. of VISTAs:** 29

**Projects:** 7

**Project Sponsors:**

**City of Lincoln**

**Habitat for Humanity**

**Mid-West Consortium**

**Mosaic Community Development**

**Nebraska AIDS Project, Inc.**

**Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission**

**Opportunities Industrialization Center**

# Nevada

## VISTA in Nevada

**No. of VISTAs: 38**

**Projects 13**

**Project Sponsors:**

**American Lung Association of Idaho, NV**

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northern Nevada**

**Communities in Schools of Southern Nevada**

**Food Bank of Northern Nevada**

**Friends of Special Children**

**Girl Scouts of the Sierra Nevada**

**Habitat for Humanity International**

**HealthInsight**

**Nevada Commission for National and Community Service, Inc.**

**Nevada Natural Resource Education Council**

**Nevada Outdoor School**

**The Salvation Army of Clark County, Nevada**

**University of Nevada, Reno**



**Featured Project:** Emergency Disaster Services Capacity-Building

**Location:** Clark County

**Project Sponsor:** The Salvation Army of Clark County, Nevada

**Project Issue Area:** Emergency response

**VISTAs: 1**

Individuals and families living near or below the poverty level in southern Nevada have limited ability to meet their basic needs. Prior to a disaster they will not be able to secure the necessary supplies to ensure their safety and well-being through the initial event in a disaster.

The Salvation Army has responded to many emergencies by deploying paid staff members that are reassigned from their regular duties. This action has not proven to be an effective long-term strategy and has been costly to the organization. The purpose of the VISTA project is to develop the sustainability of the emergency response services by creating a trained local volunteer base to help the Salvation Army operate the emergency canteen needed to meet the emergency food and hydration needs of the disaster relief workers.

In addition to canteen volunteers, trained and educated professionals are needed to respond when “pastoral and emotional/mental health” needs are encountered during a disaster or emergency event. VISTAs assist in building capacity to train and qualify professionals, who can, after training, be available to meet this need.

The VISTA project also helps provide financial stability for disaster response operations. The VISTAs raised \$79,000, which was used to cover part of the costs of a new Disaster Mobile Canteen (valued at \$150,000) to feed the responders and victims in the event of a disaster. The canteen, capable of producing 3,000 meals per day, has been used to help in volunteer recruitment efforts.

# New Hampshire



**Featured Project:** PlusTime New Hampshire

**Location:** Chichester

**Project Sponsor:** PlusTime New Hampshire

**Project Issue Areas:** Education, after-school programs

**VISTAs:** 23

Census 2000 data shows an estimated 65,055 New Hampshire youth between ages 10 and 14 need after school supervision and are unable to find any because of the lack of affordable programming. At least 15 percent of these youth are from low-income families that have working parents. According to the *Kids Count 2001 Data Book*, poor grades, inability to read at grade level, poor school attendance, and behavioral problems are all early warning signals for school dropout, particularly when combined with poverty.

Today's youth spend approximately 20 percent of their waking hours in school. What happens during the remaining 80 percent of that time is critical to their development. Left unsupervised, the hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. are the peak times for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and sex. (*Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2002*) An estimated 23 percent of New Hampshire children and youth are unsupervised after school. After-school programs do more than help out with risky behaviors, they also offer support leading to greater academic success, stronger friendships, and greater expectations for the future.

PlusTime New Hampshire VISTAs focus on building partnerships within the community, securing resources for after-school programs, and increasing the access to high quality training opportunities for program providers. PlusTime New Hampshire VISTAs have raised more than \$120,000 dollars for programs and \$46,190 worth of in-kind contributions; created funding databases, manuals, and resource lists in five communities, one of which will be distributed statewide; provided training to 84 after-school programs serving 24,000 youth; organized a statewide conference attended by 300 program directors, local businesses, educators, and community leaders; recruited 952 community volunteers, serving 6,502 hours, to engage with after-school programs; developed long-term volunteer management programs in six communities; and organized Youth Days of Service in eight communities.

## VISTA in New Hampshire

**No. of VISTAs:** 98

**Projects:** 8

**Project Sponsors:**

**American Red Cross – Manchester Chapter**

**City of Manchester New Hampshire**

**City of Nashua – Urban Programs**

**Northern New England Campus Compact  
Collaboration**

**PlusTime New Hampshire**

**Tri-County Community Action Program, Inc.**

**U.S. Foundation for the Inspiration and  
Recognition of Science and Technology**

**Youth Venture, Inc.**



# New Jersey

## VISTA in New Jersey

**No. of VISTAs: 109**

**Projects: 16**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Allies, Inc.**

**Boys & Girls Club of Trenton/Mercer County**

**Community Planning & Advocacy Council**

**Education Works**

**Free Teens, USA, Inc.**

**Greater Brunswick Charter School**

**HomeFront**

**Institute for Global Education & Service-Learning**

**ITNGreaterMercer**

**Literacy Volunteers of Ocean County**

**New Jersey Commission on National and  
Community Service**

**New Jersey State Parole Board**

**Newark Emergency Services for Families, Inc.**

**Northwest New Jersey Community Action  
Program**

**St. Paul's Community Development Corporation**

**The LEAGUE Powered by Learning to Give**



**Featured Project:** New Jersey State Parole Board

**Location:** Essex County, Newark

**Project Sponsor:** New Jersey State Parole Board

**Project Issue Area:** Prisoner reentry

**VISTAs:** 11

There are three key components to the successful reentry of an ex-offender into a community. One of these is employment. Ex-offenders continue to report difficulties finding employment due to their criminal history. Recognizing this problem, VISTAs assigned to the New Jersey State Parole Board coordinated a Job and Health Fair for parolees in the Essex County area. Specifically included were employers willing to hire parolees, health screeners, low-income and transitional housing and educational resources, voter registration, driver's license restoration, job readiness, and training.

The VISTAs from Newark helped coordinate this event. In addition, VISTAs from Camden and Mercer counties assisted on the day of the event.

For the event, VISTAs helped plan and coordinate the following activities: media coverage, advertising, invitations, posters and banners, town permits, refreshments, participation registration forms, vendor registration forms, and event site location. They also secured employers, health screeners, and local social agencies to attend the event.

The Job and Health Fair was a huge success, with more than 500 parolees attending. Many other local and state agencies attended the event and expressed a desire to be part of the next fair. Other employers called after the event to find out more about the project and assisting parolees.

# New Mexico



**Featured Project:** Concilio Campesino Del Sudoeste, Inc.

**Location:** Dona Ana County

**Project Sponsor:** SER de New Mexico

**Project Issue Area:** Community development

**VISTAs:** 25

Concilio Campesino del Sudoeste, Inc., is a community-based, nonprofit organization that was established in 1972 in southern New Mexico. Concilio addresses the needs of a population that includes seniors, youth, migrant/seasonal farm workers, immigrants, and a large percentage of people who are monolingual Spanish or bilingual. Dona Ana County includes 37 of New Mexico's 55 federally designated underdeveloped communities, also referred to as *colonias*. The New Mexico Environment Department claims that 97 percent of *colonias* residents are U.S. citizens. The rural areas are without safe, sanitary, and affordable housing, drinkable water, sewer, and drainage systems (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). Many of the *colonias* are located in the northern and southern areas of the county.

The 25 Concilio VISTAs focus on community development, organizational development, and program development objectives. The objectives of the VISTA project are to:

- Develop programs to address issues and needs in the community
- Recruit and train community members to sustain proposed programs
- Actively engage community members in addressing issues and needs in the community
- Develop and implement a sustainable strategy model to support a time-bank to increase civic engagement. A time-bank is an exchange system of time, services, and expertise among neighbors to strengthen their community.

## VISTA in New Mexico

**No. of VISTAs:** 158

**Projects:** 5

**Project Sponsors:**

**Corporation for Downtown Development**

**New Mexico Community Foundation**

**New Mexico Senior Olympics, Inc.**

**New Mexico State Aging and Long Term Care  
Department**

**SER de New Mexico, Inc.**

# New York

## VISTA in New York

**No. of VISTAs:** 245

**Projects:** 42

**Project Sponsors:**

**Advocates for Children**

**Alternatives Federal Credit Union (2 VISTA projects)**

**America SCORES**

**American Red Cross of Greater New York**

**Arab American Association of New York, Inc.**

**Big Brothers, Big Sisters for the Capital Region**

**Boys and Girls Clubs of Syracuse**

**Center for Alternative Sentencing & Employment Services, Inc.**

**Children for Children**

**City of Binghamton**

**Community Impact**

**Cornell University**

**Dress for Success Worldwide**

**East Harlem Tutorial Program**

**Fifth Avenue Committee**

**Foothills UMC**

**Girl Scout Council of Greater New York, Inc.**

**Greyston Foundation**

**Groundwork, Inc.**

**Hamilton Hills Arts Center**

**Helping Others Prosper Everyday**



**Featured Project:** New York State Emergency Preparedness Project

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsor:** American Red Cross of Greater New York

**Project Issue Area:** Emergency preparedness

**VISTAs:** 17

The American Red Cross exists to meet the needs of the community by improving the quality of human life, enhancing self-reliance and concern for others, and helping people mitigate, prepare for, and recover from emergencies. This VISTA project is working to create new infrastructures within targeted low-income communities through the development of youth-driven Red Cross Clubs that focus on increasing public awareness and empowering communities to be prepared for and able to respond to local disasters.

VISTAs focus on increasing emergency preparedness in low-income communities through:

- Creation of partnerships with local colleges, universities, and school districts to form Emergency Preparedness/Red Cross Clubs to increase public awareness and community preparedness events
- Assistance to schools in implementing fund-raising events that will allow low-income community members to participate in Red Cross training events
- Recruitment of community volunteers to be liaisons and club leaders to ensure the sustainability of all programs

Since July 2003, VISTAs have recruited more than 5,000 community volunteers who have contributed nearly 30,000 hours of service. VISTAs' fund-raising efforts have generated more than \$177,000 worth of in-kind goods and services and well over \$200,000 in cash.

Fifteen Red Cross Clubs have been created to provide low-income individuals the opportunity to learn about preparedness, basic first aid and CPR, and health and safety trainings.





Preschool children have fun learning about staying safe during a disaster with the Safety First Program, created by Angel Rivera (left), an American Red Cross VISTA in Syracuse, New York.

## VISTA in New York *(continued)*

**Highbridge Community Life Center**

**IMPACT Coalition**

**JCTOD Outreach, Inc.**

**Just Food**

**Medicare Rights Center**

**Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty**

**National Association of Community Health Centers, Inc.**

**New York City Coalition Against Hunger**

**New York Disaster Interfaith**

**New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Inc.**

**Operation Exodus Inner City**

**Seedco**

**Syracuse Cooperative Federal Credit Union**

**The Osborne Association**

**Town of West Seneca (2 VISTA projects)**

**Upwardly Global**

**Westcott Community Center, Inc.**

**Westhab, Inc.**

**Youth Venture**

# North Carolina

## VISTA in North Carolina

**No. of VISTAs: 146**

**Projects: 13**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Administrative Office of the Courts**

**Asheville City Schools Foundation**

**Burlington Housing Authority**

**Chatham Citizen Corps Council**

**Classroom Central**

**Communities in Schools of North Carolina, Inc.**

**Elizabeth City State University**

**Guilford College**

**Nash County**

**North Carolina Campus Compact (Elon University)**

**Olive Hill Community Economic Development Corporation**

**One Economy Corporation**

**Welfare Reform Liaison Project, Inc.**



**Featured Project:** North Carolina Campus Compact

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsor:** North Carolina Campus Compact, Elon University

**Project Issue Areas:** Housing, education, hunger, literacy, leadership development

**VISTAs:** 34

North Carolina's higher education institutions seek to expand their roles as community resources and increase student opportunities for civic engagement and service. Campus Compact enables its member colleges and universities to engage as key community partners, mobilizing the vast human resources of students, faculty, and staff to meet the needs of the host communities. Mobilizing these tremendous resources, member campuses respond to local needs such as youth development, hunger, housing/homelessness, literacy, mentoring, tutoring, the environment, senior care, and poverty reduction.

VISTAs serve in volunteer, community service, and service-learning offices on campuses, mobilizing students to become engaged in service efforts in low-income communities. VISTAs coordinate ongoing service projects, one-time events, and alternative break trips. They advise student groups and help build their capacity to do service, develop the leadership skills of students to sustain their service efforts, lead students in reflection on their service, collaborate with faculty to implement service-learning curriculum in their classrooms, and develop and sustain partnerships with community agencies.

VISTAs recruited 18,316 volunteers, who contributed 158,418 service hours, a value of nearly \$2,974,000 for North Carolina communities. The VISTAs also generated nearly \$50,000 in monetary donations and in-kind donation worth more than \$46,000.

# North Dakota



**Featured Project:** North Dakota State University

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsor:** North Dakota State University

**Project Issue Area:** Mentoring children of incarcerated parents

**VISTAs:** 13

The number of people incarcerated for drug and alcohol abuse has increased in North Dakota and, therefore, the number of children at risk because of that incarceration has increased. The RSVP and VISTA-led Mentoring ChIPs (Children of Incarcerated Parents) program sponsored by North Dakota State University (NDSU) serves six RSVP offices (Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Dickinson, Minot, and Bismarck) in North Dakota. This mentoring program works to keep these children from following their parents into prison.

VISTAs created a mentoring program for this specific population of children. Their combined efforts resulted in a program that created a process for conducting background checks for potential mentors, collaborated with NDSU Extension Services to tailor a training session and manual for the mentors, developed a system to track mentors and mentees, designed informational documents, recruited mentors and mentees, wrote an informational newsletter for the mentees, received grant money to support the program, and arranged mentor-mentee activities.

Since the inception of the project, 13 volunteers have mentored 17 children. Based on the evaluations of the children, guardians, mentors, and mentees, these mentors have had a positive influence on the children. The children are doing better in school, have better relationships with family and friends, and have a good outlook on their future. In addition, contact information for a child residing in Twisp, Washington, was received from an inmate at the North Dakota women's prison, and that information was passed on to the Washington offices, resulting in a match for the child.

## VISTA in North Dakota

**No. of VISTAs:** 13

**Projects:** 1

**Project Sponsor:**

**North Dakota State University**



# Ohio

## VISTA in Ohio

**No. of VISTAs: 270**

**Projects: 31**

**Project Sponsors:**

**American Red Cross of Summit County**

**Burten, Bell, Carr Development**

**Canton Area YMCA**

**Cerebral Palsy, Inc.**

**Children's Hunger Alliance**

**City of Cleveland**

**Cleveland Tenants Organization**

**Cleveland Urban Minority Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Outreach**

**Columbus Housing Partnership, Inc.**

**Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority**

**Dress for Success Warren-Youngstown**

**East Akron Community House Association**

**Family & Community Services of Portage County, Inc.**

**Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless**

**Greater Columbus Habitat for Humanity**

**Habitat for Humanity (2 VISTA projects)**

**Ohio CDC Association**

**Ohio Campus Compact (2 VISTA projects)**

**Ohio Community Computer Centers Network**

**Ohio Department of Youth Services**

**PowerNet of Dayton**

**Reuse Industries**



**Featured Project:** OASHF The Benefit Bank

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsor:** Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks

**Project Issue Area:** Asset development

**VISTAs:** 13

## Growing Program Grows Assets

“Once people are no longer in crisis and wondering where their next meal is coming from, they can begin to work on long-term strategies to pull themselves out of poverty.”

That’s the viewpoint of Dustin Speakman, who, as the director of the Ohio Benefit Bank VISTA program, understands that financial stability is the first step toward building a secure financial future. The Ohio Benefit Bank, implemented by the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks, a VISTA sponsoring organization since 2006, assists Ohioans living in poverty to achieve that stability by helping them gain access to work support programs and tax credits.

The National Council of Churches, which developed the concept of the Benefit Bank as a means to simplify and centralize the process of applying for many state and federal benefits, chose Ohio for its pilot project. The Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks (OASHF), the state’s largest charitable response to hunger, became the lead agency for implementing the Ohio Benefit Bank in 2006. That same year, OASHF received 12 VISTAs and a VISTA Leader to help put the Benefit Bank in operation.

A web-based, counselor-assisted program, the Ohio Benefit Bank reduces the myriad of applications for various work support and other public assistance programs, such as Medicaid and Food Stamps, into one online application. Low-income clients respond to questions, providing information that is populated to a secure database, which helps determine their eligibility for various programs and submits applications for those for which they qualify. The Benefit Bank also helps clients complete and file tax forms, all free of charge.

“Clients leave our offices relieved, with peace of mind that their applications are complete and knowing that help is on the way,” said VISTA Amy Schlueter, assigned to OASHF’s regional foodbank in Toledo.

Schlueter and her fellow VISTAs assigned to the 12 regional food banks recruit new organizations to become Ohio Benefit Bank sites. They set up training for the organizations' staff and volunteer counselors on the software and the basics of taxes and work-support programs to help individuals with their tax preparation and application for public benefits. They also invite local financial institutions to partner with Benefit Bank sites to open accounts for clients and sponsor financial literacy fairs.

"Not only does the program teach staff members and volunteers of faith-based and community organizations how to navigate the software," said VISTA Suzanna Witte, "but it also works to take the mystery out of public benefits and the application process."

In addition to preparing training for all new Ohio Benefit Bank tax and benefit counselors, OASHF's VISTAs conduct hunger-relief efforts at their assigned food banks. VISTAs coordinate backpack programs with local schools that send children home with a backpack full of food for the weekends. They are also involved with Kid's Cafes, a program through which foodbanks provide free meals and healthy snacks to children who attend community-based after-school programs.

As the Benefit Bank program expands, OASHF, which views its AmeriCorps VISTA project as a way to develop anti-hunger and anti-poverty leaders of tomorrow, fills many new staff positions with former VISTAs from the program. In July 2007, Jessica May, who developed 15 Ohio Benefit Bank sites and



## VISTA in Ohio *(continued)*

**Rural Action, Inc.**

**Southern State Community College (2 VISTA projects)**

**Spirit of Peace CDC**

**The Keren Emrich Foundation**

**The Legal Aid Society of Columbus**

**The Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks**

VISTAs Tom Hale, Amy Schlueter, and Haley Wightman celebrate the grand opening of The Ohio Benefit Bank.



## VISTA in Ohio *(continued)*

VISTA Suzanna Witte prepares for an Ohio Benefit Bank tax training session. Participants learn how to use the web-based Benefit Bank software to help low-income Ohioans compute their taxes.



coordinated training for more than 50 counselors, completed her VISTA service and became an OASHF regional coordinator.

“My experience with this project has influenced all facets of my life,” May said. “I am more aware of, and sensitive to, issues of poverty...I have learned the value of interacting with community members, and truly giving them a sense that their situations and opinions have just as much merit as everyone else’s.”

May is also a transformed person. Her life goals and character have changed. “I am now passionate about social change, and because this project gave me more self confidence, I believe I am capable of making social change a reality,” she said.

Since September 2006, VISTAs have developed more than 650 Ohio Benefit Bank sites and coordinated training for more than 2,500 counselors. According to Speakman, these sites have returned more than \$20 million in tax credits and work support program benefits to low- and moderate-income Ohioans. The VISTA team also secured in-kind donations totaling more than \$100,000 and nearly \$30,000 in cash resources.

“The success of the Ohio Benefit Bank and the real impact it is having on the lives of Ohioans would not be possible without all of OASHF’s partners, particularly the Corporation for National and Community Service,” Speakman concluded. “The VISTA team is the backbone of the Ohio Benefit Bank movement.”



# Oklahoma



**Featured Project:** Fitting Back In

**Location:** Tulsa, Okmulgee, Miami, and Oklahoma City

**Project Sponsor:** World Won Development Center

**Project Issue Area:** Prisoner Reentry

**VISTAs:** 66

## Getting a Second Chance

Incarcerated people face an unfriendly and often unfamiliar world when they are released from prison. Provided only \$50 and a bus ticket, it is not uncommon for released prisoners to have no identification, nothing but prison-made clothes, and no means to obtain housing, work, health care, transportation, and other needs. Family relationships have often been severed, and support networks from the past are no longer in place. Prospective employers and landlords are reluctant to accept them.

Thomas Harris has a firsthand acquaintance with these staggering challenges. Released from an Oklahoma prison after serving 31 years, Harris had to come to grips with the world around him and how it differed from his prison environment. He faced the people he once knew and found the strength to start a new beginning on the outside.

Harris now inspires and encourages incarcerated men and women to strive for a better life through a prisoner reintegration program called Fitting Back In. The program helps former inmates reenter their communities as productive, valuable members of society. A VISTA with the program since 2006, Harris frequently makes presentations in prisons about Fitting Back In and its services. He openly shares his account of survival and his struggle with fitting back in society, especially with young people. “My testimony,” Harris explained, “lets them see the most precious thing on earth is freedom, and what you do with that freedom.”

Fitting Back In, run by World Won Development Center in Tulsa, is a three-phase, six-month program that works with offenders in prison and after they leave prison. Phase one involves a pre-release preparation course and a heavy emphasis on life skills in an effort to transform the criminal thinking process and establish a new foundation for productive growth. In phase two, participants begin reintegration by performing community service with other agencies and joining the workforce. Phase three includes follow-up care support: matching participants with a mentor and assisting them with finding employment and affordable housing.

## VISTA in Oklahoma

**No. of VISTAs:** 110

**Projects:** 11

**Project Sponsors:**

**7th Generation Community Services Corporation**

**Ada Regional United Way, Inc.**

**Bartlesville Regional United Way**

**Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa, Inc.**

**Crawford County Volunteers for Literacy (2 VISTA projects)**

**Eagle Ridge Institute**

**Oklahoma CASA Association**

**Oklahoma State Department of Education**

**Stillwater Children's Museum**

**World Won Development Center**

## VISTA in Oklahoma *(continued)*

Thomas Harris (right), a former inmate and now a VISTA at Fitting Back In, likes to share his prison experience with young people. “So far I’ve been plenty successful in expressing the horrors, disadvantages, stress, pressures, and sorrow that await you in prison,” he said. “You never know if you are going to be able to wake up the next morning. My testimony lets them see that the most precious thing on earth is freedom, and what you do with that freedom.”

A team of VISTAs renders skills and knowledge to advance the capacity and goals of Fitting Back In. VISTAs assist with establishing the organizational structure of the program, educating the community on reentry issues, and publicizing the program reentry strategy. They also leverage partner relationships with local organizations, businesses, churches, prison facilities, colleges, corporations, and government agencies. And like Harris, some VISTAs are former inmates, who provide encouragement and empathy and serve as role models for Fitting Back In participants. Their personal experience makes them a critical asset to the work of Fitting Back In.

George Caddy is such an asset. When his sons went to prison, Caddy gained insight into the complexities of incarceration and the way families are affected. “Because of my personal experience, my heart is in the work that I am doing,” said Caddy, a VISTA who leads a team that focuses on outreach to inmates in 12 Oklahoma state correctional facilities to encourage participation in the reintegration program. “The need is so great and so rewarding to the people that we help. It’s a win-win situation,” Caddy concluded.

“The ex-offender population is one of the most discriminated against groups in the country,” noted VISTA Carolyn McCoy, a 64-year-old grandmother, who brings many years of experience as a public administrator and social service professional to her role at the Fitting Back In satellite office in Oklahoma City. As the site coordinator, McCoy trains volunteers, makes community contacts, collaborates with other organizations,





## VISTA in Oklahoma *(continued)*

“I know we have made a great impact on the city of Tulsa and our community because I have witnessed the lives that have been changed,” said George Caddy, a VISTA at Fitting Back In who conducts outreach to inmates in 12 Oklahoma state prisons. “When people’s lives are changed, it changes the community and everyone in the community,” Caddy said.

and develops community resources and programs to assist former inmates with job readiness skills, financial management competence, and behavior modification.

The true success of Fitting Back In is its ability to keep graduates of the program from returning to prison. An astounding 50 percent to 70 percent of ex-offenders return to prison in Oklahoma. Fitting Back In has cut that rate for its graduates.

“Between 2006 and 2007, we increased awareness about the growing number of recidivists in our community and generated excellent publicity from our local news media,” said Billon Constable, executive director of World Won Development Center. “With the assistance of our VISTAs and community volunteers, we generated more than \$75,000 in cash and in-kind donations, and we offered many programs and provided a safe and nurturing environment for more than 120 ex-offenders. Through the efforts of our VISTAs and community volunteers,” Constable continued, “not only have our clients received great professional and trade jobs, many have also reconciled with their families, purchased their own transportation, and mentored youth in their communities.” According to Constable, none of the program’s participants have gone back to prison since the program started in 2006.

“After my prison experience, and dealing with people since I have been out, it made me realize death is not the greatest loss of life,” Harris said. “The greatest loss in life is what we let die inside while we live.”



# Oregon

## VISTA in Oregon

**No. of VISTAs: 108**

**Projects: 26**

**Project Sponsors:**

**African American Health Coalition**

**American Red Cross Oregon Trail Chapter  
(2 VISTA projects)**

**Catholic Community Services**

**Community Services Consortium**

**Four Rivers Health Care**

**Habitat for Humanity International**

**Heart of Oregon**

**Human Solutions**

**Lane County Department of Children and Families**

**Lewis & Clark College**

**Marion-Polk Food Share, Inc.**

**National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Oregon  
Chapter**

**Native American Youth and Family Center**

**Northwest Housing Alternatives, Inc**

**Oregon Commission for Voluntary Action &  
Service**

**Oregon Microenterprise Network**

**Portland Impact**

**Portland State University**

**SE Works**

**Southeast Uplift**

**The National Indian Child Welfare Association**



**Featured Project:** Capacity Building in Native Communities

**Location:** Portland

**Project Sponsor:** Native American Youth and Family Center

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 10

## Early College Fulfills Dreams for Native American Youth

The test for a newly minted graduate is often the same: Will my new degree provide me with the skills and knowledge I need to succeed in the next steps of my life? For a VISTA in Portland, Oregon, serving at the Native American Youth and Family Center, the answer is a resounding yes and maybe a lot more.

A graduate of Portland State University with a Masters Degree in Public Administration and an emphasis in nonprofit management, Heather Pruess is using her education and passion for volunteering as a VISTA to make a difference in the lives of the American Indian and Alaskan Native youth and their families. At the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), which serves the Portland Metropolitan area, Pruess works at the NAYA Early College Academy, the nonprofit organization's newest endeavor.

"In my role, I am responsible for creating the student and staff handbooks, managing volunteer recruitment, and overseeing aspects of the school's infrastructure, both physical and programmatic," Pruess said.

In September 2007, the NAYA Early College Academy opened its doors to 9th–12th graders seeking a hands-on, culturally relevant, student-centered learning environment that offers a blended high school and post-secondary curriculum. In Multnomah County, Native American students have a drop out rate of 19.6 percent each year, compared with the general population of 6.3 percent. For those that leave school, the prospects are not promising. In Multnomah County, 50 percent of the Native Americans live well below the poverty level.

"My favorite moments at the NAYA Family Center have been those when the community is gathered and folks are reflecting on the love and hope that it holds for the students of the Academy," explained Pruess. "In my seventh month here the benefits have exceeded what I initially hoped for or imagined."

For over 30 years, NAYA Family Center has provided educational services, cultural arts programming, and direct support to reduce poverty to the Portland Metropolitan Area's American Indian and Alaska Native

community—the ninth largest native community in the United States with over 38,000 individuals. As an urban Indian agency, NAYA Family Center serves annually more than 1,200 youth and their families from nearly 300 different tribes.

Pruess serves with eight other VISTAs at the NAYA Family Center. Now operating in its second year, the VISTA team is strengthening the agency infrastructure to solidify its management systems and identify and address opportunities to catalyze organizational growth. VISTAs design educational curriculum, develop new resources for donations, and set up programs to recruit and manage volunteers. They are also a key to enhancing community partnerships and improving communication throughout the Portland area regarding critical areas of need.



## VISTA in Oregon *(continued)*

**Tillamook County Commission on Children and Families**

**Umpqua Community Action Network**

**Western Oregon University**

**Youth Progress Association**

VISTAs at the NAYA Family Center work to build the organization's capacity and infrastructure. The VISTAs meet twice monthly to reconnect, share successes and frustrations, receive feedback, and plan group service projects. "Our work has a positive impact on the Portland native community and the students at the academy," said VISTA Heather Pruess (far right). It is also part of an effort to alleviate poverty.



**VISTA in Oregon** *(continued)*

VISTA Shannon Effler developed and implemented a standardized client filing system to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the youth services department at the NAYA Family Center. “I know that every system I develop eases the load of the case managers and advocates. Now they have more time to spend with clients,” Effler said. “I help to alleviate poverty by building the capacity of NAYA to carry through on its mission.”

“Each of the VISTA assignments directly impacts and supports growth in the areas of community building, housing, economic development, and civic engagement,” said Lynn Ward, who supervises the VISTA team. Thanks in part to Pruess’s efforts, “the Academy has helped NAYA become a leader in addressing widespread poverty through education.”

Education at the Academy goes beyond helping local youth receive the education they need to better their lives, it also touches the VISTAs. “I was lucky enough to begin my position before the school opened, allowing me to witness and participate in the creation of a school,” Pruess said. “I am learning that ... dedicated folks can enact positive change in any community.”

For any new graduate, that might be the greatest lesson of all.

VISTA Heather Pruess (second from right) creates the student and staff handbooks and recruits volunteers at the NAYA Family Center’s newly opened Early College Academy. Here she reviews the student handbook with (from left) Juan Spotted Elk, Kalene Desrosiers, and Aasin Willeto. “I was lucky enough to begin my VISTA position before the school opened, allowing me to both witness and participate in the creation of a school,” Pruess said.





# Pennsylvania



**Featured Project:** Children and Youth VISTA Project in Northwestern Pennsylvania

**Location:** Crawford and Erie Counties

**Project Sponsor:** Allegheny College

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 21

## Collaborative Project Supports Children and Families to Crack the Cycle of Poverty

When resources of local colleges, community volunteers, and VISTAs come together on the issues facing a population in need, the results for all involved can be very positive. An illuminating example is the Northwestern Pennsylvania Children and Youth Project. With 19 VISTAs, two VISTA Leaders, and hundreds of college students and other volunteers operating in a two-county area to address the needs of low-income children, the benefits flow in several directions.

The Northwestern Pennsylvania Children and Youth Project, a collaborative effort by Allegheny College, Edinboro University, Gannon University, and Mercyhurst College, consists of three initiatives: addressing the physical and mental health needs of children and their families, improving parenting skills and family communications, and enhancing educational programming and outcomes for primary school age children.

“The physical and mental health issues include nutrition, tobacco use, addictions, and teen pregnancy,” noted David Roncolato, manager of the Children and Youth project and director of Community Service and Service-Learning at Allegheny College.

Since 2002, VISTA has supported virtually every aspect of the project, including building the capacity of organizations delivering social services; developing systems to manage recruitment and training of college students to mentor children and families; tutoring children in reading, math, and other basic subjects; and teaching family communications skills.

Eileen Gallagher, a VISTA for two years and now a VISTA leader with the Children and Youth project, mobilizes college volunteers and supports the Children and Youth project and eight VISTAs at various agencies across Crawford County. “I facilitate service opportunities for Allegheny College students, in collaboration with VISTA sites in the community,” Gallagher explained, noting that she has “sent college students into the community to do meaningful work, such as youth literacy tutoring, building a

## VISTA in Pennsylvania

**No. of VISTAs:** 236

**Projects:** 36

**Project Sponsors:**

**Allegheny College**

**Ayuda Community Center**

**Big Brothers Big Sisters State Association of Pennsylvania**

**BuildaBridge International**

**Catholic Social Service**

**Central Northside Neighborhood Council**

**Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit**

**City Year, Inc.**

**Community Action Agency of Delaware County**

**Community Action Association of Pennsylvania**

**Community First Fund**

**Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County**

**Empowerment Group**

**Family Service of Montgomery County**

**Greater Philadelphia Federation of Settlements**

**Headwaters Resource Conversation and Development Council**

**National Nursing Centers Consortium**

**North Hills Community Outreach**

**Northeast Pennsylvania Area Health Education Center**

**PathWaysPA**

**Pennsylvania Campus Compact**

## VISTA in Pennsylvania *(continued)*

**People's Emergency Center**

**Philly Fellows**

**Pittsburgh Habitat for Humanity**

**Public/Private Ventures (AMACHI)**

**SHARE Food Program**

**Tabor Community Services, Inc.**

**Temple University (Project Shine)**

**To Our Children's Future With Health, Inc.**

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

**United Way of Blair County**

**United Way of Pennsylvania**

**United Way of Pike County, Inc.**

**United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania**

**Urban Affairs Coalition**

**Volunteer Centers of Pennsylvania**

VISTA Carley Whitley (left) coordinates teen programs at the County YMCA in Edinboro. At a Teen Night she organized for Halloween, festivities included an apple-bobbing contest, dancing, pizza 'n pop, a dodge ball tournament, limbo contest, and a special prize for the person wearing the funniest costume. When Whitley's VISTA term ends, she wants to follow the path to being a youth pastor.

wheelchair ramp, visiting the elderly, and feeding the hungry at the soup kitchen." Gallagher is also a resource for local VISTAs and a member of the Children and Youth project's leadership team. Through the years, Gallagher said, "I hope I have led by example."

VISTA Sadie Litzinger served for a year at the Crawford County Children's Advisory Council, enhancing the council's capacity to promote the health, education, safety, and wellness of children and families in Crawford County. Acting as a technical advisor, Litzinger created a formal structure and strategic plan for the council. She developed bylaws and facilitated the election of officers and formation of work committees. "By helping the members of the Children's Advisory Council work together more cohesively," Litzinger said, "I am helping the populations that it serves, be it school students, those in the mental health population, or those affected by domestic violence issues."

The Northwestern Pennsylvania Children and Youth Project also collaborates with the International Institute of Erie to resettle recent immigrants. Many of these immigrants, having spent time in refugee camps abroad, continue to deal with the fear and apprehension associated with their experiences in those camps. VISTAs create programs that help immigrant families ease into American society. The programs help them learn English and American culture, develop financial literacy skills, and become self-sufficient.







## VISTA in Pennsylvania *(continued)*

VISTAs Sadie Litzinger (left) and Megan Thro (right) participate in a VISTA recruiting event at Allegheny College in Meadville, Penn. Litzinger serves with the Children and Youth VISTA Project of Northwestern Pennsylvania. Thro serves with the Center for Family Services' Parenting Together program.

“Our English as a second language and financial literacy classes help approximately 80 percent of refugees find and hold a job within six months after their arrival,” said Melody Yeouze, a VISTA at the International Institute of Erie. Benefits of the program run both ways, according to Yeouze. “What I did not expect was how much they would teach me,” she said. “Most of the time at the International Institute, I feel that I am the student and being taught a new life lesson each day.”

In the long run, clients of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Children and Youth Project face much better odds of getting out of poverty through increased access to resources and information about household finances, as well as through tutoring and other strategies designed to improve their educational performance. The project places VISTAs with social service agencies dedicated to working with children and youth, many of which partner with higher education institutions.

The VISTAs increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the agency programs, according to Roncolato. “This year, the VISTAs and their agencies have mobilized 1,871 college students to work with 2,494 elementary school children, 412 middle- and high-school students, and 21,272 families in low-income communities,” he said. The VISTAs also raised more than \$140,000 in cash donations and \$22,460 in-kind donations.



# Puerto Rico

## VISTA in Puerto Rico

**No. of VISTAs: 178**

**Projects: 35**

**Project Sponsors:**

**American Cancer Society**

**Asociacion Mayaguezana de Personas con Impedimentos, Inc.**

**Asociacion Pro Juventud y Comunidad del Barrio Palmas**

**Autonomous Municipality of Juyaya**

**Cantera Peninsula Project**

**Centro de Intervencion e Integracion Paso a Paso, Inc.**

**Centros Sor Isolina Ferre, Inc.**

**Coalicion Criolla de Cuidado Continuo a Personas sin Hogar**

**Coalition Pro-Homeless of the Eastern Area**

**Fondos Unidos De Puerto Rico**

**Gobierno Municipal de Vega Alta**

**Hogar Maria del Carmen, Inc.**

**La Tierra Prometida, Inc.**

**Mayaguez Children's Library**

**Municipality of Caguas-Community Development**

**Municipality of Maunabo**

**Municipality of Moca-Mayors Office**

**Oficina para la Promocion y el Desarrollo Humano**

**Oikos, Inc. (Tu Centro Familiar)**

**Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico**

**Prensa Comunitaria**

**Programa De Apoyo Y Enlace Comunitario, Inc.**

**Programa de Enlace y Servicio Comunitario, Inc**

**Proyecto La Nueva Esperanza, Inc.**

**Puerto Rico Assistive Technology Program**

**Puerto Rico Office of the Ombudsman for the Elderly**

**Puerto Rico Public Broadcasting Corporation**

**Puerto Rico Youth At Risk, Inc.**

**Red de Ayuda Comunal de Emergencias, Inc.**

**San Agustin Del Coqui**

**Sports and Recreation Department**

**St. Luke's Home Care and Hospice Program**

**Universidad del Este**

**Universidad del Turabo-AGMUS**

**University of the Sacred Heart**



**Featured Project:** Hogar Maria del Carmen

**Location:** Aguada

**Project Sponsor:** Hogar Maria del Carmen

**Project Issue Areas:** Health care, housing

**VISTAs:** 5

Hogar Maria del Carmen is a home for the elderly that provides permanent housing and health care to those who have limited or no financial means of support; it also provides temporary emergency shelter and assistance to help needy elderly gain access to government programs and move into permanent housing situations.

More than 17 percent of the 611 homeless in the project area comprising Aguadilla, Moca, Rincon, Isabela, and Aguada are elderly. Almost 96 percent of these homeless elderly have no financial means of support and limited or no familial intervention. Chronic health and mental conditions are amplified by no access to medical care and the overall circumstances related to life on the streets. Many elderly are eligible for government services but are intimidated or confused by bureaucratic systems and often do not complete paperwork to access needed services.

VISTAs established a Volunteer Management Program, including a process for recruiting, retaining, and recognizing volunteers, which resulted in 30 new volunteers for the Hogar Maria del Carmen. They also worked on mobilizing resources, including identifying funding sources, preparing applications for funds, requesting donations, and identifying and contacting partners and community collaborators. Furthermore, they coordinated outreach efforts to identify homeless elderly and help them obtain access to services.

VISTA's efforts resulted in the donation of a private residence (estimated value \$168,000), to which the facility was recently relocated. VISTAs established contact with the pastor of a church in New York who arranged for a group of 10 youths to come to the home for four days to help paint the new facility inside and out. VISTAs obtained in-kind donations for all materials and equipment for this project.

VISTAs also procured a \$25,000 donation for operational support from a U.S. donor, with promises of continuing support. Outreach efforts have resulted in 18 elderly getting off the street into emergency, transitional, and permanent shelters; more than 100 obtaining eligibility for services including medical care and medicine from the State Medical Plan; 15 obtaining a health certificate; 15 receiving food stamps; 20 receiving Meals on Wheels; and 29 being referred for mental care and substance abuse treatment. Finally, more than 450 indigent and homeless individuals participated in a health fair organized by VISTAs.

# Rhode Island



**Featured Project:** Rhode Island Free Clinic

**Location:** Providence

**Project Sponsor:** Rhode Island Free Clinic

**Project Issue Area:** Health care

**VISTAs:** 3

## Volunteers Do It All at Free Health Clinic

Volunteers have made the Rhode Island Free Clinic the place it is today—an integral part of the health care delivery system in Rhode Island. The newly renovated, state-of-the-art clinic in South Providence is the only site in the state dedicated exclusively to providing free medical care and preventive health services to people who are not insured and cannot afford medical care.

From patient care to data entry to Spanish interpreting, community volunteers help the clinic keep the uninsured healthy. Volunteers treat patients. Volunteers run patient workshops and healthy cooking demonstrations. Volunteers schedule patient visits, assist with medications, and obtain outside lab and referral services.

It is a volunteer, in fact, who manages the clinic's diverse group of more than 200 unpaid helpers. As the volunteer coordinator, VISTA Rishana Sklaroff Cohen works with the clinical staff to ensure that all clinic sessions are fully staffed with volunteers. The volunteer pool comes from all walks of life and includes physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, nutritionists, psychologists, medical students, undergraduate students, retired professionals, and members of the community.

"I am responsible for establishing and maintaining the clinic's volunteer infrastructure, so that the clinic is able to provide quality health care services to uninsured adults in Rhode Island," said Cohen, who graduated from Oberlin College in 2007 with a bachelor's degree in chemistry and biochemistry. "There are few opportunities for uninsured adults to obtain health care, and by providing this service we are building a healthier, stronger community," she explained.

Each day at the clinic brings challenges and rewards for Cohen, who said, "This is particularly true on the days when there are few volunteers scheduled." She takes great satisfaction in knowing that because of her work, patients receive much needed health care services. "Through my efforts, I am able to schedule another provider or interpreter to come in and make sure all our patients are seen."

## VISTA in Rhode Island

**No. of VISTAs:** 88

**Projects:** 19

**Project Sponsors:**

**AIDS Care Ocean State**

**American Red Cross Rhode Island Chapter**

**AS220**

**City Year, Inc.**

**Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island**

**English for Action**

**Family Life Center**

**Institute for the Study & Practice of Nonviolence**

**New England Farm Workers' Council, Inc.**

**Providence Emergency Management Agency**

**Providence Police Department**

**Providence Youth Student Movement**

**Rhode Island Free Clinic**

**Rhode Island School of Design (for RI Campus Compact)**

**Rhode Island Training School**

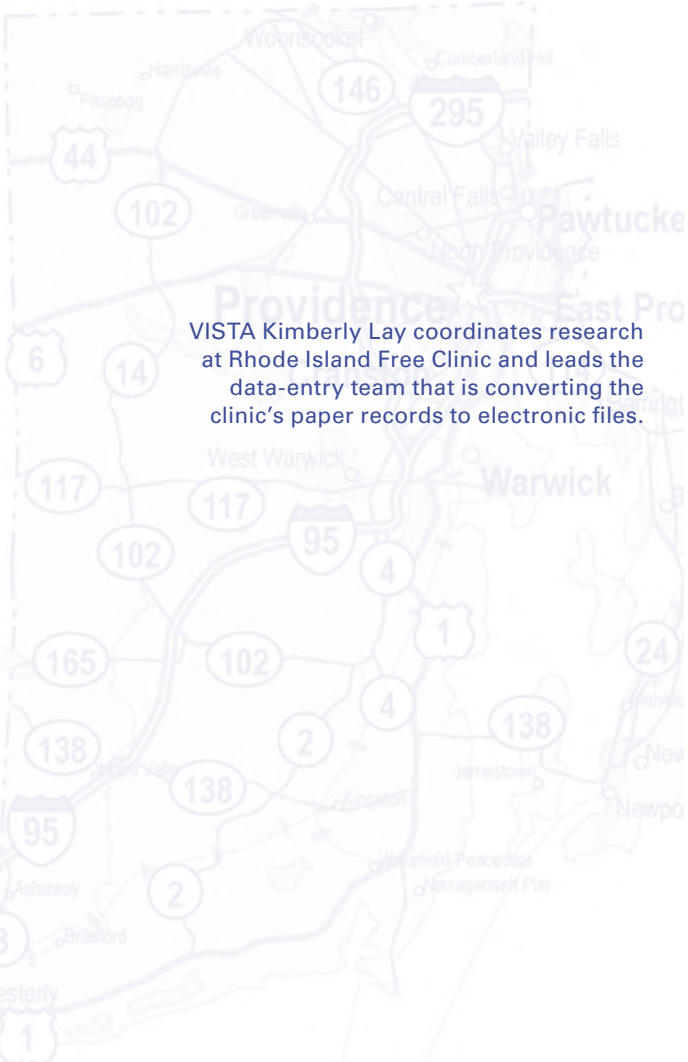
**Volunteer Center of Rhode Island**

**Westbay Community Action, Inc.**

**Woodlawn Community Development Corporation**

**Woonasquatucket Valley Community Build**

## VISTA in Rhode Island *(continued)*



VISTA Kimberly Lay coordinates research at Rhode Island Free Clinic and leads the data-entry team that is converting the clinic's paper records to electronic files.



Jessica Knapp, another VISTA who recently completed her service at the clinic, oversaw fundraising and boosted the clinic's visibility in the larger community through media relations. Knapp began her VISTA service during an "exciting time of growth" for the community-based nonprofit health center. "I was lucky," she said. "The clinic was in the process of moving into a new space that tripled its patient capacity. The preparation for this move was a huge project, and I helped coordinate a community volunteer day to assist in our move. More than 60 volunteers from in and around Providence came to help us set up furniture, move supplies, and prepare the new space for our patients," Knapp recalled. "The move made it possible for the clinic to provide health care to even more uninsured Rhode Islanders."

The clinic recently brought on a third VISTA, Kimberly Lay, to help develop its research capabilities and manage the electronic health records system. "I implemented and maintain the system, and train volunteers and staff members to use it," said Lay, a recipient of a master's degree in microbiology, who plans to attend medical school. Lay also uses the system to track outcomes, collect patient information to generate reports for grants, and increase the capacity for research in chronic disease management.

"I coordinate the work of a variety of volunteers and make many decisions that affect how the clinic is run," said Lay. She also coordinates the Patient Assistance Program, which procures free medication for the clinic's uninsured patients. The community volunteers she mobilizes help patients with the application process, order refills, notify patients when their medications are available, and educate patients about the program. "The volunteers are dedicated and advocate for the patients to ensure they get the best possible care," she said.

Serving at the clinic reminds Lay of the challenges people in poverty must overcome. "Growing up in poverty has motivated me to help others to get the care they need so that they are able to make a change," said Lay, the daughter of Cambodian refugees. "For many impoverished people, the only way to improve their lives is for them to become educated about how to make those changes, starting with their own well-being. VISTA has given me the opportunity to work with low-income individuals in a health care setting and to educate them on how to live healthier lives."

Since the first two VISTAs arrived several years ago at Rhode Island Free Clinic, Executive Director Lisa Smolski said she has witnessed expansion across all areas of the organization. "Volunteer hours increased.

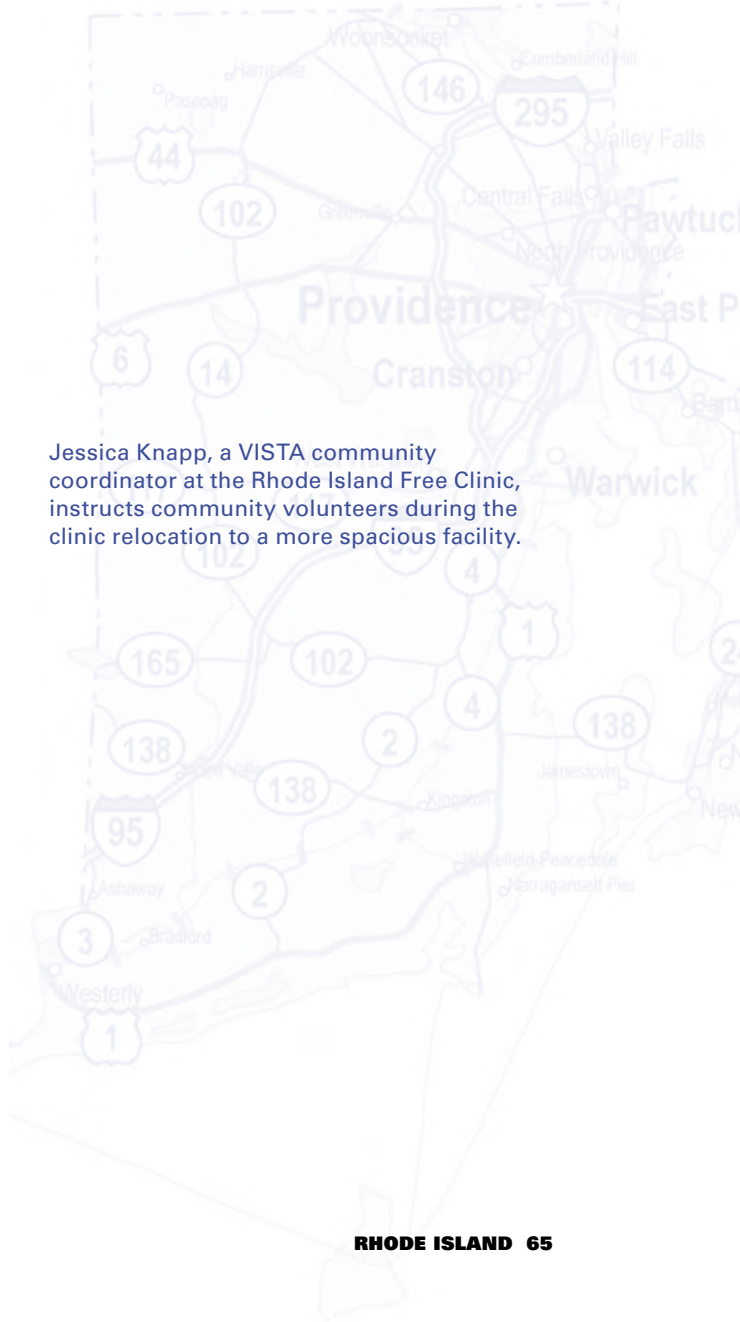




Dollars that were raised to support operations more than doubled,” Smolski said. “Our VISTAs have also increased our visibility in the larger community through the media, resulting in increased numbers of volunteers, donated services, and charitable donations. The most important measure of the program’s success is the number of patient visits, which grew by nearly 50 percent.”

Rhode Island Free Clinic is only as good as the volunteers and small core staff who make it work. “These are the people who believe in our mission and its ability to make a real difference in people’s lives,” Smolski said. “Our VISTAs are a critical part of all that we do and every accomplishment that we have enjoyed. They bring enthusiasm, commitment, idealism, and a willingness to work and learn that is an inspiration to us all. They have become a part of our organization and its culture—with each VISTA building on the efforts of those who have come before.”

## VISTA in Rhode Island *(continued)*



Jessica Knapp, a VISTA community coordinator at the Rhode Island Free Clinic, instructs community volunteers during the clinic relocation to a more spacious facility.

# South Carolina

## VISTA in South Carolina

**No. of VISTAs: 156**

**Projects: 16**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Alpha Bora Comprehensive Services**

**Berean Community Development Corp.**

**College of Charleston**

**Communities In Schools of the Midlands**

**Community Development & Improvement Corporation**

**Community Development Corporation of Marlboro County**

**Community Organization for Rights and Empowerment**

**Habitat for Humanity International**

**James R. Clark Memorial Sickle Cell Foundation**

**Ministering Life in the Kingdom of God, Inc.**

**Need Supplied Ministries**

**Noisette Foundation**

**South Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations**

**United Way of the Midlands**

**United Way of the Piedmont**

**YWCA of Greenville**



**Featured Project:** Civic Justice Corps of Metro Charleston

**Location:** Charleston

**Project Sponsor:** Noisette Foundation

**Project Issue Areas:** Housing, job development, technology, asset development, financial literacy, education, environment

**VISTAs: 7**

In 2007, the Noisette Foundation, one of 12 organizations awarded a VISTA Prisoner Reentry Project, created an innovative partnership with city government, community and faith-based organizations, and elementary schools. The goal of the partnership is to address issues affecting the communities in the Lowcountry, including: high percentage rate of student failures in a financially challenged Charleston County school district, environmental erosion of the Noisette Creek Preserve located in an improvised area of N. Charleston, lack of available resources to small minority contractors whose businesses were at risk of failure, and high recidivism rate and lack of prisoner reentry support services in the Lowcountry Region.

Each Noisette Foundation partner hosts at minimum one VISTA, who focuses on helping the partner agency create a sustainable infrastructure for organizational development; program development; resource development; and volunteer recruitment, retention, and management.

During the past two years, VISTAs serving with the prisoner reentry project have achieved several results, including: securing more than \$25,000 in donations to furnish a training center; expanding the local reentry advisory committee to include law enforcement members, community leaders, service providers, policy-makers, educators, and ex-offenders; strengthening the relationship with South Carolina Prison Fellowship, which led to a collaboration with the SPICE (Self-Paced In Class Education) Program at South Carolina Department of Corrections; joining The Corps Network, a Washington, DC-based advocacy and technical assistance organization, which led to AmeriCorps National funding for the Noisette Foundation Lowcountry Civic Justice Corps (LCJC); developing a partnership with the Sustainability Institute and Urban Alliance to implement green building techniques and energy-efficient appliances in the construction work that LCJC performs; and developing SC STRONG, a self-sustaining re-education program for ex-offenders.

# South Dakota



**Featured Project:** Brighter Tomorrows

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsor:** Volunteers of America, Dakotas

**Project Issue Areas:** Strengthening America's Children and Families

**VISTAs:** 13

Fully 90 percent of the people served by Volunteers of America, Dakotas live below the federal poverty level. More than half are Native Americans and 10 percent are immigrants and refugees new to the state. Nearly 50 percent of the youth served in the residential facilities have no family home to return to and almost all of the youth lack the skills needed to live successfully on their own.

Approximately 30 percent of the youth who come to the drop-in center are homeless, have no food or clothing, and little, if any, family support.

Recognizing the importance that one adult can make in the life of a child, VISTAs have developed volunteer recruitment processes, established a volunteer retention plan, and developed information about volunteering targeted specifically at baby boomers and college students. Other VISTA activities have focused on the importance of assisting other nonprofit agencies that have a need for volunteers to help support their programs, especially in rural areas like South Dakota. The VISTAs have begun looking for mentors for the youth in the programs, working directly with programs in developing processes of outreach to the streets, and also working directly with tribal communities.

Although the Brighter Tomorrows Project is new, 473 volunteers were recruited during its first year. VISTAs assisted in raising \$421,704 in cash resources and \$23,422 worth of in-kind resources. The money raised will allow projects to continue critical services in their community. The volunteers recruited will help programs offer more activities for their participants.

## VISTA in South Dakota

**No. of VISTAs:** 19

**Projects:** 3

**Project Sponsors:**

**Children's Home Society**

**University of South Dakota**

**Volunteers of America, Dakotas**



# Tennessee

## VISTA in Tennessee

**No. of VISTAs: 130**

**Projects: 17**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Court Appointed Special Advocates of the Tennessee Heartland**

**Graceworks Ministries, Inc.**

**Habitat for Humanity International**

**Metropolitan Board of Education Community Career Center**

**Moccasin Bend Girl Scout Council**

**National Alliance on Mental Illness, Tennessee**

**Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee**

**Tennessee Commission on Aging & Disability**

**Tennessee Commission on Children & Youth**

**Tennessee Literacy Coalition**

**Tennessee State University**

**Tennessee's Community Assistance Corporation (2 VISTA projects)**

**United Way of the Mid-South**

**United Ways of Tennessee**

**West Tennessee Special Technology Access Resource Center (2 VISTA projects)**



**Featured Project:** CASA of the Tennessee Heartland

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsor:** CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) of the Tennessee Heartland

**Project Issue Area:** Child abuse and neglect

**VISTAs:** 10

Local and state budget challenges cause high caseloads for foster care caseworkers and juvenile court. The result is a lack of case-management attention to children in state custody (mostly in foster homes) and significant delays in reestablishing safe and permanent home environments. The impact on these children is measured in acting-out behaviors, school suspensions, poor academic performance, poor self-image, low promotion rates, and high school dropout rates. The presence of adult advocates shortens foster care placements and (overall) improves all negative impacts of state custody. Many Tennessee communities have no child advocate programs.

In this CASA project, VISTAs build court and community partnerships, raise local support funding, recruit community volunteers, create and implement community outreach programs, develop or enhance advocate training systems, and develop or enhance organizational infrastructure sufficient for the local community to sustain an active CASA affiliate organization.

VISTA service has created four new local CASA affiliates that are now fully sustained by the community. Three additional affiliates are close to being sustainable. VISTAs have recruited and helped train more than 100 new advocates and raised more than \$350,000 to support local CASA organizations. New local CASA organizations and advocates have worked with more than 500 abused and neglected children, with an overall result of shortening the time required for children to return to safe and permanent home settings. Residual effects on these Tennessee children include reduced truancy and delinquent behaviors; reduced school suspensions and grade retentions; improved academic performance; and improved attitude, socialization and self-image.

# Texas



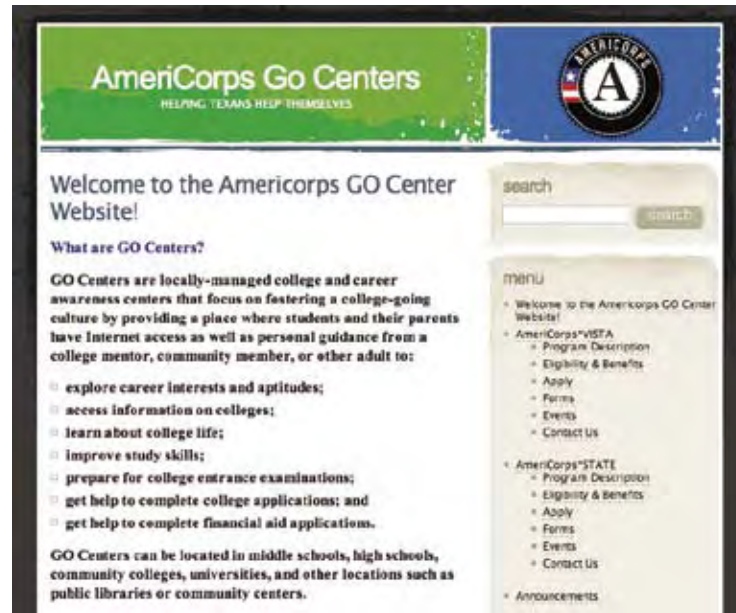
**Featured Project:** Go Centers for Texas  
**Location:** Austin, San Antonio, and Houston  
**Project Sponsor:** College for All Texans Foundation  
**Project Issue Area:** Youth development  
**VISTAs:** 15

Texas faces a critical challenge. Demographic projections show that unless the state reverses the trend of declining college participation and success rates, Texas will become less educated, less prosperous, less economically competitive, and have fewer opportunities and a lower quality of life for its people.

The Texas State Demographer projects that if past downward trends in participation in higher education are not corrected, by 2040 the annual loss in household income will exceed \$80 billion. All the ensuing consequences of this loss—related to economic competitiveness, quality of life, and opportunity for all the people of the state—will be felt most acutely by those in poverty. This projected economic impact was a major reason for the creation in 2000 of Texas’ higher education plan, Closing the Gaps by 2015.

College for Texans is an unprecedented statewide initiative that informs and advises low-income families about the benefits of higher education. The College for Texans’ slogan is Education: Go Get It, and a cornerstone strategy of the program is the creation of “Go Centers” in high schools that provide college information, motivation, and assistance to students and their families.

VISTAs create Go Centers in low-income high schools and their feeder schools in



## VISTA in Texas

**No. of VISTAs:** 321

**Projects:** 53

**Project Sponsors:**

- A Circle of Ten**
- Abundance Living, Inc.**
- Admission Control**
- Advocacy Resource Center for Housing**
- American Red Cross, Chisholm Trail Chapter**
- Antioch Community Transformation Network**
- Austin Habitat for Humanity**
- Bastrop County Emergency Food Pantry & Support Center, Inc.**
- Boat People SOS of Houston**
- Border Fair Housing and Economic Justice Center**
- Center for Faith and Health Initiatives**
- Center of Hope (The Provision Center of Parker County)**
- Central Dallas Ministries**
- Coalition of Texans with Disabilities**
- College for All Texans Foundation**
- Community Housing Corporation**
- Cornerstone Outreach Center (2 VISTA projects)**
- El Pente Community Development Corporation**
- FaithWorks of Abilene, Inc.**
- Foundation Communities**
- Goodwill Industries of Central East Texas, Inc.**
- Green Light Ministries, Inc.**
- Housing Services Incorporated**
- Houston Hope**

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## **VISTA in Texas** *(continued)*

**Imagine Art**  
**International Rescue Committee**  
**La Union del Pueblo Entero**  
**Lanetree Duckfarm Eco Center**  
**Liberty Heights Community Center**  
**Longview Community Ministries**  
**Martinez Street Women's Center**  
**Minorities for Equality in Employment, Education,  
Liberty and Justice**  
**One Economy Corporation**  
**People Empowerment Project**  
**Project Vida Health Center**  
**Promise Helpers**  
**Reasoning Mind, Inc.**  
**Saint Edward's University**  
**Tech Corps Texas**  
**Texas A&M University**  
**Texas Association of Second Harvesters Food  
Banks, Inc.**  
**Texas Conference of Churches**  
**Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board**  
**The City of Van**  
**The First Tee of Greater Austin**  
**The Potter's House of Dallas, Inc.**  
**University of Texas Austin, Charles A. Dana Center**  
**United Cerebral Palsy Association of Texas**  
**United Way of Southern Cameron County**  
**United Way of Tyler/Smith County**  
**Valley Mills Library Association, Inc.**  
**Youth Advocates, Inc.**

San Antonio and Houston. VISTAs develop and implement Go Center plans, programs, and activities to reverse the downward trend in participation rates and to ensure that neither financial aid, nor a lack of a social support system, is a barrier to youth seeking higher education. VISTAs also work with local program sponsors in San Antonio and Houston to help students prepare for higher education.



# Utah



**Featured Project:** Crossroads Community Co-op

**Location:** Salt Lake City

**Project Sponsor:** Crossroads Urban Center

**Project Issue Area:** Food distribution

**VISTAs:** 5

Food insecurity is a growing problem in Utah. Due to low wages and the high cost of housing, utilities, transportation, and health care, a growing number of low-income Utahans are struggling to make ends meet and provide for their basic food needs. Many are turning to food pantries on a regular basis, which are designed to assist people in emergency situations and are not equipped to meet on-going supplemental food needs. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 737,000 Utahans are food insecure, meaning that they do not have “access at all times, to enough food for a healthy life for all household members.” Utah has the third highest rate of food insecurity in the country.

With the assistance of VISTAs, the Crossroads Urban Center created a self-sustaining food distribution system that involves the wider community and encourages volunteer service and self sufficiency. The Community Co-op provides a convenient way for Utahans with limited means to consistently use their own resources to stretch their grocery budget, reduce their reliance on emergency food assistance, and eat more nutritiously. The co-op also encourages its members to volunteer at least two hours per month.

After two years of operation, membership in the co-op grew to 3,800 with 40 community partners. The co-op has moved to a new warehouse and has a full-time director and three part-time staff in addition to the VISTAs. The co-op produces a monthly newsletter and has a website and database designed by VISTAs. Co-op members average 3,000 volunteer hours per month in their communities and with the co-op.

## VISTA in Utah

**No. of VISTAs:** 172

**Projects:** 25

**Project Sponsors:**

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Utah**  
**Carbon School District**  
**Center for the School of the Future**  
**Central Utah Center for Independent Living**  
**City of East Carbon**  
**Community Services Council**  
**Crossroads Urban Center**  
**Green River Community Center**  
**Habitat for Humanity Western States Regional Support Center**  
**International Rescue Committee Salt Lake City (2 VISTA projects)**  
**Jesus Field Youth Center**  
**March of Dimes – Utah Chapter**  
**San Juan Foundation**  
**Somali Community Development of Utah**  
**Southwest Utah Public Health Department**  
**SPLORE**  
**St. Anne's Center**  
**The Arc of Utah**  
**United Way of Utah County**  
**University of Utah**  
**University of Utah Neighborhood Partners**  
**Utah Commission on Volunteers**  
**Utah Community Action Partnership Program**  
**Wasatch Community Gardens**

# Vermont

## VISTA in Vermont

**No. of VISTAs: 48**

**Projects: 3**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Community and Economic Development Office**

**Town of Brattleboro**

**Washington County Youth Services Bureau**



**Featured Project:** Washington County Youth Service Bureau

**Location:** Montpelier

**Project Sponsor:** Washington County Youth Service Bureau

**Project Issue Area:** Youth development

**VISTAs: 16**

Research documents that the highest levels of juvenile crime, substance abuse, and other high-risk behaviors occur between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. on weekdays when most parents are at work and youth are unsupervised. After-school programs and activities are understaffed, underfunded, and, in rural Vermont, rarely available.

VISTAs serve statewide with the Washington County Youth Service Bureau. They recruit, train, and support community volunteers and mentors. The VISTAs also work with nonprofits to create or revise volunteer and mentor recruitment plans and promote and sustain high-quality opportunities for youth. The VISTAs accomplish these tasks by implementing service projects, helping develop curricula for activities and programs, making and supporting mentor/youth matches, and developing public relations materials (e.g., brochures, press releases, articles, PSAs, videos).

VISTAs build capacity and sustainability by creating and evaluating programs, creating or improving operational systems (manuals and databases), creating or improving public relations systems (newsletters, web sites), developing or revising a resource development plan, implementing resource development strategies (e.g., raise in-kind and cash donations), and developing and maintaining a donor list and writing grants.

VISTAs have recruited almost 400 community volunteers to assist with out-of-school activities and serve as mentors to youth between 6- and 17-years-old. In addition, the VISTAs raised \$126,116 in cash donations and in-kind resources worth \$20,872.

# Virginia



**Featured Project:** Moton Community House

**Location:** Newport News

**Project Sponsor:** Hand and Hand, Inc.

**Project Issue Area:** Youth development

**VISTAs:** 3

From its location in the southeast community of Newport News, the Moton Community House (MCH) had served as a safe haven for the neighborhood's youth. More than any other area of the city, this urban community is plagued with high incidents of gang-related violence, teen pregnancy, teen homicides, homelessness, and substance abuse. But with reduced funding resources and staff and a deteriorating facility, MCH all but ceased providing services to this most vulnerable population.

Recognizing the important role and valuable services of MCH, Hand and Hand, Inc. entered into a partnership with MCH. Hand and Hand, Inc. serves as an intermediary VISTA sponsoring organization, assigning VISTAs to smaller, grassroots organizations. Three VISTAs joined MCH with the goal of garnering the necessary community resources to renovate the facility and develop a volunteer service program. VISTAs secured volunteer commitments from 50 sailors aboard the U.S.S. *George Washington*, 10 community organizations and businesses, and the Mayor's office. The first group of volunteers assisted with the renovation activities. In 2006, another group of community organizations made a commitment to help provide the much needed youth programs and activities.

Since 2005, VISTAs have generated \$35,000 in cash contributions, secured \$10,000 in donated goods and services, and recruited more than 200 volunteers. MCH currently serves about 100 youths weekly, who participate in computer classes, dance groups, family strengthening classes, gang violence prevention, and boxing. MCH's boxing program is one of the top amateur boxing programs in the Virginia area.

## VISTA in Virginia

**No. of VISTAs:** 200

**Projects:** 15

**Project Sponsors:**

**Baby Steps, Inc.**

**Beans and Rice, Inc.**

**Bragg Hill Family Life Center**

**Charlottesville Abundant Life Ministries**

**Community Mediation Center**

**Hand and Hand, Inc.**

**International Rescue Committee**

**Literacy Council of Northern Virginia**

**New River Community Action, Inc.**

**Queen Street Beacon at the Crossroads**

**Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project**

**The Nature Conservancy**

**University of Virginia Community Relations Office**

**Virginia One Church One Child**

**Youth Venture**



# Washington

## VISTA in Washington

**No. of VISTAs: 230**

**Projects: 29**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Associated Ministries**

**Columbia-Pacific Resource Conservation and Development District**

**Enterprise for Progress in the Community**

**Girl Scouts of Western Washington**

**Gonzaga University – Center for Community Action and Service-Learning**

**Habitat for Humanity International**

**Human Services Council**

**International Rescue Committee Seattle**

**Lutheran Community Services Northwest**

**North Columbia Community Action Council**

**Northeast Community Center Association**

**Northeast Washington Rural Resources Development Association**

**Olympic Community Action Programs**

**People of Color Against AIDS Network**

**Planned Parenthood of Western Washington**

**Sheriff Community Oriented Policing Efforts**

**Skagit County Community Action Agency**

**Solid Ground**

**Spokane Neighborhood Action Programs**

**Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department**

**The Church Council of Greater Seattle**

**The Opportunity Council**

**Valley Cities Counseling & Consultation**

**Volunteer Center of Lewis, Mason, and Thurston Counties**

**Volunteers of America Northwest Washington**

**Volunteers of America Spokane**

**Washington State Association of RSVP Directors**

**Washington State Employment Security Department**

**Western Washington University – Washington Campus Compact**



**Featured Project:** Volunteers of America

**Location:** Northwest Washington

**Project Sponsor:** Volunteers of America Northwest Washington

**Project Issue Area:** Children of prisoners

**VISTAs:** 17

As the number of men and women in our prison system grows steadily, another population increases in our midst—the innocent children of prisoners. More than 27,000 children in Washington have a parent in prison. When parents are incarcerated, it impacts the entire family. The children struggle to find their way through obstacles of depression, isolation, attachment issues, and low self-esteem. These children need support systems to have a healthy childhood, including positive role models and the opportunity to maintain connections to their incarcerated parents.

In 2002, recognizing that family bonds need to be strengthened during parental incarceration, Volunteers of America Western Washington created an AmeriCorps VISTA position to meet this specific need. Words Travel was created to use literacy as the vehicle to connect children to their incarcerated parents. In 2003, a VISTA secured funding to launch a mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents. In 2007, VISTAs continued to build familial strengths during the time of separation by supporting the development and implementation of parenting classes tailored for incarcerated parents. The VISTAs have been instrumental in the process of developing and supporting the Children of Promise programs at Volunteers of America Western Washington.

Despite the prison walls, Words Travel has connected children and their parents, mended broken relationships, and helped strengthen the family unit. A total of 305 incarcerated parents, both mothers and fathers, and 515 children have completed the Words Travel program. Through Mentoring Children of Promise, 128 youth have a caring, consistent mentor in their lives. Raising Children of Promise, a new pilot parenting program at Monroe Correctional Complex, has already served 20 incarcerated fathers, improving their parenting skills and the lives of their 46 children.

# West Virginia



**Featured Project:** Rural Appalachian Improvement League  
**Location:** City of Mullens and Wyoming County  
**Project Sponsor:** Coal Heritage Highway Authority  
**Project Issue Area:** Environmental and economic development  
**VISTAs:** 8

The city of Mullens and Wyoming County have been faced with many poverty issues due to the decline in coal industry activity and a devastating flood in 2001. The Rural Appalachian Improvement League (RAIL) addresses the root causes of poverty in southern West Virginia by building human and civic capacity through the incubation of nonprofit and grassroots organizations and through the provision of health, home repair, and education programs.

VISTAs serving at RAIL and at its partners, the Office of Surface Mining and the Upper Guyandotte Watershed Association, built the foundation for a watershed agency, secured a \$200,000 Brownfield Assessment Grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, and, most recently, secured for Wyoming County the prestigious Groundwork USA Pilot Community designation.

The Upper Guyandotte Watershed Association is a nonprofit corporation that oversees the installation of decentralized wastewater treatment and other projects aimed at clearing streams of dangerous pollutants. The association's work addresses 260 square miles from the headwaters of the Guyandotte River to the mouth of Pinnacle Creek, through portions of Wyoming and Raleigh Counties. The EPA grant is being used to study mine-scarred lands in eastern Wyoming County.

## VISTA in West Virginia

**No. of VISTAs:** 134

**Projects:** 9

**Project Sponsors:**

**Citizen's Conservation Corps of West Virginia**

**Coal Heritage Highway Authority**

**Doddridge County Family Resource Network**

**Eastern Regional Family Resource Network**

**LifeBridge, Inc.**

**Pocahontas Communications Cooperative**

**Step by Step, Inc.**

**West Virginia Commission for National and  
Community Service**

**West Virginia University Extension Services**

# Wisconsin

## VISTA in Wisconsin

**No. of VISTAs: 151**

**Projects: 10**

**Project Sponsors:**

**Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, UW-Extension**

**Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee**

**Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, Inc.**

**Milwaukee Public Schools**

**Northwoods NiiJii Enterprise Community, Inc.**

**Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**

**RSVP of Dane County, Inc.**

**United Way of Dane County**

**University of Wisconsin-Parkside**

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction**



**Featured Project:** Schools of Hope Literacy Project

**Location:** Madison

**Project Sponsors:** United Way of Dane County

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 32

VISTA has helped thousands of school children in Madison succeed in school and advance their educational and economic prospects during the past decade. In the mid-1990s, Art Rainwater, superintendent of the Madison Metropolitan School District, faced the grim reality that African American children in his district, who typically came from the city's poorer neighborhoods, were seven times more likely than their white counterparts to test below the minimum reading performance level.

Recognizing the importance that literacy can play in helping youth complete high school and earn a living, Rainwater formed a unique partnership that included a team of VISTAs from the Schools of Hope Literacy Project, the United Way of Dane County, and Madison Metropolitan School District to develop and implement a system to recruit and manage community volunteers as tutors for kids. In 2006, the VISTA cadre engaged more than 600 community volunteers to work with classroom teachers to tutor some 3,000 K-5 students in 24 elementary schools and several after-school community programs.

Between 1995 and 2005, the last year a standardized reading test was administered, African American students scoring at the minimal performance level fell from 28.5 percent to 5.5 percent, while Latino/Hispanic students dropped from 9.7 percent to 0.6 percent, and white students from 4.1 percent to 0.3 percent. Superintendent Rainwater attributes these impressive results to VISTA's tutor mobilization efforts and the innovative community partnership, which has brought thousands of volunteers and parents into the process of educating their children and improving their schools.



# Wyoming



**Featured Project:** Raising Readers in Wyoming

**Location:** Statewide

**Project Sponsors:** Raising Readers in Wyoming, Inc.

**Project Issue Area:** Education

**VISTAs:** 2

Children living in poverty in Wyoming are being immunized against diseases and against illiteracy, thanks to VISTAs' efforts with pediatricians and parents.

VISTAs help Raising Readers in Wyoming, a program that supports children and parents in early literacy, supply books and information to medical care providers who distribute them at well-child health care visits and immunizations. Statistics show parents who are given books and "prescriptions" to read by their children's doctors are four times more likely to read and share books with their young children. Families living in poverty are eight times more likely to follow their doctor's "prescription." According to the most recent census data, 19 percent of Wyoming's children are living in poverty.

VISTAs at Raising Readers organize and recruit volunteers and doctors, make presentations, publicize the program, organize fund-raisers, and request donations. They create newsletters, organize research projects, and plan literacy and fund-raising events.

VISTAs have recruited several hundred community volunteers. The volunteers were instrumental in preparing and delivering books to 1,300 low-income parents in the first year, 3,100 in the second year, and 4,900 in the third year. In annual surveys of parents participating in the program, 85 percent stated they increased the number of times per week they read to their children. During this same time period, the Wyoming Chapter of the American Association of Pediatricians reported a 10 percent increase in the number of children immunized.

## VISTA in Wyoming

**No. of VISTAs:** 70

**Projects:** 17

**Project Sponsors:**

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwest Wyoming**

**Boys & Girls Club of Cheyenne**

**Cheyenne Health and Wellness Center**

**Child Advocacy Services of the Big Horns**

**Community Action of Laramie County, Inc.**

**Community Action Partnership of Natrona County**

**Converse County Coalition Against Family  
Violence and Sexual Assault**

**Habitat for Humanity of the Greater Teton Area**

**Habitat for Humanity Western States Regional  
Support Center**

**Needs, Inc.**

**Raising Readers in Wyoming, Inc.**

**Sheridan Community Education Foundation**

**Teton Literacy Program**

**Wyoming Children's Access Network, Inc.**

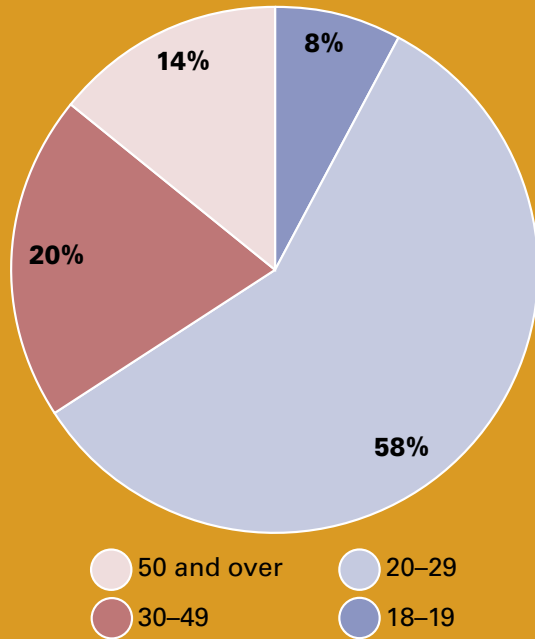
**Wyoming Department of Health, Wyoming State  
Hospital, Evanston**

**Wyoming Department of Workforce Services**

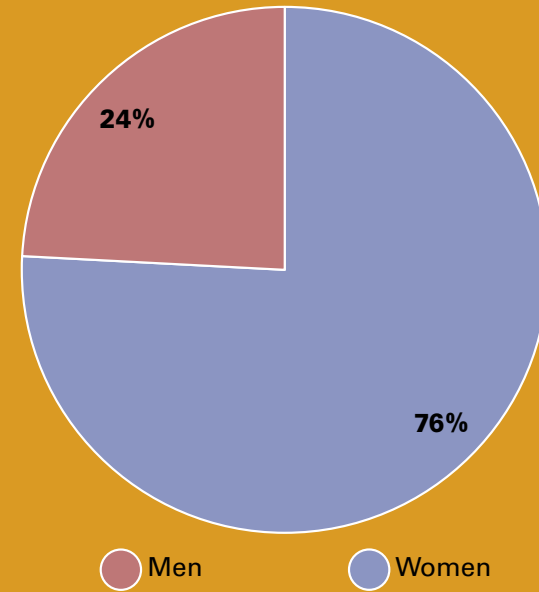
**Wyoming Legal Services**

# VISTA by the Numbers

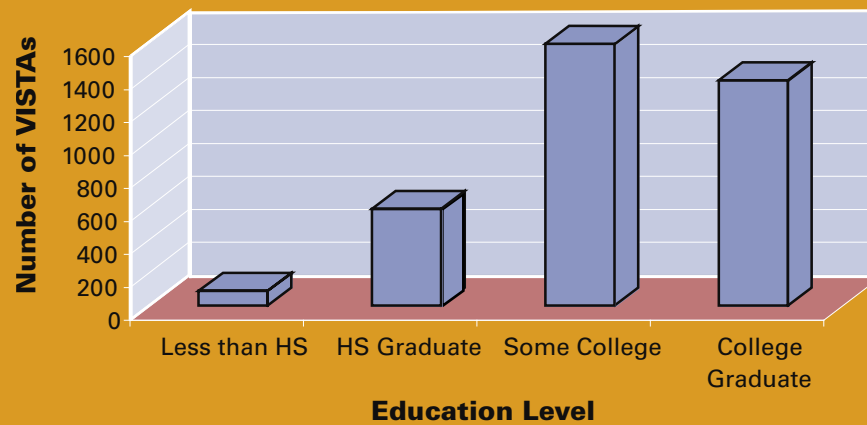
## VISTAs by Age



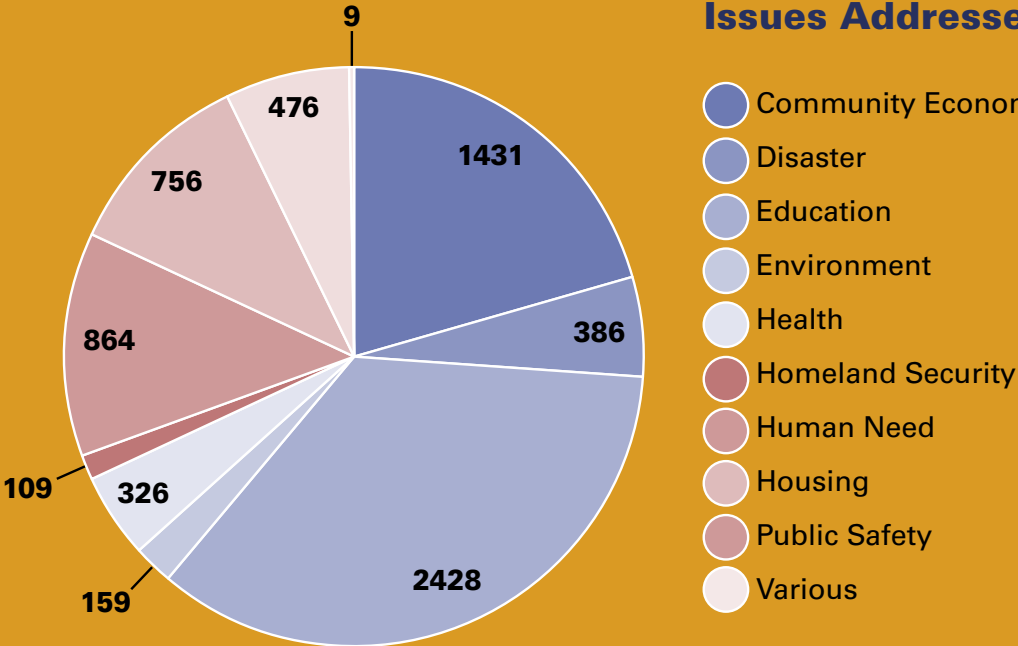
## VISTAs by Gender



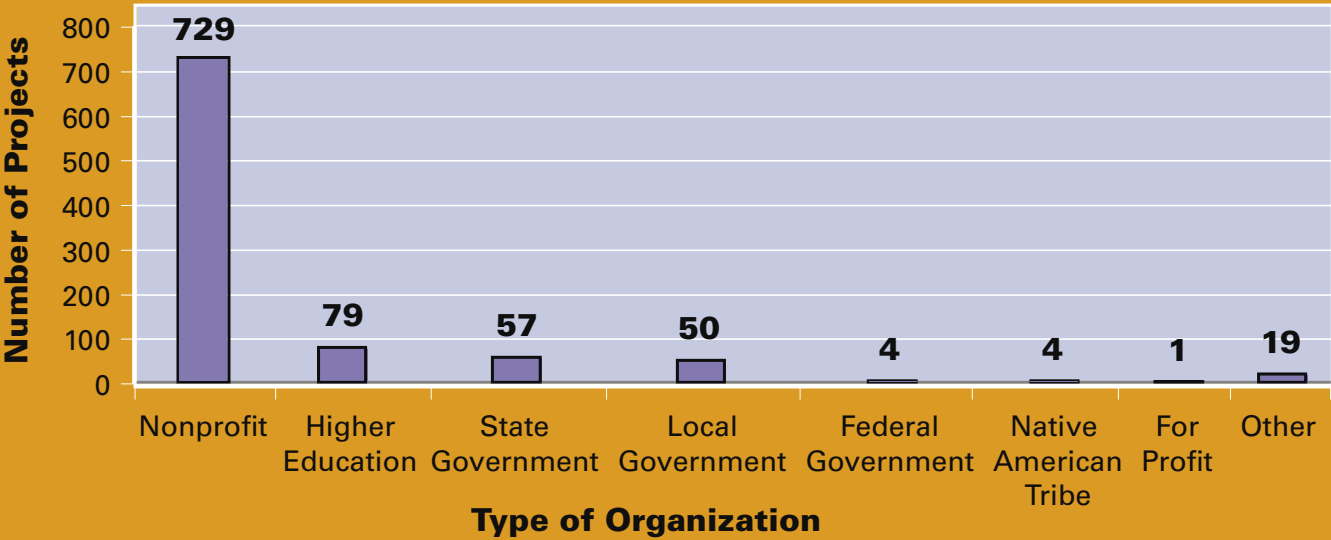
## VISTAs by Education Level



### Issues Addressed by VISTAs



### Projects by Organizational Type





# Corporation State Program Offices

VISTA helps to enhance the quality of life for the impoverished in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. VISTA resources are targeted and managed through five regional and 47 state offices maintained by the Corporation for National and Community Service, VISTA's parent agency. These field offices are staffed by people who live and work in communities served by VISTA projects.

Alabama State Office  
950 22nd Street North, Suite 428  
Birmingham, AL 35203  
(205) 731-0030

Alaska State Office  
Jackson Federal Building  
915 Second Ave., Ste. 3190  
Seattle, WA 98174  
(206) 220-7736

Arizona State Office  
230 North First Avenue, Suite 200  
Phoenix, AZ 85003  
(602) 514-7171

Arkansas State Office  
Federal Building  
700 West Capitol Street, Room 2506  
Little Rock, AR 72201  
(501) 324-5234

California State Office  
11150 W. Olympic Blvd., Suite 670  
Los Angeles, CA 90064  
(310) 235-7421

Northern California State Office  
1301 Clay Street, Suite 365-S  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 637-7140

Colorado State Office  
Denver Federal Center, Bldg. 46  
P.O. Box 25505  
Denver, CO 80225-0505  
(303) 236-2033

Connecticut State Office  
280 Trumbull Street  
Hartford, CT 06103-3510  
(860) 240-3237

Delaware State Office  
Fallon Federal Building  
31 Hopkins Plaza, Suite 400-B  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
(410) 962-4443

District of Columbia State Office  
1201 New York Ave., NW  
Suite 9201  
Washington, DC 20525  
(202) 606-6818

Florida State Office  
3165 McCrory Street, Suite 115  
Orlando, FL 32803-3750  
(407) 648-6117

Georgia State Office  
401 West Peachtree Street, NW  
Peachtree Summit Building  
16th Floor  
Atlanta, GA 30308-3519  
(404) 331-4646

Hawaii State Office  
300 Ala Moana Blvd.  
Honolulu, HI 96850-0001  
(808) 541-2832

Idaho State Office  
304 North 8th Street, Room 344  
Boise, ID 83702-5835  
(208) 334-1707

Illinois State Office  
77 West Jackson Boulevard, Suite 442  
Chicago, IL 60604-3511  
(312) 353-8283

Indiana State Office  
46 East Ohio Street, Room 226  
Indianapolis, IN 46204-4317  
(317) 226-6724

Iowa State Office  
Federal Building  
210 Walnut Street, Room 917  
Des Moines, IA 50309-2195  
(515) 284-4816

Kansas State Office  
444 S.E. Quincy, Room 260  
Topeka, KS 66683-3572  
(785) 234-5033

Kentucky State Office  
600 Martin L. King Place, Room 190  
Louisville, KY 40202-2230  
(502) 582-6384

Louisiana State Office  
707 Florida Street, Suite 316  
Baton Rouge, LA 70801  
(225) 389-0471

Maine State Office  
J.C. Cleveland Federal Building  
55 Pleasant Street - Suite 1501  
Concord, NH 03301  
(603) 226-7780

Maryland State Office  
Fallon Federal Building  
31 Hopkins Plaza, Suite 400-B  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
(410) 962-4443

Massachusetts State Office  
10 Causeway Street, Room 473  
Boston, MA 02222-1038  
(617) 565-7006

Michigan State Office  
211 West Fort Street, Suite 1408  
Detroit, MI 48226-2799  
(313) 226-7848

Minnesota State Office  
431 South 7th Street, Room 2405  
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1854  
(612) 334-4083

Mississippi State Office  
210 East Capitol Street, Room 920  
Jackson, MS 39201  
(601) 965-5664

Missouri State Office  
2345 Grand Blvd., Suite 650  
Kansas City, MO 64108  
(816) 426-2079

Montana State Office  
208 North Montana Avenue, Suite 206  
Helena, MT 59601-3837  
(406) 449-5404

Nebraska State Office  
100 Centennial Mall North,  
Room 247A  
Lincoln, NE 68508-3896  
(402) 437-5474

Nevada State Office  
400 S. Virginia Street, Suite 548  
Reno, NV 89501  
(775) 784-7474

New Hampshire State Office  
J.C. Cleveland Federal Building  
55 Pleasant Street, Suite 1501  
Concord, NH 03301  
(603) 226-7780

New Jersey State Office  
44 South Clinton, Suite 312  
Trenton, NJ 08609-1507  
(609) 989-2245

New Mexico State Office  
120 S. Federal Place, Room 315  
Santa Fe, NM 87501-2026  
(505) 988-6577

New York State Office  
Leo O'Brien Federal Bldg.  
1 Clinton Square, Suite 900  
Albany, NY 12207  
(518) 431-4150

North Carolina State Office  
Federal Bldg, PO Century Station  
300 Fayetteville Street, R. 414  
Raleigh, NC 27601  
(919) 856-4731

North Dakota State Office  
225 S. Pierre Street, Room 225  
Pierre, SD 57501-2452  
(605) 224-5996

Ohio State Office  
51 North High Street, Suite 800  
Columbus, OH 43215  
(614) 469-7442

Oklahoma State Office  
215 Dean A. McGee, Suite 324  
Oklahoma City, OK 73102  
(405) 231-5201

Oregon State Office  
620 SW Main Street, Room 714  
Portland, OR 97205  
(503) 326-3282

Pennsylvania State Office  
The Curtis Center  
601 Walnut St., Suite 876E  
Philadelphia, PA 19106  
(215) 597-2806

Puerto Rico State Office  
150 Carlos Chardon Ave., Suite 662  
San Juan, PR 00918-1737  
(787) 766-5314

Rhode Island State Office  
400 Westminster Street, Room 203  
Providence, RI 02903  
(401) 528-5426

South Carolina State Office  
1835 Assembly Street, Suite 872  
Columbia, SC 29201-2430  
(803) 765-5771

South Dakota State Office  
225 S. Pierre Street, Room 225  
Pierre, SD 57501-2452  
(605) 224-5996

Tennessee State Office  
233 Cumberland Bend Drive,  
Suite 112  
Nashville, TN 37228  
(615) 736-5561

Texas State Office  
300 E. 8th St., Suite G-169  
Austin, TX 78701-3220  
(512) 916-7000

Utah State Office  
125 South State Street, Suite 8416  
Bennett Federal Building  
Salt Lake City, UT 84138  
(801) 524-5411

Vermont State Office  
J.C. Cleveland Federal Building  
55 Pleasant Street - Suite 1501  
Concord, NH 03301  
(603) 226-7780

Virginia State Office  
400 North 8th Street, Suite 446  
P. O. Box 10066  
Richmond, VA 23240-1832  
(804) 771-2197

Virgin Islands State Office  
150 Carlos Chardon Ave., Suite 662  
San Juan, PR 00918-1737  
(787) 766-5314

Washington State Office  
Jackson Federal Building  
915 Second Avenue, Suite 3190  
Seattle, WA 98174-1103  
(206) 220-7745

West Virginia State Office  
10 Hale Street, Suite 203  
Charleston, WV 25301-1409  
(304) 347-5246

Wisconsin State Office  
310 W. Wisconsin Ave., Room 1240  
Milwaukee, WI 53203-2211  
(414) 297-1118

Wyoming State Office  
308 West 21st Street, Suite 206  
Cheyenne, WY 82001-3663  
(307) 772-2385



## **Become a VISTA**

VISTAs choose from projects throughout the country, based on their skills and interests, and serve full time for one year with community-based organizations, working to overcome poverty. Assignments may involve starting new programs; recruiting and training volunteers; writing grant proposals; seeking out sponsorships; establishing partnerships with local businesses, organizations, churches, and schools; planning community meetings; or handling public relations. Whatever the task or challenge, VISTAs make a lasting difference for low-income communities in need.

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

**Find out more at [americorps.gov](http://americorps.gov)**

**Or call 800.942.2677**

**TTY 800.833.3722**

## **Sponsor a VISTA Project**

Develop a VISTA project and host VISTAs as they work to expand your organization's capacity to solve community problems. VISTAs help organizations like yours to create the sustainable infrastructure needed to fight poverty in their communities.

**Contact your local Corporation State Office**

**Or call 202.606.5000**

**TTY 202.565.2799**

**Email: [vista@americorps.gov](mailto:vista@americorps.gov)**













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

**[americorps.gov](http://americorps.gov)**

AmeriCorps VISTA is an anti-poverty 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.

