



Michigan's AmeriCorps Great Stories

SPRING 2008

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MPCA Community HealthCorps

THE BOOK FAIRY

By: Lucille Williams

It has been my privilege to serve at Hackley Community Care Center in Muskegon as a Literacy Outreach Specialist for the MPCA Community HealthCorps. I promote literacy and early reading as a tool for healthy communities. I have been warmly received, and visitors are now looking forward to seeing me at the health center. People are starting to call me, "The Book Fairy." When I walk into the waiting areas with books, faces light up! People ask me, "What do you have for us

today?" I am especially delighted when people start talking about a book they read and how they enjoy getting books. Recently, one grandmother told me she brought a book

home and was disappointed she couldn't finish it because her grandchildren kept reading it before she had a chance to finish. After hearing that, we laughed and I ended up giving her

another copy to call her own. It is exciting to serve where I can be a positive role model and have an impact in the community. For me, it's a badge of honor to be known as "The Book Fairy."



The Book Fairy delivering her gifts.

MI Environmental Stewardship AmeriCorps

CAPTURING RAIN

By: Aistis Tumas

Rain barrels capture and store rainwater from roofs, reducing runoff and erosion and thereby protecting the water quality of lakes and rivers in Michigan. The stored rainwater can then be utilized to water gardens and lawns. This past year, serving with Michigan's Environmental Stewardship AmeriCorps (MESA), I partnered with volunteers from Growing Hope Community Gardens in Ypsilanti to teach middle school students in Washtenaw County how to make rain barrels. Using a model landscape and a spray bottle, I

would simulate a rain storm, and the students would point where on the model rain barrels could be placed to reduce runoff. After making this visual connection of how rain barrels help the environment, the students worked hard and had fun making and painting their own rain barrels. Rain barrels make an impression on adults, too. While teaching a class to homeowners, I demonstrated a calculation showing how hundreds of gallons of runoff can be generated by a

typical rainstorm. Three weeks later, I ran into someone from the class. He pulled out a piece of paper to show me he did the same calculations for his house, and was planning to install several rain barrels. It was great to see the impact of my service.



AmeriCorps led youth rain barrel build.

Huron Pines AmeriCorps



Echinacea, a native plant of Michigan, is a great rain garden addition.

LET IT RAIN

By: Brenda Irish

In its lumbering heyday, the city of Cadillac blossomed along the shore of Lake Cadillac with growth spilling along the Clam River. For 130 years Lake Cadillac and the Clam River served as receptacles for unwanted refuse, from logging wastes to present-day storm water runoff. Like many cities, Cadillac currently has no storm water management plan.

The general public is unaware of the significant impact runoff from parking lots, roofs, streets, and sidewalks has on water quality. As a Huron Pines AmeriCorps member serving at the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly, my mission is to bring watershed stewardship awareness to Cadillac and the upper reaches of the watershed. One creative and highly visible way we are bringing the issue of runoff pollution to the public's attention is a demonstration

rain garden. A rain garden is a depression in the landscape, designed and planted with native plants, to trap, absorb, and filter storm water runoff rather than allowing the runoff to enter a storm drain. Our demonstration rain garden just may be the catalyst needed to inspire storm water management in our community, thereby protecting Michigan's water. I am very proud to be a part of this project and to take the lead in conservation.

Faith in Youth Partnership

MENTOR MATCH

By: Laura Hahnfeld

Mentoring is a key focus at our AmeriCorps site, part of the Faith-In-Youth Partnership in Holland. We began training mentors and matching them with youth after we noticed the students really needed one-on-one attention. Volunteer mentors commit to meeting once a week with a mentee

and have made all the difference in the world to almost 40 youth now. Keianna, a high school freshman, and Maria, a Hope College student, have only been matched for a few months but they hit it off instantly. Keianna seems to love doing anything as long as they're together. They've tried to achieve goals jointly like healthier cooking. Keianna

loves that she can talk to Maria about things she can't talk about with her family. And, the relationship isn't one-way. Maria really looks forward to their time together. Maria told me, "Keianna's outgoing personality and beautiful spirit have been very entertaining. No matter what, she always shows up with a smile."



Keianna (below) and Maria (above) have developed a unique bond.

Michigan's AmeriCorps Partnership

COOKING CLUB

By: Jennie Weakley

Part of my AmeriCorps service with Michigan's AmeriCorps Partnership in Detroit is teaching a cooking club twice a week. The students learn not only about food, but I also provide history and obscure facts about the country from

which the recipes came. When I began, no one expected me to teach more than cooking skills. Initially, the students seemed to be bothered by the educational portion. I felt the students weren't retaining the information. One week however, we allowed the Girl

Scouts to join us. While there, they held a Q & A session to see what my students had learned. I was amazed! The students were remembering all kinds of information. I finally felt I was making a difference by connecting culinary skills to academic knowledge.

Michigan Habitat's AmeriCorps



BUILDING PRIDE

By: Karen Meyer

While serving with Michigan Habitat's AmeriCorps program, I experienced the entire process and goal of Habitat for Humanity. By working on a home build in Webberville with Sarah Morrow and her two young daughters, I discovered the power of community service. It wasn't until the dedication ceremony, however, when I truly felt the weight and importance of what Habitat accomplished. The week prior to

the ceremony was very busy and hectic. During the bustle, I received an email from Sarah's sister in Florida. She would not be able to attend the ceremony and asked if I would pass along a message to be read at the dedication. As I read the note about how she was so happy and proud of Sarah for doing this, how Sarah has worked so hard and how she felt all of her prayers had been answered, I began to feel tears welling up in my eyes. Then, as I read the note at the ceremony, I saw Sarah's emotional reaction

and felt an overwhelming sense of pride not only for Sarah and my fellow Corps members, but for the entire community who supported the Morrow family. This experience was a great reminder of what a community can do when people work together towards a common goal. We have a small community and are a small affiliate, but I really believe that it only takes a small, dedicated group to do something great.

Morrow family at the groundbreaking ceremony.



Superior AmeriCorps

MY INSPIRATION

By: Heather Heinz

I joined the AmeriCorps program during a difficult time in my life. My husband was working in Wakefield Schools and the transition was difficult. I was living on my own and soon began my service with Superior AmeriCorps teaching in Calument. The high school students were very welcoming. The first day

I was greeted with, "Good Morning, Mrs. Heinz!" and I immediately felt at home. To make the classroom cozy during the holidays, I asked if I could have a Christmas tree. The next day, we put up a monster tree. However, my students joked it was awfully "Charlie Brown"-like. The tree had lights but no ornaments. One of my more challenging students said, "We will MAKE you

ornaments!" Using my craft supplies, they made amazing ornaments. They liked them so much, many took them home as gifts. Their delight made me glow. When I was struggling in my life, these kids made me smile. Their good nature & kindness is an inspiration and makes me proud to serve with AmeriCorps.



Heather Heinz with students from Calumet High School.

Volunteer Muskegon

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By: Stefanie Roderer

As a member of Volunteer Muskegon AmeriCorps, I have made a commitment to service. Another person who made a commitment to service was Martin Luther King, Jr. Because of this strong connection, my AmeriCorps team wanted to do something

special on MLK Day. Half of our team decided to go to a local foster home center. We led some educational activities with a handful of youth that reside there. Many of the kids were uncooperative and didn't seem to appreciate our presence. However, at the end of the day, a seemingly disinterested girl, approached one of the AmeriCorps members and said,



"Thank you so much for coming out and being with us today." The member was touched and later said, "It makes me feel so good because I knew that if we touched only one person, we were truly 'making a difference'."

Volunteer Muskegon AmeriCorps Team.

4-H Mentor Michigan Initiative



Sammi (right) and Jamie volunteered and made the Magic of Mentoring special.

VOLUNTEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By: Dave Ornée

During National Mentoring Month, our 4-H Mentor Michigan AmeriCorps members had two youth who put in a lot of time and energy to make an annual event a huge success. The Magic of Mentoring awards ceremony in Zeeland hosts nearly 200 people every year. These young ladies did everything to

prepare: packed boxes, printed certificates and put pictures in frames. As a reward, several people donated dresses for the girls to choose from for this occasion.

Perhaps their biggest contribution were the words they spoke on stage. They tirelessly practiced their speeches but were still nervous in the hours leading up to the event. When the time came however, both of their presentations were great

as they spoke meaningful words to the audience. All the people in attendance could not say enough about how great it was to have young people on stage speaking and presenting awards. Their hard work paid off and it was great to see the smiles on their faces throughout the evening. They helped to make the Magic of Mentoring a success. Our members were so grateful for their contributions and proud to spread the power of volunteerism.

AmeriCorps Member, Miss Amelia, and student working with word activities



Char-Em ISD AmeriCorps

READING FOR LIFE

By: Amelia Nicolson

Through my AmeriCorps service in northern Michigan, I assisted a 3rd grade student with her reading skills. When we started, she was reading

18 correct words per minute when she should have been reading about 77correct.

Over the next four months, we worked intensely with sight word recognition activities.

To make sure we were making progress, I retested her. She read 39 correct words per minute- more than doubling her previous score! I couldn't have been happier with how effective the activities had been.

Currently, she is still below a 3rd grade reading level but is making incredible progress. Also, I have more time to help her improve and get her to the skill level she should be.

I'm very lucky to be able to participate in her education and give her the reading skills she will use for the rest of her life.

Exploring the tastes and textures of new fruits and vegetables.



Jumpstart

ORANGES 101

By: Jenna Dinkins

My AmeriCorps service with the Jumpstart program allows me to really impact children's lives. I realized this while mentoring "at-risk" children during a segment where they explore new concepts called, "Let's find out about it." We were exploring colors of the

rainbow and how they also appear in fruit and vegetables so we decided to bring in fresh fruit. Several children had never seen some of the produce outside of a can. We did taste testing so the children could see how fresh coconuts taste and how pineapples actually feel. The children were so excited! I am

so pleased with the fact the children are really starting to show the effects Jumpstart is having on their lives. These events add to their vocabulary and everyday experiences. Their families may not have the means to purchase these products so we try, each day, to provide new and varied experiences.



MARESA Michigan's AmeriCorps

PLAYGROUP OFFERS MORE THAN GAMES

By: Catherine Paul

For the past nine years, Marquette Alger Regional Education Service Agency (MARESA) and Gwinn Area Community schools in Michigan's Upper Peninsula have offered a free preschool playgroup to families in the area. This weekly playgroup provides the opportunity for both parents and children to socialize. The children learn how to play with others, share, sit quietly for story

time, and improve motor skills. In addition, the parents are given the opportunity to attend various parenting workshops, ranging from increasing literacy to making



2007 Preschool Playgroup Christmas Party.

homemade toys. The families have enjoyed outings to local museums and community centers. Parents have told me how happy they are to have this option and even recommend it to others. In the past two years of my AmeriCorps service, the playgroup attendance has nearly tripled. I have been lucky enough to witness the establishment of many friendships between parents and among children. I'm thrilled my service has made this preschool playgroup such an important part of the community.

readetroit Corps

SPARKING CURIOSITY

By: Diana Alan

KaShawna Greene is an AmeriCorps member who is currently in her second year of service as a literacy coach at Van Zile Elementary in Detroit.

During Miss Greene's first year of service, Marva Johnson, Miss Greene's principal, came up with a way to get students more involved

with reading. In 2006, the school started a 3-month reading challenge for over 300 children. Kindergarten through 2nd grade students read the Curious George series. The 3rd and 4th grade students read the Boxcar Mysteries series. With a fixed time to complete each book, they are quizzed. After they pass, they receive prizes such as movie passes, dinner, or a mall tour! To get the kids excited about completing the

reading challenge, Miss Greene rented a Curious George costume and visited each classroom.

She obviously loves finding ways to get her students more involved with reading. She is dedicated to promoting literacy and building lifelong skills for the students.



Curious George visiting the Van Zile Elementary School.

Neighborhood Youth Development - Camp Fire USA

A HELPING HAND

By: Karisha Young

As an AmeriCorps member for Camp Fire USA, I lead the 4th and 5th grade group at the Coit Performing Arts Academy after school program in Grand Rapids. I have a particular 4th grade student with learning disabilities who struggles with her homework on a daily basis. One afternoon, I learned

this student was staying up until nine in the evening. She had to take care of her younger sibling, while trying to do her homework without any help. I took it upon myself to help her with her homework during the after school program. I made sure she finished it before the end of the afternoon. One day, the student's mother came into the school to thank me and to let me

know how much this helped her daughter. This one child has opened my eyes to the needs of these kids. I'm excited to be a part of something that is really changing lives.

Karisha Young and her students.



City-Year Detroit

DEVELOPING TRUST

By: Anton Taylor

Within my first weeks serving at the Detroit Lions Academy, an incident occurred. A

student's eyeglass holder came up missing. Over time, the student who lost his case, became completely infuriated. The teacher attempted to convince the guilty party to confess. When no one

confessed, I thought maybe the students might be upfront with me. I politely asked, "Could I try to resolve this issue alone?"

What followed was significant in developing trust with the students. I asked the young men in the class if they trusted me. This went over with a mixed response. I went on to tell the class, "Whoever has the case needs to confess so we can continue with class." Initially, the class looked at me

as if I was speaking a foreign language. I then informed the class I am not a snitch, and I am here for them and their success. After my words, the case came out. Once the teacher and school liaison re-entered the class I noticed the look of surprise on their faces. This was the first big step to developing a relationship with the students. I was proud my presence changed the course of events and made a difference.

Anton and students from the Detroit Lions Academy.



Michigan Campus Compact AmeriCorps*VISTA

ALTERNATIVE BREAK

By: Alisa Dean

Alma College has alternative break trips and I decided to go on one as part of my

AmeriCorps*VISTA service. I was excited to serve a new community, increase my knowledge of an issue, and get to know the students I'm working with. It's not just a regular day at

work, it's a time to serve the community and have fun. I went to Grand Rapids and partnered with Heartside Ministries in a program called Urban Plunge. Students tour the community, volunteer at Heartside Ministries and help at a local soup kitchen. After dinner, the students sat with some of the residents to talk about their lives. These talks touched all of our hearts. The residents told stories about their lives in poverty and how

they've been given a second chance. This 34 hour experience will stay with us for the rest of our lives. It's quite amazing how such a short experience can change lives. Alternative Breaks impact people because they look at a local part of global issues. Setting out to solve the problem of hunger can be daunting. However, even by serving soup, you are still doing a great service by working to create change.

Heartside Ministries in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Downriver CARES AmeriCorps

WINTER BLAST

By: Emily Cousins-Latham

Members of Downriver CARES AmeriCorps had the opportunity to serve at Winter Blast in downtown Detroit.

Winter Blast is a winter celebration to encourage activity in the downtown

area. I helped at the snow slide alongside 20 other volunteers. The slide was so much fun! Everyone smiled and laughed as they were slipping down the icy slide. The best part, aside from watching the faces of the participants, was meeting the other volunteers who serve in

Detroit. They volunteer at each and every event possible. I met a father and son team, who take a day out of their schedules every year for Winter Blast. This helped me realize volunteering and serving is life-long and meant to be enjoyed by not only those I serve, but by me too!

Emily Cousins-Latham takes the plunge down the snow slide.





AmeriCorps Together We Prepare

CRITICAL SERVICE

By: Leslie Kingsley

It was my first disaster assignment as an AmeriCorps member, and when I arrived at the shelter, I was certain I would change the world. Although my duty was to provide vital emergency assistance, I was assigned to sit at a table and help direct clients.

As I sat, I recognized many things that needed to be happening and my frustration grew. Usually a shy follower, I rebelliously left my post. To my surprise, I began to take initiative to find food and water for the clients already at the shelter. In the chaos, I saw a family silently sitting at a table and my natural

tendency was to sit and offer my time and compassion to them. However, I realized these people simply needed me to do my job and setting up the shelter efficiently was the best thing I could offer them. Fueled by that thought, I became a go-to person, with extensive knowledge of the shelter but unable to really interact with the victims directly. This leader, with a somewhat robotic sense of professionalism, was not the natural sympathetic and conversational person I am, but it was the person that truly aided those victims the best.

Although unfamiliar to me, that leader is someone I carry with me everyday. The wonderful thing

about AmeriCorps is although we offer relief, help, and guidance to those in need, we as members receive these very things in return.



Indian Village Condo Fire in Grand Rapids, MI displaced more than 200 victims.

Smart Choice Project

JAMIE AND THE CLUB

By: Kyna King

I have been able to share in the developing and blossoming of many kids since serving with AmeriCorps in the Smart Choice Project.

Sometimes however, I feel like so much of my efforts go unnoticed. Then I read a letter from Jamie Sylvia Harris and it made my heart swell up. Jamie Sylvia Harris is an 18 year old senior at Benton Harbor High School. She has been a member at the Boys & Girls Club for four years now.

The Club means so much to her and has changed her life completely, inside and out. When she was a young child, her life was hard. Jamie was a foster child with no family to

love her and no guidance in her life. As years went by, her life was even harder as she tried to stay in school and make ends meet. She began to suffer in school, constantly getting into trouble mentally, physically, and emotionally.

When Jamie was introduced to The Boys & Girls Club she was amazed. One thing that amazed Jamie was the way everyone was a family at the club. It was something she had been looking and hoping for. The help from the staff and members really made a difference. The club offers many different activities and programs, which became an important part of Jamie's life.

After four years at the club, she has developed characteristics she thought she would never have, such

as responsibility, caring for herself, and serving the community. Since joining the Club, she has really changed for the better.

On behalf of Jamie Harris, I would like to thank all AmeriCorps members who take part in making a difference in our children's lives.



Jamie and a friend she met at the Boys and Girls Club.

“Be the change that you want to see in the world.”
-Mahatma Gandhi

AmeriCorps members and alums go ice skating in downtown Grand Rapids.



and commitment to service. AmeriCorps Alums Chapter activities are a great way to

Michigan Service Scholars

PASSION FOR EQUALITY

By: Brandon Seng

The Michigan Service Scholars AmeriCorps program has provided the opportunity for Travis Smith to recruit and engage volunteer tutors. They provide a structured and fun environment, relationship-based homework help, literacy and math support, and information about getting into colleges. Travis is a first-year AmeriCorps member who recently completed his freshman year at Kalamazoo College in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Travis coordinates a service-learning program called Community Advocates for Parents and Students (CAPS). CAPS is a grassroots, all-volunteer organization that provides tutoring opportunities to Kalamazoo Public Schools' students from kindergarten to adulthood. CAPS partners with a housing development and area children take advantage of activities twice a week after school and on Saturday mornings. In addition, there are occasional field trips, like a bus trip to educate children and their families about African

American history in the area. Volunteer tutors come from nearby colleges, as well as the community itself. Travis schedules, trains, and facilitates reflection for the volunteers. During reflection, they have the opportunity to share tutoring tips, discuss any challenges they're having while tutoring, and most importantly, relate their experiences to bigger issues of social justice. Travis has expressed a strong passion for educational, racial, and social equality, and thrives to attain these equalities through his involvement with the CAPS program.

AmeriCorps Alums

BUILDING LIFELONG SERVICE

By: Laura Schleede

The Grand Rapids Chapter of AmeriCorps Alums connects current members and alums by building on a shared passion

stay connected and build new friendships with others that have had the incredible experience of serving.

We started our chapter efforts with a Kick-off Cook-out in the summer of 2007. Since that time, we have had the opportunity to participate in some fun and worthwhile projects.

On Make a Difference Day 2007, our chapter connected with New Development Corp to work on existing houses in the community. More than 20 people came out to help. We built a garage, tore out old flooring and gutted the kitchen.

Chapter activities are not all work, however. This past January brought current

members and alums together for a fun evening of ice-skating in downtown Grand Rapids.

We are looking forward to continuing our tradition of staying connected and dedicated to service with many more projects to come.

Members do not have to be an AmeriCorps alum to be involved.

To learn more about the program and to find events and meet with local chapters, please visit:

www.americorpsalums.org





AmeriCorps Week is a recruitment and recognition initiative to bring more Americans into service, salute AmeriCorps members and alums for their powerful impact, and thank the community partners who make AmeriCorps possible.

AmeriCorps Week provides an opportunity for AmeriCorps members, alums, grantees, program partners, and friends to shine a spotlight on the work done by members in communities across the country and to motivate more Americans to join AmeriCorps or volunteer in their communities.

The first-ever AmeriCorps Week, in 2007, was a huge success, with more than 200 events taking place in all 50 states, including an Oval

AmeriCorps Week will take place:
May 11th-18th, 2008.

For more information about AmeriCorps Week, visit:
www.americorps.gov/ameriCorpsweek

Office event with President Bush. Last year, members and alumni made presentations to student and community groups during AmeriCorps Week. Grantees staged open houses, service projects, volunteer fairs, and

recruitment blitzes. And local officials and elected leaders served as AmeriCorps members for a day.

We're aiming to make the 2008 AmeriCorps Week even bigger and better, and that can happen only if as many AmeriCorps projects, members, and friends participate as possible.

Whether you're a project director, member, alumnus, partner, or friend, we encourage you to take part in AmeriCorps Week 2008.

To get involved, visit the national website or to find programs in Michigan, contact the Michigan Community Service Commission:

www.michigan.gov/mcsc



Volunteer Muskegon AmeriCorps members are proud of the finished room.



MCSC Commissioner, Bernard Parker speaks to AmeriCorps members at the 2007 Detroit AmeriCorps Week Kickoff.

Program List and Contact Information

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Michigan's AmeriCorps Member Council 2008

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Raymond Murry
Bonita "B" Neveau
Amelia Nicolson



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Casey Ressler
Stefanie Roderer
Aistis Tumas
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