

*Changing Lives:
Michigan's
AmeriCorps Voices*



Dear Friends,

Did you know AmeriCorps members have made significant contributions in transforming Michigan? Annually nearly 900 members spend an average of 700,000 service hours fulfilling the needs of our communities. These members impact thousands of people in ways never thought possible...children are tutored and mentored, the environment is protected, affordable housing is built, and much more. In addition, members receive roughly \$1.5 million in federal funds to reward their efforts and assist in funding their educational goals.

The Michigan Community Service Commission is honored to support and engage volunteers of all ages and backgrounds in service to strengthen our communities. AmeriCorps has been one of the MCSC's signature programs since 1994. In that time, approximately 9 million hours of service have been devoted to transform neighborhoods and communities.

Most importantly, many lives have been changed – those being served and those serving. During their term of service and beyond, AmeriCorps members roll up their sleeves and use their talents to solve communities' toughest challenges. While doing so, AmeriCorps members are also developing into Michigan's future leaders. Michigan's AmeriCorps alums have gone on to become state representatives, educators, nonprofit and corporate executives, and entrepreneurs.

In looking toward the future, we will continue to count on the invaluable contributions Michigan's AmeriCorps members provide our great state. We look forward to doing our part to ensure Michigan is never without the selfless commitment of AmeriCorps members.

Please enjoy the following stories that share the true voice of Michigan's AmeriCorps.

Musette A. Michael
Executive Director,
Michigan Community Service Commission





The AmeriCorps Pledge

*I will get things done for America -
to make our people safer, smarter,
and healthier.*

*I will bring Americans together to strengthen
our communities.*

Faced with apathy, I will take action.

Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground.

Faced with adversity, I will persevere.

*I will carry this commitment with me this year
and beyond.*

*I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will
get things done.*



Michigan's AmeriCorps members serve with local and state organizations to meet community needs while earning funds to help finance college or training.

These members serve through more than 360 nonprofits, public agencies, faith-based, and other community organizations, helping to meet critical needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment. They may tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, teach computer skills, clean parks and streams, run after-school programs, and help communities respond to disasters.

A Passion for Equality

Travis Smith, AmeriCorps member

Michigan Service Scholars

A structured and fun environment.... Relationship-based homework help.... Literacy and math support.... Information about getting into colleges.... I recruited and engaged volunteer tutors who provided students these very things.



I coordinated a service-learning program with the Kalamazoo community 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 adult. CAPS partners with a housing development and resident children take advantage of activities on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school, and on Saturday mornings. In addition to tutoring, there are occasional field trips, like a bus trip around Kalamazoo to educate children and their families about African American history in the area.

I scheduled, trained, and facilitated reflection for the college student volunteers. I expressed a strong passion for educational, racial, and social equality, and strive to attain these equalities through my involvement with the CAPS program.

Michigan Campus Compact – Michigan Service Scholars members support youth development and increase the volunteer capacity throughout the state.





In a Heartbeat!

Rich Kloeckner, AmeriCorps Alum

NCCC

People have many expectations when joining AmeriCorps, but I promise the experience will be much more than you expect. I left Michigan and journeyed to Sacramento, California to serve in the National Civilian Community Corps. I, along with a team of 11, traveled from Portland, Oregon to Cameron, Louisiana, then from Pass Christian, Mississippi to Green River, Utah, and finally to Eldorado National Forest.

During my year, I grew through hard work, confrontation, teamwork, friendships, and life changing events. Serving with Habitat for Humanity our team constructed houses and assisted FEMA with disaster relief.

People may join AmeriCorps intending to help others, but in the end it is the AmeriCorps member who is most changed. I will never forget the people I helped, the people that changed my life, or the new lifelong friends I have made. If I were given the opportunity again to serve in AmeriCorps, I would say yes in a heartbeat!

AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps is a full-time, team-based residential program that aims to strengthen communities and develop leaders through direct, team-based national and community service.

Learning through AmeriCorps

Antoinette Adkins, AmeriCorps member

Downriver CARES AmeriCorps

I became hearing impaired at the age of nine when I was diagnosed with a very rare disease named Cogan's Syndrome. I became visually impaired at 13 when I was diagnosed with Glaucoma as a result of the disease. At the age of 11, I received a cochlear implant, a device similar to a hearing aid. The cochlear helped me successfully complete my general education; and I graduated from Henry Ford High School in 1999. I entered Madonna University and later graduated with a Bachelor's degree in psychology.



I learned about the Downriver CARES AmeriCorps program by a career counselor who specializes in placement of individuals with disabilities. My first challenge was to pick a placement that could accommodate me. Fortunately, there were many to choose from. With the help of a great program director, I was able meet the challenge head on and find incredible placements! I have enjoyed being a part of the AmeriCorps family. Serving adults with various severe mental illnesses - teaching them life skills - has increased my desire to go back to school to achieve my Ph.D. I have formed friendships I never expected, helping me to grow and learn about myself too! AmeriCorps is an experience I will never forget.

Downriver CARES AmeriCorps members promote social and emotional readiness for learning for children, adults, and families within The Guidance Center.



Changing Lives Forever

Laura Hahnfeld, second-year AmeriCorps member

Faith in Youth AmeriCorps

I run a tutoring and mentoring program for junior high youth at Calvary Reformed Church in Holland.

After graduating from Hope College and teaching special education for two years, I decided I wanted to serve my community in a different way. I am now in my second year of service with the Faith in Youth AmeriCorps program through Good Samaritan Ministries in Holland.

Shortly after beginning my AmeriCorps service, I moved into the neighborhood of the kids I was working with. I began developing relationships with the middle school students by visiting them at lunch, chaperoning dances, going to choir concerts, and serving with the church's youth group. It didn't take long for the kids to become attached to me and show me respect.

I have also given these kids some incredible opportunities they would not normally experience. I have coordinated multiple trips to a small ranch in Kentucky. I have taken time to meet with parents and supporters and organized fundraisers to cover travel and lodging costs. Through these trips, the kids have been able to look beyond themselves to serve others.

Programs may eventually end, painted bathroom stalls will soon be forgotten, leaves that need to be raked will return in the fall. But the kind of relationships I have developed during my term of service will change the lives of these kids forever.

Good Samaritan Ministries – AmeriCorps Faith in Youth members conduct a mentoring program to improve children's academic achievement and promote a sense of well-being.

Growing Smart Girls

Kyna King, AmeriCorps member

Boys and Girls Club of Benton Harbor – The Smart Choice Project

The Miss Benton Harbor contest was filled with countless beautiful ladies. One in particular was very special. She had been placed in foster care and moved from one home to the next. As a result of her constant moves, her self-esteem was low and confidence was lacking.

To help combat her shyness, Jamie started attending Smart Girls sessions provided by the Benton Harbor Teen Center. As an AmeriCorps member I met with the girls four times a week to discuss issues such as making decisions, media influences, coping with anxiety, and substance abuse. These were hard subjects for the girls to tackle, especially Jamie. But the information would ultimately help her understand how and why things unfold in her life. I was able to provide information in a practical way that would help to build character and self-esteem. Jamie absorbed this information and used it to her best advantage.

I knew I was a part of building her confidence when I saw Jamie compete on stage in the Miss Benton Harbor contest. Speaking in front of hundreds of people she didn't know, I was able to watch Jamie blossom into a beautiful young lady.

Every time she would walk into a room you could see her face glow. Jamie now shows great concern for others and understands her new positive attitude will help her face whatever life throws at her.

Boys and Girls Club of Benton Harbor – The Smart Choice Project members help disadvantaged youth realize their full potential through mentoring.





Passing Grades

Heather Heinz, AmeriCorps member

Superior AmeriCorps – B-H-K Child Development

Each day I tutor 32 students that have failed one or more classes. They come to receive tutoring in the specific subject areas they failed to pass. Utilizing a computer program called NovaNET: students are able to retake subjects with my assistance and work to replace their failing grade with a passing one.

I work hard to make the students feel comfortable. Decorating the classroom is high on my list. When the last holiday season rolled around, I asked for permission to place an artificial tree in the classroom. The students and I assembled a large tree. I had lights for the tree, but no ornaments. One of the students (the roughest around the edges) volunteered, “We will MAKE you some ornaments!” They made amazing ornaments.

After the first three months, five students had returned to their regular schedule rather than needing NovaNET & my tutoring attention.

When I was going through one of the hardest times in my life...my husband living far away for a new job and me serving in a sometimes very challenging position - these children made me smile. Their kindness, good nature, and success have been an inspiration. They remind me why I decided to serve in AmeriCorps.

Superior AmeriCorps – B-H-K Child Development members help area students through tutoring, mentoring, and youth-enrichment programs.

Still Getting Things Done

Molly Frendo, Alumni Chapter Leader



4-H Mentor Michigan Initiative

If you had asked me in June 2006 where I saw myself in the next five months, the answer would not have included national service. Fresh out of graduate school, I applied for nonprofit jobs and was faced with the problem of being overeducated and under-experienced. When I saw an opening in the paper for an AmeriCorps member at Muskegon County Michigan State University Extension developing a mentoring program for adjudicated youth, I called. After talking with the member who was currently serving in a similar role in a neighboring county and hearing her passion, I signed on – but was still a skeptic. How much had I agreed to work for? How would I explain what I was doing to my family and friends?

As with everything in life, my service had its ups and downs. Yet, as the year progressed, I found the ups to be more frequent. In fact, I went from wondering how I was going to get through my year of service to being desperate to find a way to stay! When the opportunity arose to apply for an AmeriCorps State program director position as my year of service ended, I jumped at the chance. I see my role as an AmeriCorps program director as an opportunity to make service a life changing experience for my members – just as my program director did for me. I also serve as a co-chapter leader of the Grand Rapids Area AmeriCorps Alums Chapter, where I am able to continue to “get things done” and be surrounded by other folks whose service meant so much to them. Being a national service member has changed forever the trajectory of my life, and for that I am truly grateful.

Michigan State University – 4-H Mentor Michigan Initiative

members recruit volunteers to establish one-to-one, small group, or peer-mentoring programs.



A Life Lead through Service
Jay Brown, AmeriCorps member

4-H Mentor Michigan Initiative

Before I started my AmeriCorps service I had a conversation with my mom.

“This may be the thing that lets you know what you want to do for the rest of your life,” she said.

I hate to admit it, but she was right.

Within a week of starting my service I was informed I would be planning a huge event to occur in three months. I wasn’t sure if I could pull it off but after planning began I realized I might be able to do it. Luckily I had a great team behind me to help and was even able to get my program’s youth involved.

The night of the event everything went wonderfully and I really was able to see the fruits of our labor. It also made me realize this is what I want to do with my life – event planning and design. I am grateful AmeriCorps has helped me find my passion in life and pointed me in the right direction. You never know where life takes you but your service may help lead you there!

Michigan State University – 4-H Mentor Michigan Initiative members recruit volunteers to establish one-to-one, small group, or peer-mentoring programs.

Beauty of a Child
Catherine Paul, AmeriCorps member

MARESA AmeriCorps

“I can come in here during my recess time?”

“Yes.”

That marks the beginning of relationships developed between students and myself (an AmeriCorps member). I have spent the last year and a half serving in an elementary school as the Community Resource Center Coordinator. In that role I organize programs for preschool and elementary students and parents. I have created a resource room in the school, which is a special “safe place” for students to come during their lunch recess. On some of the days we have structured activities, like making Christmas cards for service men and women overseas or decorating baby bags that are given to new moms, while on other days we just hang out. We play cards or board games, talk, or work on schoolwork.

Some students come to the Community Resource room everyday and some visit just once a week. I always say, “Come when you want, the door is always open.”

I have to admit – prior to my service in AmeriCorps, my views of children were at times jaded. Now I have a new perspective. I see the natural, curious, and infinitely funny side of a child. My role as an AmeriCorps member has allowed me to discover the beauty of a child.

MARESA AmeriCorps members provide service in local schools in Marquette and Alger Counties through service-learning, tutoring, and mentoring.





***Fighting Illiteracy
Through Book Clubs***
Diana Alan, AmeriCorps member

The readetroit Corps

Through my AmeriCorps program, *readetroit*, I conducted a service project labeling books for Kiwanis.

We were encouraged to start a book club or reading night at our schools and I had no idea where to begin! Eventually I decided to start a birthday book club.

I discovered a few children in my program did not have books to read at home or actually had parents who were unable to read. I soon realized the extreme consequences of illiteracy and the need to take immediate action.

Through my other community efforts, such as the local high school's play director, I started an effort to gather donated books for the club. Thanks to the extra help of my daughter's Brownie Troop we received 10 books and \$70 in donations in one night!

With those donations I was able to contact the Detroit Kiwanis and Communities in Schools and purchase many brand new books for the Birthday Book Club.

Communities in Schools of Detroit – The *readetroit* Corps members address the critical literacy needs of children identified as having extreme reading deficiencies.

Understanding Roadblocks to Reading
Cheralyn Suggs, AmeriCorps member

Michigan AmeriCorps Partnership

Learning English as a second language is a difficult task. Learning to read in English, as a second language is even tougher. The Siena Literacy Center understands this.

The Center serves adult learners from several African nations: Gambia, Senegal, Guinea, Mauritania, and the Ivory Coast. I am an AmeriCorps member serving at the center assisting with matching these learners with volunteer tutors.

Whether the students are receiving individualized or group tutoring, I have observed a real desire to learn the English language. Past training evaluations have revealed the need to provide tutors as many teaching models as possible. I developed a new volunteer tutor training with this in mind.

My presentation on Understanding the Roadblocks to Reading and Speech Patterns and Pronunciation helped tutors gain knowledge about the importance of being sensitive to student needs. Tutors also increased their awareness of building vocabulary with a variety of useful teaching references and techniques.

Twenty-five volunteer tutors received training. The students who seek instruction now have tutors who are better informed, confident, and committed to making positive changes in learning.

Regents of the University of Michigan – Michigan AmeriCorps Partnership involves the University of Michigan and community and faith-based non-profits based in Detroit trying to address local human needs through direct service program activities.





Living Up to Our Name

Yvonne LeTourneau and Rachel Boss, AmeriCorps members

Char-Em ISD AmeriCorps

A fifth grade teacher pulled me aside to share this story:

Under the bold heading, Miracle Workers Permission Slip, the letter read: “ I, Mrs. Smith, give permission for my son Billy to see the Miracle Workers.”

When Billy saw his friends enjoying the time that they spent with their AmeriCorps mentors, he said to his teacher, “I wish I could do that too!”

The teacher replied, “Well, Billy, you had a chance earlier in the fall to work with a mentor. Your parents needed to give permission and now it’s almost Christmas.”

The teacher went on to say, “Then the weirdest thing happened...I found a paper in my mailbox.”

I chimed in, “They returned the permission slip after all this time?”, amazed they might still have the form.

“No,” she said, “Even better!”

The child’s mother, it turns out, had hand written her son a permission letter. Apparently, Mrs. Smith and her son had mistaken the title of AmeriCorps members. We were in their eyes called Miracle Workers. This left no doubt - the word was spreading about the great things AmeriCorps members were accomplishing at East Jordan Elementary School. What a name to live up to!

The Char-Em ISD AmeriCorps Program members conduct on-site violence prevention programs and mentor at-risk students in several school buildings in their district.

Why I Serve

Joan Johnson, AmeriCorps VISTA

Michigan Community Service Commission – Mentor Michigan

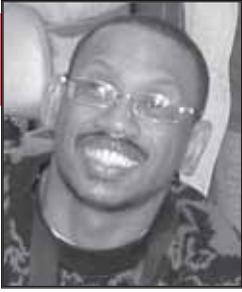


I have been a life-long volunteer; serving as an AmeriCorps*VISTA was a natural extension of my volunteer service. I learned about AmeriCorps only a few years ago when I was working as an Education Coordinator at a long-term substance abuse residential program for women and their children in Phoenix, AZ. While there I met two AmeriCorps members, Patrick and Selesa.

Patrick and Selesa were young, smart, inspiring, delightful, and fresh out of college. Patrick and Selesa had many options after graduation; they could have gone to graduate school or joined the workforce, but they chose AmeriCorps service. Not only did they have an incredible impact on the women and children in the program, but also on me. Through debates and discussions they helped me see the world from another perspective which was a true gift. Patrick and Selesa introduced me to the value of service and the reasons why someone like me should give.

I decided to take the leap and celebrate my 60th birthday as an AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteer at the Michigan Community Service Commission with Mentor Michigan. Marking this passage into a new season of my life has been the best thing I have done in many years. My AmeriCorps*VISTA experience has been incredible - it has shaped my life and will influence me for many years to come.





Overcoming Obstacles
Andre Robinson, AmeriCorps member

Michigan AmeriCorps Partnership

From my life experiences as a person growing up with cerebral palsy, I have overcome many obstacles to be where I am now. I currently live in my own apartment and work for Community Living Services in Wayne, Michigan. My service with AmeriCorps has allowed me to use my life experiences and expertise to help make children's school experiences safer. Participating in the Safe Routes to School project, I am helping to incorporate and address issues faced by students with disabilities as they make their way to school. I am also helping to include information for students with disabilities in the Safe Routes to School handbook. It is exciting to work with parents and students.

I needed to gain skills and to further develop those I already possess. AmeriCorps seemed like a perfect opportunity as I look forward to attending college after my service is completed, I reflect on my AmeriCorps service. I know I have been afforded many opportunities. My confidence has increased and I have changed!

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Working Towards a Common Goal
Karen Meyer, AmeriCorps member

Michigan Habitat's AmeriCorps

I knew Habitat for Humanity was a great organization when I began my AmeriCorps service with them. I had heard all these great stories of how emotional ground breaking and home dedications are but during my first dedication, I didn't feel any particular strong emotion. I had only been a part of the organization for two months and didn't know the partner family very well.

For my second house, I witnessed the entire process which includes: partner family selection, assisting with sweat equity, and volunteer building. Finally in December we set the date for the house dedications.

The week prior to the ceremony was very busy and hectic. During the bustle, I received an email from the partner family's sister in Florida. She informed me she would be unable to attend the ceremony and asked if I would pass on a message to be read in her absence. As I read the note about how she was so happy and proud of the partner family's mom – Sarah – for doing this, how Sarah has worked so hard, and how she felt all their prayers had worked, I began to feel tears welling up in my eyes. Then, as I read the note at the ceremony and saw Sarah's reaction, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride for not only this family and my fellow AmeriCorps members, but for the entire community who contributed in some way in supporting this project.

This was a great reminder of what a community can do when people work towards a common goal. We have a small community and are a small affiliate, but I really believe it only takes a small group of dedicated people to do something great.

Michigan Habitat's AmeriCorps Program members serve Habitat for Humanity affiliates throughout the state with training, safety practices, and construction.





A special thanks is due to all the members in this publication for allowing us to share your stories. Thanks also to all National Service Programs, nonprofits, public agencies, and faith-based organizations for allowing us to display the many accomplishments your members have achieved.

M I C H I G A N



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SERVICE**

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The Michigan Community Service Commission builds a culture of service by providing vision and resources to strengthen communities through volunteerism.

Upon request, information in this publication will be made available in alternative forms for people with disabilities.

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