

SSP 2013 Feedback / Outcomes

*More than 300 Michigan's AmeriCorps*State, National, and VISTA members gathered in Lansing for the annual Russ Mawby Signature Service Project. AmeriCorps members assisted with various community projects and worked with several organizations to make a significant impact on the Capitol region. Below are excerpts from messages we received from our community partners related to what members accomplished during this year's event.*

At Prospect Place:

I have only praise and thanks for Team 12, the AmeriCorps Russ Mawby Signature Service Project volunteers working at Prospect Place a Gardening and Gathering Space. Our garden provides free organic and heirloom produce to our diverse, intergenerational neighborhood. Our AmeriCorps team increased the accessibility of the garden by creating the base for a paved pathway and building 2 accessible raised gardening beds.

Team 12 accomplishments:

- “potted up” 70 tomato seedlings into larger pots
- painted 20 3’ garden stakes with unique colorful designs
- created a beautiful hand-lettered 3’ sign for our new memorial flower garden
- unloaded and stacked by hand 2½ pallets of paving bricks, that is over 1,560 individual bricks
- excavated over 675 sq feet of soil and clay creating a winding 75’ yard long and 4’ wide pathway
- covered the pathway with 6 yards, that is 18,000 lbs or 9 tons, of gravel
- designed and built 2 accessible raised beds, one for wheelchair users and seated gardeners and one for gardening while standing
- designed and built 2 benches for use with wheelchair accessible bed and in the garden
- used 480 lbs of paving sand and needed bricks to pave the entrance 6’x4’ entrance to the garden
- met and worked with 11 community members including a toddler
- enjoyed homemade baked goods both days brought by appreciative neighbors
- toured the neighborhood and learned the challenges and community building efforts of 3 neighborhood associations
- used an accessible neighborhood church for restrooms, reflection, rest and snacks

SSP volunteers were able to choose their work preference, however, everyone stopped what they were doing and pitched in when a time-sensitive action needed to be completed. Those doing new or challenging tasks were supported by fellow volunteers; our team member who uses a wheelchair was easily integrated and participated fully. With peer support and encouragement, a health care worker learned to use a power saw and a new gardener learned to transplant shallots.

Team 12 members were so dedicated to their tasks they did not want to stop working. They delayed meals, breaks, reflection time and sweet treats to complete the task at hand. Unasked, one volunteer drove home Thursday night to bring his own tools to the site Friday. After a day and a half of manual labor, with little shade, many team 12 members said they wished the project was a day longer so that they could do even more. Some asked to be contacted for our next work day so that they could return and continue to help. The Program Director for team 12, who is stationed near Lansing, offered to have our garden be the work site for her cohort's fall volunteer project. Sharing meals with the full SSP was appreciated by our community volunteers. They were able to better see the scope of this undertaking and the connections throughout the city.

I cannot say enough positive things about the Team 12 members of the AmeriCorps Russ Mawby Signature Service Project. Krista, Jessica, Brandon, Marisol, Paul, Fiona, Denise, Erin, Cathleen, Chelsea, Andrew, Janelle, Gary, Program Director Betsy, and LeaderCorps team leader Tamika have each made a tangible contribution to revitalizing this Eastside neighborhood. We would not have considered making the garden wheelchair accessible if not for the SSP; we could not have done it on our own.

Having attended two of the SSP planning meetings I am grateful for the extensive planning and

preparation done by Megan Sargent and the Lansing AmeriCorps members. I must applaud the work of Kristina Adair, our local coordinator. For months Kristina has been working with the multiple Allen Neighborhood SSP sites to prepare for our projects. Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday she tirelessly made herself available when needed, even driving to buy supplies when our delivery truck was late.

Thank you for the countless gifts the Russ Mawby Signature Service Project has given Lansing; it has made a significant impact throughout our city. The power of Michigan's AmeriCorps members is clearly visible here in the significant physical changes they accomplished. Equally important are the accomplishment that are difficult to quantify. By improving our neighborhoods AmeriCorps members have improved lives. Through their service AmeriCorps volunteers are a catalyst for positive change that continues when they have move on. Thank you!

Teresa Kasperick-Postellon (tlvakp@gmail.com)

At the Hunter Park GardenHouse:

- Built a 12'x12' pergola to be used as an outdoor classroom space for our gardening education programs
- Painted a colorful mural on 2 sides of a gardening shed
- Built a 136' fence along one side of the GardenHouse to create more gardening space

Yay!

Rita O'Brien (ritao@allenneighborhoodcenter.org)

At Allen Neighborhood Center Office:

Members helped transform a 5,000 sq ft warehouse into the Allen Market Place, a project of the Allen Neighborhood Center. They painted walls, re-purposed old building materials and kitchen equipment for our year-round farmers market and community kitchen. View photos at:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.160778914093155.1073741829.149831428521237&type=1>

Kristina Adair (kristinaa@allenneighborhoodcenter.org)

Power of We AmeriCorps Member/Volunteer Coordinator, Allen Neighborhood Center

At NorthWest Initiative's Gardens:

- Pine and St. Joe: Several Pine and St. Joe community gardeners are elderly due to the location of the garden - it is near Capitol Commons an apartment complex for elderly people. As a result, constant maintenance of the community garden can be difficult for our gardeners. Now, our gardeners have an attractive, well-maintained location for doing their gardening. In addition, members planted tomatoes, blackberries, and strawberries available to any and all community members.
- Grace Lutheran: Grace Lutheran was intended to be an accessible garden with raised beds and an accessible path. Member's helped us to complete the path to make the garden truly accessible. They also fixed up the grounds and reorganized the shed, so that now gardener's can focus on maintaining their gardens and growing food for their families and not worry about maintaining the land.
- Lett's: Lett's is now ready for gardening! With freshly ploughed soil, fewer weeds, and an organized shed, members' helped make this garden attractive to neighbors and ready for the garden season.
- Riddle: See information below from Terra.
- ARRO: Members' helped us break ground on this new community garden! Now, a new Lansing neighborhood has access to garden plots within walking distance of their homes.

Kimberly Rustem (rustemki@gmail.com)

Power of We AmeriCorps Member, NorthWest Initiative

At Letts (Day 1):

- Grass/weeds were removed from a large community garden
- Compost bin was improved.

At the Riddle School Garden Site (Day 2):

- Spread mulch throughout the entire garden
- Weeded over 30 raised beds and filled them each with soil.
- Planted 10 beds with various spring crops
- Turned the compost, repaired the compost bins, watered the garden and repaired several holes in the plastic on our 30x60 foot hoop house.

It was a very successful and productive work day. The improvement was noticeably visible by the end of the day and the volunteers did a wonderful job. The students who will use this school garden to learn about nutrition and food systems were able to come out and interact with volunteers and help out in their school garden on their recess which was wonderful to see. The students will benefit a great deal from all the work put into getting this garden site ready for a productive growing season! Thank you for all of your help. It was a great experience!

Terra Bogart, FSP Program Manager (terra@nwlansing.org)
 NorthWest Initiative (www.nwlansing.org)

At Fenner Nature Center:

They pulled 7250 lbs. of garlic-mustard in two days, or 3.6 tons, which is the same amount as our total for last year – meaning that in two days, a few dozen AmeriCorps members pulled the same amount of garlic-mustard that a few hundred volunteers pulled in 5 months last year. The totals are:

- 7250 lbs. of garlic-mustard pulled
- 35 plants planted
- 33-foot "stepping stump" path created
- 645 ft. (about 1/8 of a mile) trails woodchipped - comprising two complete trails

On Thursday, there were three teams that worked on garlic-mustard pulling and natural playscape improvement, and on Friday there were two teams that worked on garlic-mustard pulling and woodchipping trails. The members working on the playscape cleared the entire area of small trees, put in a stump path, woodchipped a trail, planted native plants, and pulled garlic-mustard. The length of the woodchipped trail in the playscape is 43 paces (about 129 ft.). The length of the stump path is 11 paces (33 ft.), made up of 23 stumps sunk into the ground at various heights as creative stepping stones. There were approximately 35 native plants planted, about 30 cup plants which look like prehistoric sunflowers, and about 5 virgin's bower vines. These plants are already growing in their new home and will be a colorful entrance to the new playscape. On Friday, about 172 paces (516 ft.) of additional trail was woodchipped. Throughout both days 145 contractor trash bags were filled with garlic-mustard and dames rocket plants. This was enough to fill the industrial-sized dumpster that had been donated for the event. The bags were estimated at 50 lbs. each, which means that we pulled 7250 lbs. of garlic-mustard in two days (3.6 tons), which is the same amount as our total for last year.

Brendon Fegan (bizhiwaa@gmail.com)
 Power of We AmeriCorps Member, Fenner Nature Center

Ingham County Land Bank Teams:

- 150 Raspberries Planted
- 6 Fruit Trees Planted

- 500 Feet of Fence Line Completely Cleared of Brush
- 30 Yards of Brush Cleared
- 1 Garage Completely Cleaned

Jared Talaga (jaredtalaga@gmail.com)

Ingham County Lank Bank Garden Program AmeriCorps Member

At Lansing Urban Farm Project:

Group 10 was amazing! They were a pleasure to work with, and with their help, we accomplished so much:

- Landscaped the farm entry
- Planted grass seed in a sunny space for festival gatherings
- Fixed the farm gate (dug holes for new posts)
- Cleaned fridges for 2013 market season
- Moved fridges to their permanent location under wash pack
- Spread dump truck full of wood chips around landscaping, farm pathways, and wash pack
- Prepared beds for summer planting at Red Bud Field
- Weeded Urbandale Field
- Prepared new lot for initial use by clearing weeds and brush and picking up trash
- Eliminated flowering garlic mustard
- Painted stakes to reuse as crop markers on the farm. \

So grateful for their help! We have a few pictures on our facebook page, but I didn't get a group photo. ☹

Sarah Fillius, Farm Manager (sarah.lansingurbanfarmproject@gmail.com)

Lansing Urban Farm Project

At SLCDA / Webster Farm:

- 96 ft. of fence built
- 12 plots tilled
- 72 ft. of eaves troughs for rain catchment with 4 rain barrels
- 150 ft. of hoop house poles covered with duct tape to prevent chaffing
- 100 flowers seeded to beautify the area
- 15 bags of weeds removed from gardens
- Four 4x8 raised beds assembled and added as new garden plots
- Ten large patches on hh to sustain the structure and protect from further damage
- One quarter acre cleared of brush to create new plots in the future
- Two 20x20 foot tarps set up as shaded areas
- 10x10 ft. rain catchment system set up with beams (holes dug for posts, posts put into the ground)
- 120 ft. of flagline put up around parking area
- Compost piles turned
- Rock pile moved to a more hidden area beside our shed
- Eight yards of compost loaded and unloaded from a truck
- One square yard of mulch moved from previous flower bed area to the hoop house perimeter
- Two 3x4 foot plastic pallets of dirt emptied and the dirt spread around the hoop house

The community will greatly benefit from the beautification and organization of the garden areas. The hoop house will be better protected with duct tape added to the posts and the fencing will protect the gardens from pests and animals.

Katelyn Sherman (katelyn.m.sherman@gmail.com)

At the Lansing City Market:

The members worked on building compost bins, planting seeds and transplants, spreading wood chips, weeding, and painting signage. The quantitative stats are as follows:

- Spread 20 yards of wood chips
- Planted 7 beds which included 32 transplants and 16 plant varieties were direct seeded
- Transplanted 2 bushes from one area to another, which put it into a more prominent location
- Collected 6 large garbage bags of weeds and litter

We loved having the Members here! They allowed us to accomplish many things and get the groundwork started on a few more.

Heather Hymes (heather@lepfa.com)

At the Habitat for Humanity ReStore:

- All 6000 square feet of floor space was affected
- 40 cubic yards of unusable items removed from store and yard
- 500 pounds of scrap metal hardware removed from shelves
- Almost 2000 square feet of wall space and columns painted with *at least* 2 coats
- 2000 square feet of central floor space opened up and reorganized
- Over 100 gallons of unusable paint product removed.

Qualitative accomplishments include:

- Members streamlined store so that community residents can more quickly and easily access the home repair and improvement resources the ReStore provides.
- Members' service means the ReStore can guarantee a higher quality product for the residents it serves.

I thought SSP was spectacular – you guys really did an amazing job putting it on, and as a member, I think you deserve a thank-you!

Travis Boeskool (travis.boeskool@me.com)
AmeriCorps Member, Habitat for Humanity

At Mt. Hope Elementary:

- cleaned and planted butterfly garden
- all flowers beds around the school were weeded and replanted with flowers
- 22 ferns were planted plus lots more
- two front large pots planted with flowers
- 2 book cases painted purple
- community round about weeded and cleaned up
- front of school edged
- painted basketball court lines, foursquare, and hopscotch
- wall in classroom painted to remove kindergarten words
- plain walls now abide
- hand prints removed by painting and then stenciled with words GO Panthers and paw prints
- curtain rod hung and quilt was put on it
- the quilt is a whole school quilt for reading month genre's

The beauty of this work day was not only the opportunity for the AmeriCorps members to share the experience with the Everett High School student volunteers, but also to work with the students in grades

4-6 who worked right alongside the AmeriCorps members and loved it! They BEGGED to work in the afternoon as well so we let some of them do so.

This experience was fantastic and the people involved were awesome! The AmeriCorps members worked so hard and only rested at lunch for a few minutes and then at the reflection time. They were great with both age groups of students and followed directions and were able to make decisions on their own. The other thing that I really appreciated was their willingness to do anything we asked. I also like how they helped to clean up all the areas before they left.

Our outside environment has changed and now provides neat, well-manicured gardens, flower beds, and front grass area. They also emptied the "dungeon" (basement), which every school has, of things that had been there for 10-15 years. IT WAS AWESOME!!! We also have our panther paws throughout the school making it a place to have pride in. What I also noticed was that the students who did not work were very respectful of the painting and volunteers at lunch and recess. I never saw a smudge or hand even move toward the paint or tools or court when the paint was still wet. And when career day comes next year we will be inviting AmeriCorps to take part!

One other note for you is the fact that the student government is the group that chose, suggested, and voted for these projects. We as sponsors guided the kids to things that would last. Chuck and I cannot thank you all enough for the positive changes in our school face lift!

Barbara Rhyne (rhyneb0930@yahoo.com)

At Willow Elementary:

The team that arrived was very pleasant and we enjoyed working with them. The unit as a whole was able to complete the outside garden, which consisted of weeding, applying new top soil, and clearing the immediate area. The greenhouse was constructed and the courtyard was raked and smoothed for the grass seeds. We were able to plant 10 plants and lay the landscape film and the mulch. We started the paint, but we ran short of time. Thank you!

Steven Lonzo (steven.lonzo@lansingschools.net)

At Sexton High School:

Thank you to the AmeriCorps members for sharing your project with Sexton High School! It was a great experience for our school. Students were in the building while the AmeriCorps members were working. Students asked questions and genuinely welcomed them into the school.

The volunteers cheerfully worked very hard. They filled a huge dumpster to overflowing with old computers and text books. This will go to be recycled. There were also a couple of volunteers painting numbers above the classroom doorways. They did about 35 rooms and I finished the rest of it up Monday so a total of about 50 rooms. Now we can identify every room easily. Sexton is a 70 year-old building and your efforts helped to spruce it up a bit.

I was very impressed with the group of volunteers at Sexton. Their positive attitudes and work ethic were impressive. Thank you again for all your hard work!

Cathy Bryde (catherine.bryde@lansingschools.net)

Sexton Parent Student Advocate