

AmeriCorps Quarterly



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AmeriCorps in Montana

By The Numbers
2007-2008

AmeriCorps State and National

- 777 members
- 7 sites

AmeriCorps VISTA

- 106 members
- 44 sites

AmeriCorps program funding

- \$3,979,191

Segal Educational Awards

- \$1,881,732

Uniting Youth for Service

AmeriCorps members recruit, pitch in for Global Youth Service Day

By Jordan Lyons

AmeriCorps members around the state contributed to a variety of community projects for the 20th annual Global Youth Service Day.

The event, held on April 25, is organized by Youth Serve America and the Global Youth Action Network, and consists of community level projects in over 150 countries.

The projects aim to impact education, public health, poverty, and the environment.

Here in Montana, AmeriCorps members wrangled 670 volunteers statewide. The volunteers, mostly high school and college students, performed a total of 1421 hours of service.

Many actions around the state emphasized cleaning, restoring, and beautifying public places. Volunteers picked up litter at Billings' Rim Rocks and in downtown Kallispell, gave the Wolf Point Boys and Girls Club's building a facelift, and helped maintain the Moon-Randolph Homestead near Missoula.

In Livingston, the Park High School Service Outreach Club organized a two-week food drive, collecting over a thousand food items.

In Helena, Global Youth Service Day coincided with Carroll College's annual softball weekend. Groups of volunteers dispersed to a number of sites, where they cleaned up gardens, recycled, built trails and collected clothing donations. The day ended with Frisbee, pizza, and reflection on service.

For more information on Global Youth Service Day in Montana, visit <http://acmac.wikidot.com/global-youth-service-day>



Allie, an AmeriCorps member based in Helena, works with local high school student Dani to repair trails on Mount Helena. *Photo by: Office of Community Service*

'You are Our Heroes'

AmeriCorps Members Recognized in Montana

By Rebecca Harbage

More than sixty people, including Helena Mayor Jim Smith, crowded the State Capitol Rotunda on May 12, 2008 to mark the kick-off of AmeriCorps Week. The rally began a week of recognition and support for AmeriCorps members across Montana and the entire nation.



The week also represented an outreach effort to recruit future volunteers to the program. I attended the rally, not knowing what to expect – except free lunch and cake – and was impressed by the sincere expression of thanks AmeriCorps members past and present received from community leaders.

Keith Kelly, from the Montana Commission on Community Service, started the event by voicing his appreciation of national service and the huge impact it makes on the state. Those present at the rally learned that an impressive 1,100 AmeriCorps volunteers will serve in Montana this year. Largely due to its number of volunteers, who tirelessly put thousands of hours of work into their communities, Montana was ranked number one in the nation for Civic Life Index in a study done by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The Index includes indicators in categories such as Volunteering, Neighborhood Engagement, Voting, and Civic Infrastructure. Check out the statistics at: http://www.cns.gov/pdf/VIA/VIA_rankings_national.pdf.

Chief Justice Gray expressed her deep gratitude to AmeriCorps members, telling the group, “You are our heroes.” She emphasized the importance of service in Montana communities and across the nation by explaining that “You, each of you and all of you, are our homeland security, you are our infrastructure.” The respect and support expressed by community members and state leaders was amazing to hear.

In honor of AmeriCorps week, the Office of Community Service along with CNCS organized “AmeriCorps for a Day,” a program in which community leaders were paired up with AmeriCorps members to learn about their projects. Participating were Superintendent Bruce Messinger, County Commissioner Ed Tinsley, Communications Officer Casey Kyler-West, Assistant Superintendent Keith Meyer, and Montana’s First Lady Nancy Schweitzer, among others. In response to his time spent with VISTA Allie Savage and the Capital High Link Crew, Ed Tinsley commented on the impressive level of commitment he saw and noted that “it’s all about the community.”

Local news coverage included a brief interview with Conservation Corps Field Crew Leader Danielle Welch, who explained that with AmeriCorps, “you volunteer and you work with the community and you basically just help people, so it’s always rewarding. No matter how hard your day is, you go home and you feel good about what you did.”

Thank you so much to all the community members who showed their support during AmeriCorps Week this year. Congratulations AmeriCorps Montana, you are appreciated!
Keep on keeping on.

These Teens Aren't Giving Up, Why Should You?

By Tina Maples

"R-E-A-C-T, I'VE GOT NO SMOKE IN ME! R-E-A-C-T, I'VE GOT NO SMOKE IN ME!" Now, close your eyes and imagine hearing a large group of high school students chanting these words over and over again in the streets of downtown Missoula. Sure, my ears rang, and Tylenol sure did come in handy that night! Yet after a few minutes of observation I seemed to be tapping my feet along to the beat and shouting out the words along-side my new friends.

Teens and adults from around Montana gathered to participate in the reACT Against Corporate Tobacco Summit, held at the University of Montana, Missoula from June 17-20th. Participants learned and engaged in reACT's five core components of education, activism, art, branding, and media to take-on corporate tobacco.

According to their website at tobaccofree@mt.gov, reACT is Montana's teen-led movement against the tobacco industry; one of many similar organizations throughout the United States. Fighting corporate tobacco begins where the addiction starts- with teenagers. It is estimated that over 90% of adult smokers began at or before age 18 (tobaccofreekids.org). If teens get the message out to their peers soon enough, the chance that they will eventually die from a tobacco-related illness is dramatically reduced.

A handful of dedicated and remarkably patient AmeriCorps VISTAs and I were fortunate enough to act as chaperones to 175 of these motivated and energetic students, and although we didn't participate in the educational and art activities we were able to join the students on their "activism adventure."

We paraded around downtown Missoula singing chants, drawing anti-tobacco murals on the sidewalks, and having locals sign a pledge wall. For all of their efforts the kids were spit at, yelled at, kicked out of a baseball game, ignored, and some even had smoke blown in their faces by local college students. The atmosphere was brutal and unforgiving; but teens will be teens. The more the community countered their fight, the harder they fought. But they left the event laughing and energetic, not seeming to care about their cold reception. They did what they set out to do, and they weren't going to let a little negativity sour their mood.

I think that all AmeriCorps members can learn a lesson from these teens- don't give up, don't back down, and don't sit around waiting for change to happen. Get up, get out, and get spit on if you have to, but keep on going. You may not like your worksite, your location, how your community is treating you, change may not seem to be happening fast enough in your community, you may have to redo all of your work halfway through your term, and you may not even be able to see visible results from all your hard work from your service year.

Just don't let factors such as these keep you down. Remember that it is our job as AmeriCorps members to do things one step at a time to make the lives of Montanans better. You may get discouraged, but you must keep on going. If you don't, who will? Keep this in mind and keep chugging along.



Life After AmeriCorps

Some Insight Into the Great Beyond

By Silke Popp

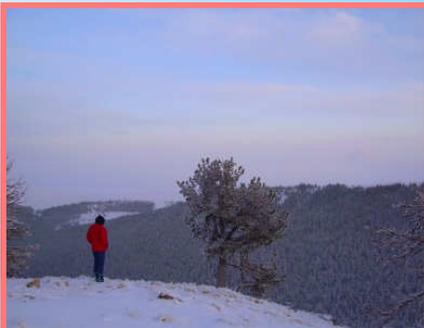
Your bags are packed, your travel voucher is cashed, and your gas tank is full. In a few short days the term will be ending for many Montana AmeriCorps members as they move on to a new chapter in their lives. It might be school, it could be a “real” job, it could be back home, but whatever it is, change isn’t always the easiest thing to deal with.

However long you end up being an AmeriCorps member in Montana, you’ve probably grown attached to people, places, and the stunning landscape has to state offer. This article serves as a guide to current AmeriCorps members who will be ending their terms in the near future, and might provide a bit of insight to those who still don’t know what do now that AmeriCorps is over.

Helpful Links

- http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/alumni/ecomunity.asp
- <http://www.americorpsalums.org>
- <http://encorps.nationalservicerresources.org/resources/documents/11-VISTAMemberHandbook.pdf>

The beauty of AmeriCorps is in the options. Yes, over the course of our respective terms, we’ve all been limited in some ways: how much we can pay in rent, our food-buying options, doing direct service for those in VISTA, but ultimately AmeriCorps opens a lot of doors for its members.



The author ponders her post-AmeriCorps future during a cold Montana winter’s day.

In AmeriCorps, depending on the program, participants receive invaluable job training, an education award or a cash stipend, a living allowance, and in some cases, healthcare, childcare, and non-competitive eligibility with the Federal Government for one year after the end of their term.

Think of the education award as a forced savings account; instead of having the choice between socking away money or spending it on useless “stuff,” you’ve avoided the temptation of throwing that money away and now have a little nest egg waiting for you. But be sure to use it wisely. If you have existing student loans and no further plans of going back to school, go ahead and use that amount to pay off some debt. However, if you plan on going back to school and will rely on additional student loans to pay for it, consider holding off on using that money for

existing student loans if the current loans have a lower interest rate that you anticipate having for your new loans.

For instance, if you have \$5,000 in student loans with an APR of 3.5%, why pay that off when you will be taking out an additional \$5,000 at an APR of 6%? Instead, continue to make payments on your old loan and apply the education award to your upcoming tuition and avoid costlier loans.

Enough about percentage rates and loan disbursements; the bottom line is that it’s a tangible benefit of AmeriCorps that we all need to recognize. So now that you’ve paid down some debt, where do you go to make some money? Being an AmeriCorps alum is a great resource. If you are moving to a larger city, don’t hesitate to tap into AmeriCorps alumni groups, and make sure to elaborate all of your responsibilities and accomplishments in your resume.

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One of the most important yet often ignored features of AmeriCorps VISTA service is the non-competitive eligibility you earn after your year. What this means is that you can apply for a federal job without having to compete with the general public for that position, and that's a priceless opportunity. In order to gain this eligibility, contact your AmeriCorps *VISTA Certifying Officer and provide: your full name, Social Security Number, and dates of service.

If you are planning on going to school right after the completion of your term and can not use that year of eligibility don't panic! You can still use it later if you have proof of a legitimate reason for not being able to use the eligibility earlier. Call 1-800-220-6316 for more information.

Now get out there, meet some alumni, follow your dreams, embrace your future, and reflect fondly on the memories you'll take away from serving your time in the State of Montana.

Montana Events Corner

-A sampling of why we serve in Big Sky Country-

Every Thursday at 7pm thru 9/04: **Uncover Montana Speaker Series.** Looking to learn more about Montana History this summer? Join local and regional experts as the 'Uncover Montana History.' Held at Travelers Rest State Park, Historical Museum at Fort Missoula, call 273-4253 for additional information, Lolo, MT.

Every Friday at 7pm: **Evening Lawn Chair Program.** Join one of the Interpretive Center staff or a special guest at the amphitheater for a special presentation lasting about 45 minutes. Bring a lawn chair. The event is held indoors if the weather does not cooperate. Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center Great Falls, MT. Call 406-727-8733 for more information.

Friday, August 1st: **Montana Fiddlers Picnic.** The Montana Fiddlers Picnic has been held in Livingston for the last 30 years as a non-competitive gathering of old time fiddlers and other acoustic musicians. This is a family oriented, informal, three-day musical event open to spectators and musicians of all ages and abilities. Livingston, MT The old Mercier Ranch south of town. Call 406-223-5049 for more information.

Friday, August 1st: **Festival of Nations.** The Festival of Nations celebrates the traditional heritage of German, English-Irish, Finnish, Italian, Scandinavian, Scottish and Slavic cultures, along with a variety of other ethnic groups. The festival begins with an evening performance on Friday at the Lion's Park. Saturday and Sunday activities include ethnic food, exhibits, daytime and evening entertainment and activities for the whole family to enjoy. Lion's Park, located at the North end of Red Lodge. Call 406-446-2519 for more information

Dates throughout the Summer: **Montana Shakespeare in the Parks.** The 2008 season will showcase All's Well that End's Well and Macbeth. Plays are FREE and located throughout the state. Log on to: <http://www2.montana.edu/shakespeare/> for dates and times near you.

All of these events and many more can be found at:
<http://www.visitmt.com/tripplanner/events/>