

AmeriCorps Quarterly

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[HTTP://
ACMAC.WIKIDOT.COM](http://ACMAC.WIKIDOT.COM)

Diversity in Montana

When friends from out of state ask you about diversity in Montana, how do you respond? Noticeable heterogeneity! Overwhelming homogeneity! Somewhere in between...

With only 944,632 citizens in the entire 147,046 square miles, the state of Montana boasts impressive religious, ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity.

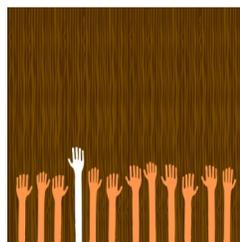
There are eleven Native American tribes living on seven reservations across Montana. Among them are the Blackfeet, Crow, Flathead, Fort Peck, Fort Belknap, Little Shell band of the Chippewa Tribe, Northern Cheyenne and Chippewa-Cree on the Rocky Boy reservation. Watch your local paper for summer Pow Wows and celebrations.

There are forty-five Hutterite Colonies across the state. Hutterites migrated to North American between 1874 and 1879 in response to a new Russian military service law (Hutterites are pacifists). Colonies practice a near-total communal ownership for goods, and provisions for individuals and families are dolled out from common resources. If you are looking for cheap, range-fed chickens, you can generally purchase them from local colonies for around \$1.8 a pound. The homemade bread, pies, cookies and tarts are likewise fabulous.

There is an impressive amount of religious diversity in Montana. There are thirteen Buddhist Sanghas in Montana, six of which can be found in Missoula alone (Hyslop 2003). Others include Arlee, Thompson Falls, Flathead Valley (Kalispell, Eureka, Whitefish, and Bigfork), Helena, Deerlodge, Bozeman, and Billings. There are three Muslim community centers: Billings Islamic Center, MSA Bozeman, and MSA Missoula (Hyslop 2003). There are 225 individual Baha'is assemblies, fourteen pagan groups and three interfaith associations—Gallatin Valley Interfaith Association, Helena Interfaith Circle, Billings Interfaith Circle—throughout the state.

This edition of the *AmeriCorps Quarterly*—in accordance with the values of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—recognizes the voices and experiences of AmeriCorps members across the state. Many of the values of the AmeriCorps program are similar to the values of Dr. King: courage, truth, justice, compassion, dignity, humility, service and respect for all people. AmeriCorps members were asked to commemorate the holiday by sharing personal experiences of living and working as an AmeriCorps member in Montana, including their views regarding Montana diversity. I hope that their insights and stories inspire members from around the state to reflect upon the meaning of AmeriCorps service, the value of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and diversity in Montana.

By Amber Murrey-Ndewa
CASA-CAN Children's Advocate Network
Great Falls, Montana



Resources for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day:
<http://www.mlkday.gov/>

Register and Share your MLKJ Day Project:
<http://pic2009.org>
<http://MLKday.gov>

Resources for diversity in Montana:
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/30000.html>
<http://profiles.nationalrelocation.com/Montana/>

Hyslop 2003: <http://www.pluralism.org/research/profiles/display.php?>

“I’m new to the Philadelphia area,”

is my usual response when a new encounter asks if I'm a native of the area. "Oh, where did you just move from?" is the expected follow up question. With a blatant hesitant facial expression, because I know the revelation of my answer will cause extreme and utter confusion to the audience interested in where I dwell from, with a forced giggle, combined with a sigh, "Montana, I just moved from Montana".

The subsequent facial contortions are to be expected from the interested party; not because someone actually lives in Montana, but let's face it, my name is Ebony, a name common among African American females—I am an African American female, born and partially raised in Brooklyn, NY, partially raised in Atlanta, Ga. I exhibit qualities, *whatever that means*, of one where most of life experience has been in or around a major urban city. I have no family members who live in Montana—in fact, none that live west of the Mississippi, and the only "rural" experience I've had is spending summers with my grandmother in the *boonies* of Clarks Hill, SC, where paved roads are a recent phenomenon for the area. So why Montana? I wanted a new experience, to break the stereotypical mode that says certain ethnicities don't move to places like

I wanted a new experience, to break the stereotypical mode that says certain ethnicities don't move to places like Montana.

Montana. I can't say I actually had any expectations of Montana prior to moving there, with the exception of what I picked up in the movie *A River Runs Through It*, the catalyst of my assumptions that all of Montana had mountains with streams and rivers going around them—you know what they say about assumptions.

Sidney, where I served as an AmeriCorps member, was the complete opposite. With the exception of a few buttes and prairie badlands, the Brad Pitt image of fly fishing in rubber boots up to the waste it was not. Nonetheless, I still looked forward to the experience. The first thing I say about my experiences from my many encounters of individuals not only in Sidney, but throughout the eastern region is their sense of community pride. Living in or around cities most of my life, agriculture didn't have an affect on me, or

at least I thought. I never cared about where the produce I consumed on a daily basis was grown, only that it was easily accessible in every grocery store. When I pick up a head of romaine lettuce, I didn't see it as someone's livelihood, or all the production cost that went into it. I was only concerned about if the lettuce was good enough for the chicken Caesar salad I'd been looking forward to all day.



During my time in Montana, I realized how important agriculture is. It's more than just produce at the grocery store or at your local Super Wal-Mart; it's an individual or family livelihood. So, in the mist of all the sugar beet fields lies more than just acres of agriculture, there lies the sweat, money, and labor of family farmers and ranchers in efforts of a stable income in a job field that's staggering. With the country's progressively declining economy and super grocery store franchises that provide relatively cheap produce that suits the palate for the American budget, agriculturalist that I've had the pleasure of working with during my time in Montana told me that the cost of production isn't really worth the salary gained. With tractor, fuel, plowing, and labor costs, the time it takes for crops to grow, the end result for some farmers and ranchers—if lucky—is \$50,000. Some have admitted that it really isn't worth all the time put in. While some choose to sell their farms, there are a good number who have strong ties to the family business; a 125 year old family business for some. This reveals a strong sense of family and community pride in my eyes. I have witnessed such strength in the urban city capacity, but never dreamed of how something such as simple as picking up a head of lettuce, an ear of corn, or an onion for that matter at my local grocery store possessed such a deep rooted story. This story may be short, but it this is the one of many experience diversity I reserved from my time in Montana.

By Ebony Carter
Communities in Action (06/07-06/08)
Sidney, Montana

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY EVENTS:

Billings

MSU-Billings Campus Corps team will be hosting a week of events. Monday the 19th, there will be a morning bell ringing and ceremony (speaker TBD) and "I Have A Dream" wall where students/attendees will write their dreams on hand cutouts and put on mural, along with MLK quotes.

Tuesday, a showing of Presidential Inauguration in Student Union, Lunch theme of diversity and Political Science professor presentation. Wednesday, an underground railroad simulation where participants are slaves using the URR to escape to freedom. Thursday, an I Have a Dream Rally featuring a showing of MLK's speech. Saturday, a service project TBA. All events take place at the MSU-Billings campus and participants are welcome. For more information, please contact Megan Jung at jung.megan@gmail.com

Butte

On January 19, MM\$ and Tech Campus Corps are joining together with Human Right Network, TAPS-Taking Action for Peaceful Solutions, Sacred Ground, Habitat for Humanity of Southwest Montana, Butte Family YMCA, and Consumer Credit Counseling Service/Rural Dynamics Incorporated to sponsor a community MLK observance speech at 5:30 PM in the Butte Courthouse. Afterward, there will be a pot luck dinner hosted at St. John's Episcopal Church. The MLK day speech will be delivered by Eran Thompson of the Not in Our Town organization. All AmeriCorps members in Butte are welcome and encouraged to participate.

Great Falls

RSVP and local AmeriCorps members are joining forces to hold a book drive for a

local children's hospital and for the Center for Communal Skills Building (CCSB), a center for free education in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

In Cameroon, some 80% of students do not have access to books and public libraries do not exist. Books can be donated in Great Falls until February 28th (in recognition of February national I Love to Read Month). Donate books at the senior citizen's center, the Great Falls Public Library, or the UGF library.

AmeriCorps members from Helena, Missoula and Browning are also organizing book drop-off sites in their communities.

Contact Amber Murrey-Ndewa for additional info about how you can get involved: ambermurrey@hotmail.com

Helena

Dancing for the Dream - The Governor's Office of Community Service, in conjunction with ACMAC and community members, is hosting a diversity fair in the Capitol Rotunda starting at 2pm. Lt. Governor John Bohlinger will give the opening remarks. There will be a screening of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech in addition to various cultural dance performances. All are welcome to attend this event. The diversity fair will follow a morning of service around the community. There will be an opportunity for volunteers to help sort food at the FoodShare warehouse, among other projects.

Havre

The Campus Corps team at MSU-Northern has created a booklet, to be distributed at the Havre Boys & Girls Club on MLK Day. The booklet includes the history of and facts about 50 different nationalities prevalent in Montana. For an electronic copy of the booklet, please contact the Northern Campus Corps team at AmeriCorps@msun.edu after January 19th.

Kalispell

Crews from the Montana Conservation Corps along with volunteers from the community will be weatherizing homes through [Warm Hearts Warm Homes](#) on the 25th of October. The event begins at 8:30 a.m. at the MCC office in downtown Kalispell. There will be a Meaning of Service Discussion followed by a short training. Crews will then assist low-income residents prepare their homes for winter and save on energy costs by installing

insulating window kits, compact fluorescent light bulbs, and the like. For more information call Cliff of Julia at 406-755-8089.

Lake County

There will be three days of events in the week prior to MLK Day. All events will take place at Salish Kootenai College in Pablo. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (January 12th-14th) there will be a film festival showcasing films from all over the world. Tuesday will kick off with a local foods lunch, and Wednesday there will be two dance performances (12-1, and 5-6). Thursday afternoon there will be a diversity fair with displays from various organizations throughout the area. Some displays will have interactive activities for the children who attend the fair. The theme this year is "What Unites Us".

Miles City

On January 19th, 2008, the Miles Community College Multicultural Club will celebrate the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and participate in the national Martin Luther King Day of Service. To honor King's memory, the Miles Community College Multicultural Club plans to show a documentary, *Citizen King*, at the Miles Community College. *Citizen King* is an in depth documentary that looks at the contributions and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

We ask the community to bring one canned good as a price of admission to the film showing. All goods collected will be donated to the food bank. Refreshments will be provided at the film screening. The showing will begin at

6:30PM in room 316 of Miles Community College on January 19th. For more information please contact Robin Gerber at 406-874-6193 or Everet Yi at 253-222-4715.

Missoula

Project Homeless Connect A day of hope for those in need... With the support of Mayor Engen and the Missoula County Commissioners, the Missoula At-Risk Housing Coalition is planning Missoula's third annual Project Homeless Connect. Project Homeless Connect is a one-day, one-stop event aimed at connecting the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless with core services. AmeriCorps members will offer one-on-one support throughout the day. Training for the day takes place on Wednesday, January 28 — stop by anytime between 9AM and 3PM for a short orientation to activities on the 29th. No appointments are necessary! For more information, contact Melissa at 258-4980. To volunteer, contact Curtis at 549-4555 or Caitlin at 829-3928.

Crow

Crow will be hosting a coat drive at the multi-purpose building in Crow Agency. Volunteers will be accepting donated coats that are in good condition for all ages. The volunteers who participate on this day will be given free MLK service day shirts. Hot cocoa and cookies will be served to everyone. The Crow Housing Authority's media team will be taking pictures so that we can capture these happy faces while they pick out their very own warm winter coat. Please contact ajefferson@crowhousing.org if you wish to participate or donate.

Diversity

in the natural world promotes the healthy and vigorous continuation of a species by gaining defenses through adaptation and experience. Humans are not separate from this competition called survival. In fact we are directly linked to the anthropocentric world and subscribe to all of the same necessities that are crucial for a robust existence.

Diversity for the human race not only guarantees resistance to disease and a heightened quality of life but also fights the commodification of culture. If you ask anyone, the last thing they want to see is a world of bleak and bland surroundings. We often find it necessary to travel—this is the need for diversity, the lack of which has already created an industry of corporate clones in every city of every country in the world. We see monoculture crops, genetically engineered animals and sub-developments that couldn't be any more uniform.

To ensure a richly diverse future for both humans and the rest of the natural

world we must educate and instill consciousness to bring all people together. During my AmeriCorps experience we did exactly that.

Personally, I expanded my comfort zone to encompass low-income folks while weatherizing for the Salish-Kootenai Housing Authority and the Northwest Montana Human Resources. Perhaps the most profound knowledge that my experience with AmeriCorps gave me is the community involvement piece. During the season, while working in the woods as stewards of the land, we discussed natural resource issues that directly impact our public lands. Through these "place lessons" I became inspired to promote change on the local level. I have developed two community projects that could eventually be used as a framework in other cities that provide a incentive for residents to use there

lawns to grow food in as well as capturing natural gas for energy form our residential waste water treatment facilities.

Everyone completed the Montana Conservation Corps with a sense of belonging, ability to bring about change, personal confidence and most of all an understanding of the importance of diversity.

I cannot emphasize enough the empowerment that the program gave to my entire crew. Everyone completed the Montana Conservation Corps with a sense of belonging, ability to bring about change, personal confidence and most of all an understanding of the importance of diversity.

After all, a diverse world and dynamic aesthetics are what provoke creative, unique and unrestrained thoughts that are fuel for the betterment of society and mankind's coexistence.

By Darren Johnson
Crew Leader 2008
Northern Rockies District



Mark your Calendars!

The next national service day is Global Youth Service Day (GYSD), the largest annual celebration of young volunteers, where millions of young people in countries everywhere carry out thousands of community improvement projects. Start planning: GYSD is April 24-26.



Sometimes, I have a hankering for some delicious Korean barbecue.

During my four years in Ithaca, NY, I frequented the four Korean restaurants in the area. Other times, my stomach growled for tempura udon with some tuna sushi rolls. Fortunately, the sushi restaurant, Plum Tree helped satisfy my sushi desires. On certain cold days, I had some hot meatball Phở (pronounced 'fuh') noodle soup. Luckily, there was a Vietnamese restaurant that happily accepted my patronage. During all-nighters, we would order some shrimp pad thai from the Taste of Thai restaurant.

Coming to Miles City, Montana, I noticed that the city lacked ethnic-based restaurants. Of course, with my limited budget, I wouldn't have been able to frequently eat at these ethnic restaurants anyway. However, having some ethnic delicacies once in a while would have been a blessing.

At the Eastern Montana Fair, I ate something called the Haystack. The Haystack is a bag of Doritos packed with hamburger meat, lettuce, tomatoes, and sour cream.

Coming back from a training in Helena, Danielle (VISTA in Glendive) and I decided to stop at Billings to dine at the Mustard Seed. Mustard Seed was considered to be a fusion restaurant that combined Asian and American food. The fusion experiment didn't work out, so afterwards, we stopped at McDonalds to get some Filet-O-Fish burgers.

Miles City does have two ethnic based restaurants: New Hunan and Mexican Lindo. My co-workers introduced me to New Hunan and I found out about the Mexican Lindo from an online forum at milescity.com. Being the only ethnically-based restaurants miles around, you come to appreciate the egg rolls, Mongolian beef, and salsa that are

offered at the two establishments. I have always wondered how I would have survived if these two restaurants did not exist. The horror!

However, the limited amount of ethnic-based restaurants has given me the freedom to try out

the local flavors (of course on a limited budget). At the Eastern Montana Fair, I ate something called the Haystack. The Haystack is a bag of

Doritos packed with hamburger meat, lettuce, tomatoes, and sour cream. Thank you Sacred Heart School!

At the 600 Café their specialty soup is tomato mac. It's tomato soup with macaroni, meat, and some type of cream. Delicious. The Airport Inn offers their drinks in three variations: pitcher, half pitcher, and glass. Imagine getting a pitcher full of coke with a 16-inch beef and onion pizza. How about going to Reynolds (local supermarket chain) and buying some pacos (bun filled with taco meet) from the hot food stand? Not bad if you want something to eat on the run.

However, the vast majority of my time eating is spent at home. Sometimes I get the water boiling to make some ramen or put a frozen pizza in the microwave. Other times, I cook rice in the rice cooker and put some hotdogs in the frying pan. Once I made a quiche!

I've learned that sometimes people have to count their blessings and adapt to their environment and situation. Every place has its ups and downs. If you have the motivation, you'll be up a lot more than down. Who knows, perhaps who'll have a chance to try out a Haystack.

By Everett Yi
CNADA-Custer Network Against Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault
Miles City, Montana

My husband and I moved to the great rural country of

Billings, Montana in the spring of 2008. My husband's job transfer brought us through a snow storm from South Eastern Washington over the Rockies landing in Billings. We were not planning on staying for any length of time. That was then.

The first thing we noticed about Billings were the friendly people. As you walked down the street people smiled and nodded. The neighbors living around us were neighborly and jumped right in to help unload furniture into the rental house. When we began looking for a permanent home, we found an area in town bordering a field that was full of antelope and deer, fox and birds of all kinds. I began my job as VISTA the week prior to the move to our new home. Again, we found wonderful neighbors to share our lives within a new area of town.

The non-profit United Way of Yellowstone County and the Roots of Promise coalition are instrumental parts of the community of Billings and Yellowstone County. Each of the entities within the organization have profound influence and volunteers that provide help with community drug

The neighbors living around us were neighborly and jumped right in to help.

problems, homelessness, ensuring safe places for children, and the overall well-being of the residents. The LIVE UNITED Day of Caring brought out an impressive 830 volunteers for 58 projects performed in Billings. United Way of Yellowstone County served a donated luncheon for 830 volunteers at the Shrine Auditorium and then all of the Live United volunteers jumped in

to perform tasks throughout Billings. Thirty-three non-profits were supported with 84 teams from 36 organizations. The total impact for the event was \$45,818 and 2441 volunteer hours donated for the day!

The Roots of Promise, The Alliance for Children and Families Coalition's projects include my VISTA volunteerism. VISTA spends time in the community developing partnerships and recruiting volunteers to help administer the projects. In partnering with the Billings Police Force, I recruited 18-20 year old students to provide the man-power and the preparation of paperwork for the compliance checks done with the Billings Police Alcohol Task Force. This so far has influenced not only the liquor establishments but also the Prevention Resource Specialists instigating the training of 100 servers of alcohol in Montana.

Where I have lived prior to Montana,

Montana is number one in the nation for alcohol dependency and abuse.

laws and licenses were needed to serve alcohol and the age limit for the server was 21-years of age. It was an eye-opener for me to learn that 18-year olds do not need a license or training to serve liquor in Montana. While doing research on alcohol use in Montana, I found some alarming statistics. Montana is number one in the nation for alcohol dependency and abuse. While preparing for the "Parents That Host Lose The Most" National Campaign I became aware of the rural mindset of the community at large on underage drinking. I

found an attitude that underage drinking is a rite of passage. I found an idea that taking the car keys away from the underage drinker or having adult hosts for parties with juveniles drinking were safe solutions to the problem of underage drinking. I have found that my niche is to instill awareness in the community regarding the laws and statistics of supplying alcohol to minors (either by hosting a party or an adult purchasing alcohol for a minor). The diversity I have found different from where I come from is the rural mindset that I have not experienced in a city as large as Billings.

By Patricia Ross
Roots of Promise
Billings, Montana

As we celebrate diversity and the life of one of the greatest civil rights leaders in American history,

it is important to consider the ways that we protect the rights of everyone in our society. Through our service in AmeriCorps, many of us dedicate our energy and talents to providing underprivileged individuals the same protections and opportunities as the rest of the population. Those individuals needing assistance are often members of a minority class of individuals, be it a cultural, racial or other grouping.

For this article, I would like to highlight the needs of those with mental disabilities. Mental illness is a medical condition that can upset a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily life functioning. People of every age, race, religion and income are affected by mental illness. According to the Montana Mental Health Association, 1 in 4 Montanans has a mental illness.

Individuals with mental disabilities comprise one of the most vulnerable populations in our society. Mental illness can keep people from being able to recognize and meet their

own needs and also from seeking help from others. Despite substantial progress in awareness and education in the last decade, mental illness still carries with it a significant stigma. People with mental disabilities suffer



According to the Montana Mental Health Association, 1 in 4 Montanans has a mental illness

disproportionately from unemployment, substance abuse, victimization, homelessness, incarceration, and suicide. Mental disabilities often have staggering effects on a person's economic stability. Without the advocacy actions of others, it is easy for those struggling with mental illness to be overlooked, ignored, and underserved.

As advocates, we have various tools at our disposal to protect people working with the negative effects of mental illness. Various laws, both federal and state, have been used to protect the rights of people with mental illnesses and to prevent some of the unemployment, homelessness and victimization that they often face. Two examples of such laws include the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Montana Human Rights Act.

More specific laws focusing on the effects of mental illness can also be utilized to protect people. My experience protecting clients with mental illness has generally involved helping them avoid eviction.

Access to decent affordable housing is an essential resource for all people, especially during the winter months in Montana. The Fair Housing Act (FHA) is a great tool to prevent housing discrimination against people with disabilities. There are safe guards in the FHA that protect a tenant from being evicted because of their mental disability. Generally, a landlord must make reasonable accommodations to policies and actions that keep a mentally disabled person from participating equally in housing options. One example of such an accommodation is allowing a person with a mental illness to have a mental health support animal in an apartment where pets are not allowed.

So take some time from your day to think about those in your personal life as well as those individuals and populations that you serve in your AmeriCorps position that may have a mental illness. Think about how you could serve them better, what tools you have to protect them, and what tools you wish were available. Be a source of

support and change for those dealing with mental illness.

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental illness or the effects of mental illness, please see the contact information below.

In an emergency situation, call 911 or other emergency services number. Additionally, there is a National Suicide and Crisis Line – 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Montana has a non-crisis line called the Montana Warm Line - 1-877-688-3377 – which is open on weekday evenings and Saturday afternoons if you need someone to talk to.

The Montana Mental Health Association has various resources and links to information on help for mental illness and its effects: <http://www.montanamentalhealth.org/index.htm>

If you need information on access to health care, contact the Montana Mental Health Ombudsman's Office at 1-888-444-9669.

If the problem is a legal issue, contact Disability Rights Montana 1-800-245-4742 or Montana Legal Services Association at 1-800-666-6899.

By Tonya Herring
Montana Legal Services Association
Helena, Montana



- Services Available:
- Child/Family/Youth
- Clothing
- Credit/Financial
- Dental Care
- Disability
- Employment/
- Education
- Eye Care
- Food
- Food Stamps
- Haircuts
- Housing/Shelter
- Info
- Legal
- Medical Care
- Mental Health Care
- Personal Hygiene
- Pet
- Public Benefits
- Senior
- Sewing/Mending



Thursday, January 29, 2009
10:00 am to 3:00 pm
First United Methodist Church
300 E. Main (Across from the library)

A day of hope for those in need...

With the support of Mayor Engel and the Missoula County Commissioners, the Missoula At-Risk Housing Coalition is planning Missoula's third annual Project Homeless Connect. Project Homeless Connect is a one-day, one-stop event aimed at connecting the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless with core services.

No appointments are necessary!

For more information, contact Melissa at 258-4980. To volunteer, contact Curtis at 549-4555 or Caitlin at 829-3928.

The past couple months have been filled with an abundance of new experiences that have changed the way that I understand work and faith.

I have learned unparalleled lessons of leadership, community organizing, social planning, meeting facilitation, project responsibility and workplace collaboration. In my personal life, I have submitted to lessons of humility, meekness, forgiveness, social etiquette, cultural adjustment and spiritual development. I have had my ups and downs throughout the past five months. Yet whether they initially affect me positively or negatively, I have learned richly and ultimately been blessed by them. Everything about Glendive seems much deeper and more heartfelt than the watered-down experiences I had previously known before I came here.

My decision to come to Glendive was based on one thing alone: I believed that I had been called here for a specific purpose known only to my innermost being, an intuition that cannot be understood nor disregarded. From the moment I arrived, my purpose began to unfold. I faced opposition in many different areas of life and struggled to overcome feelings of oppression and discrimination. Yet, being here has taught me the meaning of the word *family*; what it means to be part of one and how they love one another through all things. It is this *family* that has helped to encourage and support me to overcome these struggles. No matter what happens, they will always be there with their love and encouragement.

It is in Glendive that I have found people who care more deeply than any others I have ever met. Here, I have experienced *family* as it was meant to be known (unconditionally loving and accepting without pause). It is also in Glendive that I have seen true faith as I believed only great men could achieve. However, like all places, Glendive is also not without its less appealing facets. I see oppression and strife evident in the lives of many who come before Court. Outside the courtroom, I often meet people whose lives are controlled by negativity. Most unfortunately, I have also experienced discrimination that results from a prejudicial fear of the unfamiliar.

Working with the Glendive Healthy Communities Coalition (the committee for a safe and healthy community) and the Local Advisory Council on Mental Health (council to strengthen local mental health services), I have been inspired by the influential work the committees are able to achieve. Participating in such effectual change, watching the committees achieve their goals and work towards new ones, has inspired me to learn more about a future

career in community organizing. Their interest in my input empowers me to actively engage in community-facilitated change.

Every city has its good and bad points. For me, Glendive, though I have known her for only a short time, has presented me with the most precious people and experiences of my life thus far. She has taught me not only how to receive but also how to foster attitudes of generosity, sharing and sacrifice. There is nothing that I would give to change anything about my time here and I believe this year will have gone by far too quickly. I have come here to serve the people of Glendive, and particularly the Dawson County Domestic Violence Program. Yet, just exactly as my VISTA trainer told us at the Pre-Orientation Training, I have come to learn and experience overwhelmingly more from the community of Glendive, MT than I ever could offer them.

By Danielle Leung
Dawson County Domestic Violence Program
Glendive, Montana

Everything about Glendive seems much deeper and more heartfelt than the watered-down experiences I had previously known.

your story could be here.

next time don't miss out.

**email newsletter contributions to Amber at
ambermurrey@hotmail.com**

AmeriCorps members in Montana have an opportunity to help low-income people claim benefits in what has been called “the nation’s largest antipoverty program for working families.” It benefits

more people than food stamps or cash welfare payments; several reputable studies claim it is more effective than raising the minimum wage. It is named the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

Even though EITC is the major federal anti-poverty program, several studies have reported that millions of dollars have been left unclaimed and that many claims have been rejected due to errors. These two problems mean that somewhere around \$438 to \$4,824 in 2008 tax credits available for potentially eligible low-income working families will not be received.

To help enable potentially eligible people receive their tax credit, there is free tax help available at hundreds of locations across Montana. Some of these Montana locations have already listed volunteer opportunities on the national Martin Luther King service day site.

Who is eligible for EITC? Millions of people are eligible, according to the IRS. Here are the 2008 maximum income limits for eligible people:

	Married Filing Jointly	Single or Head of Household
No Children	\$15,880	\$12,880
One qualifying child	\$36,995	\$33,995
Two or more qualifying children	\$41,646	\$38,646

Source: <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=150513,00.html> Many Montana people have claimed their tax credit in past years. The congressional Research Service reported the following regarding 2003 Montana federal tax returns:

State	Number of federal tax returns	Percentage claiming EITC	Average EITC
Montana	433,522	17.18%	\$1624.16
Average state		17.01%	\$1772.48

By Bob Springer
Montana Making \$ense
Missoula, Montana

AmeriCorps members can help extend these efforts to people who need assistance in a variety of ways, including:

- Promotion at service sites
- Information sessions
- Outreach and education
- Child care support
- Volunteering at a free tax help location

There are private companies offering tax assistance and tax refund anticipation loans (RAL). According to an Urban Institute study, higher percentages of minorities and those without a high school education use paid preparers than the rest of the population. According to a Brookings Institute report, typical preparation costs are from \$90 to \$100, to file electronically add \$12 to \$40; typical RAL loan fees are \$75 with \$33 for document preparation; and, claimants without bank accounts may also incur charges averaging 3 percent (\$45 for a \$1,500 refund) to cash either the tax refund or the RAL check.

Some AmeriCorps members and their host sites began preparing for the 2008 tax season in December, 2007. For example, Montana Making \$ense members at Consumer Credit Counseling Service sites and the Browning Community Development Corporation participated in site sponsored training to gain knowledge and understanding regarding the tax credit and to learn where tax assistance is available in their communities. Also, the next MM\$ newsletter will focus on the EITC.

To learn about free tax assistance efforts and learn how to help, check Montana’s extensive listing of free tax assistance sites managed by the IRS’s Volunteer Income Tax Assistants (VITA) and AARP at <http://www.montanafreefile.org> You can find locations, contact information and volunteer opportunities through the site. Once you know who to contact, please follow through and discuss how you can help.

The next issue of AmeriCorps Quarterly will go out in mid-April, 2009. We are always looking for article ideas, photos, and information on your local events.

Please send newsletter submissions and questions to Amber at ambermurray@hotmail.com

About ACMAC :

Our Mission

ACMAC is a representative council of AmeriCorps State and AmeriCorps*VISTA members from across Montana. We work to encourage networking between all AmeriCorps programs in Montana through action, communication, and representation, in an effort to enhance the national service experience in our state.

ACMAC reports to

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