VISTA Reflection

By Monica Cano
FASS AmeriCorps*VISTA Member
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Monica Cano (left) is assisting Emma (right) with her application for Medicaid while interviewing her to gather information for HSC's Ford Foundation/Families and Work Institute grant.

My name is Monica Cano; I began my service as a FASS VISTA member in February 2008 at the Human Services Coalition, a non-profit agency in Miami, FL. For the past three months, I have been working on projects that are designed to help low-income workers access needed public services to supplement their incomes. Low-wage jobs are a reality for many area residents who work full-time: many make less than $16,000 per year.

One project at the Human Services Coalition that is designed to help area residents is the Prosperity Campaign, through which I help people access free-tax preparation services, financial education, and affordable healthcare. To build the capacity of the Prosperity Campaign, I train service-learning students from local colleges who serve as volunteers. These students are giving back to the community through utilizing the skills they have learned in the classroom.

I have learned a lot in my time as a VISTA member, as recently I attended a lecture by political scientist Robert Putnam focusing on the importance of social capital. The connections people develop through their social networks often influence their ability to find employment, go to college, and may even impact life expectancy. As the Human Services Coalition and I train college students to become civically engaged, these students are in turn working to increase the social capital of those living in the community. Through these efforts, members of the community are more likely to escape poverty.

As a VISTA member, I actively participate in the good work being done by the Human Services Coalition. As a VISTA, I assist individuals like Emma (photo) so they can access benefits. I am learning both personally and professionally; most importantly, I am part of a positive social change.