

**FASS  
AmeriCorps  
\*VISTA  
Initiative**



# VISTA VISION

**February 2006**

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## Not Your Typical VISTA

My name is Lois Brauckmuller and I am not your typical VISTA member. When I walked into Pre-Service Orientation I felt like I shouldn't be there. I was old enough to be the mother of most of the new VISTA members. Although there is no upper age limit, the majority seemed to be fresh out of college. I graduated more than twenty years ago, and have a few years of work experience on my resume. I figured that experience would give me a bit of an edge.



*Lois Brauckmuller (right) guides students in a service-learning project at Dunnellon Middle School in Marion County, FL*

Most of the new VISTA members were traveling to new cities, meeting new supervisors, and taking on projects that were the inspiration of a stranger. I knew my project, because I had been part of it for several years. I started as a volunteer when my children were in the program. My oldest is in college now, and I have yet to move on. *(continued on page 2)*

**Save the Date!**

June 14-16, 2006

The Florida Institute on  
Disaster Preparedness and

Community Safety

Eckerd College, St. Petersburg

More information coming soon at  
[www.fsu.edu/~vista](http://www.fsu.edu/~vista)

## HealthCare Outreach in Miami

**Siramene Abraham  
AmeriCorps\*VISTA  
Miami-Dade College**



Born and educated to be a Doctor in my home country of Nigeria, I am now an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member serving in Miami. I became a VISTA to serve this great nation I now call home and to gain a better understanding of American culture. I want to know how Americans live their lives so I can be better suited to serve and work here in the medical profession. I

am now six months into my year of service and I am pleased that AmeriCorps\*VISTA has provided me this opportunity to better understand and serve America, in particular its younger generation.

I serve at the Miami Dade-College Medical Center Campus. Miami is a culturally diverse and beautiful city with warm weather, beaches and palm trees. It is a tourist paradise with a booming real estate market. However the cost of living in Miami is very high and many people cannot afford the necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter. There are many homeless people in the downtown area and many low-income workers cannot speak English and often times have little understanding of how the system works and even if they do, they are often too poor to help themselves.

*(Continued on page 4)*



Florida | **Campus Compact**



## ManaTeens Deliver “Birthday Books”



Each month Volunteer Services of Manatee County Inc. (ManaTeens) visits local first grade classes at Kinnan and Tillman Elementary Schools. Tillman Elementary, in particular is an FCAT “D-rated school” located in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood in Manatee County. The birthday books program is designed to spark children’s interest in reading. Volunteers deliver a brand new book to every child whose birthday falls in a given month. As an organization, the ManaTeens believe it is important for children to read effectively. By helping children from disadvantaged communities learn to read they, will have an improved chance to further their education and break the cycle of poverty.

We create a festive atmosphere when delivering the books. We throw a small party, bringing juice and cupcakes for the kids. Their excitement upon receiving the books makes this event one of my favorite things and I always look forward to seeing the children. I along with ManaTeen volunteers sit down with each child that receives a book and read it aloud to him or her. The children always respond with lots of excited comments and giggles. Their looks of joy and excitement create a priceless feeling of accomplishment, one that exceeded all my expectations of being an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member.

Each month we return brings the same excitement, there is nothing quite like entering a room filled with kids who are happy to see you. We are able to bring joy by celebrating birthdays and we help inspire these children to go places they would not have before. I hope we are able to expand the birthday books program to more classrooms and sustain it for many years into the future. So that kids can continue to discover a passion reading and expand their horizons. For more information about the ManaTeens visit [www.manateens.org](http://www.manateens.org).

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**AmeriCorps\*VISTA Jay Liegl, delivers a birthday book to a young and eager reader at Tillman Elementary.**

*(Not Your Typical VISTA, continued from page 1)*

I thought I had an advantage on the rookies since I actually helped to write my own work plan. I knew the community where I was serving, since my own children had grown up there. I knew the families that I was serving, the children in the classroom, and our community partners. I thought I knew it all!

When we talked about poverty, I knew the statistics. I knew that 65 percent of students at my school are on free or reduced-price hot lunch. I knew that poverty and literacy are linked. But I didn’t think of my own students as poor. When VISTA leaders talked about children going to bed hungry, I didn’t think that it happened in my own community. But I have learned.

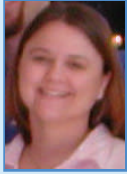
Through my experience as a VISTA member I have learned that children in my own community do go to bed hungry, sometimes cold. They experiment with drugs because their parents do. They lose their books because they cannot remember if they are at Mom’s house or Dad’s. They live with grandparents because it’s the only family they have. I have learned that nothing is constant. Even in this community I know, this school where I have volunteered for seven years, and the building I call home, every day is new. Every day brings a new challenge.

I have learned that age is only a number, and most days I feel as young as the students that I help. There are times when I want to play the mother role and teach them all they need to know. And there are times when I want to sit back and learn along with them.

And I have learned that I can’t change the world, but I can make a difference. I can give students the opportunity to improve their own reading skills while tutoring younger students. I can help foster an appreciation for the environment, and I can help community members see hope in the faces of teen-agers. I have learned that sometimes it is best just to listen, and there are times when you must speak up. I have learned to be more patient, and less of a procrastinator. I have learned that you can teach an old dog new tricks.

And I have learned that I am taking away from this opportunity so much more than I have given.

# Life Lessons of VISTA



Robin Jones  
AmeriCorps\*VISTA  
Pensacola's Promise

At any moment in life you can stop and reflect on what you have learned. Being an VISTA member provides the opportunity to focus on eradicating poverty and

provides many moments that may change one's view of the world. One's realizations may be issue based, but the lessons learned relate to everything from the world of work, the role of volunteers and relationships.

Throughout my term as a VISTA member I have had the opportunity to serve my community. I continue to learn new things on a daily basis. I don't think I can trivialize it by saying "I learned this about poverty... or I realized that ..., etc." I have met people. I have heard stories. We all have a common thread. We all have the same struggles. Our goals may differ. Our backgrounds may differ. Our expectations on life may differ. But at the core, we are all the same. We have all the same stuff inside.

Recently my niece was required to do a presentation for African-American History month. She explained to my sister that she wanted to do a report on someone that looked like her. She did not understand race or ethnicity; she just wanted to pick someone who looked like her. She's five, and she has already programmed most of how she will view

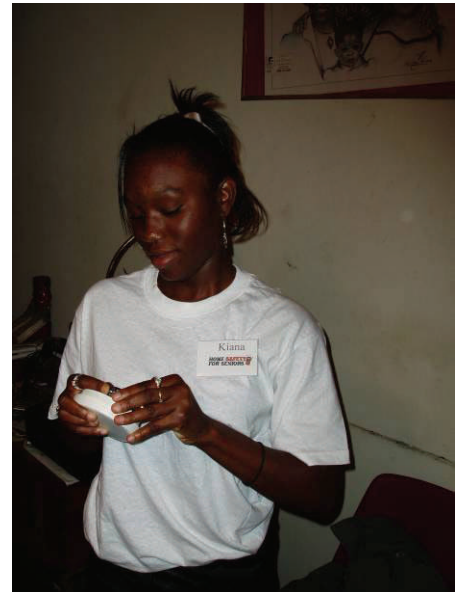
the world for the rest of her life, but there is always room for growth and expanding our views. I was able to share an activity for my sister to use with my niece that I learned at the service-learning workshop. In the activity, you take two different colored M&M's, close your eyes, eat them both, and then are asked if you could tell which one was which color. The goal of the activity is to compare the M&M's to people illustrating that while we may be different on the outside, we are all the same inside.



This may make a difference in my niece's view of the world. Working to positively affect the future for others is what being a VISTA member is all about. Making change, so that the world will be a better place for others. Most of us start with the people that we love and are closest to us. Some of us are fortunate and can extend that love to complete strangers. We all have a role to play.



*Chain Reaction Home Safety for Seniors Crew*



I have learned that we are all the same. Everyone wants to be loved and know that people are listening to their story and care. Everyone wants to be valued. AmeriCorps\*VISTA has provided me the opportunity to continue to grow, to continue questioning and most importantly to care for others and work towards the big picture.





## VISTA Youth Track

From November 16-18, 2005, the Florida Alliance for Student Service (FASS) held its 11<sup>th</sup> annual Service Learning Institute in Tampa, Florida. FASS is my AmeriCorps\*VISTA sponsor, therefore, I was asked to take a major role in planning the Institute. My role was to create and run a “youth track” for the 50 plus students in middle and high school that would attend the Institute.

Having never run anything like the youth track before, I was a bit overwhelmed as I began planning. Luckily, some old pros came to my rescue. Taurean Wong, former VISTA member with Community Tampa Bay, and Wendy Doromal, along with her students from Timber Creek Service Learning Academy, signed on as my partners in coordinating the youth track. We divided the youth track into four separate workshops, with Taurean and Wendy and her students agreeing to take responsibility for three of them.

Now holding the responsibility for only one workshop, I could really get to work. But where would I start? I had to pick icebreakers, lessons, games, interactive activities (can't give kids any chance to fall asleep!) along with, of course, a topic. Because I attended the Points of Light Youth Leadership Institute last August, I concluded that “Leadership and Motivation” was a topic on which I could facilitate 50 students.

I wanted to be prepared, so I started planning my workshop two months early. Still, as the Institute drew near, I started getting nervous about the turnout of the youth track. What if

100 kids showed up instead of 50? What if the activities that seemed like a good idea in my head turned out to be total flops? And, although I graduated high school in 2000, I worried that things were already so different since I was a high school student that maybe I would be “out-of-touch” with the concerns of students today.



**VISTA member Holly Gudaitis signs students up for the Youth Track**

Luckily, these concerns did not play out during the eagerly anticipated youth track. The number of students attending was right at the predicted 50, and I felt that I could relate to the group. What helped the most was telling myself to RELAX and talk to the students as if they were familiar adults. The kids greatly impressed me, coming up with much better ideas and brainstorming than I imagined. Walking away from the experience, I can say I gained much confidence: in myself as a facilitator, and in youth as future leaders.

*(Health Care Outreach, continued from page 1)*

As a VISTA member my job is to help build the capacity of our community by providing people the resources to empower them to solve problems and enable them to make positive changes in their lives. Specifically, I respond to requests for assistance from various community agencies that provide healthcare services for underserved populations in Miami. I visit these sites and acquaint myself with their work and access their needs. If a site needs extra assistance, I refer clients to the medical center on Miami-Dade College's Medical Campus where students and faculty provide free healthcare services. Patients receive blood pressure screenings, diabetes screenings, dental services and health education on topics ranging from good nutrition, women's health and sports safety. These activities are examples of service-learning, students are providing medical care for patients and are learning to become civically engaged citizens. The experience builds campus and community partnerships and allows participating students to make a lasting difference in peoples' lives.

At the beginning of my service year, I visited a medical

clinic at an elementary school located in Overtown, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Miami. While talking to the clinic's manager I noticed a seven year old girl who was waiting to see a nurse. I introduced myself and asked the girl what she wanted to be when she grew up. Her face lit up with a smile as she pointed to the clinic's manager and said “like her.” Tears came to the manager's eyes as it dawned on her how meaningful the clinic's help had been to this child. By being this girl's role model, she had unknowingly planted good seeds of service. As a result, this child and inevitably many others are eager to help build a better tomorrow. Bringing hope to one generation which in turn will help future generations is why I am an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member.

***“The future belongs to only those who give the next generation reasons to hope.”***

**-Pierre Teilhard DeChardin, philosopher**

## FASS VISTA Photos



*FASS VISTA members at the November 2005 Florida Service Learning Institute in Tampa, FL*



*“As an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member, the most important thing I do is show these children that someone does care!”*

*- Marjorie Fahs, I Have A Dream*



*“As an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member, I enable others to have an impact in their community!”*

*- Jay Liegl, ManaTeens*

## Second Time Around



**TyAnna Vickers**  
AmeriCorps\*VISTA  
Big Bend Cares

I used to think that things were supposed to be easier the second time around. But my second year as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member has proven that notion not to be true. As a VISTA member I coordinate the youth corps at Big Bend Cares in Tallahassee, FL. I was the first VISTA to work in this capacity at Big Bend Cares.

The goal of the youth corps is to teach teenagers about health issues relating to HIV/AIDS through peer education. During my first year as a VISTA member I discovered it can be difficult scheduling and coordinating meetings and trainings. The most difficult task was finding venues for the youth corps members to conduct peer trainings. It was disheartening for me to train students, give them certification and then be unable to schedule peer training opportunities.

Schools are often hesitant to have outside organizations come into the school and work with students because of the sensitivities surrounding HIV/AIDS education. I spent most of my first VISTA term writing letters to principals, teachers and student organizations trying to get the youth corps into the schools. The schools just were not convinced that outside education was needed.

When door after door at the school system kept closing, I decided to work with other programs and organizations who worked with teens so the youth corps could conduct peer-education trainings. This was great, but I still wanted the youth corps to directly work with students in the schools. So instead of trying to walk through closed doors, I went through open windows. I began contacting after-school and extra curricular activities sponsors. We did not climb any mountains, but we did conquer small hills. I was not sure it would happen, but the youth corps was able to do three in-school presentations by the end of my first VISTA term.

I thought it would be easier to work with the school system during my second year as a VISTA member. Unfortunately, I have found many of the same doors closing again. So I applied for a grant through Youth Venture and MTV “U” which has enabled the youth corps to start the “ROPE” project, “Reaching out through Peer Entertainment.” The youth corps will host monthly events to educate area teens about HIV/AIDS using entertainment; the first project will be a comedy and talent show. Through these events we hope to stress to students the importance of HIV/AIDS education.

While my VISTA service has presented me with challenges, I would not change anything about my experience. This journey has taught me great lessons, especially about fighting for what you believe in. I have learned that things are not always easier the second time around and that everything worth fighting for is worth fighting for more than once.



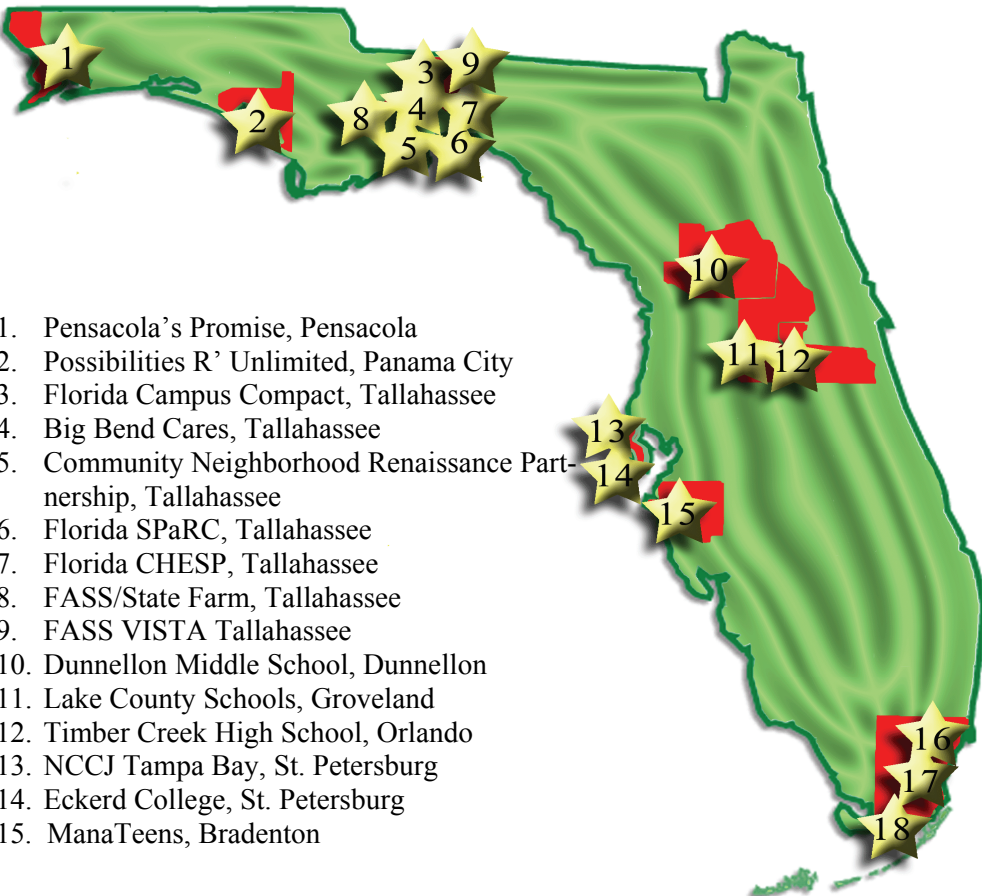
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## FASS AMERICORPS\*VISTA INITIATIVE

*Empowering students through volunteerism and service-learning  
to create positive change in our communities.*

Check us out at  
[www.fsu.edu/~vista](http://www.fsu.edu/~vista)



1. Pensacola's Promise, Pensacola
2. Possibilities R' Unlimited, Panama City
3. Florida Campus Compact, Tallahassee
4. Big Bend Cares, Tallahassee
5. Community Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership, Tallahassee
6. Florida SPaRC, Tallahassee
7. Florida CHESP, Tallahassee
8. FASS/State Farm, Tallahassee
9. FASS VISTA Tallahassee
10. Dunnellon Middle School, Dunnellon
11. Lake County Schools, Groveland
12. Timber Creek High School, Orlando
13. NCCJ Tampa Bay, St. Petersburg
14. Eckerd College, St. Petersburg
15. ManaTeens, Bradenton

16. Human Services Coalition, Miami
17. Miami-Dade College, Miami
18. I Have A Dream, Overtown, Miami

### FASS VISTA Initiative Goals:

- To develop meaningful service-learning opportunities for students in K-12 schools and Higher Education.
- To promote the values of AmeriCorps\*VISTA: Get Things Done, Strengthen Communities, Encourage Responsibility, and Expand Opportunity.
- To empower students to be catalysts for community change.

## Save the Date!

February 26-28, 2006  
Student Civic Engagement Conference: Gainesville, FL  
[www.floridacompact.org](http://www.floridacompact.org)

March 8 - 11, 2006  
Hands On Network Leadership Conference: Boston, MA  
[www.handsonnetwork.org/2006-leadership-conference](http://www.handsonnetwork.org/2006-leadership-conference)

March 22 - 25, 2006  
17th Annual National Service-Learning Conference:  
Philadelphia, PA  
[www.nylc.org](http://www.nylc.org)

March 30 - April 1, 2006  
4th Annual Service Learning & the Arts Conference:  
Miami, FL

April 15, 2006  
Project Progress Reports Due to FASS Office  
(VISTA Supervisors)

June 14 - 16, 2006  
Florida Institute on Disaster Preparedness and Community  
Safety through Service: St. Petersburg, FL  
[www.fsu.edu/~vista](http://www.fsu.edu/~vista)

June 18 - 20, 2006 National Conference on Volunteering  
and Service: Seattle, WA  
[www.volunteeringandservice.org](http://www.volunteeringandservice.org)

July 15, 2006  
Project Progress Reports Due to FASS Office  
(VISTA Supervisors)