

**FASS
AmeriCorps
*VISTA
Initiative**



VISTA VISION

July 2005

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Responding to Hurricane Dennis

Because the damage from Hurricane Dennis was less extensive than last year's Ivan, much of the national media downplayed it as "not that bad," but I had the chance to travel to the areas worst hit and judge for myself. Shortly after placing a call to the ManaTEENs, I was traveling west on I-10 from Tallahassee to help set up a Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) in Santa Rosa County.

When I got to where the eye of the storm had hit, the trees were mangled and highway signs were ripped from their posts and now laid about the ground a good distance down the road. As I approached the Milton exit, a gas station that looked like it had been bombed greeted me; I continued along the state road where the businesses were indistinguishable from one another with blown-out signs and boarded up windows.

I was greeted at the VRC by Adraine LaRoza and Kat McKell from

(Continued on page 3)



VISTA Holly Gudaitis unpacks army cots for hurricane victims in Santa Rosa

We are currently recruiting VISTA members for the following sites:

MDC — I Have a Dream, Miami

FASS/State Farm Home Safety Initiative, Tallahassee

We are also accepting applications for new project host sites.

For more information contact Laryn Flikkema at

lflikkema@admin.fsu.edu

Making a Difference in Miami

Following graduation from college in Massachusetts, I packed up my belongings and drove to Miami to serve in the poorest neighborhood, in the poorest city in the United States. Twenty Five hours later I was in Overtown.

The fifty-four second graders here at Phillis Wheatley Elementary School are "Dreamers." They have been promised a college scholarship by a former VISTA, now an attorney, as long as they stay in school and out of "trouble." Statistically, most of the boys in this neighborhood will see a chalk outline before a high school chalkboard and most girls will glare at a pregnancy test before knowing the acronym SAT. My job is to give them a chance in hell.

In the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I serve in a program called "I Have a Dream." Dr. King once wrote from a prison cell in Birmingham, Alabama, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny." This conception of justice is what called me to the Dreamers. It is also why I make a difference.

Elizabeth Howard
AmeriCorps*VISTA
I Have a Dream, Overtown
(Miami)



Elizabeth Howard's essay was awarded second place at the 2005 Florida AmeriCorps and National Service Conference, May 20th, 2005

(Continued on page 3)

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE**

VISTA Reflection

Lois Brauckmuller
AmeriCorps*VISTA
Dunnellon Middle School



Promoting Awe



DMS students pay it forward

In Dunnellon, our students don't know that they are poor. They think they own the world because their campus sits near the confluence of two of Florida's most beautiful rivers. Students come to school early, stay late and sometimes dedicate their weekends to protect their greatest resource.

They are students of PAWS, Promoting Awesome Watershed Stewardship. They monitor the quality of the rivers and report data to scientists, they create gardens at Rainbow Springs State Park, they produce displays about Florida's flora and fauna, and they write articles about taking care of their watershed for our local newspaper. But they are also struggling with poverty and reading skills. Roughly half of our middle school students cannot read on grade level; 67 percent are on free or reduced price hot lunch.

For information about Dunnellon's PAWS program, contact VISTA Lois Brauckmuller, lois.brauckmuller@mario.n.k12.fl.us

One of our most successful projects this year was a tutoring program in which struggling readers from our middle school boarded buses with neighborhood children and traveled to one of three elementary schools. They worked with low-level readers for about 45 minutes and then rode a bus to their own campus for the start of the school day. The students met once a week for ten visits before FCAT. Dur-

(Continued on page 3)



Ericka Zdenek
Program Consultant
Volunteer Florida

Ericka Zdenek On 'Community'

What is community? The origin of the word community comes from the Latin *munus* which means the 'gift', and *cum*, which means 'together, among each other'. Community literally means to give among each other. I would propose that community is a group of people who share gifts which they provide to all. We are all members of so many communities, whether it be the place where you live, or the university you attend, the cyber-community, or the world community. Which one is most important? Which one cries out for our attention most? Which one feeds our mind, body, and spirit? The perspective that I have gained is that I am connected to all of these communities in a unique way. Each of them has value and a way of grounding you to the present. So I choose to invest the best that I have in all these communities by recycling, by volunteering at my child's school, by donating items to goodwill, etc. The most critical thing for me and for all of us is to stay engaged and share our gifts.

The catalyst for me to come to this conclusion is my experience with national service as a Peace Corps Volunteer, AmeriCorps*VISTA, and a member of the AmeriCorps*NCCC. For all the barriers that separate us within our community be it locally, nationally, or internationally, it is the power of our humanness that connects us to others. Peace Corps allowed me to experience the true meaning of generosity when a woman gave me her last bowl of beans because I was a guest in her home. The NCCC taught me that team work is real work. AmeriCorps*VISTA introduced me to the power of change on the local level. I discovered that people are willing to help you; you just need to let them know how.

Tell your story. Tell your story. Tell your story.



I am inspired to be a part of all my communities. At times, I am overwhelmed and confused by where and how to invest my time, but I love the adventure and richness shared when I dedicate myself. I am a mother, wife, artist, kick-boxer, and an AmeriCorps alum. In reality, if you break it down in simple terms and forget all the labels – I am a human with a heart and mind dedicated to connecting with others. National Service gave me this gift. I unwrap it everyday and say thank you.

*Ericka was Director of the FASS * VISTA Initiative from 2001 to 2004. Your community appreciates you, Ericka, and everything you do!*

(Dennis, continued from page 1)

the ManaTEENS who had traveled nine hours from Bradenton to set it up. Running the VRC involves interviewing and matching able volunteers with people and places that need their help.

This center had a very slow day. Word of its location had not gotten out, and phones were still down. Around 4pm, we shut down for the day and headed to the nearest hotel with vacancies, 70 miles away

Up bright and early the next morning we traveled back to the VRC and a much busier day greeted us. The phones were up and ringing non-stop with aid requests, people were trapped in their houses by downed trees, and others were being rained on through holes in their roofs. Many were elderly with mobility restrictions. No one had power yet.

Word had gotten out over local TV and radio stations of the VRC's location. Volunteers as well as those in need were steadily coming in to the center. One elderly man caught my eye as he sat and took an extended period of time to fill out the simple two-sided sheet to request aid. I noticed that his eyes were teary and he seemed severely shaken at the devastation he had gone through, as well as much humbled to ask for help.

I am amazed at people's desire to help those in need, or rather, those in *more* need. Many volunteers were local residents who still had no power, but instead of sitting at home decided their time would be better spent on more dire situations. I also learned how to set up a VRC so the ManaTEENS won't have to travel nine hours for the next Panhandle hurricane. Lastly: don't always trust the national media. Just because they claim a hurricane "isn't as bad as last year's" doesn't mean help isn't needed.

*"If this is your first time hearing this
You are about to experience something cold man
We never had nothing handed, took nothing for granted*

*Took nothing from no man, man I'm my own man
But as a shorty I looked up to the dope man
Only adult man I knew that wasn't a broke man...*

*... You know the kids gonna act a fool
When you stop the programs for after school..*

*... Look at what's handed us, our fathers abandoned us
when we get the hammers gone and call the ambulance
Sometimes I feel no one in this world understands us
but we don't care what people say... "*

-Kayne West

(Difference in Miami, continued from page 1)

In addition to conceiving, directing, and maintaining an after-school program for the students, I work intimately with their families to cultivate a stable home environment and with their teachers to foster programs that educate the children beyond their tattered textbooks and meager walls. Each day I greet 64 children in a classroom without desks.

I fight for the dream. I fight with parents to bring their children to school and to see these scholarships and extra-curricular programs as instruments of self-enrichment rather than as futile inconveniences. I fight with parents' employers to dismiss them for thirty minutes to go to the food stamps office so that my students can eat dinner. I fight with a school administration that sees my coming in from outside the neighborhood as a sign of my mal-intention. I fight with burnt out teachers who cannot stand one more thing to do. I fight with a community scarred by broken promises that counted my fight over before I even arrived. I fight with students to dream for themselves because their education can lift them to heights they never thought possible.

I am humbled. While I would love to boast about my accomplishments, the truth is that most evenings I go home battered. I lose more battles here in Overtown than I win. Thirty-Six years after Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, I am awed at how far there

is to go. I had not understood the gravity

(Continued on page 5)

(PAWS, continued from page 2)

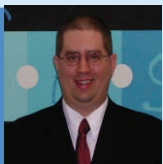
ing the visits, the students worked with materials focusing on the environment. While our students practiced reading skills, they learned about the environment and becoming responsible citizens through their community service.

The elementary schools were encouraged to "pay it forward" with projects of their own. During a campus "green day," students at Romeo Elementary were visited by Ripply the Raindrop, mascot of the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Ripply also stopped by the middle school to thank the tutors for their efforts.

I ran into one of those students at the grocery store recently. He asked if he could be a tutor again next year. I told him that I hoped his reading scores had risen so much that he would be ineligible. His smile faded, then lit up when he learned that he might be able to take part in another of our PAWS projects. Promoting Awesome Watershed Stewardship is a way of life in Dunnellon.

The View From Here: Engaging Communities

Laryn Flikkema
Director
FASS VISTA Initiative



This past year has seen many successes, challenges and opportunities for growth. FASS VISTA is building partnerships between K-12 schools, colleges/universities, and community-based organizations to provide meaningful service opportunities for students that benefit communities. In the summer of 2004, our VISTA members responded after Florida was hit by four hurricanes. They helped to set up Volunteer Reception Centers across Florida and many sites have since become involved with disaster preparedness education efforts. Because of these efforts we have been able to expand our programs to reach new audiences.

As I approach the end of my first year as the director, I have enjoyed visiting the communities we serve and getting to know the VISTA members and site supervisors. Memorable moments

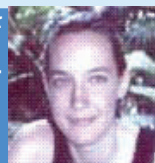
this past year have included presenting with FASS VISTA members at the Service Learning Ambassador Camp in Tallahassee and doing calisthenics with seniors and nursing students at a HUD funded retirement home in Miami. I am looking forward to getting to know our new VISTAs and visiting new projects over the next year.

Because of the efforts of our VISTA members and project sites, K-12 and college students have participated in hurricane recovery efforts, community garden projects, alternative break trips and even worked to screen children for diabetes. Since August 2004, the FASS VISTA Initiative has engaged 12,550 students and community volunteers in 147,400 hours of service-learning activities and generated approximately \$172,400 in cash (grants, donations) and \$172,800 of in-kind support.

Our project's greatest strength is its diversity of sites and quality VISTA members; the impact of our project would not be possible were it not for these VISTAs and the support provided by our local site supervisors. 12 VISTA members are exiting this summer, whether they are continuing their education or moving on with their careers, each of them has brought something unique to their projects and made a positive difference in their communities. FASS VISTA continues to grow; we are placing VISTA members at four new project sites: Miami-Dade College (medical campus), ManaTEENs (De Soto County), Pensacola's Promise, and the FASS/State Farm Home Safety Initiative. With the new project sites and the addition of 12 new VISTAs this summer, we are looking forward to another great year.

VISTA Vine: Promises From a Year of Transformation

Lynn Taff
AmeriCorps*VISTA Leader
FASS VISTA Initiative



A large number of VISTAs are leaving us this month and the next, myself included. I struggled with what words I could use to tell the VISTAs goodbye and thank them for all of their hard work. I finally realized that I was having so much trouble because any words from me are inadequate. So, I've decided to use their own.

These quotes are taken from the VISTAs' "reflection conversations" (a recorded conversation they have with their VISTA Leader about their year of service). The final question of the conversation is meant to draw out a promise the VISTA makes to him or herself, based on the lessons learned during their year as a VISTA.

I'm going to keep the quotes anonymous. The point lies in the positive effect a short year of VISTA service has on our communities, and on the VISTAs themselves. Also, though it's true that these VISTAs are extraordinary, *they could be any one of us.*

"I promise to be more proactive; *more* out in the community, doing community service; I promise to stay positive."

"Enjoy every day. Enjoy my family. Don't sell out too badly with the student loan debt."

"I will ALWAYS take care of myself."

"I will continue volunteering, because of the impact I've seen it have on our community and soci-

ety. If I can do this, then I know I'll be satisfied."

"I would like to remain as idealistic as I can for as long as possible."

"I will always find the good things in life, and treasure the small things. Be supportive, be true to myself, be spiritual, and to take risks."

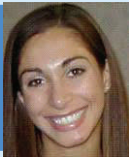
"To keep my personal standards high."

"To connect."

Goodbye everybody. There is a complete list of the exiting VISTAs on page 6.

'SLACKers'!

Kim Tabah
AmeriCorps*VISTA
Volunteer Leon



Citizens are not born, but made! During the week of June 20, 2005, sixty-five high school students attended the Service-Leadership Ambassador Camp (SLAC) in Tallahassee, Florida.

Volunteer Leon received a grant from the Points of Light Foundation to implement the "Service Learning

Impacting Citizenship" curriculum into a program for high school aged students. It was decided that the curriculum would be integrated into a week-long service camp.

During this camp, the students participated in youth leadership and civic engagement activities. One unique aspect of the camp was that it was peer-to-peer teaching. The camp, led by the ManaTEENS, included very fun and hands-on leadership & team-building activities. The ManaTEENS are the largest service club in the country that engages youth in service. They drove up



'SLACKers' and ManaTEENS gather for a group shot

from Bradenton, Fl. to lead the campers.

Camp participants focused on community issues that were important to them, such as teen pregnancy, literacy, hunger, environment, disaster preparedness and homeland security. The students identified real community needs, designed projects that addressed

the community needs through service, visited local service agencies, and participated in local service projects. The agencies visited included the Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross, the Tallahassee Museum of History and Natural Science, and Big Bend Cares.

"The camp will teach them how to be leaders," commented Jeri Bush, Director of VolunteerLEON. "They don't need adults to tell them what to do since they will be able to get out there and do it themselves". That is just what the students who attended the SLAC camp did!

Through this special week, youth emerged as more active citizens in their community, and become empowered to address issues they really care about now and in the future. Through learning about various community issues, civic engagement advocacy, leadership and teambuilding, they realized they too are a voice in their community and their opinions matter!

The SLAC camp was hosted by VolunteerLEON, the ManaTEENS, the Service Learning Network of the Big Bend, the Florida Alliance for Student Services (FASS), Learn & Serve, the Points of Light Foundation and Tallahassee Community College.



'SLACKers' painting a mural for Big Bend Cares in Tallahassee

(Difference in Miami, continued from page 3)

of the distance until I stepped inside and looked out.

But now, when I leave VISTA and begin my work in the Justice system, I will have heard the voices from the community and be able to do something about it. Too many lawyers and politicians make gross assumptions when dealing with the complexities of poverty and civil rights. I will not have to guess.

The kind of difference I make as a VISTA is impossible to measure in numbers on a strategic plan or evaluation. The difference I make is visible on the face of a kid who has learned to look past the drug dealers and pimps. The difference I make is in making that kid believe he is a king.

Each day I expose forgotten children to new people and ideas. Each day I tear away another layer of their thick cocoons. Each day, they see a little more sun.

No matter how hard I try over the next three months, my Dreamers will still be crossing through drug deals on the crosswalk to school. They will still be falling asleep in the echoes of gunshots and domestic violence. They will still be learning how to read through the blind pangs of hunger. They will still be here, and I will be left with an aching hope that they have not forgotten their dreams.

In three months, I will go on to law school because they shouldn't have to put stock in Dreams alone.

In three months they will remain. Neither of us will be the same. That is the difference I make.



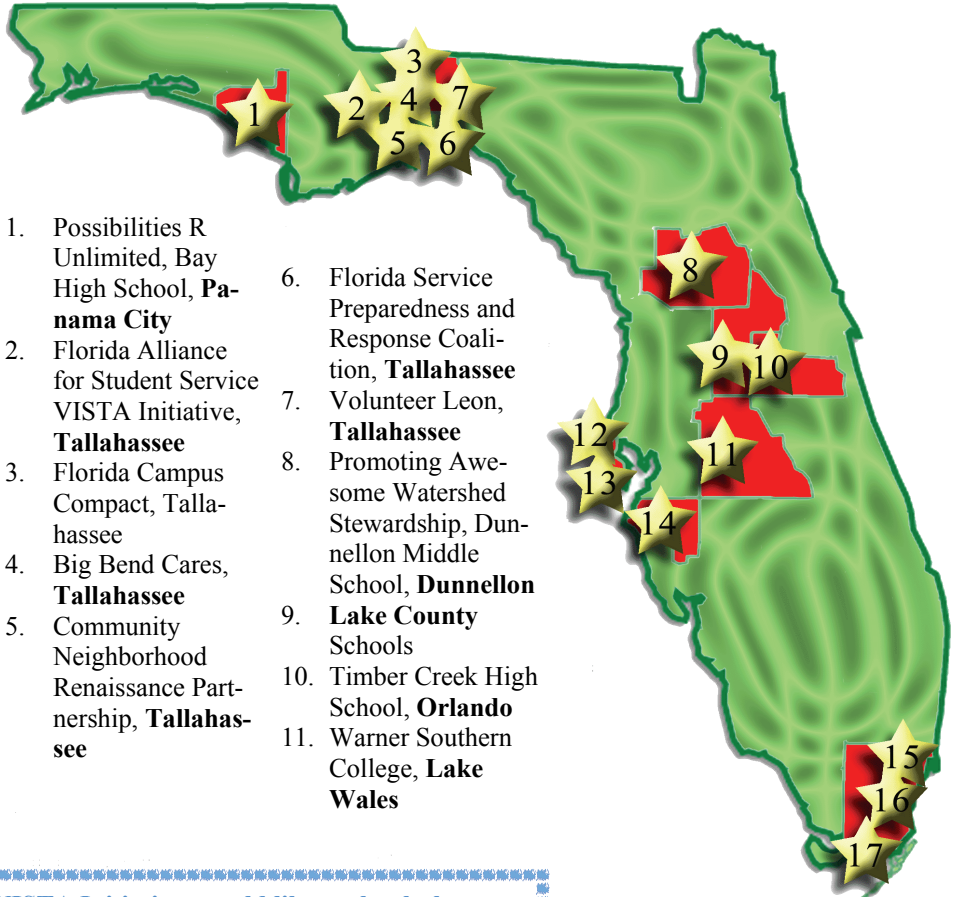
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FASS AMERICORPS*VISTA INITIATIVE

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

Check us out at
www.fsu.edu/~vista



1. Possibilities R Unlimited, Bay High School, **Panama City**
2. Florida Alliance for Student Service VISTA Initiative, **Tallahassee**
3. Florida Campus Compact, Tallahassee
4. Big Bend Cares, **Tallahassee**
5. Community Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership, **Tallahassee**
6. Florida Service Preparedness and Response Coalition, **Tallahassee**
7. Volunteer Leon, **Tallahassee**
8. Promoting Awesome Watershed Stewardship, Dunnellon Middle School, **Dunnellon**
9. **Lake County** Schools
10. Timber Creek High School, **Orlando**
11. Warner Southern College, **Lake Wales**

12. National Coalition for Communities and Justice, **St. Petersburg**
13. Eckerd College, **St. Petersburg**
14. ManaTEENS, **Bradenton**
15. Human Services Coalition, **Miami**
16. **Miami** Dade College
17. I Have a Dream, Overtown, **Miami**

The Florida Alliance for Student Service VISTA Initiative would like to thank the following VISTAs for their outstanding service this year. They will be missed.

Ross Loomis, CNRP
Amanda Kennedy, NCCJ
Lynn Taff, FASS VISTA Initiative
Kim Tabah, Volunteer Leon
Brent Jones, FCC
Laura Lockwood, ManaTEENS

AJ Kleinheksel, Warner Southern College
Anne Cavazuti, Eckerd College
Elizabeth Howard, I Have a Dream
Jonathan Small, HSC
Krista Walker, MDC
Dawne Waithe-Talbot, Lake County Schools

Save the Date!

August

18 AmeriCorps Alums, Tallahassee (7:30pm Pescado's Grill)
23-26 Pre-Service Orientation, Atlanta

September

30 Applications due for November PSO

October

15 Project Progress Reports Due
22 Make-a-Difference Day

November

15-18 Pre-Service Orientation, Atlanta
16-18 Florida Service Learning Institute, Tampa