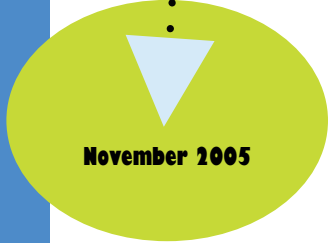


**FASS
AmeriCorps*
VISTA
Initiative**



VISTA VISION



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We are currently accepting applications for new project host sites.

For more information contact Laryn Flikkema at lflikkema@admin.fsu.edu

Positive Chain Reaction

My year as an AmeriCorps*VISTA member will be spent in Pensacola, FL serving with Pensacola’s Promise and their teen volunteer center, Chain Reaction. Pensacola’s Promise is an organization I learned about as a sophomore in college. I did an internship and fell in love with the mission of the organization and the passion of the Executive Director, Kristin Fairchild. Serving with Pensacola’s Promise and Chain Reaction is a dream come true.

As a VISTA member at Pensacola’s Promise, I work to build the capacity of Chain Reaction, and assist members who plan student-led service projects. I experience the most satisfaction from hearing our teenagers discuss how their service experiences have positively affected them. One volunteer, after having had a difficult time keeping the attention of a group of students she tutored, spoke of a new found respect for her teachers. Another volunteer,

(Continued on page 3)



VISTA Robin Jones (right) works alongside Chain Reaction volunteers on a Habitat for Humanity build

Empowering Youth

My name is Taurean Wong, I am a VISTA member serving with the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) of Tampa Bay; an organization that works to “Empower youth to make positive change and transform their communities.” Moreover, NCCJ is dedicated to facilitating a dialogue of respect and understanding among diverse races, religions, and cultures in our community. Our most effective “tool” to achieve this end is our annual cluster of week long summer sessions known as “Anytown”.

Taurean Wong
AmeriCorps*VISTA
NCCJ Tampa Bay



This past summer, over the course of seven weeks, seven groups made up of 250 high school participants, ages 14-18, attended a week long course of Anytown. Supervising each group of about 50, were volunteers drawn from all over Florida and throughout America. The mission of the NCCJ Tampa Bay’s Anytown program is to empower diverse groups of youth to create more inclusive schools and communities; helping to engender a feeling amongst participants that all individuals should be treated with respect, justice and understanding. Anytown encourages youth to confront their deepest prejudices, drawing people together from far ranging socio-economic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds to discuss a wide scope of challenging topics including; racism, religious diversity, sexual orientation, gender issues, social activism, and

(Continued on page 3)



Florida | **Campus Compact**



AmeriCorps*VISTA After College

Lori Wells
AmeriCorps*VISTA
Florida Campus Compact



Thinking about life after college is a scary endeavor. Thoughts filled my mind concerning the kind of person I wanted to become. College classes inspired me to make a difference in our world through my actions and communication. I just knew that when I walked down the graduation aisle I would morph into a Wonder Woman of sorts, with my gown as a cape and my diploma as a secret power. Okay, okay, maybe that is an extreme exaggeration, but doesn't everyone want to make a difference? I knew that I wanted to make a difference after graduation; I just didn't know what that would entail for me.

Towards the end of my senior year, I made an appointment at the career center on campus. My plan was to start looking for an internship, a place where I could get my foot in the door and perhaps continue on in a full time position. While I was waiting for a career counselor to see me, I began feeling a little uneasy. To make myself more comfortable I began randomly picking up fliers that read, "Have you ever thought of having a job in the automotive world?" and "Why not join the Walt Dis-

ney team for a summer at the happiest place on earth?" By shoving these fliers into my handy black, red, and green striped folder I carried, labeled "future job prospects," I felt as though I looked like I was serious about finding a career. Nothing that I was finding, though, seemed like a good fit for me, so I continued to investigate my surroundings further.

As I continued investigating the variety of fliers located within the center, my hand ended up finding its way to a row of boxes nailed fairly low on an inconspicuous wall. I am a short person, five foot two on a day that I wear heels, but even I had to bend down to examine what was before my knees. Upon closer inspection, I discovered that the fliers were dedicated to helping the United States. Most of the fliers were for the various military fields, "Be all that you can be" and such, but one flier ended up striking my eye. It read something like, "are you a person that doesn't know what they want to do with their life, and if so would you like to make a difference?" Before I could read the brochure further I the receptionist said, "Lori Wells, Randy, the career counselor, can see you now."

Randy was very pleasant and he tried to be as helpful as he could be, in a box that he called a career center, but I left thoroughly frustrated and anxious. The resources that they provided were limited. I felt that there was no way I was going to find my future career!

(Continued on Page 4)

Youth Councils Hold District Training

Barbara Burch
AmeriCorps*VISTA
Lake County Schools



The annual District Training for Service Learning Youth Councils was a great success. It was held at the FFA Leadership Training Center in Haines, Florida on September 28-30, 2005. The coordinator was Evelyn Robinson. The councils were from East Ridge, Umatilla, Tavares and South Lake High Schools. The students were there for leadership training. The guest speaker was Mr. Charles Thomas, Managing Director of CACH International. He taught the students about the importance of Homeland Security issues. Each Youth Council demonstrated leadership skills through speeches, role playing and obstacle courses. Each activity emphasized an area of leadership. This included communication, decision-making and problem solving skills.

The students were grateful for the opportunity to meet their counterparts from various High Schools. They left the training a unified group with the same ideas and shared experiences. Evelyn Robinson is to be congratulated for making the training a wonderful experience for the students and staff that attended.



Leadership Training Participants, September 2005



Sock Hop at Timber Creek



VISTA Brenda Graciani (middle) poses with Timber Creek students

My name is Brenda Graciani and I am an AmeriCorps*VISTA member serving at Timber Creek High School in Orlando, Florida. I have always had the ability to empathize with others and recognize that many people are in greater need than myself. Moreover, just the thought of being able to help others within the community is gratifying. This is

what motivated me to become an AmeriCorps*VISTA member at Timber Creek High School. Since I began my year of service in July, I have been involved in disaster preparedness, hurricane relief efforts and the “Sock Hop” fundraiser. Each of these activities has benefited the community and left me with a sense of accomplishment.

A short time into my service, I have already witnessed how my site supervisor, Mrs. Wendy Doromal and the Service Learning Academy at Timber Creek High School make a difference for the community and in the lives of the participating students. One of the more notable classes centers its theme on disaster preparedness; the students work on several projects to help prepare the community to respond to a hurricane.

In this class, groups are divided up to work on specific tasks; some groups have been working on hurricane survival brochures in both English and Spanish. While another group has drafted a flyer and constructed a drop box, to help collect products needed for the creation of hurricane survival kits for senior citizens in this region. Additionally, some students are working to create children’s hurricane books and a pet survival guide. Students also posted Hurricane Katrina relief fund flyers on big envelopes, distributing them to all teachers and around the whole school. To date, as a school we have raised over \$10,000 for the Red Cross. Nine students have relocated to Timber Creek High School as a result of Hurricane Katrina. To assist these relocated students, the Service Learning Academy assembled “goody back packs”, which included movie tickets, school supplies, personal items and t-shirts. Last year the Service Learning Academy conducted research on the homeless and found

(Continued on page 4)



(ANYTOWN continued from page 1)

oppression. By focusing on such controversial topics with each other, these diverse students overcome personal inhibitions and challenge their belief systems; they develop a new capacity to face difficulties in their lives that might otherwise impede their potential to positively relate to people different from themselves.

I am inspired to know there is a program like Anytown, where an extremely diverse body of young people can come together to discuss societal issues they face. A program where, the “straight A” student and the “drop-out” student can sit next to one another and still have fun; where an inner city students interact with students from the suburbs. Such relationship building and awareness are key elements that make the process of Anytown work. Anytown makes a seemingly untenable dream of community understanding and cooperation become a reality. As a former high school participant, I know from personal experience how this program can change a life. Now I am honored to be an AmeriCorps*VISTA member helping to coordinate the Anytown program, spread the mission and vision of NCCJ, and to help others help themselves.



(Chain Reaction, continued from page 1)

who seemed to be very good with tools and quite comfortable on our construction site, offered that the best part of volunteering at Habitat for Humanity was, “It just feels good to be able to contribute with something your good at.” Being so close to the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina, many of which have not yet fully recovered from earlier encounters with Hurricanes Ivan and Dennis, the citizens of Pensacola have a great need for a strong community. Chain Reaction members answer this call by; mobilizing teenagers, helping seniors rebuild their homes, and helping Katrina evacuees relocate. Regardless of the reasons behind our individual misfortunes, we have a strong sense of HOPE and believe we can accomplish anything!

The ABC's of Disaster Relief

Michael Olsen
AmeriCorps*VISTA
Leader



On October 19, 2005, an Alternative Break Corps (ABC) Troop composed of 20 FSU undergraduates and I, set out on a weekend trip to Mississippi, intent on helping with the Katrina Hurricane relief effort. We traveled over four hours westward to reach some of the most affected areas of the Gulf Coast. Before the weekend was over, our group had assisted two families in the battered Gulf Coast community of Pascagoula, Mississippi. Picking up hammers and crow bars, we cleared out these families' homes, helping them to build towards a more hopeful future. The whole experience of this trip has left me with a couple of lasting impressions. First, the magnitude of the tidal surge and the ensuing destruction it caused, can not be overstated. Second, I was inspired by the sense of cooperation and human resilience demonstrated from both the students I

traveled with and the disaster victims we came to assist.

At its most towering point, Katrina's tidal surge rose close to 30 feet. Residence whom I questioned, spoke of this monstrous wave reaching as far as a mile in-land, sweeping as far north as Highway 90. The shear power of the wave was evidenced closer to the coast line, where I saw former structures which had been reduced to mere piles of rubble. In some cases the second story of homes had been hurled several blocks northward, torn free from the houses foundation by this powerful surge. A couple of local residents, according to the family we first helped, attempted to endure the storm in there house and were forced to escape the rising waters in their 22 foot cutter. Maneuvering the vessel through flooded neighborhoods, they rescued marooned neighbors from their rooftops. It was not until they were a mile inland, that their boat began scraping objects below them: objects they soon discovered to be automobiles. Once the water had retreated, I noticed it left a water line on most houses at about 4 feet. Several residents speculated that if New Orleans' levies had not burst, their circumstances would have made the headlines featuring the largely untold drama of America's "tsunami".

Before our ABC group of 20 FSU students arrived to Pascagoula, I entertained worries over the hardiness of my travel companions, a rather sexist thought. Sure, I reasoned, their heart was in the right place, but their cozy sleeping bags, I-Pods, and light hearted conversations led me to believe this group was better suited for a slumber party, than the rigors demanded by relief

(Continued on Page 5)

(After College from Page 2)

But then I remembered the last flyer that I picked up to read. It was a two sided, black, white and red flier sitting in my folder labeled "future job prospects." I pulled it out and began to read about AmeriCorps.

After deciding that I would be suited for an AmeriCorps position, I started searching and found a variety of ways I could help change the world. "Hurrah," I thought, now I'll really get to change the world and have the greatest adventure of my life! Today I am an AmeriCorps*VISTA member with Florida Campus Compact; I am having a great adventure and I am changing the world! It just isn't in the way that I had first expected, but that's another story.

(Sock Hop from Page 3)

that the number one need of the homeless in Central Florida is the need for socks. This spurred our Service Learning Academy to hold a fundraiser last year and inspired me to help organize a similar event this year; both called "Sock Hop." By paying \$2.00 or donating a pair of new white socks, students were able to participate in several "Sock Hop" sponsored games and enjoy the music of a live DJ from a local radio station. The Service Learning Academy was able to raise over \$2300 as well as 178 pairs of socks to benefit the Health Care Center for the Homeless in Orlando.

During my time here at Timber Creek I have been extremely impressed by the continuous commitment, dedication, and enthusiasm displayed by the students in the Service Learning Academy. I consider myself fortunate to be able to work along side a group of students that all have something special to contribute and thank all of them for allowing me to enter their academic, and sometimes, personal lives. I know that the rest of the year will bring even more remarkable challenges that will make this experience all the more memorable.



(ABC Disaster Relief From Page 4)

work. But wow, my first impression was wrong; any doubt about these volunteers was quickly removed by their inspired work ethic. Several young women, refused to shy away from power tools needed to loosen floor boards, while enduring injury and continuing to work. This show of determination to help the victims, led many local residents to comment that they have a restored faith in the younger generation. One tearful but grateful gentleman in his 80's welcomed us back to be his guest anytime. So great was his appreciation, he vowed to root for FSU football, even if they should play against his alma mater, LSU. These feelings of gratitude, and the resilience I witnessed with everyone involved in this relief effort, despite the magnitude of destruction, made this trip to Pascagoula, Mississippi an invaluable experience.



October 2005, FSU Alternative Break Corps in Pascagoula, Mississippi

Thinking Positively

Josh Orphanidys
AmeriCorps*VISTA
Eckerd College



Every year the Eckerd College Office of Service Learning puts on an event called Into the Streets. It is an opportunity for freshman to volunteer, familiarize themselves with the St. Petersburg area and have fun. Students are afforded the opportunity to learn about issues related to poverty, homelessness, and environmental issues. The goal is to encourage students to volunteer on a consistent basis. In fact, the motto for Into the Streets is "Try it for a day, you may love it for a lifetime."

This year was a record breaking year in terms of participation. Over 300 students volunteered at 19 different sites, a 50 percent increase from the previous year. A lot of organization and planning was required to make the event successful. A concept that helped me through all of this was something I learned at my AmeriCorps*VISTA Pre-Service Orientation, Opportunity Thinking. Opportunity Thinking and Critical Thinking are two different ways of analyzing information. Critical Thinking asks "What can be better *next time*?" or "How *should* I have done this?" It looks for the negative so that improvements can be made. Opportunity Thinking looks for the positive that can come out of the situation. It always asks "What *opportunity* can come from this?"

This way of thinking has helped to guide me through my first couple of months of AmeriCorps*VISTA, especially when dealing with an event like Into the Streets.

The following example illustrates how I utilized Opportunity Thinking to turn a potentially negative situation into a positive experience.

The Eckerd College Office of Service Learning was days away from implementing Into the Streets when a tropical storm later to become Hurricane Katrina appeared suddenly. The college's Vice President and Dean of Students asked us to please move all of the outdoor sites indoors. We were struggling to find three organizations that could take 15 to 20 volunteers with such little notice. Countless phone calls were made and the tactic of shameless pleading was employed. Eventually organizations were secured and students that signed up were able to volunteer.

Many would recognize this as a stressful situation. There were numerous circumstances in which I was tempted to think "How could this happen?" or "What could we have done to prevent this?" However, Opportunity Thinking provided me the guidance to complete the task of finding organizations. I was able to step back from the situation, analyze it, and see how to make it better. Because we had to search for indoor volunteer opportunities the Eckerd College Office of Service Learning had the opportunity to partner with new community organizations. Students that volunteered at these sites were originally signed up to volunteer with completely different organizations. For example, students who were signed up to do a beach cleanup volunteered at a hospice. This gave them an opportunity to expand their perspective outside of their main areas of interest. The experience was an exercise in Opportunity Thinking. Instead of using Critical Thinking and focusing on the negative, we looked for the positive opportunities that could come out of this potentially negative situation.



Eckerd Students volunteering in St. Petersburg



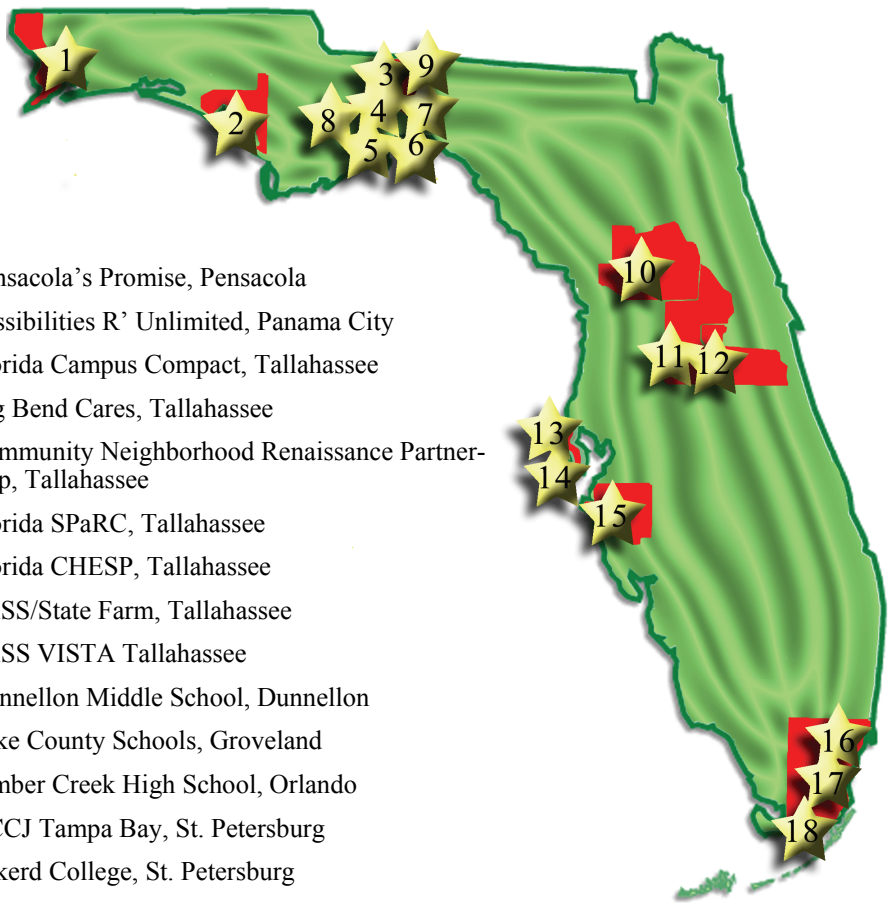
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AMERICORPS*VISTA
INITIATIVE**

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. 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

The FASS VISTA Initiative would like to welcome the following new VISTAs for the 2005-2006 program year!

- Siramene Abraham, Miami Dade College
- Meg Buckley, Human Services Coalition
- Barbara Burch, Lake County Schools
- Brenda Graciani, Timber Creek
- Robin Jones, Pensacola's Promise
- Regina Knight, NCCJ-Tampa

- Jay Liegl, ManaTeens
- Michael Olsen, FASS
- Joshua Orphanidys, Eckerd College
- Carlton Stout, ManaTeens
- Lori Wells, FCC

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

Save the Date!

November

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

December

- 8-10 Nat'l Conference on Disability Inclusion, Washington DC

January

- 15 Project Progress Reports Due
- 16 Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

February

- 22-26 Student Civic Engagement Conference, Gainesville

March

- 22-25 National Service Learning Conference, Philadelphia
- 30 Service Learning & the Arts Conference, Miami

April

- 15 Project Progress Reports Due