

**FASS
AmeriCorps
*VISTA
Initiative**



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We are currently recruiting
VISTA members for the following
sites:

MDC — I Have a Dream, Inc.

Miami-Dade College

Community Tampa Bay

For more information visit:

www.fsu.edu/~vista



Florida | **Campus Compact**



VISTA VISION

November 2006

The New Orleans Experience

By Lori Wells
*FASS AmeriCorps*VISTA Member*
2005-2006

The effects of New Orleans and the conference that I attended there entitled, “Building Community in the Gulf States,” has touched my life in a special way. My mind swirls around the possibilities of wanting and not being able to do more for a community that was ultimately able to show me how to take my power back. To explain, I will use New Orleans and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as a guide.



Lori presenting the “Five C’s”

As with any life experience, there are ups and downs. Sometimes those ups and downs are more devastating than others. Failures and obstacles and waves of hopelessness can come crashing down, damage things I have dedicated myself to. Sometimes, life sends a wave so powerful and that does so much damage I am left staring at the scattered pieces of what used to be my dream. Such a similar feeling of despondency is what I felt as I viewed only a small portion of the lower ninth ward in New Orleans.

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Keep Dreaming Big

By Marjorie Fahs
*FASS AmeriCorps*VISTA Member*
2005-2006

My name is Marjorie, I am serving as an AmeriCorps*VISTA member in the bustling city of Miami for an amazing non-profit called I Have a Dream – Overtown, Inc., a long-term scholarship program established to motivate and inspire at-risk youth to do all things necessary to achieve their dreams. I was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a fairly large country located right in the heart of Africa, but I was raised in up-state New York. Being that I am not from the South, I did not know what to expect when I began my year of service in Miami. I have since found that every moment of this past year has been a blessing.



Marjorie tutoring a “Dreamer”

I am now a veteran of the AmeriCorps establishment. I served for one year as an AmeriCorps member in Rochester, NY with the Neighborhood Empowerment Team program and

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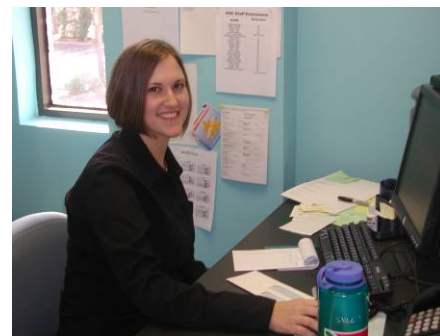
The Prosperity Campaign

By Meg Buckley

FASS AmeriCorps*VISTA Member

2005-2006

I am nearing the end of my term as an AmeriCorps*VISTA member and I cannot believe how quickly time has passed. Working with the Human Services Coalition (HSC) in Miami has taught me so much about what it means to make a difference in a community. HSC does this through many projects, but the one that I have worked most closely with is the Prosperity Campaign. This campaign links low-wage workers to services and benefits in hopes of lifting them and their families out of poverty.



Meg hard at work

This year HSC has nine Prosperity Centers. These are non-profit organizations in the community that we work with to offer services such as free tax preparation, financial literacy, benefits screening, home buying, and small business loans. From October 2005 through January 2006 I worked to train most of these centers to prepare tax returns and screen clients for benefits. During the 2006 tax season our centers prepared over 1,900 tax returns and brought in over \$2.5 million to the community. Many of our clients received tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a credit geared towards low-income working parents. Once clients receive their returns, counselors help them plan for their future. It is wonderful to see the change that we can help make in the lives of people.

One of the countless success stories at HSC is of a 39-year-old single mother whose yearly apartment rental costs total \$11,400 when her yearly income working four jobs is \$11,167. She went to Sant La Haitian Neighborhood Center to have her taxes prepared for free and received a \$4,538 tax return. This money went a long way. "I did a few things for my family with the tax money I got," she modestly answered when asked what she did with the income tax return. In reality, she paid almost three months of back rent, bought a new refrigerator, took her children out for a day and indulged them just a little bit and made her oldest daughter's graduation as special as possible by buying her graduation cap and gown, ring and pictures.

(The New Orleans Experience continued from page 1)

A friend of mine and I decided to drive through the lower ninth ward in order to empathize with the people who's lives were left in shambles, but it was to no avail. No matter how hard I tried, I could not "experience" what it would have been like to be stuck on a house that was floating into a neighbor's house, with the words HELP and NEED FOOD written on the side. X marks the spot, but on this X there included the number of people who died during the nightmare that Mother Nature sent. Loss of family, loss of pets, loss of house, and loss of life were the effects of what is now called the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Driving through the lower ninth ward immediately brought out the sense of powerlessness that has haunted me most of my life. Perhaps I can empathize with what it feels like to wake up and be okay and then—BANG! Something "catastrophic" happens that leaves me curled up and crying out of fear, anger, loss, and sadness. In the experience of loss, all human beings are as one. Empathy as it pertains to loss can be felt by every human being.

As I think back on the feelings from the New Orleans conference, I shift from feeling powerless, to feeling strength and commitment to the community that needs to be rebuilt. In life, I feel that growth can only occur when something is taken away. If a person stays the same, won't they become stagnant as the world changes around them? Change, renewal and growth are important in our lives no matter how horrible the costs seem at the time.

Through community, its people and the connection that we create in life, growth is possible in an individual as well as in the heart of a community. As with any "destruction" there is a chance for a community of people to come together and rebuild. During the rebuilding process, what is lost can be regained in an astonishing way. Where something is lost, something must also be gained. This universal law of truth is what gives communities and individuals the power to grow. I know that community is what will continue to nurture my growth as I get older no matter what I "lose" in the process. I previously mentioned that New Orleans was able to show me how to take my power back. As a female I have been taught to defer

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Big Bend Care's AIDS Walk

By Jake Galles
FASS AmeriCorps*VISTA Leader
2006-2007



VISTA member Lark Mitchell and Leader Jake Galles distributing food at Big Bend Care's 16th Annual AIDS Walk.

HIV/AIDS is a challenge both locally and nationally. According to the Center for Disease Control at the end of 2003, an estimated 1,039,000 to 1,185,000 persons in the United States were living with HIV/AIDS and nearly 40,000 additional people are diagnosed each year. The state of Florida ranks third in the nation with more than 100,000 adults being diagnosed positive for HIV/AIDS, of which more than 1,000 live in the Big Bend area. Big Bend Cares is local non-profit agency working to serve more than half of these citizens and is the only organization in the Big Bend area that is solely devoted to providing HIV/AIDS services.

On October 8, 2006 Big Bend Cares hosted their 16th annual AIDS walk on a gorgeous Sunday afternoon in downtown Tallahassee. I volunteered my services preparing and distributing food at the event with my fellow FASS member Lark Mitchell. Sitting at the table for the duration of the afternoon gave me an interesting perspective of the day and of the people that were involved. I was able to observe, if not chat with, a large percentage of the individuals who would walk that day (by chat I mean offer a granola bar and say "how about this weather"). I was delightfully surprised

by the diversity of folks who turned out to march for this great cause. It is truly a powerful thing when people from all walks of life come together with one common, benevolent purpose.

Downtown Tallahassee was bustling with participants as the walk kicked off at 3:00pm. 678 people comprised of 31 teams hit the streets to do their part for HIV/AIDS prevention; this was the largest turn-out to date. Each year the Tallahassee community is becoming more aware of the problems that HIV/AIDS and related issues pose.

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(Keep Dreaming Big continued from page 1)

I am one month away from completing my term as a VISTA member. My experiences in AmeriCorps have helped to clarify my path in life; I realize that certain social injustices irk me to the core. Serving through AmeriCorps and volunteer service are great ways to take action and fight injustice. One of the greatest things about volunteering is that it is easy to do. As the late Dr. King once said, "Everyone can be great because everyone can serve."

At the risk of sounding pompous, I have never felt more confident that I am capable of achieving any goal that I pursue with conviction; my AmeriCorps experiences have lit a flame in me that will be impossible to extinguish. I now know that an authentic life is led when you get involved with what you are passionate about. This is the type of life I choose for myself, dancing to the beat of my own drum.

There are 51 third and fourth graders in the I Have a Dream – Overtown program. I feel reassured when I witness their resilience first-hand. Less than 35% are expected to graduate from high school yet they are all transforming themselves from at-risk kids into true achievers. Everyday I find hope and strength through their perseverance. The Dreamers and I are blessed because the future will bring so many new opportunities. Even with adversity, there is a purpose and beauty to be found in life. This is the greatest gift AmeriCorps has given me: inspiring me to keep on dreaming and to dream big.

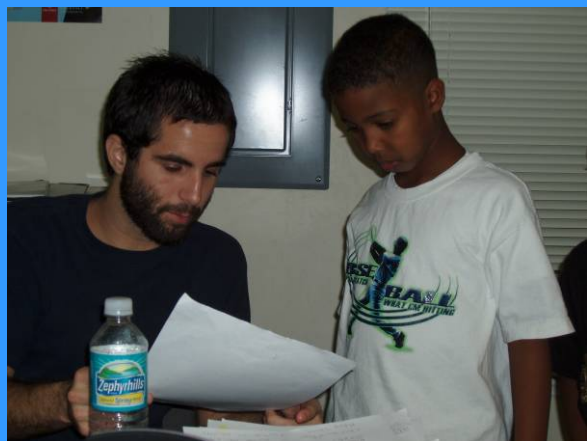
" I now know that an authentic life is led when you get involved with what you are passionate about"

Apalachee Ridge Technology Center

By Peejay Perez

FASS AmeriCorps*VISTA member

2006-2007



Peejay helping a student

After receiving my Bachelors degree in Anthropology from Florida State University I knew that I wanted to be involved in the community. I spent the next two years substitute teaching at the middle and high school level in Leon County. After teaching for two years, I felt that it was time, as Gandhi said, "to be the change I wished to see in the world." So I started my term as a FASS VISTA member in May of 2006 at the Apalachee Ridge Learning and Technology Center. The Center provides

after-school programs using technology to focus on homework help and mentoring for students ages 8-18. The Center is supported by the Apalachee Ridge Estates Neighborhood Association, a tenant run organization that convenes monthly at the Center to discuss community issues. It is important for residents to make decisions about their own lives and community. I am excited to see their passion about affecting positive change in the neighborhood.

This past summer the Center hosted a Digital Media Camp, students from across Leon County learned about music, film and graphics production. They were provided the opportunity to work with a variety of digital media including: ACID, Fruity Loops, Pro Tools, Photosuite, Photoshop, Auto Producer, Windows Movie Maker, and Nero. I was fortunate to be surrounded by talented students and staff at the camp. I co-taught the film portion of the camp with Faith Kakulu, a Master's student in film at Florida State University. Students wrote, produced, and filmed their own projects which included two short films and a documentary. I also worked alongside Terrance McNeil to instruct students in songwriting and music production. Students produced their own beats, wrote lyrics, and recorded their own tracks. Students learned the fundamentals of Adobe Photoshop in a graphic design class taught by Syrheda Reed, who served as a Summer VISTA Associate.

(continued on page 5)

(The New Orleans Experience continued from page 2)

all thoughts, ideas and feelings to male figures in my life. I felt that I did not have a voice or a say even in my own future. But after the conference (as well as what a year as an active VISTA can do) I have come away with a new sense of power. This sense comes from the people in the community who showed me how to take charge of my life and fill the holes that have at times left me feeling hopeless. Due to the indisputable positivity of growth, the hopeless feeling that I got from seeing the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is steadily being replaced by a voice of power. I saw this voice in the church signs that read "Reclaiming New Orleans," and "Rebuilding New Orleans Together." People are what make a community, not the streets, houses, hospitals, schools, stores, or even the amazing music that fills a street. It is the people who are playing the hymns of renewal and hope, who live in the houses, work in the stores and hospitals and go to the schools to learn. People are the ones that make a community strong. The people on the streets of New Orleans, the ones that I talked to, were filled with hope, confidence, patience, and the foresight to see that they are a community of people who are willing to grow and rebuild together. While this year is coming to a close, I know these experiences will never be closed for me. They will forever impact my life and the way I see our communities.

"None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful."
 ~Mother Teresa

(AIDS Walk, Continued from page 3)

Big Bend Cares collected almost \$35,000 in donations as a result of this year's AIDS Walk, an increase of about \$8,000 from the previous year.

FASS VISTA member Lark Mitchell began her term of service with Big Bend Cares in August of this year, and has already made a lasting and positive impact with Big Bend Cares and in the Tallahassee community. One of Lark's main projects, in addition to organizing the AIDS walk, is to coordinate Big Bend Cares' Youth Corps. Lark recruits and educates youth and adults ages 13-24 on the subjects of HIV/AIDS, STDs, abstinence, and teen pregnancy. In turn these youth and young adults teach others through peer-to-peer education.

There is a great need for the services that Big Bend Cares provides for the Tallahassee community. The AIDS walk gives people an opportunity to make a difference and the donations that Big Bend Cares receives from the annual walk go a long way for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS in the Tallahassee area. It was truly a pleasure to be a part of something so important (ensuring that no walker go hungry) and to learn more about the work that this organization does.

My favorite part about being a VISTA Leader is having the opportunity to see first hand the great work that our host sites and VISTA members accomplish, and knowing that I play at least a small part in enabling it to happen. Even when I am sitting behind my computer screen for hours on end completing paperwork, I have pride in the work that I do. This comes from knowing that each of the host sites with the FASS VISTA Initiative is making a real and positive difference. I personally commend all FASS VISTA members, for sacrificing a year of your life, and for doing your part to make your community, and this world a better place.

"It is truly a powerful thing when people from all walks of life come together with one common, benevolent purpose."



Peejay and Syrhedra with a student at the Digital Media Camp

(Apalachee Ridge continued from page 4)

In August, we celebrated the camp's success with a block party for the Apalachee Ridge neighborhood and students were presented with awards for their outstanding work. The block party was well attended by residents, parents, politicians, and local media. The positive media coverage is currently helping with our volunteer recruitment efforts. The Digital Media Camp was a great experience, and I hope that it continues to grow in the years to come.

Serving as a VISTA member has been a great learning opportunity for me. Everyday I am reminded of the considerable difference between possessing knowledge and the ability to convey that knowledge to others. Learning how to communicate with kids in way that they can understand and learn has been the most challenging aspect of my VISTA service thus far. Working with the students at the Center each day provides an opportunity to build upon both my strengths and weaknesses. I am now able to better communicate with students and neighborhood residents. In the time I have remaining I hope to instill a sense of brotherhood within my students and community by promoting charity and non-violence.

Welcome New VISTAs!

Dorrissa Griffin, Pensacola's Promise
 Carla Caison, CNRP
 Julia Craig, Human Services Coalition
 Dana Hatteberg, Florida Campus Compact
 Meghan Cohorst, Eckerd College
 Meghan Rimelspach, New College of Florida

Lark Mitchell, Big Bend Cares
 Tammy Jeffries, Community Tampa Bay
 Nicki Mauriello, MANATEens
 Kris Suarez, MANATEens
 Sara Guiffre, Florida Impact
 Amy Kochanasz, State Farm



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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



1. Pensacola's Promise, Pensacola
2. Possibilities R' Unlimited, Panama City
3. Florida Campus Compact, Tallahassee
4. Big Bend Cares, Tallahassee
5. Florida Impact, Tallahassee
6. FASS/State Farm, Tallahassee
7. FASS VISTA Tallahassee
8. Community Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership, Tallahassee
9. Timber Creek High School, Orlando
10. Community Tampa Bay, St. Petersburg
11. Eckerd College, St. Petersburg
12. ManaTeens, Bradenton
13. New College of Florida, Sarasota
14. Human Services Coalition, Miami
15. Miami-Dade College, Miami
16. 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.

Save the Date!

November 6-8
12th Annual Florida Service Learning Institute
Orlando, FL
www.fsu.edu/~flserve

December 1-2, 2006
Florida AmeriCorps and National Service Conference
Orlando, FL
<http://volunteerflorida.org/conference/>

January 15, 2006
Project Progress Reports due to FASS office
(VISTA Supervisors)

January 26-28, 2007
Florida Campus Compact Student Conference
Tallahassee, FL
www.floridacompact.org

March 14-16, 2007
Gulf South Summit on Service-Learning and Civic
Engagement through Higher Education
Tulane University
www.tulane.edu/~ServLrng/summit/

March 28-31
18th Annual Service-Learning Conference: Beyond
Borders, Beyond Boundries
Albuquerque, NM
<http://programs.regweb.com/metro/NYLC2007/registration/>