

VISTA Viewfinder
30 march 2010

As an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, each of us feels like a part of a family; a family of individuals working towards a common goal using our creative energies, past experiences, and motivation to serve those in our nation who are less fortunate. In January, a member of this family passed away. Diane Williams was a member of the Oregon Microenterprise Network's Asset Building Corps and worked for CASH (Creating Assets, Savings, and Hope) Oregon, improving financial literacy services to Oregonians in the Portland area. Fellow VISTAs who had the privilege to work with Diane remember her profound observations, insightful words, and funny stories. Below are some of these memories—painting a picture of a person who shared her sense of hope and perseverance with those around her.

“Diane was a strong woman who, despite any roadblocks that may have come her way, persevered and worked diligently to succeed. Her radiant smile was contagious, and she had a beautiful way of finding joy in life: she once told me her favorite activity had been taking naps in tree branches in Italy.” –Paige Huggler

“Many of us VISTAs have ambitious goals about solving poverty, although we do not know poverty. I believe that people were impacted by more than Diane's ambition to volunteer; they heard a personal experience of word-travel, creative writing, education, and hope. What made Diane's words so powerful, when I heard her voice her opinion, were her deep understanding of what poverty is and why she returned to be a part of the change. The world needs stories of hope and ambition like Diane's.” –Luke Bonham

As we think about what motivated us to pursue a VISTA year, a look at Diane's inspiration is both a powerful and hopeful reminder of why we're here:

“Some people need money and power to motivate them. I need inspiration and hope to reward me for succeeding when life seems bleak and impossible. When I apply for opportunities, I carefully weigh the costs of my time against the rewards the experience can bring me. An opportunity to serve in the community, organizing, and impacting others is an opportunity which brings great reward and satisfaction at the end of the day. When I was a young student, I lived in the lowest poverty area in Chicago. Although my personal circumstances were dire, I was treated with dignity and respect by teachers and volunteers who gave their time to help me see my value and the hope for change in my life. These people gave me a reason to look beyond my circumstances and to strive to be that change I wanted to see in my world. As I look back on these experiences, I am reminded of how the service of others greatly impacted my life. For this reason I choose to seek opportunities like AmeriCorps to take my turn in impacting lives.” –Diane Williams

In an effort to memorialize Diane's contribution to the VISTA program as well as to support her daughter, Genevieve (“Gigi”) Williams, a fund has been established that will allow Gigi to get a higher education. Diane valued education as a way to address a core cause of poverty and enabling her daughter to gain an education is the greatest legacy she could leave behind.

To contribute to the fund (a custodial account), please send your contribution to:
Damilia Head
547 South C Street
Oregon City, OR 97045

Please make checks payable to: Genevieve Marie Williams