



October 2011

MVP Highlights

Quarterly newsletter for the Maine VISTA Project

Maine VISTA Project Kicks Off

Katie Klein

August 2011 marked the start of the Commission's new AmeriCorps VISTA project. VolunteerMaine VISTA project wrapped up, and Maine VISTA Project began.

New VISTA Members

In August we welcomed sixteen new VISTA Members to the project. These VISTAs bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their sites, as well as enthusiasm for the goals they will pursue this year.

The Telling Room welcomed Emily Baer and Molly Haley. Emily is working on development and Molly is coordinating volunteers to expand the afterschool program.

Van Beckman is serving with Healthy Androscoggin to start a 5-2-1-0 Let's Go initiative.

UMaine Cooperative Extensions brought on VISTA members Harry Leahey in Bryant Pond and Genna Cherichello in Waldoboro to expand their service learning programs.

Mike Costello (UMO) and Caleb Gilbert (USM) are serving in Maine universities to make those campuses more veteran friendly.

Several VISTA members are working with Maine schools to help with service learning and/or extended learning opportunities. Katie Richardson is serving at MDI RSS, P.J. Stewart serves

with Searsport schools, Amy Nigen is at MSAD 54 in Skowhegan, and Laurie Beane shuttles between several York County school districts.



VISTAs at New Member Orientation

Tom MacMillan also works on service learning, but through afterschool programs at LearningWorks.

Both Catholic Charities and Southern Maine Agency on Aging use many volunteers, but they brought on Kerrie Keller and Monika Pardon to help them institute better volunteer management practices.

Jennifer Wilson is also focusing on volunteer management at Community Financial Literacy.

Tri County Mental Health welcomed Jerry DeWitt. Jerry applies his military and health care experience to connecting veterans to services.

These incredible VISTA members wasted no time jumping into their service as you'll see in this newsletter.



VISTAs at August 31 NMO

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“Press-entation” at the Blaine House Conference on Service and Volunteerism

Pamela Stewart

Presenter Megan Emery, the children's technician at Lewiston Public Library and VISTA alum, spoke on the topic “Building Media Relationships.” Megan led us through a discussion exploring and contrasting the use of traditional media, such as print, radio and television with social media, characterized by an online presence through applications, such as Twitter and Facebook. Traditional media can target a specific geographical area, but it is expensive and only communicates one-way. Social media may cost less and be interactive, although it is difficult to control access, and requires frequent online attention. There was no one better way, except the way that would work best for our own organizations.

In traditional media relationships, Megan relies on contacts and networks she has developed over several years. She stressed the importance of forming a relationship with a reporter who is already covering stories about issues related to our organization. For print media, find out how our contact prefers to receive their information from us (either press releases, requests for articles or tips on events they might like to report on). Radio advertisements must have a “hook,” something unusual

or interesting to attract or intrigue the listener. In any case, building rapport with press contacts takes time and persistence. Once we know how our contact wants us to interact with them, we look for topics of interest to help them do their jobs.

When creating press releases, Megan stressed that many media sources have a specific way they like to receive information from the public. Call and find out how they want our information, how we should send it (email, fax, etc.) and who should receive it, to ensure it will be seen. All events and news sent to the media should include contact information, press date, a headline, lead paragraph, fleshed out by the body of the information. Make sure to include an “about our organization” section and details for readers following up or requesting more information.



Building Media Relationships workshop.

Most papers will accept public service announcements at no cost; so make sure to utilize any and all opportunities to promote our organizations. Megan offered a clever idea for reaching teens: put a call out for teens in the calendar section of the local newspaper. Although the

teen may not see it, typically a grandparent, church member or neighbor will read it and pass it on to the youth.

In terms of building a good online presence, take the leap and create Facebook and Twitter accounts. There are plenty of how-to sites to help make the creation easy. For an active social media presence, Megan reminded us of the importance of keeping organization information current and fresh: update news about yourself and your organization. Also add details about any event that would be of interest to those who subscribe to your site. Remember that anyone might see your posts, so keep every message appropriate for all audiences. We can

keep our “fans” and “followers” engaged, by constructively responding to those who post and including the different sectors of our target population.

What should we report? Whether using traditional or social networking methods, report “everything” - successes, factoids, pictures, press releases, staff bios, grants received, donations, want ads or wish lists, relevant links – give your “press-ence” a personality! Be aware of “advocates” and “WOM (word of mouth) Champions” or those who use social media to report negative information to their family and friends. When negative press occurs, Megan suggested we minimize damage by meeting with key players and communicating a shared message throughout our organization for anyone who inquires. And always, if the mistake was caused by our organization, make our apology public and visible.

Although the presentation was very enjoyable and informative, my favorite part came when Megan recommended investigating several websites. These very cool sites included: weebly.com (create quick and easy web pages); animoto.com (easy online video slideshows); alice.org (a 3D educational animation tool); prezi.com (an easy to use, free presentation designer); and sparked.com (a site for online micro-volunteering). We ended the session armed with tools and tips for improving the media presence of our respective organizations and at least one of us was feeling a little more “in the know” than when we arrived.



AmeriCorps members network geographically at BHC.

Media Covers “Let’s Go!”

Van tells the Sun Journal how much sugar is in your drinks.

Nathaniel Beckman

A reporter for the local newspaper for Lewiston-Auburn, the Sun Journal, came to the HA offices a few weeks ago looking to interview some of our staff around the subject of healthy eating for kids. Although I was not part of the initial interviewing, I was eventually called in to meet the reporter and describe a tool that the Let's Go program uses, the Sugar Bottle display. This is a simple, visual and interactive display which shows the "actual" amount of sugar (in granulated form) found in many popular soft drinks. She expressed interest in arranging a photo session with me and the display to go



Van shows the sugar content of soda. Photo by Sun Journal.

with the healthy eating article, but could I assemble a kit with the actual drink liquids still inside. I agreed and that evening gathered the necessary items at the grocery store, then the following weekend stopped at the Nutrition Center in Lewiston to meet the photographer. Not only did he take multiple pictures of the display and individual bottles with sugar packets in front of them, but he also shot a video of me describing the display for several minutes and touting the benefits of water.

Early last week we received word that although the article had been submitted, the editors apparently had little interest in it and it likely wouldn't run. This past Sunday, however, lo and behold, my photo appeared alongside a nearly full-page article talking about Let's Go! and the 5-2-1-0 message at length, in addition to the video appearing online. The entire package can be seen here: <http://www.sunjournal.com/bplus/story/1094267>.

Census Data on Elderly Helps SMAA Plan Services

Monika prepares databook of elder population

Ken Murray

One of Monika Pardon's first projects as a VISTA was to sort through the 2010 Census to compile data on the elderly population of southern Maine and make it available to Southern Maine Agency on Aging staff.

The statistics on the growth of the elderly population of southern Maine are quite startling - the population of people age 60 and over in York and Cumberland counties has grown by 30% since the 2000 Census. SMAA expects the data to be very valuable as they work with local communities to plan and fund senior services to benefit their residents.

There was no one within the agency with the time to pull this together until Monika started her service with us. She has made a big difference.

Upcoming dates

October 31-November 3
Framingham, MA
Pre-Service Orientation

Calvin and Pete, our newest VISTAs, will begin their service with this PSO.

November 4
October reports due

Submit your monthly reports in OnCorps.

November 9, 9:30-3:30pm
MCCS Office, Augusta
VISTA Training

We'll welcome new VISTAs and congratulate VISTAs finishing their terms. VRC Training and more.

November 11
Veterans Day

Stay tuned for possible direct service opportunities.

November 19, 2pm
The Big Pie Farm, Waldoboro
VISTA Thanksgiving

Come to Mike Ashmore's farm to celebrate Thanksgiving with all your VISTA friends! RSVP to Monika and let her know what you're bringing.

November 24
Thanksgiving

Timekeeping is due on:

November 4
November 18
December 2
December 16
December 30

Paydays:
October 28
November 11
November 25
December 9
December 23

CFL Nominated for Better Neighbor Fund Grant

Jennifer Wilson, VISTA member at Community Financial Literacy, encouraged her fellow VISTAs to support her host organization in October.

64 Southern Maine organizations were nominated for the Better Neighbor Fund, but only eight will get part of \$25,000 from Town and Country Federal Credit Union. The winners will be decided by popular vote on Facebook. Good luck CFL!

Community Partnership Plans Shelter for Homeless Veterans

Jerry DeWitt

We are working with the Veterans Administration from Togus VA Medical Center Homeless Veterans Project, Dr. Bann, Joan Detel Tri County Mental Health Housing Coordinator, Douglas Rawlings professor at University Maine Farmington and Founder of Veterans for Peace (who is a Viet Nam veteran



Mike and Jerry take a break from orientation for a motorcycle ride.

himself), Ken St Amand volunteer expert in community development and a Viet Nam veteran, Tina Clark Director of public relations and community Development for TCMHS. We are all working together to refurbish a building in Farmington to become an emergency veterans housing/shelter. The effort is focused on working together with the veterans in that community, the Veterans Administration, and Tri County Mental Health to provide services along with housing. With the University of Maine in that town we can also use the university's education programs for veterans. We will meet with the VA Homeless Team in Togus this month to build our relationship.

Volunteer Reception Center Model Presented To U.S. Coast Guard Area Committee Meeting

Eileen Buzzello

On September 27 VISTA Eileen Buzzello traveled to Portsmouth New Hampshire to present to the United States Coast Guard (U.S.C.G.) on the topic of using the Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) model in their disaster exercises. Earlier in the year Eileen led a VRC team in a joint mass rescue exercise with the U.S.C.G. in Bar Harbor. Trained VRC team members processed nearly 100 actor volunteers, gathering their personal information, giving them a safety briefing, and coordinating their assignments with the

U.S.C.G. The VRC team earned the highest ranking in accountability of all the various components participating in the exercise, and several of the team members were VISTAs, including Erin Dunne, Brad Hunter, Whitney Guthrie, and Michael Costello. The purpose of the New Hampshire presentation was to inform the audience how the VRC model can be adapted to these types of disaster preparedness exercises and the benefits to the exercising agency as well as to the volunteer team members. The U.S.C.G. is currently considering adding the use of a VRC team to all future exercises of this type nationwide. Eileen will be training new VISTAs in the VRC model at the November VISTA training, so they will be ready to staff a VRC in the event of a disaster or another exercise opportunity.

Outreach Generates Donations and Volunteers

Whitney Guthrie has done a lot of outreach for United Way of York County lately. Presenting at UPS, Loaned Executive Training, Kennebunk Portside Rotary, UNE Fall Community Service and Volunteer Fair, Noble High School has generated volunteers, donations, and support for United Way projects. In August the "Tools for School" supply drive helped more than 500 kids to have what they needed to



Whitney speaks to a Rotary Club about the "Born Learning" initiative. Photo from seacoastonline.com

start school on the right foot. The success of on-going food drives and weatherization projects depend on partnerships United Way makes with other organizations. Whitney has also been working to establish

community partners for “Born Learning,” a service-learning initiative at Noble High School and Sanford Alternative High School.

VISTAs Attend Introduction to High Quality Service-Learning

Service-learning is officially defined as, “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities.” But, how can schools be sure their service-learning is meaningful and enriching? What do students really get out of service-learning? And, where can those looking to institute service-learning find resources to help get it started? This was the subject of the MCCS September 22 Service Learning Training.

Participants, including many MVP VISTAs, attended a day-long workshop conducted by Mike Ashmore. Participants learned about service-learning standards, saw examples of quality service-learning, and discussed hows and whys of the practice.

VISTAs Volunteer After Orientation

Fourteen members of the Maine VISTA Project, ended their week of orientation by lending a hand at the Loaves & Fishes Food Pantry on August 19. The food pantry is sponsored by the

Dominican Sisters of Sabattus Maine and is open to all Sabattus-area people in need of food. VISTA members also helped the sisters with housekeeping, landscaping, and preparing their summer garage sale for winter storage.

The Sisters were so pleased by the work we did they bought us all ice cream.



PJ and Kaitlyn unpack donations at the Dominican Sisters food pantry.

Maine and reported that over 8500 “I Will” pledge cards were distributed, and over 10,000 volunteer hours were pledged from 33 different locations across the state – all the way from Wells to Fort Fairfield.

Radio stations produced and broadcast 680 public service

announcements that ran for nearly two weeks leading up to 9/11. Volunteers handed out pledge cards at Farmers Markets in Augusta, Belgrade, Camden, Damariscotta, Portland and Waterville, and they participated in the Freeport Flag Ladies 9/11 event, among other things. Some of the things people pledged to do include donating blood, sending care packages overseas to military members, making brownies for local firefighters, and shoveling out an elderly neighbor. The Maine effort was reported to the national campaign, and MCCS will follow up in the spring to see how many people were able to keep

their pledges. It was a great effort and VISTAs were there to do their part!

AmeriCorps and VISTA Members Help Make 9/11 “I Will” Campaign a Success

Eileen Buzzello

The Maine Commission for Community Service partnered with 70 other statewide organizations and over 700 volunteers (including several from Americorps and VISTA) in the national 9/11 “I Will” campaign. This campaign was the brainchild of My Good Deed, a nonprofit founded by families of 9/11 victims, and it urged everyone to pledge some time in service as a tribute to the victims, heroes, and all who rose in service following 9/11. VISTA Eileen Buzzello chaired the campaign in



“I Will” 9/11 campaign materials

The next issue arrives January 2012. Be sure to send your stories to Katie at Katherine.klein@maine.gov to share your news!