



Montana | Campus Compact

MTCC AmeriCorps*VISTA Quarterly

VOLUME III, ISSUE I OCTOBER 2011 - JANUARY 2012

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More alumni and member stories!

Happy January!

The new year is upon us in lovely Montana. We have said our goodbyes to outgoing January host sites long after they have left. Last week we welcomed three new members into the MTCC VISTA network.

They were part of a larger class of 17 VISTA members that will be serving in Montana until next January. These folks had the fortunate experience to be sworn in by Governor Brian Schweitzer. As we move into spring and summer we are looking forward to hearing success stories in this Year of the Dragon!



From the left, MTCC VISTAs Alyssa Charney and Natasha Hegmann pound rebar that will serve as anchor for PVC pipe. They were a part of a project orchestrated by MTCC VISTA, Camille Green. The project was in honor of the 9-11 National Day of Service and Remembrance. Three hoop houses were built to showcase affordable options to extend the growing season in Butte, MT

All the best,
Rabi Vandergon

Service By the Numbers

During the reporting period of October 2011 to January 2012, 29 MTCC AmeriCorps*VISTAs and host organizations:

- Raised **\$41,542** in cash funding and in-kind donations valued at **\$6,250**.
- Offered services to **2,282** new clients.
- A total of **605** volunteers recruited to serve in programs, providing **8,337** hours of service work.
- Of those 605 volunteers, **488** were students.
- **74** disadvantaged children and youth were served.
- **325** individuals were mentored through VISTA programs.



Sarah Cameron
Parent Engagement in Helena Public Schools
Helena, MT

What is your background that led you to serve a year as an AmeriCorps*VISTA?

As I neared graduation last May I was searching for something meaningful to do with my time. My original plan was to attend graduate school but I needed a break from academia to test my other strengths. I decided to apply for a position through AmeriCorps VISTA because it provided an opportunity to live somewhere new, meet people from different backgrounds, and work for positive change in a community. My VISTA position has given me the chance to try out beautiful Montana over city life, meet some fantastic VISTAs and people, and work on a project that will ultimately lead to a better relationship between families and schools.



Describe a typical workday at your host site.

My work focuses on creating and sustaining a positive relationship between families and schools. A typical workday might include: meeting with a principal to map out an upcoming event; researching parent engagement strategies; networking via phone, email, or visits with education-oriented nonprofits around the state; hosting an event for parents and families; or attending a meeting with local community members interested in family-school partnerships.

How have you incorporated your campus partner with your work efforts?

I have met with the campus partners from both Carroll College and UM-Helena to learn more about how we could partner on my project. As I plan events and work towards the creation of a family resource center for area schools, I've been able to network with the people at these schools both through the campus compact and independently of it.

What are your motivating factors that justify this type of work?

Being with AmeriCorps VISTA allows me to focus on making my project both successful and sustainable without the distraction of punching a time card. I put forth my best efforts to make my project successful because I know the work will impact Helena's schools and families positively. The research done on parent engagement and the support I've found in the community helps me to keep moving forward, particularly when progress seems slow. I also know that the work being done will see positive results for this community, and that my efforts will affect those results. I can look back on the past several months already and point out how I have helped change the relationship between Helena schools and families.

What are your plans after VISTA?

Throughout the fall, I applied to several graduate schools to pursue an MFA in creative writing. After my VISTA term ends in July I plan to either attend grad school or work in writing and publishing.

Alyssa Charney
Red Lodge Area Community Foundation
Helena, MT

What is your background that led you to serve a year as an AmeriCorps*VISTA?

I grew up in Massachusetts, and after majoring in Environmental Studies at Vassar College, I began making my way west, driven by a desire to support and learn from rural communities where the intersection between sustainability, agriculture, and public health is absolutely undeniable. I interned with a nonprofit working on organizing and policymaking around these issues in Nebraska, and was excited to head to Red Lodge for an AmeriCorps VISTA/ Montana FoodCorps position that I knew would provide me with the opportunity to help educate youth about where their food comes from and explore how they can take action to make healthy changes.

Describe a typical workday at your host site.

A typical workday in Red Lodge inevitably depends upon the season, but the snow has yet to keep us from growing and building a healthier community. Recently I have been working with high school students to create a video about where their food comes from, and I'm regularly teaching introductory lessons in K-8 classrooms about the indoor garden boxes we'll soon be planting. In these winter months I'm also planning for the youth garden by meeting with the school board, parks board, and community members, and I am working with our food service director and local producers to coordinate purchases for next season.

How have you incorporated your campus partner with your work efforts?

I have worked with my campus partner to connect with individuals at MSU Bozeman as well as participate in webinars to provide more information about FoodCorps work throughout the state. My campus partner has also been a valuable resource in navigating the complexities of the school food procurement. Additionally, our Wellness Committee was able to visit with my campus partner in a planning meeting to address next steps for improving school food.

What are your motivating factors that justify this type of work?

Everyday I work with students who can barely stay in their seats because they're so excited to share their ideas for what to plant in the youth garden. I work with farmers who choose to grow and raise food the way they do because they care deeply about the health of our land and communities. And there is an inevitable overlap between improving the health and nutrition of our youth and supporting local agriculture and family farms, as well as an urgent need to address this overlap. The opportunity and potential that rests in this type of work is what motivates me to and allows me to collaborate with such inspiring people on a daily basis.

What are your plans after VISTA?

My whereabouts for next year remain up in the air, but I do plan to return to school to further examine and understand the policies that impact agriculture and health. Serving as a VISTA FoodCorps member in Red Lodge has enabled me to recognize the significance of local efforts in bringing about change to improve the health of our communities. I plan to integrate what have learned about the power of community action into work that strives for policy change. Regardless of where I end up, I will continue to grow food and empower others to grow food in a way that benefits the environment, our health, and local communities.



Camille Green
National Center for Appropriate Technology
Butte, MT

What is your background that led you to serve a year as an AmeriCorps*VISTA?

Honestly, I'm not sure. I was about to finish my undergrad and realized that I'd never really lived outside of Southern Oregon, so I looked for opportunities where someone would pay for me to move somewhere else. One day I sat down and applied for any position I could find on the AmeriCorps website that had something to do with agriculture. This was the first job I was offered, and I quickly accepted.



Describe a typical workday at your host site.

After I down at least one cup of coffee I do a walk around the property to check on everything. I see if the compost is still cooking, make sure the plastic on the hoop houses survived the evening and see how warm it is inside, walk through both greenhouses to check on my plants and critters, and just generally observe every project to see how it is or isn't working and think about what else I need to be doing. Then I'll drink a couple more cups of coffee and respond to e-mails, work on grants or a blog post, do research, go over my notes, or do whatever else I need to be doing at my desk. When I can't stand that any more, I'll find something to build, turn some compost, tend the crops in the greenhouses, and whatever other work needs to be done.

The project I am working on involves developing the urban farm on our property in Butte in tandem with an educational component, so there's a lot of work to be done at the desk and in the field. In addition, I have a lot to learn not only about farming, but farm management, curriculum development, and program management. I am often researching, talking to other farmers, reaching out to other local non-profits, building prototypes and just generally experimenting and taking thorough notes of what I find.

How have you incorporated your campus partner with your work efforts?

Most of the work I have done with the campus has been developing a volunteer base. Right now there are no big work days to organize, but when it's warmer there is constant work to be done that truly benefits from young volunteers.

What are your motivating factors that justify this type of work?

There are too many to count. I guess I'll say that this relates to my academic background studying global food production and human rights, I love the work, and I honestly think that it is important. The world is a complicated place, but sustainable food should be simple. Everyone deserves to eat good food, and deserves to understand how producing sustainable food relates to health, the environment, community, economics, and politics. Besides all that, this job essentially combines everything I've enjoyed about any job I've ever had: I get to work outside, I get to build things, I get to learn by doing, I spend hours with plants, I connect and work with intelligent knowledgeable human beings, and it feels like I'm helping to develop something that can really help this crazy mining town.

We may not be making any money, but I often look at this gig as a paid apprenticeship, and the skills I develop here will benefit me greatly in the future. Somehow, I'm far less broke than I ever was in college, and I think it's worth it. I'm hopelessly in love with Butte and with this job, so the pay (or lack thereof) doesn't bother me much.

What are your plans after your term as a VISTA?

I hope to stay on for a second year at NCAT. I can't just plant a bunch of things and then leave! The ladybugs and compost critters would miss me too much.

Elizabeth Currey
Former VISTA for the Bitter Root Land Trust

When and where did you serve during your term as an AmeriCorps*VISTA?

I served at the Bitter Root Land Trust office in Hamilton, MT; working to create a community garden for the city of Hamilton. I was there from summer 2005-summer 2007.

How did your year of service impact your life?

My year(s) of service have dramatically impacted my life. I learned so much about what it takes to organize community efforts, and the importance of working collaboratively. In terms of practical experience; I learned how to grow food in cold climates, research and write grants, organize and lead meetings, and had the important realization that people are incredibly willing to donate goods/time/energy to better the community they live in.



What did you do after your term as a VISTA?

My daughter was born just as I finished my second term as a VISTA, so I continued to volunteer in my spare time as a new mom. Later, I continued to work in the non-profit world, doing outreach & education for an incredible afterschool program in Hamilton.

Where are you now and what is your daily work life like?

In the last year, I wrote and received a federal grant to help cover the cost to build a high tunnel or hoop house to garden in to help increase the local food supply in Dillon, MT (where I am living now). Over the summer I grew a wide variety of produce that, until now, had been unavailable fresh & local in this part of the state. I participated in the Dillon Farmers Market, and am now the Vice President of that organization. As of today (Nov. 18th) we are still growing greens and cool-weather loving root veggies, and providing them to customers! If I hadn't been a VISTA, I may never had discovered my love of farming, or gained the nuts & bolts skills to start my own farm & business. I am doing something I love and really believe in for my daily work, and I absolutely credit the VISTA program with helping me get here.

Cassandra Maurer
Former VISTA for MSU Bozeman Service Learning

When and where did you serve during your term as an AmeriCorps*VISTA?

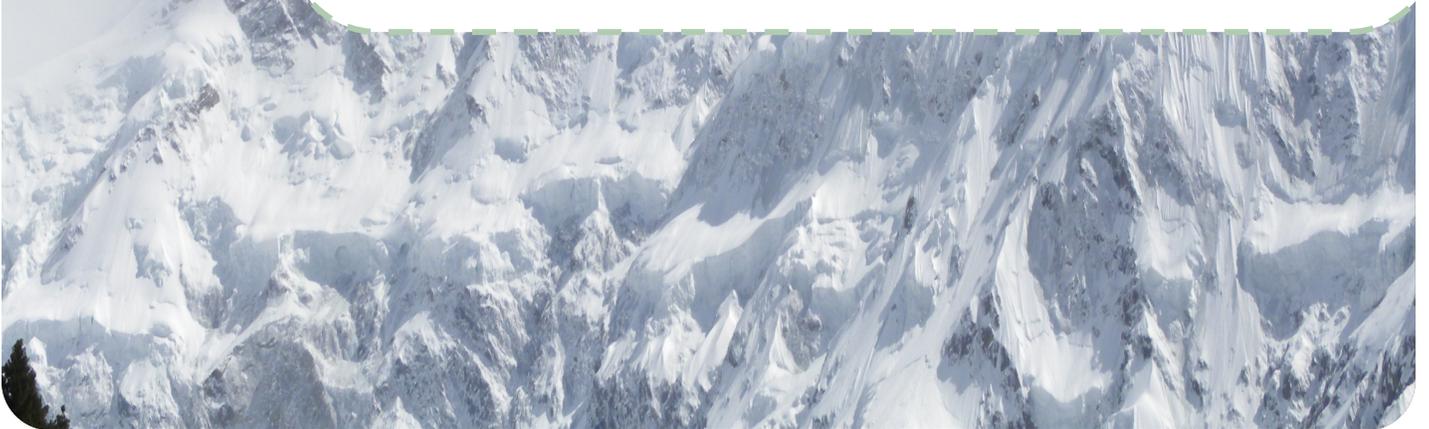
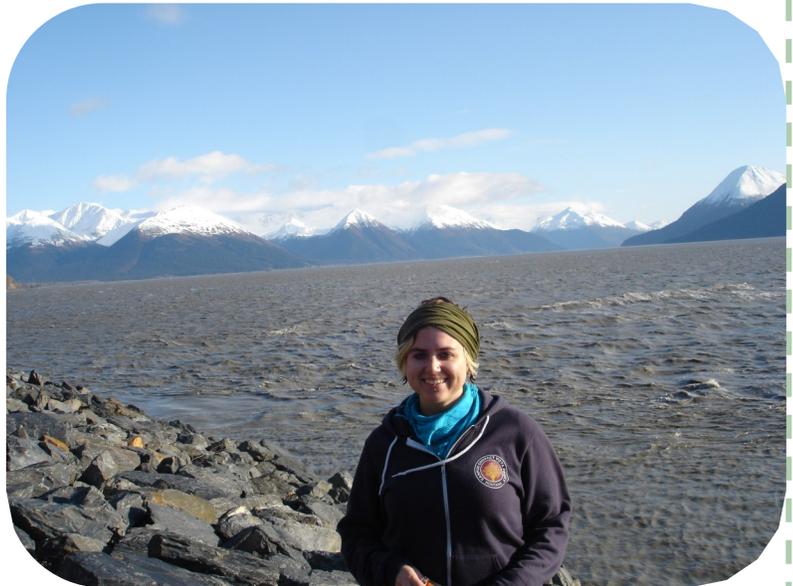
Serving a year as an AmeriCorps VISTA in MT impacted my life by teaching me to slow down. Before starting my year of service, I was constantly running around stressed to my wits end. However, the slower pace of university politics and volunteering at the Gallatin Valley Food Bank forced me notice what was happening around me. By focusing on what I could do to help others, rather than think of what I needed to get done that day, I was able to learn that consent stress is no way to live life day to day. In addition to

this, having the privilege to work with such an amazing community over the course of a year allowed me to feel much more engaged. I realized that all communities have something special to offer, you just have to learn where to look for it.

How did your year of service impact your life and where are you now?

After my year of service in Montana, I accepted the position as AmeriCorps VISTA Leader at the University of Alaska

Center for Economic Development in Anchorage Alaska. Because of everything I learned during my year in MT, I was able to quickly settle into life in the Last Frontier. I feel a strong connection to the community in Alaska, even though I have only lived here a few short months. During the summer, I was able to bike 6 miles to work and only crossed two roads. Now that it's winter, I am able to ski during my lunch break on a trail system that leaves across the street from my work.



Graham Murtaugh**Former VISTA for Missoula in Motion and Leader with MTCC****When and where did you serve during your term as an AmeriCorps*VISTA?**

From 2006 - 2007 I served in Missoula, MT at Missoula in Motion; from 2007 - 2009 I served as the MTCC VISTA Leader in Missoula.

How did your year of service impact your life?

In so many ways -- but mostly it helped me understand that service is part of my greater makeup. Doing meaningful work impacting people other than myself matters a great deal, and VISTA helped me see that more clearly. More specifically, my VISTA service made it clear to me that volunteers -- be they national service or local, one-time volunteers -- need the space and opportunity to discuss and reflect on their service. The things we "do" are important, but without understanding "why", much value is lost, or at least never uncovered.

What did you do after your term as a VISTA?

I moved home to Oregon and got a paying gig at a cafe. But I continued to serve, and especially to seek out opportunities to help volunteers -- AmeriCorps and otherwise -- reflect on their service through the Project on Civic Reflection, an organization I first worked with during my time at MTCC.

**Where are you now and what is your daily work life like?**

I continue to work closely with the Project on a freelance basis, helping AmeriCorps members and others do the valuable work of reflecting on their service. I'm also involved in other volunteer opportunities in Portland and will be going abroad to SE Asia for two weeks as part of a service trip at the end of November.

Wyatt Urlacher
Former VISTA for Women's Opportunity & Resource Development
(WORD)

When and where did you serve during your term as an AmeriCorps*VISTA?

I served as a VISTA for Women's Opportunity & Resource Development (WORD) in Missoula, MT during the 2004/2005 service year.

How did your year of service impact your life?

Being a VISTA opened my eyes to a lot of things not taught in college. The cycle of poverty moved from being an abstract concept to a reality. Working with homeless families in Missoula completely rearranged my perspective and made me see that even though I was not making a lot of money, I was flush with resources that many families just don't have. What stayed with me after my service as a VISTA is a commitment to community, family, and experiences for growth—not to mention a continuing freedom from materialism.



What did you do after your term as a VISTA?

I have continued working in the non-profit sector since finishing my VISTA term. I worked for a few years with a Head Start Program. The last three years I've been with a youth mentoring program in my home state of South Dakota.

Where are you now and what is your daily work life like?

My work life is busy. I do mentor training and recruitment for a School-Based program through Lutheran Social Services of SD. It is a wonderful job where I get to meet a lot of inspirational people and take part in something that is making a difference in my community. I also serve as the steering committee chair for the South Dakota Local Foods Co-op, of which I'm a founding member. I have become increasingly active in community organizing and am working with a community group in Sioux Falls to ensure a fair and progressive urban agriculture ordinance in the city as our council is updating the law this year.

Potpourri

MTCC VISTA Alumni Corner

Stay Connected! Please give us your updated contact information by completing this [online form](#).

Also be sure to check out the [VISTA Campus alumni page](#).

Lastly, begin networking with other [AmeriCorps Alums](#).

Fun and Helpful Links

[Montana AmeriCorps Connection](#) - a place to share stories, find housing and more!

[VISTA Campus](#) - Tutorials, resources and tools await your arrival.

[MTCC VISTA](#) - The official website for the MTCC VISTA program. If you don't find what you need here, [let us know!](#)



MTCC VISTA Program Manager, Brian Christianson, reads to a group of kindergarteners for Martin Luther King Jr. [Read for Peace](#) in Missoula, MT.



Montana | Campus Compact



Rabi Vandergon
MTCC VISTA Leader

Montana Campus Compact
302 University Hall
Missoula, MT 59812

Phone: 406-243-5451
E-mail: vandergon@mtcompact.org

MTCC AmeriCorps*VISTA Project

The Montana Campus Compact (MTCC) is a 20-campus network of colleges and universities committed to the public purposes of higher education. MTCC campuses build long-term partnerships with local non-profits, schools, and faith-based organizations. Student volunteers, service-learners, Campus Corps AmeriCorps members, faculty, and staff volunteer their time to address critical needs across Montana. MTCC VISTAs help to facilitate much of the community planning work and start many of the campus-community partnerships in Montana.

MTCC AMERICORPS*VISTA QUARTERLY