

U.S. Volunteers In Service To America

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U.S. Volunteers in Service to America
The six program emphases.

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COMMUNITY PLANNING

Pennsylvania (II)

Community Design Centers

The Pittsburgh Architects Workshop, sponsored by the Pittsburgh Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, is staffed by VISTA architects, landscape architects and planners who are supervised by volunteer professionals in these disciplines. The Workshop provides architectural and related professional services, upon request, to community organizations and individuals, not otherwise able to afford such services. The Workshop assists these organizations and individuals in understanding and evaluating planning and program concepts so that these organizations and individuals can participate in the decision making process that affects their lives.

Typical of the work of the VISTAs assigned to the Workshop is their activity in the Hazelwood community. There in late 1970, the Hazelwood Glenwood Glenhazel Citizens' Council (HGGH) asked the Architects' Workshop to help the Hazelwood community attack the problems of a deteriorating business district, inadequate housing, and the potential effects of a proposed highway on the community. In order to adequately deal with these problems, the Workshop was invited to set up its first satellite workshop in a vacant storefront in the Hazelwood business district. Staffed by VISTA Architects Alan Billingsley and Alan Hunninen, the new workshop spent the first half year assessing the community's problems, establishing working relationships with various groups and individuals, and producing a detailed existing land use study of the community. In addition to offering technical advice to Hazelwood residents, the Workshop VISTAs gathered basic information and drew up the necessary plans to get new scattered-site housing started in Hazelwood. Due largely to the cooperative efforts of the HGGH Council and the VISTAs, the first group of 55 units of low to moderate income housing will be constructed during the summer of 1972.

Other projects developed by the satellite workshop included:

the rehabilitation of a vacant commercial facility to function as the Glenhazel Community Services Center (the renovation, as designed by Alan Hunninen, has been completed and the building is now evidently full of life again)

a design program for a new Neighborhood Facilities Center which will be funded under the HUD 703 Program

the development of detailed design alternatives to the proposed highway to insure the best possible impact on the community. This has required a coordinated planning effort with the community and the various local, state, and federal agencies that are involved.

Two new VISTAs, John Valley, an architectural graduate, and Douglas Sharp, A VISTA Planner, have now joined the Workshop to replace the two Alans who completed service.

Indicative of the value of the Workshop to the people of Hazelwood, the HGGH Council has recently agreed to provide the money to cover the operating expenses of the satellite Workshop, which is increasingly being viewed by the community as a prime tool in affecting changes favorable and desirable for the community of Hazelwood as a whole.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Texas (VI)

Community Design Center

Four VISTA Architects assigned to the Community Design Center in San Antonio, Texas, which just opened in March, have been working with the following projects among others: remodeling the barracks for two 25-pupil classrooms; designing the Via Coronado Barrack Clinic; helping to design a Food-To-Go business; helping to remodel an old parochial school which is now the Espada Head Start Center; planning a recreation center and swimming pool; providing plans and a model for the Palo Alto Community Co-op; undertaking North Expressway and Bandera Freeway studies; at the request of a City Council committee, studying the re-use of an existing library as a Black Cultural Center; getting involved with annexation studies for Via Coronado, a fringe community which is not part of the city; and applying for federal sewer grant.

These VISTAs are Richard Bodane, who just completed his VISTA service, Mike Imbimbo, Ellen Berky and Bryan Richart. Their work has received praise from many quarters. For instance, they were just invited to become members in the American Institute of Architecture.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Missouri (VI)

Working to effect community improvement can be particularly difficult if the surrounding city refuses to recognize you. In Hayti, Missouri, Alan Wheeler, a VISTA sponsored by Missouri Associated Migrant Opportunity Services (MAMOS), is working with a black community of 2,000 which the city refuses to annex. The Hayti Heights Community Development Corporation has been formed to develop a municipal structure of its own which would bring in the services now denied the town. Alan has been involved with conducting population and physical characteristics surveys, with renovating an old building to be used as a community center and with a youth economic development project. The youth have access to three acres of land on which they intend to raise tomatoes and cucumbers, which they hopefully will be able to sell to the community and also to the agricultural commodities program.

When Chris Iverson was a VISTA under MAMOS sponsorship (he's now a Volunteer Leader), he worked in Haywood City, an all black community of about 450 people. Basic city services were critically lacking and he thus became involved with helping the City Council get gasoline taxes back from the county. This added up to about \$200 a month, money which was used to purchase a dump truck and a tractor -- both of which are now used for local improvements. Last summer, when a 500-gallon fire engine was up for sale elsewhere in the state, the City Council tried, unsuccessfully, to bid for it. Chris went to the doctor who actually purchased the truck as a gift for his son, told him about the needs of Haywood City and how the Council had tried to purchase the firetruck. As a result, the doctor gave the firetruck to the city with the stipulation that when it no longer worked it be turned over to the Cruthersville City park system.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Virginia (III)

Farmers Co-op

Tobacco is a principal crop in much of rural Virginia, but many small sharecroppers have difficulty making ends meet because of tobacco allotment levels. Second-year VISTA Alan Towne is trying to expand the operations of a farmers cooperative into Pittsylvania County. The co-op was started a couple of years ago with the help of other VISTAs in neighboring Halifax County and the co-op is encouraging Pittsylvania County sharecroppers to grow and market vegetables through several co-op plans. The National Sharecropper's Fund has loaned the Southern Agricultural Association co-op money for this effort, and the co-op is getting technical assistance from the Extension Service at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Working with the co-op, Alan is trying to find land the co-op can lease and is organizing groups of farmers to participate.

EDUCATION

Maine (I)

Alternative School

In Robbinston, Maine, a group of parents found they couldn't convince the school board to renew a teachers contract so they started their own school. This past fall, "Our School" reopened with 32 students from a dozen families, \$21,000 from the United Presbyterian Church, and two VISTA Volunteers to help run it.

National pool Volunteer Linnea Simons and community Volunteer Bradford Jewett are two of the five full-time teachers at Our School, but many of the courses are taught by parents. The school has created a sense of community among the families within a 20-mile radius who are involved in the school. According to the Volunteers, this rural area is the poorest county in New England, and they expect many more good things to come out of the common efforts of the families bound together by Our School.

EDUCATION

Arizona (IX)

For almost two years Sister Julie Baird, a 56-year old nun, has been working as a VISTA Volunteer with the Pima County Adult Basic Education Division in Tucson. There she has been the driving force in bringing adult basic education to prisoners in the Pima County jail and to Indians on the Papage Reservation. Due to her work, the jail has now institutionalized the adult basic education program and is paying for tutors. Sister Julie has also been working in the four adult basic education learning centers in Tucson where she has been teaching citizenship, GED preparation and English as a second language. So successful has she been in working herself out of a job, that she is now transferring as a VISTA to work 200 miles north of Albuquerque in bringing adult basic education to 19 small Pueblo villages. Sister Julie has a masters degree in English literature and is working toward her Ph.D.

EDUCATION

Alaska (X)

Community Volunteers

Community Volunteer Neva Rivers lives and works in the village of Hooper Bay on Alaska's west coast. She is assigned to the State of Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Adult Education. In trying to raise the educational levels in her village, she also made a large contribution to saving parts of native culture by starting classes in cultural heritage taught by the village's older people. Neva managed to convince these older people that their **traditional legends** would not be prostituted by being told in these classes. **Now, instead of the old legends dying out, they've been passed on, and the younger people have taken a strong new interest in hunting, fishing and other traditional skills.**

Other Community Volunteers have succeeded in getting schools to stay open late at night and have helped start adult basic education classes in practical "basics," such as first aid and showmobile repair, in addition to reading.

MANPOWER/
HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

MIGRANT

New York (II)

In the eastern part of Suffolk County, New York, VISTAs assigned to Rural Housing and Economic Development are involved in an interesting project designed to develop means for persons to leave the migrant stream. Alternative institutions are being created to provide regular jobs and to enable people to settle down in communities where they could participate and exercise control. ESCAPE, Eastern Suffolk County Community Action Program Enterprises, a representative body which controls this developing community, administers the credit union, a \$72,000 state-funded day care center and a printing shop, all formed by VISTA Volunteers. In the community, there is also a housing construction business, Calverton Industries, and a local farming company, Horticulture Industry, Inc. Through agreements made by ESCAPE, migrants interested in leaving the migrant stream can be hired on a temporary basis by Horticulture Industries; once they are "stabilized" in the community, they have the opportunity of working on a permanent basis for Calverton Industries. ESCAPE also has an agreement with the Farmers Home Administration whereby a certain number of mortgages are approved each year for ex-migrants. Ex-migrants wishing to own a home can clear up all their debts through a credit union loan, leaving them thus with one debt, and if their FmHA application is approved, Calverton Industries as the local contractor actually builds the house. The VISTAs on this project have also been responsible for all the leg work/paperwork behind the agreements made by ESCAPE with the Horticulture Industry and FmHA.

MANPOWER

California (IX)

Mike Banzhaf, VISTA Attorney, assigned to the San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation, became involved in a suit with the San Francisco Fire Department which brought about changes in their minority hiring practices. Mike came to the realization that of the 1,800 firemen hired only four represented minority groups, and this was particularly significant due to San Francisco's high minority population. When attempts to negotiate failed, Mike was forced to file a suit which resulted in the Fire Department changing its tests. No longer is it necessary to spell "camellia" to qualify as a fireman nor to perform well in highly academically-oriented tests. Now potential firemen are tested in their ability to do firefighting things, like unrolling hoses and climbing ladders. To date, forty minority firemen have been hired by the San Francisco Fire Department.

HEALTH

Region IV

Frank Fisher, 24, a VISTA assigned to the Economic Opportunity Coordinat-
Group of Broward County, a CAP based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, has
been particularly successful in raising funds from local organizations
and businessmen for a dental and eye mobile clinic. His efforts have
raised about \$60,000 from local sources -- including \$18,000 from the lo-
cal Lions Club to pay for the van, a Title IV-A grant, contributions
from Kiwanis and Rotary and a large contribution from one businessman.
One particularly novel approach that Frank used was convincing some lo-
cal yacht owners that the proceeds resulting from the tax-deductible
sale of their boats could best be used toward sustaining such projects
as the mobile VISTA clinic. This mobile van serves about 200 children
and youth in several outlying poor communities, and the volunteers also
inform people about food stamps, community meetings and other services
while they are attending the clinic. The EOCG VISTA project, located
in a county which encompasses both a 20% poverty population and the
wealth of the "Gold Coast," has attained unusually high community sup-
port and acceptance.

HEALTH

Kentucky (III)

Development of Ambulance
Service

It is less than 20 miles from Hickman City, Kentucky to the hospital in Union City, Tennessee, but a \$25 ambulance fee made it just too far for many poor people. Thomas King, a VISTA Volunteer assigned to the Mississippi River Economic Opportunity Council in Hickman worked with the people there and helped them to make some changes. Starting with an emergency fund to pay ambulance fees, the people in Hickman City got more than they expected. By teaming up with a funeral service, they were able to establish an ambulance service insurance plan. Now, for \$1.50 per person per year, members get whatever ambulance service they need for only \$9.00 per trip plus \$100 burial policy as well. More than 60 people now belong to the insurance plan, and it is expanding to the more urbanized communities nearby.

HEALTH

West Virginia (III)

Drug Counseling

VISTA Volunteers at Multi-County Community Action Against Poverty in Charleston, West Virginia managed to bring together community-wide efforts by such diverse groups as businessmen, students, clergymen, street people, city officials and just plain interested people to help create a drug-counseling and information center. Most of the resources were already there when Jane Rosser, Ivan Ourossoff and Ken Buxton began working on the project, but it took a sizable publicity campaign to get them all working together -- and that was a necessity in order for the center to get the credibility it needed in all segments of the community. The Charleston Council for Drug Information, set up under a state non-profit organization charter, now offers a drug reference library, a 24-hour crisis phone manned by 60 Volunteers and a contact team to deal directly with individual drug emergencies. The Council is currently exploring the possibility of expanding its services to a methadone clinic, a halfway house and a synanon group.

HOUSING

Wisconsin (V)

Home Improvement

VISTAs Mary Lou Hinchey and Jim Barnes have worked since the Spring of 1969 with the Center for Civic Initiative, a delegate agency of the Milwaukee Associates of Urban Ministries. They have been principally involved in credit counseling, housing inspection and follow-up as they relate to the purchase of 235 housing. The Volunteers have devised intake interview forms, sample offer-to-purchase contracts and followup forms to assist low-income families in the purchasing process. They have also accompanied families on the initial inspection of a house to help them to evaluate its potential. As a result of their sophistication in the inspection process, they have been instrumental in bringing about an upgrading of housing standards: lead plumbing no longer meets the FHA requirements, also additional shelving must be put in the kitchens. In an effort to provide effective follow through, Mary Lou has taught home maintenance and repair courses.

In all, more than 400 families have been counseled. The success of this program involves a complex set of cooperative efforts on the part of FHA, the Welfare Department, city relocation and social service agencies, community groups, buyers and the Volunteers. At the time of Congressman Patman's subcommittee's investigations into the abuses existing in the national 235 program, Milwaukee's 235 program was specifically lauded by Secretary Romney.

(A biographical note, one of Mary Lou's older brothers spent three years as a Peace Corps Volunteer; Mary Lou's mother has been accepted as a VISTA Community Volunteer in Massachusetts; presently Mary Lou is working for the Metropolitan Housing Center in Milwaukee.)

HOUSING

Massachusetts (I)

VISTA Volunteers assigned to the Community Action Committee of Cape Cod capitalized on a little-known state housing assistance program to bring rent supplement support to many families on the Cape. The program, 707, from Chapter 707 of the Massachusetts Housing Act of 1966, now operates in 23 communities in the state.

In Barnstable, Mrs. Vicki Bell and Mrs. Julie Conroy were chairman and co-chairman respectively of the Tenant's Council before joining VISTA. As Volunteers they were active in making the program known, in setting up the rent scale for the program, in locating landlords who would participate, in helping persons to fill out the necessary forms and in working with the local housing authority. Under this program, similar in many respects to the federal rent supplement program, the state through the local housing authority makes up the difference between the rent scale set and the full rent required for the dwelling. In an area where there is an extreme housing shortage, this program has enabled persons to obtain decent housing at no more than 25% of their income and to have the security of a year long lease. (Frequently during the summer influx of tourists to the Cape, families are evicted and rents quadrupled.)

HOUSING

Alaska (X)
Tenants Rights

Jim Landis, one of twenty-one National pool Volunteers assigned to three projects in Alaska, works with the Greater Anchorage Area Community Action Agency in Anchorage. At 23, he has a master of law degree from UCLA, but has not taken a bar examination. Residents of low-income housing in Anchorage thought that something needed to be done about the quality of their apartments but were afraid that nothing could be done, Jim worked with them and they got state and borough housing inspectors to visit their building. In less than two hours, the inspectors had found 283 violations.

With this evidence, Jim helped file a law suit against the landlord in the name of the tenants. After a series of suits, countersuits and court orders, the issue was settled out of court, repairs were started on the building, and there was suddenly a tenants rights organization in Anchorage. At about this time, and partly speeded by this action, the Greater Borough of Anchorage passed a new housing code which had been in the legislative process.

SOCIAL SERVICES

New Hampshire (I)

Legal Services

VISTA Volunteer Kim Steele is a para-professional working with the New Hampshire Legal Services component of the New Hampshire OEO VISTA Project. In conjunction with two groups of low-income people, he has prepared a questionnaire to examine the quality of service given and the nature of problems poor people have had with public utilities. The two groups will use this information to make a presentation to the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission, which will be holding hearings on a proposed 13 per cent utilities rate increase. The groups and New Hampshire Legal Services contend that such a raise would be in violation of the price freeze guidelines and have filed a petition with the U.S. District Court to halt the increase.

Guy Lescault is a VISTA lawyer with Legal Services, and also a locally-recruited Volunteer. He is presently working with low-income people concerned with the shortage of low-rent housing in New Hampshire. In Lebanon, he helped a group draw up a petition asking the city council to reactivate the Lebanon Board of Substandard Housing. The people are afraid that some apartments, vacant for a year, will be re-rented in poor condition, and want the board reactivated to keep this from happening.

The six VISTAs at the Legal Services project--two lawyers and four para-professionals--are also working toward the creation of a public defender program in New Hampshire.

SOCIAL SERVICES

New York (II)

Prison

At Rikers Island (N. Y.) Reformatory, preparation for the critical period of moving back in the community begins two to three months before the offender is scheduled to be released. At that time, VISTA Volunteers assigned to the New York-Department of Corrections begin meeting with prospective releasees in a counseling-employment program. Each VISTA works with four to ten inmates, counseling each for at least forty-five minutes a week. Through this counseling, the Volunteer works with the inmate to help him identify his problems and interests, and to design a program which will help the offender face the reality of the world outside the prison gates.

One of the first things a Volunteer may do to make the offender's transition back into the community easier is to restore family ties which are often severed by the prison experience. The VISTA tries to work with the family to "patch things up" before the releasee returns to his home. At other times the Volunteer might check on family problems which have been worrying the inmate; also, he encourages family members to visit the reformatory. A second area where the VISTA tries to help is locating employment for each releasee, a task which is complicated by the depressed job market and by prejudice and legal constraints.

At the time of release the VISTA often accompanies the man to his new home and job. Follow-up counseling and job-referral are available for any of the former inmates with whom the VISTAs have worked.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Pennsylvania (III)

Day Care

In 1970, when VISTAs first arrived at Citizens of Tioga-Nicetown (COT-N), outside of Philadelphia, they tried to start a day care center but ran into difficulties obtaining a physical facility. An alternative to a day care building, they found, ^{was} the development of family-type centers in which a mother on the block would take in six children during the day while their mothers worked. Today, two such centers are operating. Community VISTAs Florence Miller, Gloria Gadson and Thelma Fultz act as day care aides in these centers. Based on experience gained on this project, one former VISTA, Mrs. Sherie Williams, has been hired as a day care supervisor for a project sponsored by the West Nicetown-Tioga Comprehensive Family Health Center.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Region IV

Ethel Anderson, 76, with 25 years of teaching experience behind her, created and developed a Senior Citizens Hot Lunch program in Hollywood and Dania, Florida with the cooperation of her sponsor the Economic Opportunity Coordinating Group of Broward County based in Fort Lauderdale. The program is attended regularly by over 50 senior citizens and has attracted remarkable support from other senior citizens groups and local churches which have made the program possible with private donations. Ethel also spends a great deal of time transporting senior citizens to the hospitals and welfare department. She is a respected source of information regarding social security benefits.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Tennessee (IV)

Pre-Trial Release

VISTA Volunteers assigned to the Shelby County Penal Farm outside Memphis, Tennessee work in a two-part project trying to equalize the system of justice and to make the Farm a model prison. One of the eight Volunteers works in the Farm, counseling, tutoring and providing post-release follow-up services for the inmates. The other seven work in the courts seeking alternatives to pre-trial lockup and trying to get probation rather than incarceration for first offenders.

Chris Wolfe lives at the Penal Farm, where he helps try to ease the personal concerns inmates have about pregnant wives, hungry children or the need to get legal counseling so that the prisoner can concentrate on helping himself. He also tutors the prisoners and, with his supervisor, former VISTA Jim Martin, coordinates a tutoring program at the Farm using volunteer tutors from Memphis State University.

Four VISTAs are assigned to work with Project First Offender which was started by previous VISTAs on the project. Peter Rowan, a second-year Volunteer, Howard Payne, Richard Feldman and Paul Barringer work closely with a judge and see if a first-offender might benefit more from probation than jail. If this is the decision, the judge can release the offender to a volunteer probation officer from the community.

A Law Enforcement Assistance Administration grant of \$12,000 is helping provide a secretary and equipment for Project First Offender, and the Department of Corrections has also assigned staff members. By sometime next year, the VISTAs feel they can phase themselves out of the Project. Former VISTA Dick Dory now directs this project, assisted by Bill Beyer, another ex-VISTA.

A second LEAA grant, this one for \$34,000, helps the pre-trial release and bond-reform portion of the VISTA project. Thanks to the work of Ben Hassan, Charlie Andersen and previous VISTAs, bonds are now substantially lower in the county court; fewer poor people are kept locked up just because they're poor.

VISTA Chuck Fox has helped reduce city court bonds and is working with city judges on a program to establish pre-trial release for misdemeanants. These three VISTAs in the courts also hope to turn their work over to the community by the time their terms of service end. Future plans calls for only three or four VISTAs working at the Farm, continuing to share the close cooperation Volunteers have built with the courts in trying to assure that the court system deals justly with all the people it handles.