

VISTA



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HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE?

Contact your state contributor (pg. 14) and send your submission to your contributor by June 2, 1994.

WHAT ARE THE GUIDELINES?

1. Try to keep submissions under two pages.
2. Include your project name, phone number, and a sentence or two about yourself.
3. Make sure photos and graphics are black and white.
4. All works submitted become VISTA property and may be edited.

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VISTA



N·E·W·S

VOLUME 2 ■ SPRING EDITION ■ 1994

Rebuilding After the Storm

by Yvonne Guidry, VISTA

When Hurricane Andrew came roaring in out of the Gulf of Mexico, my only thought was: will we survive? It was a long, terror-filled night. When daybreak came, our once peaceful community of Coteau Holmes lay before us in ruins. Families were homeless. Mobile homes looked like they had been ripped open with giant can openers. Our majestic oak trees lay on their sides with roots exposed. Communication with the outside world was completely cut off.

My faith was tested. I thought, surely this can't be happening. A day passed before I realized we were protected. Although many lost their homes, none lost their lives. As soon as the rain stopped, we started cleaning trees and other debris from our yards. One morning in April, I received a phone call from Sister Lorraine Landry of the Diocese of Lafayette asking me if I would like to become a VISTA Volunteer. My first question was, what is VISTA?

There are now ten VISTAs working out of the Diocese of Lafayette under the supervision of Sister Lorraine Landry and Una Hargrave. Bringing community folk together to volunteer, we have since coordinated the rebuilding and restoration of 1,250 homes in a three-county area. Of these homes, 13 have been completely rebuilt. Twenty-one trailers were bought to replace the ones that were destroyed. The lives of about



After Hurricane Andrew struck, VISTAs began supervising local reconstruction in communities throughout Coteau Holmes, LA. Pictured above are students and volunteers recruited to help rebuild.

3,000 people were affected by the Hurricane Relief Project. This has been a collaborative effort on the part of many organizations and residents. Supply companies, developers, and carpenters have all been recruited to help. We have learned to pool our resources with other community service providers.

Recovery takes longer than one year. Several homes have yet to be repaired and many residents are still in need. We have already helped bring HUD and CDBG grants to some communities and continue to work with public officials.

Nine months have passed since I be-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear VISTAs:

I began my career working in a public housing project in St. Paul, MN, where I worked alongside VISTAs. It was then that I saw firsthand the invaluable contribution VISTAs make to the communities they serve.

My association with VISTA continued in the late 70's when I worked with projects around the country to help plan and carry out a national celebration of VISTA's 15th Anniversary. This year we will launch a commemoration of three decades of VISTA service. More than 100,000 VISTAs have served with more than 12,000 projects across the nation. Using our 30 years of experience, we are now a vital part of the new national service program, AmeriCorps.

This is an exciting time of growth for VISTA. Our proposed 1995 budget shows an increase of \$16.7 million, for a total of almost \$60 million. That translates into 4,743 VISTAs—a substantial increase from this year's 3,580. These numbers represent some of the highest funding for VISTA ever requested by an administration, a clear demonstration of President Clinton's deep commitment to national service.

Today we enter a new era of national service in America. As a VISTA, you are part of this growing movement of getting things done, strengthening communities, and supporting citizens who give of themselves to better their country. Volunteer contributions can, and will, make a difference all across America. I commend you for your service and salute your spirit of giving.

Sincerely,

Jim Scheibel, Director
Domestic Volunteer Service Programs
Vice President, Corporation for National Service

VISTA Flash-back: 1967

VISTA Interviews her Supervisor, a former VISTA Volunteer

In the late 60's Warren Friedman threw caution to the wind, shifted gears and changed lanes on the highway of life. Tossing away the possibility of an assured future as an English professor, Friedman left a Ph.D. program to become a VISTA.

When VISTA was younger, there were no state offices. So Friedman packed his bags for training in Washington, D.C. then relocated to a suburb of Chicago to begin working with high school students divided along racial lines. He found himself immersed in an environment where "white students were fighting black students." After spending time with the community, Friedman had some success in getting students to see each other as something more than black and white.

Without hesitation, Friedman says the work he did that year affected his life. "The biggest impact came from the realization that people could earn a living trying to solve social problems." As an undergrad at UC-Berkeley, he participated in "lots of volunteer stuff" but had "no concept of paid organizers." VISTA changed that: "I was bitten by the bug."

Friedman never left the realm of community service and now works as executive director for the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety (CANS). CANS played an integral role in bringing community policing to Chicago. In 1991, CANS convened the city-wide Community Policing Task Force, composed of over 100 community organizations.

Friedman's VISTA connection still remains. CANS sponsors 18 VISTAs. Based in communities throughout the city, each VISTA helps organize local residents to work with the police and help solve crime-related problems in their neighborhoods. Friedman sees a year of VISTA service

as the entry level for people committed to social change. But, he admits, the world of 1994 is a different place than it was in 1967. Looking back, Friedman says the 60's were a more naïve age. He credits his belief that "justice was possible" with his decision to redirect his life. In contrast to the hope of yesterday, Friedman acknowledges that people have less hope today. When community policing became a re-



ality in Chicago, Friedman recalled people's expressions of surprise, "Gee, I didn't think we had a chance."

Despite differences between then and now, Friedman points to community policing in Chicago as proof of the power wielded by an organized community. "People can even change neighborhoods if they're getting together to coordinate their efforts."

"Today, there's so much going on," he says, "but there's no national image. A lot of organizing is happening at the local level." Friedman is an advocate of local organizing and hopes that the new Corporation encourages such activity and brings visibility to local efforts. He also would like to see resources aimed at getting people "bitten by the bug" and directed toward a life of community service.

VISTA Eithne Barton is a recent graduate of Carlton College, MN and serves with CANS, Chicago, IL, (312) 461-0444.

BY VISTA EITHNE BARTON

EDITOR'S NOTE

With over 80 outstanding submissions and 215 responses to the first edition, we've set the foundation for our newsletter and now continue to build. Consider this an interactive, hands-on forum for sharing VISTA successes and frustrations, ideals and realities.

Perhaps you've got a great fundraising idea, heard about an innovative project, or found yourself overcoming amazing obstacles? Write about it, photograph it, draw it. Tell us what you've learned. If your schedule's full, get a fellow VISTA to report. Here's an opportunity to acknowledge each other's work and draw from your individual experiences.

As part of AmeriCorps, VISTA has strong support to develop this kind of national dialogue. The communication lines are wide open. Indicate your volunteer needs on the back page and send submissions to your state contributor (pg. 14) by **June 2, 1994**, to make sure the newsletter represents your interests.

Our space here is limited. However, contributions are being circulated to Corporation Headquarters and field staff as firsthand accounts of the VISTA experience. And, Volunteers are invited to write me for copies of submissions (specify area of interest). Thank you for helping to create the spring edition. We look forward to hearing from you in June.

Sincerely,
Sondra Friedman, Editor,
VISTA News

Rebuilding

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

came a VISTA. Needless to say, I now know what VISTA is. If listed in the dictionary, VISTA would be defined as: Providing hope, doing the impossible, and drawing on strength you did not know you had.

Yvonne Guidry is a locally recruited VISTA with the Hurricane Relief Project in Coteau Holmes, LA, (318) 394-3579.

VISTAs Assist L.A. Homeless

Five VISTAs Combine Skills to Employ & House Residents of "Skid Row," L.A., CA

Aaron Thompson is not certain how many agencies he visited before 516 South Main Street. "Somehow, with all the people I talked to, I was referred to Chrysalis," he says. Fortunately, he came to the agency that could give him a way out of the area literally known as "Skid Row."

Chrysalis, located in downtown L.A., is a different kind of homeless assistance agency. It returns homeless men and women to self-sufficiency by providing clients with resources needed to find jobs and a stable way of life. To Chrysalis, resources mean computer training, monthly job search workshops, resumé development, and sustainable housing. Chrysalis taps downtown businesses and service agencies to conduct job skills workshops and refers clients to available housing. Four VISTAs work hard to expand Chrysalis's outreach and services. Mostly strangers to L.A., these four now know the Downtown very well.

A stranger to L.A. himself, Aaron moved here from Alabama to start a car detailing business. One month later, he was robbed and lost everything. Without a job, money, or place to live, he reached a low point in his life.

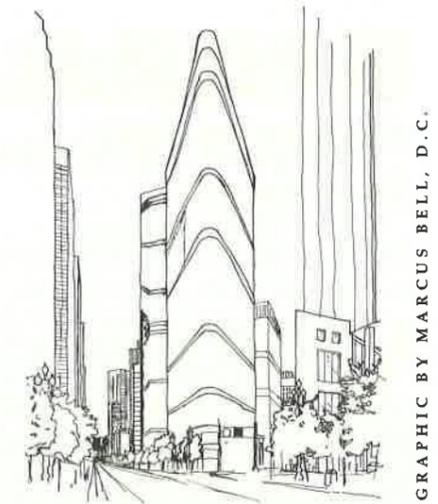
VISTA Jason Wagner serves the Chrysalis Employment Department, networking with as many employers as possible. Jason spoke with Aaron about job leads. To fine-tune Aaron's wordprocessing skills, Jason directed him to the IBM Computer Center, which is managed by VISTA Bailey Smith. Bailey made sure he had a place to work and help from computer cen-

ter volunteers. The training was followed up by VISTA Ben Frey, Volunteer Coordinator, who put together an all-day job search workshop staffed by volunteers from a local law firm.

Before Aaron arrived at Chrysalis, he had a job lead but still did not have a place to live. His case manager found him a bed in a nearby shelter which required Aaron to save part of his income for future housing. VISTA Ann Clark, the Development Assistant, helped him budget his temporary job finances and helped him access Chrysalis's telephone and resources needed in his search for full-time work.

Two weeks after he walked into Chrysalis, Aaron was hired to market office products and worked two jobs until he was promoted. In a month, he saved enough for his own apartment. Now his furniture is paid for, he can pay his monthly bills, and his life on "Skid Row" is "just a memory."

BY VISTA BENJAMIN FREY



GRAPHIC BY MARCUS BELL, D.C.

Aaron is now assistant manager. He has hired two Chrysalis clients and plans to hire more as the business grows. He is still pursuing the reason he came to L.A.: "the chance to own my own business."

The key to his success might be summed up in a single word: "focus." He explains, "When I didn't have a job and didn't have Chrysalis support, I could never focus well enough to get where I wanted to go." At Chrysalis, each VISTA cooperates with the L.A. community to provide client services for people like Aaron Thompson.

Aaron is an example of a client who has "made it." The VISTA program helps make Chrysalis what it is today—a place where residents of "Skid Row" can come to revitalize their dreams.

Benjamin Frey volunteered in shelters as a student in Carleton College, MN and joined Chrysalis, (213) 895-7777, as a VISTA to share and develop his outreach skills.

HOMELESSNESS QUIZ

1. According to 1993 figures, there are approximately _____ million homeless people in the U.S.
A) 5 B) 13 C) 25 D) 1
2. The average time a homeless person spends on the street is:
A) 7 mos. B) 1 yr. C) 3 yrs. D) 5 yrs.
3. Children represent one out of _____ homeless persons.
A) 10 B) 8 C) 4 D) 2
4. Families represent _____ % of the homeless population.
A) 25 B) 43 C) 65 E) 85
5. Which of the following most often leads to homelessness?
A) Lack of affordable housing B) Low paying jobs C) Deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill D) None of these E) All of these
6. In 1993 families seeking food and shelter increased by _____.
A) 5% B) 10% C) 20% D) 30%
7. _____ % of Americans are willing to pay higher taxes to increase spending on homelessness.
A) 1 B) 10 C) 45 D) 65 E) 80

* The above statistics are based on the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Annual Survey on Homelessness, Dec. 1993.

ANSWERS: 1) B 2) A 3) C 4) B 5) A 6) D 7) E