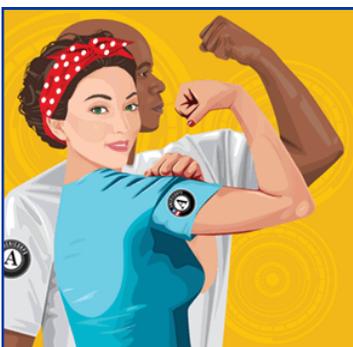




The CASC

*A publication of the Charleston Area Service Collaborative AmeriCorps*VISTA Project*

Charleston Area Service Collaborative



ment, partnership building, outreach, as well as program creation, implementation and evaluation to help strengthen their organizations' abilities to fight poverty long-term. Focus areas for the CASC VISTA projects include Education (literacy, parental involvement, mentoring, youth leadership, etc.), Healthy Futures, and Veteran and Military Families.

VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) members have been serving American communities since VISTA's inception in 1964, and serving the Charleston area for over a decade. This year, the City of Charleston Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Families is in its third year as project sponsor for the Charleston Area Service Collaborative (CASC) AmeriCorps*VISTA project.

VISTA members have a special mission within AmeriCorps – to fight poverty by committing a full year service to a non-profit, educational institution or government agency. Most of the current CASC VISTAs started their service terms in late August, with two more joining the team in November. The 24 CASC VISTA members are supported by two AmeriCorps VISTA Leaders. These individuals are serving at 22 different host organizations throughout Charleston County. CASC VISTAs are doing volunteer manage-

ment, partnership building, outreach, as well as program creation, implementation and evaluation to help strengthen their organizations' abilities to fight poverty long-term. Focus areas for the CASC VISTA projects include Education (literacy, parental involvement, mentoring, youth leadership, etc.), Healthy Futures, and Veteran and Military Families.

Almost half-way through the service year, VISTAs have put forth an enormous amount of work so far to increase the effectiveness of their sites. Although VISTAs are paid a modest poverty-level living stipend, members will end their year receiving a cash stipend or Education Award along with the satisfaction of having served the greater Charleston community in a very meaningful way.

Quick Facts

- VISTA was started in 1964 as a part of the War Against Poverty.
- VISTA was incorporated into AmeriCorps in 1993.
- AmeriCorps is administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

I **Volunteers:**
1,705 Recruited
1,866 Managed
19,813 Hours Given by Volunteers
\$438,660 Dollar Value of Volunteers Hours Given
*estimated value of volunteer time for 2012 is \$22.44 per hour

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A **Served:**
4,906 Economically Disadvantaged Children and Youth
384 Economically Disadvantaged Veterans and Military Families

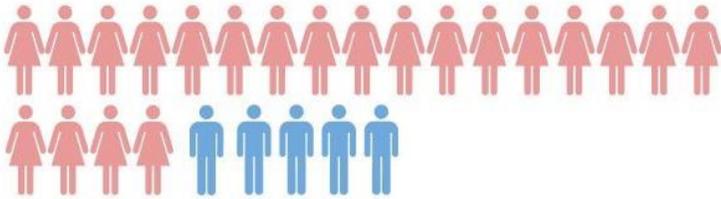
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T **Leveraged:**
\$58,395 Cash Donations and Grants Awarded
\$268,847 In-kind Donations

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2013-2014 CASC Members



Some of us come from two miles away, but some of us relocate thousands of miles to serve in South Carolina. We work to make the state safer, smarter and healthier; to bring Americans together and to make our communities stronger. We are here to fight poverty and get things done for America.

Kate Brown is the Outreach Coordinator for **Reading Partners**. She recruits volunteers to work one-on-one with students who struggle with reading skills.



Erin Burks is the Latino Volunteer Development Specialist at **MUSC's PASO's** program. She supports Latino leaders in the community through trainings, coordination and evaluation.



Michael Galvez is the Parent University Expansion Manager at the **Charleston County School District**. He works to expand the program throughout Charleston.



Sarah Gerald is the Outcomes Management System Coordinator at **Trident United Way**. She helps to implement an outcomes management software system for the Links to Success initiative.



Brillyance Gilchrist-Poteat is the Community Outreach and Alumna Liaison at **Florence Crittenton**. She reaches out to help young, pregnant mothers.



Jordan Hardy is the Veteran Services Coordinator for **Family Services, Inc.** She helps to build the capacity of the One Less Homeless Vet program.



Zachary Huey is the Volunteer Management Specialist at **Our Lady of Mercy**. He works to create volunteer management tools for OLM.



Lori Kinnard is the Parent Engagement Developer for **Charleston Promise Neighborhood**. She works to involve parents and develop the "parenting" focus for CPN.



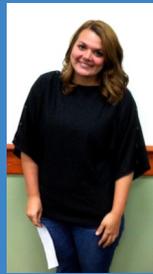
Louis Kines is the Partnership Coordinator for **Big Brothers Big Sisters**. He works to secure funding and help and enroll volunteers to help children and teens overcome adversity.



Katrina Kulik is the Volunteer System Manager for **Metanoia**. Her focus is volunteer management, event planning and some graphic design work.



Stephanie Lehman is a Site Coordinator for **Reading Partners**. She manages a Reading Center at Mitchell Elementary where tutors work one-on-one with students.



Brittany Mathis is the Mentor and Public Outreach Coordinator for **Be A Mentor**. She works on recruiting and training new mentors as well as marketing.



Meredith McGrew is the Program Manager of the **Palmetto Project**. She works to improve volunteer recruitment and the development of the Heart and Soul program.



Madison Orme is the Community Circles Coordinator for **Communities in Schools**. She works to get community members involved in supporting schools in their area.



Lorcan Peterson-Miller is the Marketing and Special Fundraising Events Developer at **Metanoia**. He produces a variety of marketing materials and writes grants.



Shahnaz Rashid is the Development and Evaluation Coordinator for **MUSC's HealthLinks** program. She directs volunteers who help connect patients to resources.



Lauren Roberts is the Foster Home Recruitment Developer for the **Department of Social Services**. She works to recruit foster parents in Charleston County.



Charlie Rosemond is the Literacy Outreach Initiative Program Manager for the **Honors College at the College of Charleston**. He manages community engagement activities.



Caroline Savage is the Strategic Parent and Family Program Planner and Volunteer Management Specialist at **WINGS for Kids**. She focuses on parental engagement.



Anna Selfridge is the Volunteer Management Specialist at the **Our Lady of Mercy Neighborhood House**. She assists with development of their GED program.



Morgan Tully is the Nutrition Education Associate at the **Lowcountry Food Bank**. She develops a sustainable framework for nutrition education.



Joanna Weaver is the Volunteer Coordinator for **Palmetto Goodwill Veterans Enhancement Project**. She focuses on veterans and volunteer management.



Katherine Wright is the Youth Programs Manager at the **Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Families**. She works with high school students to discuss youth issues.



Jessica Zserai is the Community Coordinator for **Veterans On Deck**. She focuses on volunteer management and coordination.



Jennifer Gorham is a VISTA Leader at the **Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Families**. She works to provide meaningful experiences for the VISTAs.



Rachael LaBattaglia is a VISTA Leader at the **Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Families**. She works to provide support and build the professional capacity of the CASC VISTAs.



I will get things done for America, to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier. I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities. Faced with apathy, I will take action. Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground. Faced with adversity, I will persevere. I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond. I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done. - AmeriCorps Pledge



By: Joanna Weaver—Palmetto Goodwill

Palmetto Goodwill partnered with the Ralph H. Johnson Medical Center for the annual Stand Down Against Homelessness event on October 31 and November 1 at Armory Park in North Charleston. The event helps the veteran and community homeless in the Charleston area. These veterans and community homeless not only receive items such as clothing, gloves, hats and toiletry items, but also different services such as haircuts, legal counseling and medical screenings, among others.

One of the items the homeless received was a pair of underwear. Most of the underwear given away at the Stand Down Against Homelessness event was donated at the Undy 500. The Undy 500 is a charity motorcycle ride in September.

As the volunteer coordinator for Goodwill, I am required to recruit volunteers for several special events Goodwill has. Volunteers were given several different tasks for the event. They were placed at the gate to help with the flow of those needing assistance; registration tents, as well as offering clothing vouchers to be used at Goodwill stores. They were also stationed at the clothing tents to hand out different items such as socks, underwear, gloves and hats; however, most volunteers were used as personal shoppers. These personal shoppers were paired with one member of the homeless community and took that person to each tent, ensuring they received the correct items.

This year's event helped over 2,000 members of the homeless community receive different goods and services.

Top: Joanna directs an individual to the clothing tents as they enter.

Below: A volunteer packs a bag of clothes for an event attendee.

He did not stand out among the crowd; in fact, he was rather ordinary looking

By: Jordan Hardy—FSI

For two months, I looked at the days blocked off on my calendar for the Stand Down Against Homelessness event at The Citadel Armory Park.

Listening to combat stories from a veteran of any war renews my commitment to empower and connect veterans to the benefits they deserve and the people who can help them receive the honor they have fought to defend.

I cannot imagine an event that could foster more good will among a crowd of people concerned for the homeless than the two-day Stand Down initiative. These events brought hope to all, regardless of what they had seen or done in their lifetime.

Out of all the stories from my time as

a volunteer at the community fair, only one surpassed them all. He did not stand out among the crowd; in fact, he was rather ordinary looking. He approached the Family Services, Inc., booth and confidently introduced himself as Michael Robinson.

Now that I have met him, I can say that Robinson is an ordinary man with an extraordinary story. When he came to Family Services, Inc., a few years ago after being deployed overseas, his life was far from where he wanted and needed it to be.

Through our homebuyer and credit counseling programs, he improved his credit score in 13 months and achieved his dream of being a homeowner.

Since then, he has worked tirelessly

to inspire others to never give up on their future, saying that present circumstances are not always permanent. He is now working at the VA hospital, extending the joy of events like the Stand Down to the other 363 days of the year.

It is our turn to support those who fought for us. Robinson is one of the numerous testimonies to the wonderful work being done every day by the staff at FSI and the Ralph H. Johnson Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

FSI offers numerous programs to empower and encourage individuals and families to gain and sustain assets and to become financially independent. There are never enough hours in the day to complete all that is to be done, but the FSI is never short on care and concern.



Jordan spreading the word about FSI at the Stand Down Event.

Family Services, Inc. Offers:

- ⇒ Behavioral Counseling Services
- ⇒ Credit Counseling & Bankruptcy Management Programs
- ⇒ First-time Homebuyer Programs

In addition to other programs.

Going Places With Be A Mentor

Founded in 2004, Be a Mentor is a nonprofit organization headquartered in North Charleston, S.C. There are currently three signature programs being implemented in various schools throughout the Lowcountry.

The Lunch Buddy program fills the need for in-school mentoring for elementary and middle school children. Project SHINE focuses on career exploration, academic success and teaches the importance of setting and reaching goals at the middle school grade levels. Lastly, the Career Path program matches mentors with high school students interested in similar career areas. Through weekly meetings, mentors work to instill confidence, build social and emotional skills and ensure that every child has a caring adult in their lives.

As a VISTA, I work primarily on mentor coordination by recruiting and training new mentors. I also perform background/ reference checks on each of our potential mentors. Additionally, I work on marketing including creating promotional items such as press releases, newsletters and supervising our social media intern by monitoring our social media

engines. I also hold monthly check-in meetings at each of our partner schools where I interview the mentors and the school coordinators to ensure that everything is going smoothly.

On Thursday, December 5, we hosted our first inaugural fundraiser at the South Carolina aquarium – The Going Places Gala. The event featured a silent auction that included a trip for four to Disney World, a two-night stay at the Tides Hotel on Folly Beach with complimentary meals at their signature BLU restaurant, and an array of other exciting auction items.

The Gala also showcased live music from Honeysmoke, heavy hors d'oeuvres and an open bar. Additionally, our gala also honored four of the community's most influential mentors. Honorees included Jim Stelling, president of The GEL Group; Sam Lesky, campus pastor at Seacost Church; Priscilla Roper, director of human resources at Charleston Marine Containers, Inc; and Jessica Jackson, an advisory board member for Be a Mentor.

By: Brittany Mathis—Be A Mentor 



Left to right: Be A Mentor intern Jessica, a volunteer and Brittany at the Gala.

Promotor Power: Health in the Latino community



PASOs Promotores members at the Latino Health Fair.

If you visited the Latino health fair at the Midland Park Community Center on October 12, then you would have had the opportunity to receive free and confidential HIV testing, flu shots, diabetes and anemia screenings, and cholesterol and blood pressure checks. You would have also been able to learn about services offered by various community

organizations, and you would have likely encountered a group of dedicated Latina volunteers helping direct people to tables, supervising children and providing reproductive health information to fair attendees. These motivated and dynamic young women are part of a team of Latina community health workers called "Promotores de Salud".

As an AmeriCorps*VISTA, I've had the privilege to engage with the dedicated team of promotores. I have created a lesson plan to develop the promotores' skills in communication, evaluated aspects of the PASOs (meaning 'steps' in Spanish) program, and managed leadership meetings. The work that I've done with PASOs will serve as a model for the future.

South Carolina is home to one of the fastest growing Latino populations in the nation. Due to various barriers such as lack of insurance,

lower income, and lack of transportation, Latino families experience a higher rate of neural tube defects in their children, higher rates of unintended pregnancy, lower use of contraception, lack of prenatal care, and lack of long-term breastfeeding.

PASOs is a state-wide organization that is working to decrease these health disparities through education, support and grassroots leadership development. In Charleston, PASOs is a partner of the MUSC College of Nursing and helps link Latino families to services throughout the Tricounty.

On a larger scale, PASOs serves Latino families in more than 15 counties across the state. The organization's vision is to see a healthy South Carolina with a healthy Latino community. The mission—to help the Latino community and service providers work together for strong and healthy families. Promotores are the grassroots leaders that are helping PASOs take the steps to achieve its goals.

By: Erin Burks—MUSC's PASOs Program



“My motivation does not come from data, but instead from the realization that every person I speak to on the phone means another child helped by our program.”

Kate: Outreach Coordinator for Reading Partners

Recruitment phone calls can be daunting—and frankly you either like them or you don't. My personal opinion is that phone calls shouldn't be viewed as daunting, or even boring; they are an opportunity. In my job as a Volunteer Coordinator for Reading Partners, phone calls have the potential to open doors. After a five-minute conversation and a simple “yes,” I know that another child's life will be changed forever.

To help give context to why I am spending my time recruiting volunteers for Reading Partners, one must understand the literacy crisis we are facing in Charleston County. Four out of five fourth grade students are not reading proficiently—and those same students help to make up the 24 percent dropout rate at North Charleston High School. In order to address the needs of early literacy intervention, members of the Charleston community founded Book Buddies. Book Buddies eventually expanded enough to garner the attention of Reading Partners, and the two officially merged to become the eighth Reading Partners region in the country. For those that aren't familiar with what Reading Partners does, Reading Partners is a National Literacy nonprofit that works in Title I elementary schools in eight different regions across the United States. Reading Partners thrives off the support of volunteers; therefore, my job is critical to Reading Partners' success or failure in Charleston.

As a VISTA, I understand that my role is to build capacity in the community, which will create change great enough to combat the poverty that so many struggle with in the inner city of Charleston and nearby North Charleston. Most of the students that we work with are directly affected by poverty so by recruiting volunteers to work with them, I am creating the opportunity for someone to empower another to reach their full potential, or capacity. The generosity and outpouring of help from the Charleston community has continued to amaze me and I feel truly honored to be in the midst of such a community-focused population.

Because I am often working from an office instead of a school, I don't always get to experience the same tangible results that Site Coordinators do everyday in their reading centers. However, my motivation does not come from data, but instead from the realization that every person I speak to on the phone means another child helped by our program. The stories that the Site Coordinators then share inspire me to keep adding to our 450 plus volunteer base so that we can continue to meet the enrollment goals at each of our, now, nine sites.

Stephanie: Site Coordinator for Reading Partners

The life of a Reading Partners Site Coordinator can be many things. It can be active, stressful, surprising, but most importantly fun. When students and tutors walk into my Reading Center, I want them to feel as if they are in a safe, fun learning space. A place where students can build confidence in their literacy skills and community members can connect with the youth of our community all while having a good time reading.

As the Site Coordinator at Mitchell Elementary School, I currently oversee 57 students in grades two through six and approximately 100 community volunteers. In order to be eligible for our program, students must fall between a half-year and two and a half years behind in their literacy skills; they cannot have a cognitive IEP; and they must speak conversational English. Once the student is placed within the program, there is the delicate process of pairing them with a community volunteer who will tutor them using the Reading Partners curriculum at least once a week.

While Reading Partners keeps track of students' progress through tutor notes, assessments and surveys, I've found that no statistical information can show you the milestones that we have experienced in Room 308 so far this year. During assessments a fifth grader tested almost three years behind grade level in reading. She struggled with vocabulary and was extremely shy while reading aloud. Fortunately, I had a patient, kind volunteer who began working with Book Buddies a few years ago. They began working together twice a week for 45 minutes. By winter break, they had completed 23 sessions and mastered five lesson topics. As Site Coordinator, I have watched this fifth grader's vocabulary slowly grow and her hesitancy transform into confidence. I observed the moment when she began to trust her tutor and the session she found her favorite book. This month, the Reading Center was her first stop after learning she had gained five points on her Winter MAP testing (Measure of Academic Progress).

These are the moments that have shown me the significance of community involvement and student participation in Reading Partners. Through my work as a VISTA, I have the opportunity to empower volunteers in their service to Mitchell Elementary School students and introduce them to the tools needed to narrow the literacy gap here in Charleston. This program helps students get one step closer to high school, and potentially college, by teaching them basic reading skills they need to read at grade level. They can dream of a brighter future through this early literacy intervention program!



Above: Kate Brown and Nicholas at a Sanders-Clyde tutoring session.
Below: Stephanie Lehman pictured top and right with other site coordinators.

Spreading Cheer

By: Lauren Roberts, Department of Social Services



As a member of AmeriCorps*VISTA, I am working with the Department of Social Services. My role as a VISTA is specifically related to the foster care department. Charleston County is in short supply of foster parents to take in children and provide them with a safe and stable environment. My focus is to recruit more foster parents in the area. The first step of this plan involved extensive research of foster care in Charleston County and of the specific licensing requirements needed in order to foster. With a better understanding of the system, my hope is to create a successful foster parent recruitment event to raise awareness in this issue and to increase the number of licensed foster parents in Charleston County.

The most recent project that I've dedicated my time to involved the HALOS Holiday Giving Program. The holiday season at Charleston County DSS is a time of generous giving. Each year the goal of our holiday program is to provide gifts for abused and neglected children who are served by the agency. These children live with foster parents, their non-abusing parent or with caregivers who are related to them (grandparents, aunts, uncles, adult siblings). These families live on tight budgets, so providing gifts for Christmas is just not feasible. Our Holiday Giving Program allows these children the opportunity to enjoy a warmed-hearted and joyous Christmas because our community sponsors purchase gifts for them. Sponsors are given the child's first name, age, gender and several wishes the child or caregiver suggests. Sponsors drop off their gifts to DSS where volunteers spend hours sorting and packing up the gifts to be delivered to families by their case workers.

This year, over 1,900 abused and neglected children were served by our program. In many instances these will be the only gifts the children have under their trees on Christmas morning. These families could not ask for a more gratifying holiday as they hear the laughter and see the bright smiles on the faces of their children as they are opening gifts. Through the efforts of this program, DSS ensures that these families have a joyous celebration during the holidays.



Lauren sorting gifts during the final hours of the drop off.

- ※ **Disadvantaged** children/youth served: 1,900+
- ※ Dollar value of **in-kind** resources leveraged: \$95,000
- ※ Dollar value of **cash** resources leveraged: \$5,000



By: Sarah Gerald

I am Sarah Gerald and I am an AmeriCorps*VISTA at the Trident United Way. I graduated from Elon University with a degree in Environmental Science, and like most science majors, I'm a fan of statistics. Even when my passion for science morphed into a passion for change, I never forgot the value of quality data and strong results.



Sarah Gerald with the user manual she created.

That is how I became the Outcomes Management System Coordinator at TUW. I help to implement and oversee a software system called *Efforts to Outcomes* (ETO). This system will track and measure the outcomes of the Links to Success initiative.

My position began slowly, as I spent most of my time taking webinars and reading manuals on how to operate this ETO software. I also familiarized myself with Links to Success, a collaboration of programs that support students in Title 1 schools in Charleston, Dorchester and Berkley County. These programs work together, rather than independently, to achieve a collective impact in education.

My supervisor and I worked with the software company, *Social Solutions*, to configure a system that would track and measure the outcomes of 12 different educational programs in 11 schools that participate in Links to Success. Once the system was up and running, I created a step-by-step user manual for each ETO function. Our most recent accomplishment was training over 40 individuals on how to track their daily activities in ETO. In January, these users began entering data into the system on a weekly basis. As the system begins to accumulate data, it will be my job to regularly conduct data quality checks and review feedback from users; the end goal being, of course, results.

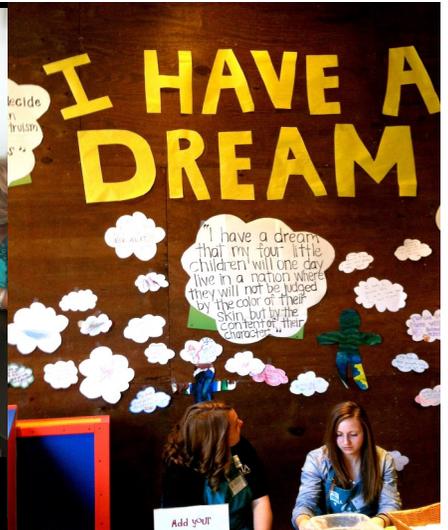
It has been five months since I began my position and my experience has already been invaluable. I strongly believe that the work I have put into this collaborative software system will have a positive impact on our community. I am one who values good results, and I cannot wait to use ETO to measure them for the Links to Success initiative.



Volunteer Management Training with Christine Messick.



Supervisors and VISTA members network with other project sites at OSOT.



Members enjoying the Charleston Harbor at OSOT.



An activity VISTAs did at OSOT.



Top Right: Stephanie and Lauren volunteering at the Children's Museum on MLK Day.

Bottom Right: The CASC's very first logo created by the VISTA Leaders.

A Special Thanks To...

- | | |
|--|---|
| Those who have invested in the professional careers of the CASC members by being a guest speaker or trainer. | ◇ Cathy Easley
Trident United Way |
| | ◇ Liz Mester
WINGS For Kids |
| ◇ Chelsi Howard
Charleston County Human Services Commission | ◇ Shelli Quenga
Palmetto Project |
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Lowcountry Food Bank | ◇ Christine Messick
Messick Consulting, LLC. |
| ◇ Evelyn Owens
Lowcountry Food Bank | ◇ Rev. Bill Stanfield
Metanoia |

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Want to become an AmeriCorps*VISTA site in 2014? Contact Mindy Sturm 843.965.4190

The application process will begin in February / early March with a mandatory informational meeting.