

Section Seven

Program Profiles

This section contains profiles of a wide variety of out-of-school time (OST) programs and activities that are impacted by various Corporation for National Service Programs. These profiles are designed to offer concrete examples of how members, volunteers, and service-learning activities supported by Learn and Serve America grants are being effectively integrated into programs for young people that go on outside the regular school day. For this section, we have selected a group of programs that are meant to be representative of the wide variety of excellent OST programs that currently involve AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps*VISTA, Senior Service Corps, and Learn and Serve America in their work. Programs featured in the following pages represent different geographic areas of the country, different ages of youth served, different types of activities, and different ways of integrating members and volunteers. Some programs are quite new. Some have been around for decades. Each has challenges and successes. This section can help Corporation programs find inspiration, ideas, common ground, and encouragement through learning about other programs that are striving for similar successes.

This section begins with a chart comparing programs profiled and ends with a list of ideas for training and collaboration that are drawn from all of the programs.

Program Profiles

Comparison of Profiled Programs

	Energy Express (Morgantown, WV)	Esteem/Foster Grandparents (Orlando, FL)	Hands on Atlanta (Atlanta, GA)
Year established	1994	1972	1990
Stream of service	AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps*VISTA, Senior Service Corps	Senior Service Corps	AmeriCorps
Number of members or volunteers involved	439 AmeriCorps members, 61 VISTA members, 110 Foster Grandparents, 33 RSVP volunteers	221 (entire Orlando program) 2 (Esteem)	145 AmeriCorps members
Demographics of community			
<i>Community type</i>	primarily rural	urban, suburban, rural	urban
<i>Children of color served</i>	9%	98%	90%
<i>Children eligible for free or reduced lunch</i>	50 - 90%	98%	Not tracked
Children/youth involved annually	3,400	500 (Orlando) 40 (Esteem)	1,400
Ages of children/youth involved	6 - 12	5 - 18 (primarily 5 - 12)	5 - 18 (primarily 5 - 12)
Types of activities			
<i>Homework</i>		✓	✓
<i>Tutoring</i>		✓	✓
<i>Literacy</i>	✓		✓
<i>Recreation</i>	✓		✓
<i>Arts</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>Nutrition</i>	✓		
<i>Environmental education</i>			✓
<i>Math or science</i>		✓	✓
<i>Service-Learning</i>		✓	✓
Annual budget	\$3,000,000	\$800,000 (entire Orlando program)	\$75,000 (amount used to support out-of-school time activities)

Program Profiles

Comparison of Profiled Programs

(Continued)

	Kids in Action (Montgomery Center, VT)	Partners in Nourishing Bodies, Nurturing Minds (Columbus, OH)	Stevens Elementary School (Seattle, WA)
Year established	1997	1989	1991
Stream of service	Learn and Serve	AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps*VISTA	Learn and Serve, AmeriCorps
Number of members or volunteers involved	100 young people, numerous parents, teachers, and community members	4 AmeriCorps members	10 AmeriCorps members
Demographics of community			
<i>Community type</i>	rural	urban	urban
<i>Children of color served</i>	0	90%	51%
<i>Children eligible for free or reduced lunch</i>	50%	94% low income	48%
Children/youth involved annually	100	2,800	170
Ages of children/youth involved	5 – 14	5 – 12	5 - 11
Types of activities			
<i>Homework</i>			✓
<i>Tutoring</i>			✓
<i>Literacy</i>			
<i>Recreation</i>			✓
<i>Arts</i>		✓	✓
<i>Nutrition</i>		✓	
<i>Environmental education</i>	✓		
<i>Math or science</i>			✓
<i>Service-Learning</i>	✓		✓
Annual budget	\$36,000 (including in- kind donations)	\$330,000	\$250,000

Program Profiles

Comparison of Profiled Programs

(Continued)

	Students of Promise (Rockingham County, NC)	Youth Harvest (Mission, TX)
Year established	1998	1996
Stream of service	Learn and Serve America	AmeriCorps
Number of members or volunteers involved	55 high school students serve as volunteers	100 high school-age AmeriCorps members
Demographics of community		
<i>Community type</i>	rural	rural
<i>Children of color served</i>	Information unavailable	95% - 100%
<i>Children eligible for free or reduced lunch</i>	Information unavailable	89% below poverty line
Children/youth involved annually	90	2,500
Ages of children/youth involved	11 - 18 (teenagers serve younger people)	5 – 18 (teenagers serve younger people)
Types of activities		
<i>Homework</i>	✓	✓
<i>Tutoring</i>	✓	✓
<i>Literacy</i>		
<i>Recreation</i>		✓
<i>Arts</i>		✓
<i>Nutrition</i>		
<i>Environmental education</i>		
<i>Math or science</i>		
<i>Service-Learning</i>	✓	✓
Annual budget	\$11,000	\$600,000

Energy Express:

A Summer Program Focusing on Reading and Nutrition

West Virginia

Program Description:

In early 1994, an executive assistant from the West Virginia governor's office contacted the West Virginia University Extension Service. The agenda: could Extension help find ways to increase the use of USDA summer meal funding? USDA funds for summer meals were being underspent, yet there were thousands of West Virginia children who were not getting sufficient nutrition during the summer. In some West Virginia communities, 96% of children are eligible for free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch at school. When school is not in session, many of these children are left without adequate nutrition.

That conversation between the governor's assistant and WVU's Extension Service led to the formation of Energy Express, a program that couples providing nutritious meals with reading enrichment. Energy Express has two goals: to improve the academic achievement of children entering grades one to six, and to maintain or improve their nutritional status. AmeriCorps members serve as mentors to children and both AmeriCorps members and VISTA members serve as volunteer coordinators. In some communities, Foster Grandparents and RSVP volunteers are actively involved. Each Energy Express site is supported by an active "county collaborative" made up of local agencies and organizations such as boards of education, businesses, faith communities, libraries, and family resource networks.

Energy Express started with two pilot sites and now, five years later, offers programs in eighty communities across the state of West Virginia.

Activities:

- **Daily Activities:** During the summer, children attend Energy Express for three and one-half hours per day for six weeks. Children are assigned to a "mentor group" made up of eight children (there are at least three different ages represented in each group) and guided by an AmeriCorps member. The children remain with this family-like group for the entire six-week program. Each day during the six-week session includes breakfast, lunch, noncompetitive recreation, and a large block of literacy-related activities. The program immerses children in a print-rich environment and inspires them to develop a love for reading, writing, and learning. Specific activities include reading (alone, aloud, to partners, and being read to), writing (journals, individual and group stories, letters, lists, labels, and a variety of other language experiences), and art and drama that builds on the themes and related books.

- **Place-Based Curriculum:** The program’s curriculum is “place-based” – organized around a child’s surroundings and designed to recognize, respect, and celebrate who the children are and the people and places to which they are connected. Each week, activities center around a different theme. The six themes are “Myself,” “Family,” “Friends,” “Home Place,” “Community,” and “Making My World a Better Place.” Books and activities for each week are reflective of the theme. For example, during the first week when the curriculum focuses on “Myself,” children might read *Where the Wild Things Are*, a book that explores the inner thoughts and imagination of one little boy, Max. The children might create masks and present a play based on the book; use cardboard boxes to create scenes from the book; list words to describe Max’s feelings; or write their own text for the book’s pictures. As part of the final theme, “Making My World a Better Place,” children take part in a community service project.
- **Take Home Books:** Every week, children receive a “take home book” based on that week’s theme. Many activities center around this book and at the end of the week, children take home and keep the book.
- **Mentor Involvement:** Mentors form close relationships with the eight children in their groups. The activities they do together range as widely as the mentor’s and student’s interests. For example, one mentor read a portion of “Walden Pond” to his group. The students created a large mural of a pond and wrote quotes from the book.

How Members and Volunteers Are Involved:

AmeriCorps members are usually drawn from the local community or a nearby town, and serve as summer-only AmeriCorps members. They serve for eight weeks and get a living allowance and an education award (prorated for the eight weeks that they serve). Each AmeriCorps member guides a mentor-group of eight children under the supervision of the site coordinator. Energy Express staff at WVU has developed the basic structure of the program, but mentors have the freedom to create activities that fit into the program’s structure and themes. In addition to running the daily three-and-a-half-hour program with the children, members participate in two hours of “team time” each afternoon when they plan future activities, reflect on their work, and participate in ongoing training. Members are in contact with the families of children in their group every week, either in person, in writing, or by telephone. The members at each project site also undertake a community service project during their term of service. Examples of these projects include supervising a neighborhood playground, presenting story hours at libraries, conducting book drives, working with Habitat for Humanity, or painting playground equipment.

Every site has a volunteer coordinator. Some are VISTA members and some are AmeriCorps members. Their responsibilities are to recruit, train, and recognize community members and family members of participating children. Some VISTA members come “on loan” from other programs for the summer.

Volunteer participation is an essential part of the Energy Express program. In 1999, 910 hours of volunteer time were contributed at each site. A total of 4,582 family members and community volunteers participated in Energy Express. Volunteers help set up the site before the program starts, answer phones, and help prepare and serve food as well as assisting with activities and reading one-on-one with children. The program ensures that all children participate in one-on-one reading every day. This requires the help of many volunteers.

Many community volunteers are teens and preteens. They enjoy helping with activities, reading one-on-one with the children, and presenting puppet shows or plays for the children. These young volunteers typically benefit from the opportunity to increase their own literacy and nutrition through reading and eating with the children.

Foster Grandparents and RSVP volunteers are involved at a number of sites, reading with children and helping with activities.

Numbers:

In 1999, Energy Express' seventy-six programs served 3,400 children in thirty-eight of the state's fifty-five counties.

Four hundred thirty-nine AmeriCorps members and sixty-one VISTA members participated in 1999. After completing two terms of service, many AmeriCorps members wish to continue to participate in the program. In 1999, forty-seven former members participated in the program for a third time and Energy Express footed the bill for their living allowances and education awards since they had already completed two terms of service and were no longer eligible to receive AmeriCorps funds.

Last year 110 Foster Grandparents and thirty-three RSVP volunteers participated in Energy Express.

The annual budget of Energy Express is approximately \$3 million. Those funds come from Title I through the state Department of Education, a line item in the budget of the Secretary of Education and the Arts, the state Department of Health and Human Resources, USDA, West Virginia University, the Corporation for National Service, and private foundations. Each local county collaborative raises a 30% match from sources that might include school systems, community fundraisers, grants, and business and civic group donations.

Program Impact:

Energy Express has developed some very effective methods of evaluation which help refine the program on an ongoing basis and help secure and maintain funding. WVU faculty and doctoral students conduct the comprehensive evaluation using both quantitative and qualitative strategies. Two subtests of the Woodcock Johnson Individual Test of Achievement are administered to a stratified random sample of Energy Express participants at the beginning and end of their six-week experience. This testing has shown that children who take part in Energy Express have an average

gain of three and one half months in broad reading scores over the course of the six-week program; the results are statistically significant. Pre- and post-program questionnaires indicate that children's positive feelings toward reading also increase significantly during the course of the program. Qualitative interviews are conducted with parents and teachers and have resulted in positive feedback and ideas for program improvement.

The project also evaluates the impact Energy Express has on mentors (AmeriCorps members), using pre- and post-surveys. These surveys show that members experience remarkable personal growth through participation in the program and develop a deep love for service and for working with children (see quotes at the end for examples). In order to further evaluate their experiences, this year's mentors will keep portfolios to assess their skills and develop strategies for improvement.

Energy Express continues to look for ways to improve and extend its evaluation process. A longitudinal study that will include looking at participating children's standardized test scores and compare them to those of a control group is currently underway. In addition, this year's program will include a new "family satisfaction survey" to assess the attitudes of the families of participating children.

Best Practices to Share:

- *Place-based curriculum in a print-rich environment* – The Energy Express curriculum recognizes and respects children, their families, and their communities. The children are knowledgeable experts in the exploration of their place in the world. The print-rich environment that they create builds their confidence and their excitement for reading and writing.
- *Connecting with parents and communities* – By involving parents and community volunteers, Energy Express builds a sense of community ownership of the program and increases the community's commitment to children's learning. Parents begin to see their children as learners and take on new roles that benefit children's learning.
- *Young, enthusiastic AmeriCorps members serving as mentors* – Mentors form positive and supportive relationships with children and serve as important role models. They bring energy, enthusiasm, commitment, and caring to the program.
- *Two nutritious meals served family-style every day* – These meals help children maintain their nutritional status over the summer. The family-style format encourages them to learn social skills and good eating habits. Relationships between mentors and children are strengthened during meals.
- *Small groups* – Group size is limited to eight children so that all can participate and have a voice in group discussions and activities. Children are grouped "vertically" with at least three ages in each group to create diversity and opportunities for cross-age learning and support.
- *Noncompetitive environment* – Because so many children experience repeated and discouraging failure in school, the supportive and cooperative relationships and the absence of grades at Energy Express help create an environment where children take risks and become more confident in their abilities.

- *Partnerships at the local and state levels* – Partnerships among agencies and organizations lead to a sense of shared ownership as well as diversified funding and program sustainability. Groups to learn to work together to address an identified community need.

Training:

There is a three-day training for all members at the beginning of the program, and site coordinators provide ongoing training. Training topics include the concept of a print-rich environment, noncompetitive games, connecting with families, and community service. Energy Express is beginning to focus more training on the concept of reflection so that the member experience will provide more of an opportunity for self-learning.

While the pre-program training passes on some specific skills to members, an additional focus is equipping site coordinators to be effective site leaders. Energy Express staff know that there is no way to teach members all that they need to know in three days, so high-quality leadership at the site coordinator level is an important key to a successful program. During the three-day training, site coordinators practice leadership skills as they work with their teams on structured activities.

Quotes:

“I feel I...have made a difference in this community. Given the chance, I would like to do this again. I feel I have been able to reach the lives of children in this area who are in need of basic reading and writing skills. Thanks for giving me a chance to make a difference in my community.”

- *AmeriCorps member*

“[A] thing I noticed that is just great for these kids is that each kid got equal attention, equal time in everything they did. It just amazed me, because life is not like that. It’s not fair at all...you know in classes there’s always kids who never get involved or get attention, because half the time they aren’t noticed.”

- *Parent of a participant*

“Each year we return to school facing the fact that many of our students have regressed over the summer months. We have to re-teach academic skills, as well as social skills and basic school skills like paying attention...What a pleasant surprise we had this year when our students returned ‘energized’ for school and ready to take up where they had left off in the spring, and had even improved their reading skills over the summer! We can’t applaud the Energy Express program enough.”

- *Special education teacher*

Esteem After School Program: Part of the Orlando Foster Grandparent Program

Orlando, Florida

Program Description:

The Foster Grandparent Program brings at-risk children and seniors together and gives them the chance to help meet each others' needs. Seniors receive a small stipend to cover expenses as they serve twenty hours a week with children. The mission of the Foster Grandparent Program is to help each young person meet his or her maximum potential. To do this, the organization secures placements for Foster Grandparents in child-serving organizations, including schools, Head Start, community organizations, and out-of-school time (OST) programs.

Foster Grandparents are making a real impact on the large, diverse, and growing population of Orlando, Florida (the fifth fastest-growing metropolitan area in the country). Orlando's Foster Grandparent Program is the largest in Florida, with 221 Foster Grandparents. The program has a waiting list of over 100 prospective Grandparents and numerous child-serving organizations that would like to partner with the program.

Orlando's Foster Grandparent Program began in 1972 with eighty Grandparents serving profoundly retarded children in a state hospital. About twenty years ago, when hospital closed, the program needed to find new placements for Foster Grandparents in order to keep service hours at the required level. Staff began to place Grandparents in Boys and Girls Clubs, and other out-of-school programs began to ask for help from Grandparents as well.

In order to illustrate the way that Orlando Foster Grandparents are involved in out-of-school time programs for children, this profile focuses on one after school program that effectively utilizes the help of Foster Grandparents. "Esteem" is a grassroots Orlando nonprofit organization with a mission to "empower children and remove obstacles that prevent children and youth from meeting their goals." The organization recently began an OST program at Margaret Square, a housing development in Orlando that serves an ethnically mixed, low-income community. Two Foster Grandparents are assigned to this program.

Activities:

The two Foster Grandparents assigned to the OST Esteem program at Margaret Square are involved in the following activities, all of which are designed enhance skills and boost knowledge and understanding while promoting good social development.

- **Homework Help:** Daily time is set aside for doing homework with help from staff and Grandparents.

- **Computer Lab:** Children use computers for help with homework assignments and exploration of interests.
- **Special Curriculum Units:** Foster Grandparents develop and present units on various subjects. For example, one Grandparent did a unit on neighborhood safety.
- **Community Service:** Children participate in quarterly service-learning projects at the housing development. Past activities have included cleaning up a parking lot and landscaping.

The Esteem program also has an on-site library, where Foster Grandparents work one-on-one with children who need extra attention.

Esteem serves young people in kindergarten through twelfth grade. High school students arrive at the program first and work on homework. When younger children arrive, the high school students join the program staff and Foster Grandparents to help the younger children with homework and activities.

How Volunteers Are Involved:

Foster Grandparent Program staff members match Foster Grandparents with sites requesting volunteers. In general, Grandparents serve under the supervision of the staff at the partner site. At the Esteem program, the two Foster Grandparents assigned to the program help with all of the activities explained in the previous section. In addition, one of their most important roles is to provide individual attention to children who are having difficulty participating in the planned activities.

Numbers:

Forty young people in Kindergarten through twelfth grade attend the Esteem program at Margaret Square. Two Foster Grandparents serve in the program.

The budget for the entire Foster Grandparent Program in the Orlando area is approximately \$800,000. Funding comes from federal and county grants, United Way, Disney, the Orlando Magic Youth Foundation, and RIF (Reading is FUNdamental). The program receives some in-kind funding as well.

Program Impact:

The impact of the work done by the Orlando Foster Grandparent Program is demonstrated by the eighteen Walt Disney service awards that the program has received. Sites value the Foster Grandparents' services and abilities, as evidenced by the fact that in a recent two-week period, two sites hired Grandparents for regular paid staff positions.

Evaluation of individual children's progress and the effectiveness of Foster Grandparents' participation is the responsibility of the partner organizations. In some cases this may include looking at improvement of test scores, in other cases assessment may involve surveys of children, program staff, parents, and the Grandparents involved. As evidenced by the quotations at the end of this profile, Esteem staff and children consider the Foster Grandparents to be an important and effective part of their program.

Best Practices to Share:

- *Carefully chosen placements and clearly established expectations* - A real strength of the Orlando Foster Grandparent Program is its ability to clarify the roles of its central office and staff, the Foster Grandparents themselves, and the partner organizations. The program is very intentional when beginning a partnership with an OST program. The responsibility of the OST program staff for planning and supervision is clearly established. Before sending Foster Grandparents to a given site, staff meet with personnel from the OST program to make sure that the placement is appropriate and meets community needs. Objectives for Foster Grandparents at each site are mapped out and a memo of understanding is developed before any Grandparents begin to volunteer at a program. Special attention is given to the ways in which the partner organization will provide appropriate training and supervision to the Grandparents. This negotiation process helps the partner agency reflect on what its specific needs are and helps to clarify the roles and expectations of everyone involved.
- *Understanding and targeting community needs* - Another factor that contributes to the success of the Orlando Foster Grandparent Program is its understanding and targeting of community needs. By using community needs surveys, staff attempt to strategically place Foster Grandparents in positions where they can make the most difference in the community.

Training:

When seniors become Foster Grandparents, they participate in a pre-service orientation that offers training on such subjects as values clarification, working with children, recognizing and responding to child abuse, and Foster Grandparent rules and regulations. Then Orlando Foster Grandparents meet monthly for a four-hour in-service training offering a mixture of activities, speakers, and group interaction. Presentations during these in-service meetings are on subjects of general interest to seniors such as storytelling, transportation, fire safety, senior-targeted scams, and Social Security. Program sites are expected to do all program-specific training for Foster Grandparents. The Foster Grandparents serving Esteem were trained by Esteem program staff.

Quotes:

“The Foster Grandparents fit right in. It is such a natural match. From day one, the kids realized that they were special and call them Gramma Pat and Grandmother Virginia. Each day at least one child walks Grandmother Virginia to the bus stop and makes sure that she gets on the bus safely. This relationship is really good for our kids.”

- *Esteem Program Director*

“[Grandmother Virginia] is proud of children when she is able to help them. What I like about [her] is that she is nice. She told me a story. [She] is nice, and she is a good friend.”

- *Cierra, 10-year-old Esteem participant*

Hands On Atlanta: AmeriCorps Members Working in School-Based Out-of-School Time Programs *Atlanta, Georgia*

Program Description:

Hands On Atlanta (HOA) is currently celebrating its tenth anniversary of serving the diverse metropolitan Atlanta area. HOA works toward two goals:

- to provide flexible volunteering opportunities to a diverse group of citizens
- to enhance literacy, service-learning, and service leadership opportunities available to Atlanta's youth and families

The agency has sponsored an AmeriCorps program since 1993 and has 145 members serving in out-of-school time (OST) programs in twenty elementary schools, five middle schools and six high schools. The agency also sponsors an AmeriCorps*VISTA program and coordinates statewide VISTA placements. Hands On Atlanta hosts a number of AmeriCorps Promise Fellows under the America's Promise initiative for the purpose of identifying additional resources to enhance the lives of public school students.

HOA AmeriCorps members interact with a very diverse group of young people. Hands On Atlanta AmeriCorps school partners serve African American, Caucasian, Asian, Latino, and Eastern European families, including refugee and immigrant families.

Activities:

AmeriCorps members serve in several kinds of OST programs:

- **After school enrichment programs at twenty elementary schools:** AmeriCorps members lead programs structured in blocks of five-week sessions. The general program includes a snack, homework help, literacy-focused activities, recreation, and an enrichment component. Enrichment components have included sports programs, multicultural activities, chess, arts and crafts, and special activities designed to promote self-esteem and community awareness. Collaborations with other community agencies have contributed to a wide spectrum of opportunities for students. AmeriCorps members develop and facilitate the activities and lesson plans for the enrichment programs and follow a standard format for implementation of the regular components of the program. Members are encouraged to apply their creativity and talents in presenting the enrichment component of the program.
- **After school enrichment programs at five middle schools:** Middle school programs include most of the same components as the elementary programs, with an additional focus on service-learning. At the middle school level, youth are often unable to be involved on a consistent basis due to their many other after school activities, so the middle school programs have more of a "drop-in" feel. HOA

AmeriCorps-sponsored programs are coordinated and facilitated by the three members placed at each middle school site.

- **Out-of-school time programs at six high schools:** HOA programs for older teens are service-oriented and designed to support an Atlanta Public Schools service requirement that mandates that students complete seventy-five hours of community service before graduation. AmeriCorps members work with youth to plan and implement a variety of programs. Such programs include weekly open-forum discussions on responsibility for young women, the Youth Serving Youth Leadership Conference (an overnight retreat with follow-up workshops and a day of service), the Prudential Youth Leadership Institute (four days of service leadership training for youth), and specific service opportunities such as painting school murals, visiting senior centers, and serving as reading coaches to elementary school students.
- **Saturday tutorial programs:** At elementary and middle schools, Saturday tutorial sessions are offered by members who serve as tutors and program leaders. At several of HOA AmeriCorps' partner school sites, Saturday programs are sponsored and funded by corporate partners and address literacy skills as well as preparation for standardized tests.
- **The Discovery program:** Discovery is a volunteer-led Saturday morning tutoring and enrichment program in nine elementary schools. Of these nine schools, four have HOA AmeriCorps teams involved in their Saturday Discovery sessions. Last year, total student attendance in the Discovery program was over 5,000, and volunteers contributed over 7,400 hours of service. On average, Discovery programs attract twenty to twenty-five volunteers and thirty-five to forty students each session. AmeriCorps members have provided volunteer support not only at their own schools but also at other Discovery programs.
- **Club HOA:** This service-learning based program engages middle school students in service activities generated from the core academic curriculum of their schools. For example, student groups have identified community beautification as a focus area, developed blueprints, and constructed flower boxes using mathematics and science skills from their core curriculum. Club HOA meets a minimum of two times per month at each partnering middle school site.

Both the middle school and high school OST programs emphasize service-learning. The service rendered by the youth makes a real impact on the Atlanta community. Specific activities have included serving as "reading coaches" in elementary schools, visiting senior homes and day care centers, working with teachers on projects such as school beautification, and preparing meals for people with HIV/AIDS. HOA AmeriCorps members ensure that students are engaged in a comprehensive service-learning curriculum in each of these projects. Members focus not only on instilling service-learning concepts in students, but also on giving students the forum to develop service-learning curriculum themselves.

How Members and Volunteers Are Involved:

Hands On Atlanta's OST programs mostly grew out of existing relationships with schools where they were providing services during the school day. Once a decision to offer OST services has been reached in concert with the school partner, HOA AmeriCorps members take a leadership role in planning and operating the after school enrichment programs. In some OST programs, members take more of a supporting role. For example, some of the Saturday tutorial programs are developed by the schools and corporate partners, and members serve a supporting role in facilitating curriculum and coordinating volunteers. Club HOA leadership comes from adult community volunteers, while AmeriCorps members support and participate in each session.

Hands On Atlanta makes effective use of many community volunteers to leverage the impact the organization is able to have. For example, in five of the elementary school programs, volunteers and Federal Work Study students from Emory University assist AmeriCorps members in after school enrichment classes. An HOA AmeriCorps alumnus who is currently an Emory student organized this volunteer program.

Community and corporate volunteers are involved in a number of programs, particularly the Saturday tutorial programs and the Discovery Program. Corporate volunteers also assist in leadership-development training for AmeriCorps members.

Numbers:

One hundred forty-five Hands On Atlanta AmeriCorps members serve approximately 1,200 elementary students, 120 middle school students, and 100 high school students during each five-week after school enrichment program session.

Elementary school teams are comprised of five AmeriCorps members and an AmeriCorps Team Leader. Middle school sites benefit from two AmeriCorps members and a Team Leader. High school teams are comprised of two AmeriCorps members at each school, with a Team Leader supervising three school teams.

A budget of over \$75,000 supports HOA AmeriCorps initiatives in after school enrichment programs at thirty-one school sites, as well as the Youth Serving Youth Leadership Conference, the Prudential Youth Leadership Institute, Saturday tutorial programs, Club HOA, and other OST projects.

Program Impact:

Participation in Hands On Atlanta has a real impact on the lives and career paths of its AmeriCorps members and program participants. All program managers on staff as well as the leadership development manager are former AmeriCorps members. Many former HOA AmeriCorps members continue to be involved in serving Atlanta's children and youth after their term of service with HOA by continuing involvement in HOA programs and/or becoming teachers. One former participant in the high school program is now serving as an HOA AmeriCorps member at an elementary school. These facts demonstrate the successful leadership development offered by the

program, as well as the fulfillment and enjoyment that HOA AmeriCorps members and participants find in their service and participation.

Current assessment tools and surveys gauge the satisfaction of students, parents, volunteers, and school administration in regard to Hands on Atlanta AmeriCorps' overall programming. To date, there have been no assessments done that specifically target HOA's out-of-school time initiatives.

Best Practices to Share:

- *Parent involvement* - In the elementary and middle school OST programs, parents are asked to volunteer a minimum of two hours during each session in which their children are enrolled. This has been most successful with parents of younger students. HOA staff and AmeriCorps members work to develop flexible options for this requirement in order to meet the needs and interests of parents. Parent involvement leads to more human resources for programs and more parental support for student learning.
- *Established program structure combined with the creativity and energy of members* - The specific format of the after school enrichment program provides an effective, safe learning environment for students. The creativity and insight of AmeriCorps members complement this format and lead to dynamic and often innovative approaches to learning. Students are offered a wide variety of enrichment activities, from more formal and traditional learning activities to interactive learning through hands-on projects and field trip experiences.

Training:

Members receive training appropriate to their specific role. For example, at the elementary level, some members focus on working with volunteers, some on literacy activities, and some on family and community leadership. Specific training is offered on each of these topics throughout the service term. Hands On Atlanta staff develop much of the training, while also collaborating with other Atlanta community organizations to enhance the leadership development curriculum. The Children's Museum of Atlanta, the National Mental Health Association of Georgia, the Atlanta Foundation for Psychoanalysis, Atlanta Public Schools, and Literacy Volunteers of America are just a few of the organizations that help HOA train AmeriCorps members.

All HOA AmeriCorps members meet weekly for a morning of training, peer-facilitated workshops, and teambuilding. In addition, there is a two-week pre-service orientation, a midyear retreat, and a closing "debriefing" week. Team Leaders participate in an additional two-week training session before the general pre-service orientation. Training topics include the concept of national service, member roles and responsibilities, literacy, leadership, team building and teamwork, and volunteer recruitment and management. These themes are introduced at the pre-service sessions and reinforced throughout the year.

Quotes:

“My son had the pleasure of being involved with Hands On Atlanta AmeriCorps during his school year 1998 - 1999 at Adamsville Elementary. Hands On Atlanta was a great experience for my son. He had the opportunity to experience activities, responsibility, and many other learning abilities that are very important in his everyday life. Hands On Atlanta had a very well-trained and polite staff that was involved with all the children. Hands On Atlanta was concerned with all that went on with each child and kept us well informed of each and every event and behavior of our children. I am very grateful that Hands On Atlanta was with Adamsville Elementary and was a part of my son’s school year. I am looking forward to Hands On Atlanta being at Adamsville Elementary for this school year 1999 - 2000, and hope that Hands On Atlanta will continue for years to come.”

- Greer Hutchinson, “Very pleased parent” (as she calls herself)

“My attitude towards life, towards people has changed. As I walked into my school Monday morning I felt like a new student...I learned how to work together to get things done...I can do tons of things to improve not only myself, but my community, and anything else that needs improvement.”

- Marshall Middle School Student, eighth grade Club HOA participant

Kids in Action: A Student-Led Service-Learning Program *Montgomery Center, Vermont*

Program Description:

As part of a program called “Bridges to Learning,” the University of Vermont helped schools around the state develop improvement plans. In Montgomery Center, a small town near the Canadian border, the school improvement plan included a recommendation that the community launch a service-learning initiative. With help from the university, school staff applied for and received a Learn and Serve America grant.

Out of those ordinary beginnings grew Kids in Action (KIA), an innovative service-learning model which involves every student at the school and the entire town. Led by a student planning group, KIA’s goal is to “improve the environment of the school and community” by planning and implementing service-learning opportunities. The student planning group is assisted by a town oversight group called the School Community Team. A paid project coordinator works with a teacher from the school to coordinate the work of the student group and the oversight group.

The town of Montgomery Center is very rural and has about 850 residents. It is sixty miles from Burlington and eight miles from the Canadian border. The county has the highest rate of teenage cigarette and alcohol use in the state. Montgomery is primarily Caucasian; the main minority population is French Canadian (perhaps one third of the community). About half of the school’s children are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch.

Activities:

Kids in Action has planned and implemented several projects to improve the community:

- **Environmental Preservation:** “Forever Green Woods” is an environmental education project that entails improving a one quarter mile trail between the school and the recreation center. This is both an in-school and an OST project. Schoolteachers integrate learning related to the project into their curriculum and much of the physical work involved takes place during out-of-school time. Work includes erosion control, improving foot paths, mulching, signage and mapping, plant identification, maintenance, putting in a bike path extension, and installing railings. The entire school participated in a “Trail Week” in the fall of 1998.
- **Youth Lounge:** There is a drop-in youth lounge located in the basement of the town offices that is open two afternoons a week for middle and high school students. An advisory group which includes some older teenagers works with the younger students in the KIA planning group to develop programs. The lounge provides a place for youth to “hang out” together and offers some organized

activities such as “coffee houses” and dances. In addition, a certified drug/alcohol coordinator works on site.

- **Huts for Mutts:** This is an ongoing project that engages young people in building dog houses for pets whose owners cannot afford appropriate shelter. Primarily middle school students are involved, although other students can participate as well.
- **Mutt Strut:** A group of students is working to create the “Mutt Strut,” a dog parade in the spring of 2000 that will raise money for immunization for dogs. This project also involves primarily middle-school-aged children.
- **Historic Preservation:** As a step in the historic preservation process, several students are working with a community volunteer/mentor to make models of the several historic covered bridges in the town.

How Volunteers Are Involved:

The planning group includes nine young people (three each from grades six, seven, and eight) and reports to the School Community Team. The planning group members are chosen through a combination of student and teacher nomination. Other students in the school are involved in specific projects.

KIA projects also involve community volunteers. Parent volunteers chaperone activities. Community volunteers with needed expertise serve as trainers/mentors. For example, one volunteer with carpentry skills taught students how to build dog houses.

Numbers:

All the students at the school (about 100) participate in some aspect of KIA. Older children (particularly fifth through eighth graders) have more of a chance to initiate and help plan projects in which they are interested; younger children participate primarily through class projects.

The project’s budget is approximately \$36,000, including in-kind funding. Approximately \$7,000 of the total is cash funding from the Learn and Serve grant.

Program Impact:

Young people have a great deal of pride in the Forever Green Woods trail. The project was initiated by KIA after members heard about a similar project in Maine. Students get constant and immediate reinforcement about the impact of their work because the trail is in frequent use by youth going to the recreation center from school.

Although KIA is a school-based project that spans in-school and out-of-school time during the school year, last year’s planning group participants were so enthusiastic about their work that they continued to meet during the summer.

Although much of the work on the trail takes place during out-of-school hours, the project has had an impact on the in-school environment as well. Teachers adjust their curriculum to include service-learning activities. For example, the eighth grade is

working on a mapping unit this year, which includes mapping the trail. The maps will eventually be incorporated into the signage on the trail.

Best Practices to Share:

- *Youth leadership* – Kids in Action offers a great example of how to effectively let youth direct their own service-learning. Planning group members moderate their own meetings and take notes with support and help from adults. Projects grow out of the interests of planning group members; for example, the ideas of the Huts for Mutts and Mutt Strut projects came out of a meeting at which a representative from the Humane Society did a presentation.
- *Active community involvement* – Once projects are identified, students are encouraged to partner with community groups to make the work happen. In the case of the trail, KIA partnered with the Hazen’s Notch Association, an environmental/conservation group. The students also invited all town residents to attend two community forums in order to get ideas about how the trail should be improved.

Training:

Most training is done in the spring, when the new planning group members (rising sixth graders) are brought on and the eighth graders graduate. Training covers such subjects as understanding the idea of service and the project’s mission, and reviewing the last year’s achievements and areas for improvement. Weekly planning group meetings include some training content or presentation on community needs (e.g., the humane society presentation). In late spring, the group says “goodbye” to graduating eighth graders with a meal and a small gift and presents each young person with a T-shirt emblazoned with an adjective that describes that individual student.

Quotes:

“Our goal with everything we’re doing is to get the community and the students involved with each other.”

- *Jackie Batten, eighth grader and KIA planning group member*

“This morning I had a really good day (working on the trail). My group and I worked great together. We got the trench digged and made the holes in the trench . . . Our group had worked hard. We did not fool around. I enjoyed learning about the different animal skulls . . . I enjoyed learning about the different birds and the two groups.”

- *From an eighth grade participant’s journal*

PARTNERS in Nourishing Bodies, Nurturing Minds: *After School Nutrition-Focused Activities Offered by Ohio Hunger Task Force and AmeriCorps Members*

Columbus, Ohio

Program Description:

For the past thirty years, Ohio Hunger Task Force (OHTF) has worked to eliminate hunger in the state of Ohio. Its programs range from sponsoring Child and Adult Care Food Programs to developing nutrition education programs. An increasing segment of their work involves working with school-age youth in partnership with local out-of-school time (OST) programs.

About ten years ago, OHTF began serving evening meals to children attending after school programs in the Columbus, Ohio, area. From this initial effort, partnerships with twenty-nine community agencies have been developed to help serve children in out-of-school time programs. OHTF's work with OST programs is called Partners in Nourishing Bodies, Nurturing Minds (or PARTNERS). PARTNERS works with existing OST programs, including settlement houses, Boys and Girls Clubs, churches, parks and recreation facilities, and housing developments. OST programs contact OHTF and request that an OHTF AmeriCorps member present a nutrition-focused program at their site. In response to these requests, members provide both one-time presentations and activities and ongoing programming and services to OST programs. Through PARTNERS, both VISTA and AmeriCorps members are involved in designing and implementing programs.

PARTNERS currently serves nearly 2,000 children ages five through twelve and the program is expanding its services this year to include thirteen through eighteen-year-olds.

Activities:

The primary goal of PARTNERS is to serve nutritious meals to children involved in OST programs. The fun nutrition-focused activities conducted by AmeriCorps members in OST programs serve as a complement to this primary goal. When conducting sessions, the leaders (generally AmeriCorps and VISTA members) arrive at the site with huge enticing bins full of all the materials needed for the day. All lessons include lots of hands-on activities for children. Nutrition-focused programming offered by AmeriCorps members in OST programs includes the following:

- **Food Folks:** (formerly Food Funtastic) Children participate in hands-on educational activities, including cooking and gardening. The program includes lesson plans for ten sessions. Most sessions introduce children to new fruits, vegetables, and breads and engage them in using this new food to prepare a delicious dish. Through this program, children have learned to enjoy such foods as spinach, hummus, and pomegranates.

Program Profiles – PARTNERS

- **Little Chefs:** Professional chefs and volunteers team up to work with children and teach them about meal etiquette, nutrition, food safety, and preparation. On the last night of this four-week class, the students prepare and serve a meal to their families. All participants receive a bucket of cooking utensils and supplies for graduation.
- **Family Nights:** Special meals are prepared for families to eat together at the after school programs so that children and their parents can learn together about good nutrition.
- **Bright Futures:** Adults working in different professions are recruited by members and OHTF staff to visit OST programs to share their career choices and experiences.
- **Earth Friends:** Members lead fun, hands-on activities that teach children about environmental issues.
- **Cook With a Book:** Members and volunteers read a book with a food theme and then children and members work together to prepare a snack that follows the theme.

How Members and Volunteers Are Involved:

PARTNERS engages both regular AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps*VISTA members (four in all) in leading their OST activities. These members are assisted by volunteers from the community. Members visit each site at least once a week, and are assigned to up to four sites. Members and volunteers may develop and pilot new programs to meet specific community needs that they observe.

Numbers:

Almost 2,000 children are involved in Ohio Hunger Task Force programs during the peak months of the year (February, March, April) at twenty-nine different sites. More than 90% of participants are children of color. Most are five through nine years old, with about 20% in the ten through twelve-year-old age range. PARTNERS is expanding its services this year to thirteen to eighteen-year-olds through a new USDA child nutrition program, "After School At Risk." OHTF activities in OST programs are run primarily by four AmeriCorps members.

The OHTF budget is over \$900,000. Funding comes from federal and local grants, the United Way, and private and foundation funding. Approximately \$330,000 goes towards after school activities and food.

Program Impact:

To assess the impact of PARTNERS programs, children fill out evaluations at the beginning and end of their participation in such programs as Little Chefs and Food Folks. Through this evaluation process, OHTF is able to look for changes in eating behaviors as well as new understanding of important aspects of nutrition (for example,

understanding of the food pyramid). OHTF is considering the use of video interviews of children as part of their evaluation process.

One evaluation process allowed staff to review student test results and survey teachers for a sample group of children involved in OHTF's programs. This evaluation showed that students who participated in OHTF programs had increased school attendance, improved behavior, more homework completed, higher grades, and a lower incidence of disciplinary problems as compared with those who did not participate. OHTF is working on ways to evaluate all aspects of their programming.

Best Practices to Share:

- *Effective partnerships and collaboration* – PARTNERS uses community collaborations to reach nearly 3,000 children. All OST involvement is made possible by working with existing OST sites, including Boys and Girls Clubs, community centers, settlement houses, Parks and Recreation facilities, and housing developments. The PARTNERS programs are sponsored and/or funded by a wide variety of organizations: the Ohio Environmental Education Fund, the Rotary Club, the Columbus Medical Association Foundation, the American Culinary Foundation, American Express, and the Corporation for National Service. A large part of the success of OHTF can be attributed to the organization's highly effective methods for building and maintaining strong partnerships.
- *Creative, well-developed curriculum* – Out-of-school activities conducted by AmeriCorps members and volunteers as a part of PARTNERS are well developed, interactive, and supported by binders full of instructions and ideas. AmeriCorps members arrive at program sites with large colorful bins full of enticing foods and materials, peaking children's interest and enthusiasm for the program. PARTNERS offers plenty of support and ideas to members and volunteers as they plan and implement curriculum.

Training:

AmeriCorps members participate in orientation at the beginning of their service and receive ongoing monthly training at OHTF. Training topics include nutrition, child development, computer skills, leadership skills, conflict resolution, career planning, and volunteer management. They also participate in other training opportunities available in the area. Community volunteers attend training in which the lesson plans they will be using are presented and their roles are clarified.

Quotes:

"Sometimes what I like best is breakfast and lunch, all you can eat, especially when we don't have any more food at home. I play with toys, play foosball. I eat breakfast, lunch and dinner. I like cereal, carrots, green beans, and chocolate milk."

- *After School program participant, age 11*

"From now on, the only thing I'm going to eat is spinach!"

- *Food Folks program participant, age 7*

Stevens Elementary School: After School Enrichment, Tutoring, and Service-Learning with Help from AmeriCorps Members Seattle, Washington

Program Description:

Stevens Elementary School in Seattle serves 300 ethnically diverse students in Kindergarten through fifth grade in an urban neighborhood of the city. Over twenty different ethnic or cultural groups are represented; about half are children of color. About 50% of the students at the school qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch.

The school began its involvement in children's out-of-school time (OST) almost ten years ago with a program of after school activities led by parent volunteers. Since then, its OST programming has expanded considerably. In addition to Kids' Club (the separately-incorporated before and after school program that grew out of the original volunteer-led program), the school has a number of other OST programs and a service-learning component that is integrated into both the regular school day and OST activities.

The school has both an AmeriCorps program and a Learn and Serve America grant. Ten AmeriCorps members serve at the school and are considered full members of the school community. Each member is assigned solely to Stevens Elementary and serves in both school-day and OST activities, encouraging a sense of continuity for members, school staff, and the children they serve.

Activities:

OST programs and activities at Stevens Elementary include the following:

- **Kids' Club:** a separately incorporated, PTA-led nonprofit after school program that is seen as an integral part of the school. Some AmeriCorps members serve with Kids' Club and have the opportunity to lead activities that are based on their interests and skills. Examples include: tennis, paper making, exploring various countries (incorporating language and cooking), puppet making, eco-dioramas, field trips, science activities, and making musical instruments.
- **Tutoring:** AmeriCorps members tutor students who are not meeting academic standards three days per week in an after school tutoring program.
- **Clubs:** Children can choose to be part of a variety of after school clubs focusing on sports, chess, math, books, drama, etc. AmeriCorps members help lead clubs in accordance with their individual interests and goals.
- **Specialty enrichment activity programs:** From time to time, AmeriCorps members help to offer short-term (four to six week) specialty enrichment activity programs. Subjects of these mini-programs have included swimming, Spanish language and Hispanic cultures, recycled sculpturing, ceramics/clay, wearable art,

African drumming and dance, basketball skills, photography, cooking, book making, paper making, hands-on science, and woodworking.

- **Service-Learning:** The Learn and Serve grant has helped Stevens Elementary to involve students in a wide variety of service-learning activities during school and as part of their after school activities. Service-learning activities have included mural painting, collecting books, clothing, and food, working at food banks, and raising salmon to restore fish runs.

How Members and Volunteers Are Involved:

AmeriCorps members begin their year with a time to sample different ways that they can serve in the school, both during the school day and in the OST programs. After this initial “shopping” period, members and staff work together to make decisions about how each member will spend the year and what his/her goals will be. Member involvement includes working with Kids’ Club, providing classroom assistance, tutoring, or beginning a new club. For example, this year a member is beginning a drama club.

Parent volunteers fill many short-term volunteer opportunities. Many help on projects in their student’s classroom, chaperone field trips, help on picture day, prepare the bulletin/handout packet to go home each week, participate on the school leadership team, and help with PTA fundraising activities. Parent volunteers are the leaders of the math and chess clubs. As part of the enrichment activities offered, parents have shared their expertise in geology, architecture, cooking, book making, art, and Shakespeare.

Numbers:

About seventy children attend Kids’ Club, and an additional 100 are involved in other OST activities. All students at the school have the opportunity to participate in service-learning activities. Ten AmeriCorps members serve at the school.

The total annual budget for Kids Club is \$130,000, for AmeriCorps is \$115,000, and for Learn and Serve is \$15,000.

Program Impact:

Stevens evaluates the impact of AmeriCorps member participation as well as service-learning and other OST activities on the students involved through several measures, including participation counts and test scores. Last year, all students in the fifth grade, including the ESL (English as a Second Language) met or exceeded the state standards in writing. Staff members attribute this in part to the extra help that AmeriCorps members have been able to offer students both in school and after school.

Best Practices to Share:

- *Shared goals and close working relationships between all programs* – All Stevens Elementary programs, even those that are not officially under school auspices, are seen as “part of the family” and work together very closely. For example, service activities supported by the Learn and Serve grant extend from in-school activities to OST activities and vice versa. The staff of all programs are expected to work

together on an ongoing basis, and the AmeriCorps members are freely shared by in-school and OST programs. Everyone works towards a common goal: offering Stevens Elementary students excellent opportunities to expand their knowledge and academic skills, build their talents and interests, understand each others' cultures and appreciate differences, and develop leadership and social skills.

- *High level of parent participation and support* – Considerable parent participation and support has greatly enhanced all Stevens Elementary programs. Stevens makes it clear to parents that their involvement and support is welcome and expected. Through getting to know the skills, talents and interests of parents and then using them, school and OST staff have generated a high level of parental involvement. Everyone in the Stevens “family” is in the business of recruiting parent volunteers.

Training:

AmeriCorps members meet all day each Friday to review their work and plan; some of these meetings include training. At the beginning of the school year, members have one and a half weeks of training. Members also attend Membership Development Institutes through the Washington Service Corps. Training topics include understanding school culture, how to administer reading tests, tutoring tips and skills, First Aid and CPR, playgroup management, conflict resolution, teambuilding, diversity, anti-bias curriculum, service-learning, and presentation skills.

Parent volunteers receive an orientation and ongoing training.

Quotes:

“The benefit of having [AmeriCorps members] involved is that we have activities, both academic and enrichment, which would not otherwise be offered. [This school] is the best around, even compared to a private school system.”

- *Parent of an OST program participant*

“This month we got to work with children from all grades. One of the loudest children in class (the one who generally disrupts) showed some amazing people skills with the little ones this month.”

- *AmeriCorps member*

Students of Promise: High School Students Tutoring and Mentoring Middle School Students

Rockingham County, North Carolina

Program Description:

Rockingham County Youth Services provides prevention and enrichment programs for at-risk youth. One program it offers is the statewide Support Our Students (SOS) program. SOS provides after school tutoring and enrichment activities for middle school students considered by their teachers to be academically at risk. Spurred by the county's commitment to America's Promise and after being awarded a Learn and Serve America Community-Based Grant in 1998, the county youth services department created a peer mentoring program, called Students of Promise (SOP), that engages high school students as tutors and mentors for middle school SOS students.

At the four high schools in the county, students identified by school counselors and teachers as service-oriented or leaders can apply for participation in Students of Promise. Once selected for participation in the program, youth are assigned to a nearby middle school's SOS after school program. At least twice a month, the high school students visit the after school program to mentor and tutor the younger students. The high school students are not assigned to specific middle school students. Instead, they are able to pair up or form groups on their own, which fosters more natural and relaxed relationships. As well as engaging in tutoring and mentoring, SOP volunteers work with SOS students to develop and implement service-learning projects.

Activities:

- **Tutoring and Mentoring** -- SOP volunteers are matched up to an SOS after school program, usually housed at a middle school, near their high school. They generally mentor and tutor a group of middle school youth on a bimonthly basis. At the SOS program, the SOP volunteers work one-on-one with students or with groups to help them with homework, plan community service projects, and/or help with special events such as field trips or guest speakers.
- **Service-Learning Projects** -- During their term of service, SOP volunteers are asked to plan three service-learning projects that they will do with SOS students. The youth work together to research community needs, meet with community groups related to their project and plan the entire effort. Projects in the past have ranged from school beautification to organizing a blood drive. The SOP volunteers teach the middle school youth how to plan projects by involving them in the process. "When we do a project, we teach them about the things they need to learn like dependability and following through. Then when we do the projects and they get to

help other people too, I think they feel good. Then they can see that they can do what we can do,” says SOP volunteer Valorie Conley.

- **Youth/Senior Citizen Interaction** -- The program also creates opportunities for meaningful interaction between youth and senior citizens. SOP volunteers have worked with SOS students to organize visiting days, goodie bag deliveries, and entertainment at homes for the elderly. “We try to set the stage so [youth and seniors] can get to know each other on an informal basis before doing activities together,” says Youth Services Director for Rockingham County Teresa Price. The program hopes that building up these intergenerational relationships will aid in recruiting more senior volunteers for various community service efforts, including the forming of the community’s future volunteer center. The program aims to integrate senior citizen involvement in service-learning – both as recipients and providers of service. One example of an intergenerational activity took place on Groundhog Day. “In past years the Madison-Moyodan Rotary Club traditionally had students come shadow them in their jobs, but this year we had them shadowing the kids. That’s a wonderful opportunity for these retired adults to actually see that all youth aren’t how they appear on the news and to see how difficult school has become,” says Price.

How Other Volunteers Are Involved:

Adult volunteers (teachers, county human services staff, and other community members) help train SOP participants for their work with the middle school students, visit SOS sites as guest speakers to address topics such as teen pregnancy and peer pressure, and help youth organize and implement service projects.

Numbers:

Each year about fifty-five Students of Promise volunteers participate in the program and work with about ninety SOS students at the various sites. Usually about six long-term service projects are completed each year in addition to numerous small-scale projects.

The program’s annual budget is about \$11,000, with funding from Learn and Serve America augmented by in-kind support from local government and school agencies. Each year of the project, Learn and Serve America contributions decrease as local contributions increase. Eventually, the project will be fully maintained by local funds.

Program Impact:

The SOP volunteers significantly impact the middle school youth they mentor and tutor. According to program records, in the 1998 - 1999 school year:

- Forty-six of the fifty-four SOS students surveyed (or 85%) improved in at least one academic area as demonstrated by pre- and post-progress reports on grades
- Forty-seven of fifty-four (87%) improved on at least one academic area of testing in end-of-grade tests
- Fifty-three of fifty-four (98%) improved in two academic areas of testing in end-of-grade tests

SOS students also completed pre- and post- self-esteem inventories, which indicated that 33% increased their general self-esteem, 23% increased their perception of their academic abilities, and 20% increased their confidence in their social capabilities.

Through service-learning projects, SOS and SOP participants have fulfilled community needs through spending quality time with senior citizens, planting trees, beautifying school grounds, and promoting and participating in a blood drive.

Best Practices to Share:

- *Emphasis on recruiting youth who can be involved for more than one year* - In the program's first year, the staff aimed to include a diverse age group of students but put an emphasis on the recruitment of sophomore and junior students so they could be involved for more than one year. The returning SOP volunteers serve as peer leaders, build long-term relationships with the middle school youth, recruit friends to join the program, and set examples for new SOP volunteers. "I thought we would have to police the contacts [between the high school and middle school youth] and put fires under them to get them to go, but it is just not that way. I had no idea that there would be that much involvement—their eagerness, their willingness, their responsibility," says Program Coordinator Lynn Flowers.
- *Support from the schools involved* - "It is nice to be a community-based program, but to still have the support of the schools," says Youth Services Director Teresa Price. The high schools support the program by helping to identify potential SOP volunteers, including the program in recognition events such as award assemblies, and giving youth participants permission to leave school on a few occasions for SOP-related events. The middle schools have also been supportive. "They let us use their facilities, use computers – they opened the schools to us," says Price. "They were a little leery at first because of the fact that older kids would be on campus, but now they support us."
- *Fostering caring for others and civic responsibility* - SOP volunteers have the opportunity to gain a new perspective on how they can directly impact members of their community. Through working with the middle school students, the volunteers learn about the issues involved in the lives of at-risk youth through first-hand experience and gain increased understanding of the critical importance of service and caring for others. With time and support to process new perspectives on their community through reflection and group discussion, the SOP volunteers connect to the broader issues facing society and the role all citizens need to play to work toward solutions.
- *Clearly defined responsibility and commitment of youth mentors and tutors* - Through the application process, expectations are clearly stated up front and committed and concerned high school youth are recruited.
- *Time for reflection* - SOP staff help volunteers focus on what they are gaining from the experience through many methods including journal questions that help them

analyze how working with younger youth influences them and helps them think about the mentors they have had in their own lives.

Training:

Before SOP volunteers begin tutoring and mentoring middle school youth, they attend two half-day training sessions. The first training session focuses on the characteristics, needs, and environments of at-risk youth and is presented by trainers from county human service agencies. For many SOP volunteers, this is the doorway to a new world. As Program Coordinator Flowers states, “[The kids] really get a look at the different lives people are living out there.” The second training session is usually presented by staff from the state’s commission on service and explains a process for planning and organizing service-learning projects.

Quotes:

“There is nothing like it when you see one of the kids smile at you. That’s when you know you are making a real difference in their life. I mean, I never had to deal with some of the things they have. For me to be able to help them is a real honor.”

- *Kristen Gwaltney, SOP volunteer*

“If [the middle school students] see from us that we are in high school, we are this age and we are not doing bad things like drugs or whatever, and we are still cool, then maybe it helps them see that they don’t have to do certain things.”

- *Amber Sands, SOP volunteer*

“You have to understand yourself because you know that [the middle school youth] are going to be looking up to you and you are going to impact them. They need to know that no one knows it all. So, when things come up that you don’t know about, they need to know that – they need you to tell them you are on the same level.”

- *Jonathan McLawhon, SOP volunteer*

“I have learned a lot about myself because you are really taking what a lot of other people have taught you and using it to positively influence someone else’s life. Knowing you are doing that is a great feeling for me.”

- *Patrick McFall, SOP volunteer*

Youth Harvest: High School-Age AmeriCorps Members Serving in Out-of-School Time Programs

Mission, Texas

Agency/Program Description:

Youth Harvest (YH) is an innovative AmeriCorps program that engages local high school seniors as AmeriCorps members in the small rural community of Mission, Texas. Located near the Mexican border, Mission is about 95% Hispanic, with a high percentage of children from migrant families and 83% of the population living below the poverty line.

Youth Harvest's AmeriCorps members serve in local schools and community organizations. All Youth Harvest service is education-related. Public schools have priority in securing the help of members. After the needs of the schools have been filled, other community organizations can request assistance. YH works with twenty community organizations including a Boys and Girls Club, housing authorities, and public libraries. YH members help younger children with homework and conduct a wide array of OST activities.

Youth Harvest began in 1996 when the Texas Workforce Commission gave a grant to the Mission school district for a high school AmeriCorps program. In addition to the Mission school district, five other nearby school districts now participate in Youth Harvest.

Activities:

- **Homework Assistance:** Homework assistance is considered a priority, and during the school year, members spend at least one and a half hours per day helping younger children with homework.
- **After School and Summer Activities:** After school and summer activities led by members include theatre, cooking, arts and crafts, computer activities, English as a Second Language, and sports.
- **Service-Learning:** Members undertake monthly service-learning projects in addition to the daily service of tutoring, mentoring, and helping to lead OST activities. Projects conducted by members have included sweater drives, feeding programs, and a youth summit. One team of members coordinated a "shopping spree" which gave thirty-five families the opportunity to select from a donated collection of both new and used items.

How Members Are Involved:

Members are high school seniors “sponsored” by their high school. Each high school requests a given number of slots for members to participate in Youth Harvest. The process of applying to become a member is competitive, with students completing an application, writing essays, and supplying references. Once assigned to a site, members work with their host site supervisor to determine what kind of work they will do. The member submit to YH staff a monthly plan, report, and contact logs that detail the work they have been doing. As with all AmeriCorps members, Youth Harvest members receive a monthly stipend as well as an educational grant at the end of the service year. Members put in approximately twenty hours a week and between seventy and eighty hours a month.

Members are organized into teams that include students from different high schools. Teams meet at least monthly to reflect and debrief.

Numbers:

Youth Harvest has ninety to one hundred AmeriCorps members each year. All members are seniors at one of the area’s eight high schools. The Youth Harvest budget is about \$600,000, and includes the federal grant and funds from the participating school districts.

Youth Harvest members serve approximately 2,500 young people, including large numbers of children who are enrolled in summer programs through the Boys and Girls Club. Most of those served by the members are younger children, although some members also tutor their peers in high school.

Program Impact:

Youth Harvest is undertaking an expanded evaluation of student achievement this year. Evaluation practices include use of a tool called a “Passport to Success” which asks members to focus on five students with whom they are working and their progress toward specific goals. Goals may include grade improvement, increase in reading levels, or learning a specific skill.

Parents complete surveys and in many cases attach heartfelt letters about the difference Youth Harvest members have made in their children’s lives.

Best Practices to Share:

- *Continuous program improvement* - Youth Harvest is very intentional about continuous program improvement. Each year, every aspect of the program is reviewed. All forms, documents, and procedures are reexamined and redeveloped as necessary. As part of this internal evaluation process, the program made a decision last year to “streamline” and focus more intensively on homework and academic assistance. This meant dropping some member placements and activities that were more recreation-focused, and even renegotiating some collaboration agreements with partners. This realignment with community needs has been successful but somewhat stressful for YH staff and members.

- *Members serving their own community* - Another effective aspect of the Youth Harvest program is the use of high school students as members serving their own community. Many AmeriCorps programs around the country bring in members from other areas to provide service to a community, and these members leave when their term of service is done. In contrast, Youth Harvest members serve their own community and have the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of making schools and OST options better for their own town and their own families.
- *High school students serving as members* - High school students enjoy the responsibility of assisting others and appreciate having their ability to make a difference in their community recognized. By getting high school-aged youth involved in serious community service, YH hopes to get them “addicted” to service so that they will continue to serve their communities throughout their lives. The ideas, creativity, and enthusiasm of its young AmeriCorps members really keeps the program vibrant and fresh.

Training:

Members attend a six-evening orientation at the beginning of the school year, participate in a retreat in February, and go to regular monthly training meetings. At the monthly meetings, a formal presentation of one to two hours is presented on such subjects as peer mediation, financial management, HIV/AIDS, CPR/First Aid, looking for a job, public speaking, tutoring, leadership, and team building. Volunteer trainers from outside the team and program staff make these presentations. Training presentations are followed by time for each team to meet together and reflect on the work they have been doing. Meetings offer structured times for team members to present inspirational stories and a prize drawing at the end of each meeting. These activities help provide a sense of fun and community.

Quotes:

“I have learned that changing and helping others by volunteering is the greatest satisfaction there is.”

- *Amanda, AmeriCorps member*

“I know that a few minutes that I spend with a child makes a lot of difference. If not now, then definitely in the long run. These children are learning to have role models in their lives, people to look up to. I see it in the kids that they look up to me.”

- *Melissa, AmeriCorps member*

“I’m really enjoying my duty! It feels great to know I make a difference in children’s lives.”

- *Nadia, AmeriCorps member*

“Ever since the Youth Harvest members started working in my room, my students have done a better job.”

- *High school special education teacher*

Successful Training Practices

The following compilation of ideas for successful training practices comes from the programs profiled in this section:

- Build organizational capacity by training leaders and teaching them to train others effectively. (Energy Express)
- Offer food at training sessions. It helps everyone be in a better mood! (Esteem - Foster Grandparents)
- The local Cooperative Extension staff may be used as a resource for training meetings. (Esteem - Foster Grandparents)
- Consider what style of training and what content will work with the specific group you are training this year. Don't assume that a session that was popular last year will work again this year. (Hands on Atlanta)
- When training members and volunteers, include sessions on career planning and cultural awareness. (Ohio Hunger Task Force)
- Contact corporate human resources departments and see if members and/or volunteers can participate in training sessions on relevant subjects that they have set up for their employees. (Ohio Hunger Task Force)
- Structure a member training session as a roundtable discussion with representatives of a graduate school of education to talk about educational theory and practice. For example, a discussion could focus on how children learn and how to accommodate different kinds of learners in OST activities (Stevens Elementary)
- At the beginning of the school year, have a "sampling" time during which members and volunteers can try out several kinds of activities and types of positions before making a long-term commitment. (Stevens Elementary)
- Use "parent teacher conferences" early in the year as an opportunity for members to learn how to operate an OST program: members can operate a short-term OST program while children's parents are meeting with teachers (Stevens Elementary)
- Involve local agencies such as the county health department in presenting topics as part of your training. (Students of Promise)
- Offer training that helps members and volunteers understand and empathize with the youth they will be working with and serving. (Students of Promise)
- Include traditions at each meeting to help create a sense of community. Possible traditions include the sharing of a poem or reading, a prize drawing, or a reflection activity. (Youth Harvest)
- Give out a "door prize" at training sessions or group meetings. The prize doesn't need to be costly; in fact, the "cheesier," the better. You'll never look at free samples the same way! (Youth Harvest)

Collaborations

Collaborating with other organizations can lead to new energy, financial resources, and expertise for your programs. But don't stop at the tried and true when forming partnerships. Here's a list of potential collaborators, based on ideas from the programs profiled in this section:

- Colleges and universities
- Parks and Recreation Departments
- Local children's coalitions
- School personnel: principals, teachers, librarians, custodians, Title I Coordinators, district curriculum specialists
- Public libraries
- Business and civic groups (Chamber of Commerce, United Way, Rotary)
- Professional sports teams
- City, county, state governments (try offices related to health, human services, education, drug and alcohol prevention, child care, mental health, community service, workforce)
- Amusement parks
- Cooperative Extension
- Food Banks
- Boys and Girls clubs
- YMCAs and YWCAs
- Boy and Girl Scouts
- Churches
- Settlement houses
- Urban League
- Housing developments
- Literacy groups
- Refugee assistance programs
- Housing advocates
- Mental health programs
- Parent Teacher Associations and Organizations (PTAs and PTOs)
- Animal welfare groups
- Environmental conservation groups
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Other National Service programs