



# VOCAL NEWS

Literacy Volunteers of Illinois



## Lots of “SERVICEPOWER” at the 2013 National Conference in D.C.

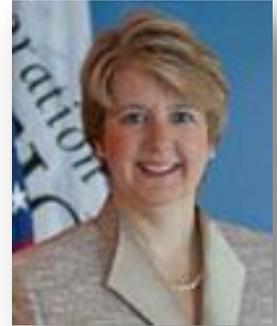


Mayor Vincent Gray welcomed us on day one of the National Conference on Volunteering and Service, the largest gathering of volunteer, national service and civic leaders in the world. After a few brief remarks he then welcomed the Conference convener Points of Light CEO, Michelle Nunn who said, “I can’t think of a better or more important place to share your example and your message (of service) than right here in Washington D.C., I think Washington can use this” to a rousing round of applause at the opening plenary.

In addition to plenary sessions, breakout sessions and immersion learning sessions there were multiple service activities happening in and around DC for attendees and their families. The massive Exhibitors Hall held registration stations both web-based and for those who like the personal touch cheery volunteers to help with any last minute additions or changes to one’s itinerary. Beyond them in the Great Hall were the vendors. Believe me there were so many Points of Light created a mobile app! This year’s theme was “Service Unites” and it is my belief that from June 19<sup>th</sup> thru the 22<sup>nd</sup> this conference lived up to this statement.

Speaking of “Service Unites” during my time at the conference I attended sessions that were focused on program development which gave me a chance to listen and converse with other programs that in most cases had similar questions about the session topics as I had. Whether by design or interest most of my sessions were attended by Corporations representing small and fortune 500 companies. While program coordinators like myself were interested in learning tips on topics like *Tech Training with a Twist*, with the preconceived notion that I was going to learn about free technological resources, I ended up sitting at the table with a health insurance company executive who was looking to offer skill-based volunteers from her organization to help agencies with limited or zero finances to build their tech department.

On Thursday, June 20<sup>th</sup> the event that stood out for me was the CNCS Town Hall. At the Town Hall meeting, Corporation for National and Community Service CEO Wendy Spencer took to the stage and talked about how national service is the solution to our nation’s challenges.



*Wendy Spencer, CEO of Corporation for National and Community Service*



*Michelle Nunn, CEO of Points of Light*



*Chamala Travis, VOCAL AmeriCorps Program Coordinator volunteering on Movie Night sponsored by Redbox.*



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## From the Executive Director ...

So once again, as is life in a non-profit, June was a good news/bad news month. We learned in mid-month that, alas, the VOCAL program was not selected for another round of competitive funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service. While we were naturally disappointed, we are at the same time thankful for the post support we had received from them.

Our good news came a few weeks later, when Serve Illinois came to the rescue and provided “formula” funding to keep our VOCAL program going. While the funding is reduced and the member count lower than that of past years, the program will be able to maintain a substantial presence in the adult literacy field. We credit the good work of our present and past members, not to mention the excellent supervision and training provided them at their sites, for the program’s renewal. Full details on the mix of members for the coming program year will be available shortly.

So as this program year draws to a conclusion, I once again thank everyone who has been a part of it – our dynamic corps of members, our experienced, knowledgeable and most hospitable host site supervisors, and our funding bodies – the Corporation for National and Community Service and the staff and commissioners of the Serve Illinois Commission.



In celebration of our member’s service year, we have two social activities this month that we invite you to be a part of – Summer Fun at the Cell on July 24<sup>th</sup>, courtesy of the Chicago White Sox, and our annual End of the Year Celebration, which now looks like it will be held on Friday, August 16<sup>th</sup>.

Enjoy the rest of your summer !

Congratulations to Ron Happach who was named Volunteer of the Year at IYC-Kewanee for his work as a tutor in the Jump Start Program ! The presentation was made at his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration given by program coordinator and host site supervisor Deb Sundberg. Ron is currently serving in his third year with the VOCAL AmeriCorps program as a minimum time member.



*Left: Deb Sundberg and VOCAL member Ron Happach are joined by IYC-Kewanee School Principal John Downey*

## 2013 National Conference in D.C. - Continued

Though a lot of important things were discussed there were several milestones that stuck out for me. Wendy acknowledged that 2 years ago 80,000 AmeriCorps members recruited 3.5 million volunteers. This year these numbers went up to 4 million. To my surprise she mentioned that AmeriCorps will be turning 20 years old! On September 21, 1993 legislation was signed into law to create the Corporation for National and Community Service to “house” the new AmeriCorps programs and combine the other successful national service programs that were part of the ACTION agency. As you may or may not know I served my first term of AmeriCorps service in the Pilsen/Little Village neighborhood at Latino Youth, Class of 1994-95. If there was ever a question of the importance of volunteering how about a report that says “Volunteers have a 27 percent higher odds of finding a job after being out of work than non-volunteers”. To read the full report and methodology, visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/>.

Other Conference highlights at this year's event included:

- The launch of One America, a nationwide yearlong campaign Points of Light is leading, with founding support from Chase, to bring together rivals in politics, entertainment and sports with the goal of inspiring millions to unite in service to their communities.
- Education activist and Grammy Award-winner John Legend's stirring performance at Target's Sunday Supper.
- Senior Advisor to the President Valerie Jarrett announcing that President and Mrs. Obama will host a celebration at the White House, on July 15 to honor the winner of the 5,000<sup>th</sup> Daily Point of Light Award.
- Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin E. Dempsey's powerful call to engage and support more veterans and military families through volunteer service.
- Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle - like Sen. Dan Coats, Sen. Tim Kaine and Rep. Joaquin Castro -- coming together to support America's volunteers and discuss the future of service.

For more in depth coverage of the 2013 National Conference visit <http://www.volunteeringandservice.org/>.

In closing, I had a lot of fun visiting D.C., I even Tweeted and posted my updates on Facebook. I also got a chance to enjoy inspirational remarks by Governor of New Jersey Chris Christie while seated alongside our Serve Illinois Commission staff Executive Director, Brandon Bodor, Program Officer Scott McFarland and Graduate Intern Laine Cooper during the closing session. I am hopeful and reinvigorated to continue to serve my agency, welcome future AmeriCorps members and be amongst the “Lights”.

– *Chamala Travis, Program Coordinator*



*Governor (NJ), Chris Christie*



*Points of Light Chairman, Neil Bush*



*Singer, John Legend*

## Member Spotlight: World Relief



**Jenny Terrell**

Jenny is from Chicago. She attended Duke University in Durham, North Carolina and majored in Public Policy, graduating in 2009. She did a partial year with AmeriCorps in 2009-2010. Before joining VOCAL this past September she spent the summer working at a summer camp in Wisconsin leading nature activities and camp-outs for kids. She also did a stint as a legal assistant, helping incarcerated women. Jenny serves at World Relief, her title is Resettlement Project Coordinator and her primary responsibility is to coordinate volunteers. One of the many things she likes about her work is that she gets to work with newly arrived refugees every

step of the way from training to final evaluations. Along the way, she teaches everything from the simplest act of how to board a bus to the more complex handling of life's challenges. Jenny says it is "A Good Neighbor Team" that offers many rewards. The biggest challenge for her is getting volunteers - some is achieved through the World Relief relationships with universities and some through online postings. After AmeriCorps, Jenny plans to go to law school with a long range goal of becoming a lawyer who works alongside community organizers. She attributes her interest in community outreach to her family background. Her father is a pastor and her mother is a psychotherapist. Her parents were always involved in neighborhood social issues such as affordable health care and housing. One of Jenny's reasons for wanting to join AmeriCorps was because the position offered her experience in community outreach. She also says that it's personally exciting to give back to the place where she grew up, Albany Park.

Jenny's off time is spent with her three roommates, cooking and going to free events in the City. Reviewing her list of possible law schools, she says she will likely go to law school outside of Chicago. For now, she is grateful for her experiences at World Relief because it has a really good staff, it is a wonderful environment and above all, she's gotten to meet many interesting people.

world relief™ 

World Relief-Chicago's mission is to engage communities to foster dignity and wholeness for immigrants and refugees in transition. English language and literacy development to obtain employment and integrate more fully into the Chicago community is a key avenue that World Relief uses to accomplish its mission. Education services include intensive English Language Training part-time ESL programming, family literacy and in-home tutoring. Also offers weekly employment preparation and cultural adjustment training.



**Annie Scott**

Annie is from Boulder, Colorado. She graduated from the University of Colorado in the spring of 2011 with a major in psychology. Annie joined AmeriCorps in the fall of 2011. In between school and joining AmeriCorps, she worked for an organization called Imagine where she helped children with developmental disabilities. Annie's interest in international issues stems from a year she spent while in college, studying at the University of Ghana and traveling around West Africa with the missionary couple with whom she was living.

She was familiar with World Relief and its work with refugees and moved to Chicago to work with the organization. Her title at World Relief is ESL Tutor Coordinator and her main responsibility is to work with volunteers and place them with refugees for English tutoring in their homes. The refugees are primarily from Iraq, Nepal, the Congo and Burma (Miramar). Annie says the biggest challenge of her job is navigating cultural differences and the often unpredictable nature of refugees' lives. One of the greatest rewards is seeing the growth of the college-age volunteers with whom she works. This is Annie's second year with AmeriCorps and at some point she plans to return to Colorado where her family and college friends reside. She does want to continue working with a diverse population and thinks she will do that eventually. Her personal interests are many. She sings in the DePaul Community Chorus, plays the violin at her Church, she runs and has a garden where she grows vegetables. World Relief has given her the opportunity to learn about other cultures and, even more important she says, the chance to learn more about herself.

# Member Spotlight: Christopher House



**Damaris Jara**

Christopher House helps build thriving families in the Logan Square, Lincoln Park and uptown communities through a wide array of social and community services. The adult literacy program provides individual and small group tutoring in ESL, ABE, and GED. Services are offered on-site in the day and evening hours. To encourage high retention, free childcare and transportation are offered.

Damaris is from Chicago. She attended DeVry University and earned an Associate in Network Administration degree. She then began studies at Loyola University with a double major in political science and psychology and will graduate in 2016. She joined AmeriCorps in August 2012 and before that did volunteer work at the Korean American Community Center and at the Albany Park Neighborhood Council. This past summer she volunteered at Asian Human Services.

Damaris' host site is Christopher House at Logan Square. She joined AmeriCorps because she enjoyed volunteering and tutoring. Her official title is Literacy Tutor Advisor but to most she is known simply as the AmeriCorps member. The biggest reward of her service, she says, is when someone she is tutoring understands and begins to move forward. Two recent examples occurred with two of the ESL students when one moved from level 1 to level 2 and another moved from level 3 to level 4. The challenge is trying to help students who get frustrated when work begins to pile up. One of the tasks she enjoys most is making lesson plans. She says Christopher House is a wonderful center and she's especially proud of their CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) training certification. After her AmeriCorps service, Damaris would like to study abroad. Loyola has a center in Beijing and in Viet Nam. After that, her long range plan is to go to law school and then enter the Navy.

She believes strongly that one of the best ways to protect our military men and women is as a lawyer. As to hobbies, Damaris likes to do woodcraft. She also plays the piano and the guitar. She believes her name underlies her role in life: Damaris is Greek and means gentle spirit. Working at Christopher House has given her the opportunity to get to know and work with some really nice students and staff. She plans to continue doing volunteer work wherever she lives because she says it is who she is.



## *2013 ICOVA: Returning to the Basics – The Three R's of Volunteerism*

The **Illinois Conference on Volunteer Administration** is holding their annual conference on Thursday, August 8<sup>th</sup> at the Metcalfe Center in downtown Chicago from 9:00 a.m. through 4:30 p.m. with reception to follow. Key Highlights include an Opening Session featuring Brandon Bodor, Executive Director, Serve Illinois Commission and Jonathon Monken, Director of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency discussing how volunteers improve the quality of life in Illinois, over a dozen workshops covering a variety of volunteer recruitment, retention, and management-related topics, and a networking lunch. Continuing Education Units for Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC), Social Worker (LCSW), and Teacher - Learning Standard 9, Collaborative Learning are available through Prairie State College. ***The conference brochure and online registration will be available soon at - <http://www.icova.info/>.*** All members are invited to attend, LVI will cover registration costs.

## Reflections on the Service Year – The Quarterly Meeting in Review

On June 14<sup>th</sup> the final quarterly meeting of VOCAL members for this program year was held at LVI's downtown office. One by one, the members summarized their AmeriCorps experience, described their most memorable moments, what they felt were the significant contributions they made as AmeriCorps members and voiced their post-service plans. While several members expressed interest in renewing, some spoke of going off to law school, others to distant shores and still others who said they'd like to continue their work in a capacity that will allow them to continue serving and giving back. This year's members were an eclectic group to be sure; they were as varied a rainbow of personalities and aspirations as anyone could ask.

After breaking for a delightful lunch at VOCAL's favorite restaurant, "Under 55," the members returned to begin a discussion on the meaning of service. They split up into two groups, to make sure everyone would have a chance to speak. They had all read the selected topic for discussion, "What I Didn't Know Then" from the book *Taking Action*. In lively and sometimes boisterous exchanges, the members expressed their views on the author's first-time experience with serving and the pros and cons of the author's revelations about herself and her travels.

A highlight of the meeting was Lauren Thompson's presentation of her project in which she asked members to share the knowledge they had gained to raise awareness of and support for adult literacy using LVI's social media sites. In an earlier e-mail, she had asked VOCAL members and LVI staff to write a quote based on one of several prompts such as "Adult Literacy is important because" and "I teach/tutor adults because" Another prompt was "The students in my program are great because". The quotes, explained Lauren, would be laid over photographs of the members posted on the LVI Facebook page and Twitter Feed to promote awareness of and support for adult literacy.

The members' responses were revealing and even poignant. Damaris Jara wrote, "Adult literacy is important because it opens doors that were previously locked"; Anna Ochs voiced her views by answering all of the prompts. One of her answers was, "Adult literacy is important because it serves a semi-forgotten population that is capable of lifting up entire communities". Sam Reese voiced his belief that "Adult literacy matters because literacy is fundamental to surviving and thriving in the modern world". All of the responses are posted and can be seen by going to [www.facebook.com/lvillinois](http://www.facebook.com/lvillinois).

The final segment of the quarterly gathering was devoted to financials and the Eli J. Segal Education Award to which each member is entitled after completing his or her service. Chamala did an excellent job of walking members through the facets of the award and tackling a few of the frequently asked questions. Her presentation covered a multitude of topics including how to work with a financial aid officer; how the award can be used, paying off student loans, traditional and non-traditional uses of the Ed Award and even information on taxes. She also offered to meet or take phone calls from members who have questions and need advice or clarification on their particular situations.

The reality of the year soon ending and the future lying before them could not be escaped as members noted that the friendships they had formed during their service would last a lifetime. The memories would go with them as they accepted new challenges and moved on to new experiences. Serving as VOCAL members on the front lines of literacy, this fraternity of VOCAL AmeriCorps members had traveled a journey that brought amazing personal growth, proud accomplishments at their sites and the treasure of shared friendships. Indeed, the quarterly meeting celebrated moving forward, yet know the year was coming to an end was bittersweet. One could take heart from the words of that famous British politician, Enoch Powell, who summarized, in sailing terms, the lasting and enduring state of friendship, "If my ship sails from sight, it doesn't mean the journey ends but only that the river bends." The class of 2013 is ready to move on.

## Never Too Old For Story Time



Our experiment of having story time on a weekday proved to be very interesting. Unbeknownst to us, Wednesday, June 19<sup>th</sup> was the last day of school for many CPS students. So much to our surprise no children showed up for our session. The day was not a complete disappointment because an older gentleman in his 50's stopped by to find out more about our event.

On Saturday, I was pleasantly surprised to see a mother who I had been corresponding with for weeks about registering for the story time sessions. She greeted Nili and me with a hug. In tow were her two daughters and her niece. The theme for June's sessions was "Let the Sun

Shine In," which is the title of a song from the musical *HAIR*. Nili tried something new this month: doing tongue twisters with the group. She included some tongue twisters from the musical as well. Towards the end of the session, Nili and two of the girls began discussing their hair. Nili asked the older girl how she would describe her hair. The seven year old mentioned that she had a "kitchen." (I had to explain this term to Nili) a "kitchen" is commonly used by people with Afro-textured hair; it is the hair located at the nape of your neck that can sometimes be uncontrollable.

Although we had marginal attendance on Saturday, I thought this month was a success because we tried something new and the people who came were delighted to be there, and enjoyed this interactive exercise. The mother who attended wrote Nili and me such wonderful notes afterwards. To Nili she wrote, "It was such a pleasure meeting you today. The girls were singing the paint song and button songs all day! They truly enjoyed the stories and your time." She wrote to me that "We look forward to more stories and songs next month. Thank you again for this opportunity and please thank the owners of the company for this wonderful program for children in Chicago."

Please join us at the next Terrific Tales Story Time on either **Wednesday, July 17, 2013 from 2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.** or **Saturday, July 20, 2013 from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at West Englewood Library 1745 W. 63<sup>rd</sup> Street.** All ages are welcome to attend. To register for the next session, please call me at 312.661.1010 or visit our website at [www.companies-that-care.org/tt-story-time-registration!](http://www.companies-that-care.org/tt-story-time-registration)

- *Tanika Richardson, Center for Companies That Care*

### Upcoming Dates

**Wednesday, July 24<sup>th</sup>**

*White Sox Summer Fun Day*

US Cellular Field

Tail Gate – 5:30 p.m. / Game – 7:10 p.m.

**Thursday, August 8<sup>th</sup>**

9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

*Illinois Conference on Volunteer*

*Administration - ICOVA*

Metcalfe Federal Building

77 West Jackson Blvd.

Chicago IL

**Friday, August 16<sup>th</sup>**

*End of Year Celebration*

Location TBA

Stay Connected !

<http://twitter.com/LVillinois>.



<http://www.facebook.com/lvillinois>

Links to both social media are also on the LVI homepage.

**Happy Birthday!**

**Sam Reese**

**7/3**

**Aminat OdunEwu**

**7/31**