



VOCAL NEWS



Literacy Volunteers of Illinois



VOCAL Assists Veterans Hall with COVID Cleaning

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And More ... !

On Thursday, July 2nd, VOCAL members and Executive Director Dorothy Miaso went to the Rhine VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars), Post 2729 to assist with a major cleaning project. Located at 5858 South Archer Avenue, on the southwest side of Chicago, the hall is volunteer-run and coordinated by their veteran members, many of whom are senior citizens. For much of this year the hall, which typically hosts weekly activities, had been closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. As those restrictions loosened upon word from the governor and mayor, the Post looked forward to making its space available once again for neighborhood events, bingo games, member meetings and family occasions.

To assist with that aim, they reached out to Literacy Volunteers of Illinois (LVI), an organization that has worked and volunteered with them for many other events in the past, to disinfect the hall and give it a thorough cleaning. LVI rose to the occasion and recruited VOCAL AmeriCorps members to participate in the cleanup. Together, they cleaned the restrooms, the kitchen, the bar, and the main hall; going over the floors, the walls, and even the overhead fans and lights, the VOCAL members diligently cleaned, all the while practicing social distancing, both from each other and with the hall volunteers. Together, they spruced up the hall and prepared it for its post-lockdown debut.

Afterwards, in recognition to their service, the VFW volunteers expressed their appreciation by contributing a donation to LVI, which was accepted by Executive Director Miaso. After a quick photograph session to commemorate the event, the VOCAL team departed, ready to assist the vets with all their future endeavors.

— Colin Herzog
Team Leader



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From the Executive Director ...

While the past several months have been topsy-turvy with seemingly dark clouds swirling around us, every cloud, as they say, has a silver lining, and if legislation that is pending in Congress makes it way to a public act, there will indeed be a silver lining for AmeriCorps programming. Introduced in mid-June by a bipartisan group of fourteen US Senators, including Senator Duckworth from Illinois, the CORPS Act (Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service Act), seeks to expand national service programs significantly to help the country respond to and recover from the public health, economic, and social crises facing the nation in the wake of the COVID-19.

Some CORPS Act highlights worth noting include:

- Funds national service positions for a three-year response and recovery period and grows it to the level authorized in the Serve America Act of 2009. Under the CORPS Act, the number of positions could grow from 75,000 to 150,000 the first year and then steadily to 250,000 by year three.
- Provides flexibilities to stabilize national service programs during the economic crisis and to allow them to grow and respond quickly to dynamic local recovery needs.
- Prioritizes funding for activities directly related to response and recovery including, among others -
 - Services that support economic opportunity, workforce and reemployment services,
 - Education support (including for adult learners)

The Act also increases the AmeriCorps living allowance to 175 percent of the federal poverty line and ties the value of the Segal Education Award to twice the value of the maximum Pell grant, and makes the education award nontaxable. (Note: The federal poverty level for 2020 is \$12,760 - 175% would boost the living allowance to \$22,330.)

Another goal of the Act is encouraging participation by members of low-income and underrepresented communities. To do this, it funds an awareness and outreach campaign on response service opportunities; expands the Volunteer Generation Fund; and, funds new online tools for Senior Corps to safely move to a teleservice model and expands Senior Corps eligibility.

While there is substantial support for AmeriCorps programming in Congress, there are competing interests for the relief dollars being proposed and there's also inter- and intra-party bickering which has been known to sink even the most noble of proposals. The Act is in its early stages, and has not yet been assigned to committee. Service advocates are seeking to have the Act included in the current relief bill being debated in Congress, which could put it on a fast track. It is important to build support for the Act, so take a few moments and write to your Congressional rep voicing your support. Let Senator Duckworth also know of your support and encourage her to keep with it until it is passed !

Stepping Up to COVID-19: Host Site Spotlight

In the wake of COVID-19 and its continued widespread impact, many local organizations have had to step up and address the many needs that the situation has inspired, including our host sites. Today, we spotlight the work of a few of our organizations as they went above and beyond the call of duty. Some, like Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition (CCLC) and Literacy Works, employed technology to widen the scope of their services to keep adult literacy organizations unified and together. While others like Centro Sin Fronteras continued with boots on the ground.

CCLC, in addition to compiling resources into a directory, developed a Learning Circles series, that representatives from adult literacy organizations could attend and learn more about from guest speakers covering crucial topics, such as Michelle Gilbert from Legal Aid Chicago's presentation on evictions and tenants' rights, as well as Kate Lapinski from the Chicago Public Library, who covered online learning. Meanwhile, Literacy Works transitioned their trainings online, including their tutor training in Adult Basic Education and English as Second Language. Additionally, given the transition to online learning they opened their workshops to organizations all over the state, and even drew students from as far as Texas, as they explored such topics as Queer Language in the Classroom.



Meanwhile, with how vulnerable incarcerated people are to the virus, organizations that work with incarcerated youth like Literacy Volunteers of Illinois had to adapt as well. While we were restricted in getting into the centers for a few months, we continued to work tirelessly to set up programming to help the youth when they get back outside. LVI's VOCAL AmeriCorps member, Katrina Mioduszewski, reached out to numerous organizations such as Jobs Corps and Instituto Del Progreso Latino, to learn more about their career trainings; additionally, she assisted with developing a Life Skills curriculum to better help make the transition back to outside life more stable and smoother.

On a ground level, Centro Sin Fronteras took on many different duties to help the community of Pilsen get help and resources crucial during this time. They established a partnership with Community Organized Relief Effort (CORE) to provide free COVID testing a few times throughout the week. After the riots of early June, they recruited local volunteers to help clean and board up minority-owned businesses. All the while, with the shortage of cleaning supplies, they held a cleaning supply drive to gather cleaning products and distributed personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies as well. As the stimulus relief was handed out, it came to Centro Sin Fronteras' attention that there were members of their community who were ineligible or couldn't access the funds, and so, with the help of volunteers and donors, were able to assist over 600 families with care packages of food, baby supplies, and PPE.



While there have been many hurdles and sure to be more to come, VOCAL AmeriCorps member Cecilia Garcia could not help but feel inspired, saying, "Despite this pandemic, it truly opened my eyes and heart how, as humans, we can survive just about anything; for as long as we got us, we will get by."

- Colin Herzog



Spotlight on AmeriCorps in Kewanee

The Sunshine Community Services Center (SCSC) is a nonprofit agency in Kewanee, Illinois that was founded in 2008. After serving four terms as an AmeriCorps member at the Illinois Youth Center (IYC) in Kewanee, I quickly recognized how other local agencies could benefit from these services and entered into a partnership with Literacy Volunteers of Illinois in 2014 that allowed for AmeriCorps members to serve at various agencies in the community. SCSC oversees the local projects during the year and recruits additional members for the summer of service programs.

As an “incubator” project of LVI’s VOCAL program, SCSC has nine members (4 FTEs) serving in full, part and minimum-time positions year-round in five local agencies. These agencies are further assisted during summer months through *Summer of Service* programming.; this year there are four. The host sites and a brief description of their services follows -

- **Abilities Plus** is an agency that serves adults with disabilities. Founded in 1959 with a class of seven children, Abilities Plus now annually serves some 250 children and adults from Henry, Stark and western Bureau Counties through a variety of services that include Adult Day Programs, Residential Care, Transportation, Community Support, and a Resale Shop.
- **Kewanee Public Library** offers residents an array of services that include - Computers and wireless internet access, children’s activities, copiers, printers and fax machines, genealogy resources and assistance, research databases for students and learners of all ages, voter registration, equipment and services for those with disabilities. reference services, a community room available for community use and over 80,000 books, movies, music and magazines
- **Kewanee Salvation Army** operates on an ongoing basis a thrift and consignment store in the city’s central business district that is run primarily by volunteers. The money generated allows them to offer periodic programming thorough out the year that respond to emerging community needs.
- **Kewanee YMCA** offers an array of programs for area residents including Youth Development, After School/ School Out, Swim Lessons, Family Activities, Tumbling & Trampoline, Martial Arts, Fitness Classes, Water Exercises and CPR and Life Guard Certification.
- **Sunshine Community Services Center** offers a variety of community education programs including the Step Ladder Tutoring Program which works with Middle School students, summer reading programs in partnership with the Kewanee Public Library, and summertime ESL and Citizenship classes in collaboration with Black Hawk College’s Community Education Center.

Top photos—From left - Linda Bolls, Etta LaFlora, Brittany Grier, Kari Sturtevant, Kayla Thomas, Soledad Estrada, Yoraima Chavex, and Janet Pilarski (Kaitlyn Cameron missing from photo)

*Etta LaFlora
Executive Director of SCSC*

Member Spotlight: Linda Bolls

Linda Bolls is a second-year AmeriCorps member at Abilities Plus. She was familiar with AmeriCorps having hosted members as the Executive Director at the Salvation Army. On retirement she sought to continue being of service to her community and having already served as a volunteer at Abilities Plus and having a degree in Special Education she became their member.

At Abilities Plus, she teaches life skills, monitors the breakroom and computer room, and assists with social activities like walks, outside activities, and taking clients to the humane society to socialize with the puppies and kittens. She also is the Special Olympics coach, assists with bowling club and helps with other sports as needed. A challenge for her was learning the Disability Act guidelines and Abilities Plus's; that said she finds it incredibly rewarding to see clients light up when they accomplish a goal, or even just talking about sports. Her clients are excited and happy to see her, and it makes her feel special and happy to be close with them. Post service she will pass this year's Ed award to one of her grandchildren, and then look to serve another two. Besides serving, she loves walking her dog, reading, and participating & leading church services.

Member Spotlight: Kaitlyn Cameron

Kaitlyn Cameron is a third-year AmeriCorps member serving as a Program Assistant at the Kewanee YMCA. She heard about AmeriCorps from a classmate, but it was her boss at the time who approached her with the opportunity. Originally from Peoria, Kaitlyn attended Western Illinois University in Macomb where she majored in Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration.

At the YMCA, Kaitlyn handles their social media accounts, teaches tumbling, swim lessons, and water exercise classes. Additionally, she works the front desk and assists the other youth programs as needed. It can be challenging working with youths, particularly with the shutdowns and pandemic, she says. Still, she loves working with the kids and seeing them grow and come into their own. She plans to serve all four terms of AmeriCorps, and when she isn't serving, she likes to bike and be outside.

Member Spotlight: Yoraima Chavez

Yoraima Chavez is a first-year member serving with the Kewanee Public Library. A Kewanee native, she plans to attend Monmouth College and major in Political Science in the Fall. She originally heard of AmeriCorps from her sister, a former AmeriCorps member. At the library, Yoraima works at the service desk, puts books away, and assists patrons; it can be challenging when there are many books to put away, but she still finds it encouraging knowing that the people of Kewanee are using the library. When she is not serving, she likes to make crafts to decorate the library with, and also conduct tutoring online.

Member Spotlight: Soledad Estrada

Soledad Estrada is a second-year member serving with the Sunshine Community Services Center. She heard about AmeriCorps from Etta LaFlora at a school registration session, when she encouraged her to become a tutor in the SCSC's Step Ladder program. She began the school year conducting live one-to-one and small group tutoring but as a result of the pandemic the tutoring is now virtual. The transition to online hasn't been easy as it can be difficult to have kids focus at home, but she says it is rewarding to see them complete their assignments and progress. After serving, nursing school will take up more of her time, so she will not have time to serve another term, but has treasured the experience. Besides service, she also is a manager and part-time waitress; however, in brief moments of free time, she also likes traveling.

Member Spotlight: Brittany Grier

Brittany Grier is in her first term as a member at the Kewanee YMCA. She learned of AmeriCorps from the Y staff who recruited her for the position. From Kewanee, she attended Clarke University where she studied Elementary Education, and then transferred to Arizona State University Online to study Education Studies with a minor in History. At the “Y” Brittany serves as a tumbling and trampoline instructor, and assists with special events and the after school youth development program. Her biggest challenge is juggling between two jobs and full-time student work; however, she finds it rewarding getting to work with different departments at the YMCA. After her service year, she plans to focus on her family (she has a newborn) and finish her schooling. When she isn’t serving, she likes to read, spend time with her niece, cook, go on walks, and relax.

Member Spotlight: Damian Neiryneck

Damian Nieryneck is in his second year of AmeriCorps service having served last year as a minimum-time member in the SCSC’s Step Ladder Tutoring program during his senior year in high school. This year he is a part-time member serving at the Salvation Army where he has been involved with preparing items and clothing for sale in their onsite store. He is currently a student at Black Hawk College, and is still contemplating what university he will move on to when he completes his current studies.

Member Spotlight: Janet Pilarski

Janet Pilaski is in her third term as a part-time AmeriCorps member at the Kewanee YMCA. She is a veteran of the US Air Force. Janet works in two areas at the Y - sanitation services, which has become more important than ever, and child watch, which is working with youth who come to the Y with their parents, who are working out or attending classes. With COVID and social distancing the child watch has slowed down, she said, however on the sanitation side what she does is now very much in the spotlight. The rewards of her work, she says, are that she gets to teach the children about safety and to be aware and concerned for more than just what is right in front of them. Janet is looking to renew her service for one more term. Besides her service she also volunteers with some of Kewanee’s senior citizen programs.

Member Spotlight: Kari Sturtevant

Kari Sturtevant is in her second term as a minimum-time member at the Kewanee YMCA. She is from Kewanee, and is currently attending Carl Sandburg College for Early Childhood Development. She heard of AmeriCorps from the staff at the “Y” who recruited her to be a tumbling teacher and assist with their summer camp programming. Outside of service, she enjoys spending time with her family and after service she plans on spending even more time with them !

Member Spotlight: Kayla Thomas

Kayla Thomas serves at the Salvation Army and is in her second AmeriCorps year. Hailing from Kewanee, she attended Black Hawk College for two years and earned an Associates in Arts; she will be attending Western Illinois University in the fall. She originally heard of AmeriCorps from one of her friends. While serving at the Salvation Army, she recycles clothing, weighs recycling bags, assists clients, and fields information calls. As the year has gone on, while her duties have remained pretty much the same, she has found that she is working more with clients than before. She has not encountered many challenges, and finds the work and new friends made rewarding. After service, she will be pursuing her Bachelor’s in Social Work. When not serving, she enjoys hanging out with friends, cooking, and watching Netflix.

Summer of Service Spotlight: Alvin Cole Jr.

Alvin Cole Jr. is a Summer of Service member at the Salvation Army. Originally from Chicago, he is now a Kewanee resident and a student at Black Hawk College, where he is studying Anthropology. He heard about AmeriCorps from Etta LaFlora, who recruited him for the summertime position. As a Tutoring Assistant in the Salvation Army's Black Youth Development Program, Alvin tutors and mentors program participants. He also is a Salvation Army volunteer; and finds it challenging to schedule his time around volunteering, work, and tutoring. Once his Summer of Service term is complete, he plans to finish school and renew his AmeriCorps service for a full year. When not serving, he likes to help others, staying busy, and traveling.



Summer of Service Spotlight: Veronica Del Toro



Veronica Del Toro is a tutor and program assistant with the Sunshine Community Service Center. She is from Tepehuanes, Durango Mexico but has lived in Kewanee for the past 19 years. She is a certified Patient Care Assistant and a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). For her Summer of Service activity she is assisting SCSC with their citizenship and English classes at Black College's Community Education Center and later will help with the tutoring program for middle school students. A challenge, she says, is to be able to help people who don't speak English understand what is spoken in class. Her reward, she says, is to one day to hear them speak English very well. Her plans for the future include a return to college to continue nursing studies. Outside of her service with SCSC, she says she like to encourage people to continue studying and attend her children's sporting events.

Summer of Service Spotlight: Alexandria Henderson

Alexandria Henderson is a first term *Summer of Service* member with Sunshine Community Services Center where she tutors middle school students in the Step Ladder program and tutors adults in an ESL class at the Community Education Center. She also helps out at the Salvation Army. Alex is from Kewanee and is a rising senior at Kewanee High School. She's been a tutor in the Step Ladder Program since junior high and knew of AmeriCorps through the program. She had hoped to join last year, but was not old enough. She enjoys her tutoring, but has found it to be a bit of challenge to get all her service hours in with the pandemic going on, but a reward is getting scholarship money for college. Her immediate plans after service is to finish her senior year in high school with good grades. Outside of service, she likes to practice for Cross Country and Track and read books mostly about history.

Summer of Service Spotlight: Valerie Painter

Valerie Painter is an English as a Second Language and Citizenship Instructor at the Black Hawk Community Education Center in Kewanee. She learned of the program when Etta and her AmeriCorps members began volunteering in her ESL class at the College. When the semester ended and Valerie was off until the fall, Etta suggested she join the *Summer of Service* program. Originally from Toulon, Illinois, she earned her Bachelors in Education from Bradley University and a Masters in TESOL from Concordia University in suburban Chicago. A challenge she encounters with her adult students is time—many are working and juggling schedules is difficult; still, she finds everything she does with her students rewarding. In the fall, she will return to the classroom. Besides teaching she loves to travel, work on her hobby farm, and outdoor activities like rafting, snorkeling, and diving. During a normal summer, she often works at and directs a summer camp.



Kewanee Members and Site Supervisors



From left—Kaitlyn Cameron, Kari Sturtevant, Jill Milroy-Director YMCA, Janet Pilarski, Jodi Wall, Site Supervisor YMCA, Etta LaFlora, Damian Neiryneck, Kim Walker-Director Abilities Plus, Linda Bolls, Kayla Thomas, Eddie Toliver Director-Salvation Army, Yoraima Chavez, Soledad Estrada, Missing from photo-Barbara Love Director-Kewanee Public Library.

Upcoming Dates

August 20, 2020

Illinois Conference on Volunteer Administration

Where Do We Go From Here ?

Virtual Event - Free Registration

Register at ICOVA.Info

LVI SOCIAL MEDIA



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Happy Birthday!

August

Patricia McClendon 8/1

Faith Fojas 8/14

Colin Herzog 8/27

Soledad Estrada 8/19