



VOCAL NEWS



Literacy Volunteers of Illinois

National AmeriCorps Week - March 8th -14th

VOCAL at the Thompson Center for AmeriCorps Week



It's that time of the year - the Corporation for National and Community Service National AmeriCorps Week. Now in its 14th year, National AmeriCorps Week is a time to salute AmeriCorps members and alums for their service, thank community partners, and communicate to everyone AmeriCorps impact on communities and on the lives within them. To all that have been involved with our AmeriCorps programming – members, host sites, and all supporters, Thank you.

For the past ten years, our AmeriCorps Week festivities have kicked off each year with an Information and Referral Fair at the State of Illinois Thompson Building in downtown Chicago. We did it again this year on Monday, March 9th with a strong contingent of our members filling the Center's atrium, greeting all who passed by. The Fair provided members an opportunity to promote the good work of their sites, and recruit volunteers to assist in the work. Not only did members snag a few recruits during the day, one member even received a cash donation for her host site !

While the Fair provided members with a forum to be involved in this special week, I also encourage members and site supervisors to promote the week at your sites and within your communities. This can include posting signs or flyers at your site and on your web site, blogging a story on your social media, or writing a letter of thanks to your congressman highlighting the work you do, the clients you serve, and the services your agency extends as a result of the AmeriCorps program. A template for a letter can be found in Member Resources on our web site.

Illinois State Service Plan - 2020-2022

Every three years, the Serve Illinois Commission prepares a state service/strategic plan to guide them in fulfilling their mission to improve Illinois communities by enhancing volunteerism and instilling an ethic of service throughout the State. In order for this plan to be beneficial to the people of Illinois, Serve Illinois is seeking input from the people of Illinois, especially programs involved with AmeriCorps programming and AmeriCorps members, via a Survey Monkey. The 20 question survey is a mix of open-ended and easy to check off questions, and shouldn't take longer that 10-15 minutes to complete. You can check it out at - <https://surveymonkey.com/r/ILService2020>

AmeriCorps Alums

While you're only halfway through this service year, you may already be thinking about "Life After AmeriCorps" and AmeriCorps Alums is a great resource to use. There is a Chicago Chapter and they have an upcoming Career and Resource Fair slate for Thursday, April 9th at Convene, in downtown Chicago. For further information on them and the Fair, visit their Facebook page.



LVI STAFF

Dorothy M. Miaso
Executive Director

Melissa Auer
Program Director
IYC-St. Charles

Alex Dunbar
Program Coordinator
IYC-Chicago

Larry Durfee
Program Coordinator
IYC-Harrisburg

Sandi Ivemeyer
Program Assistant
IYC-St. Charles

Danielle Johnson
Senior Program Associate
IYC College Bound Program

Gabriel Perez
Program Coordinator
VOCAL AmeriCorps

Teresa Urfer
Program Coordinator
IYC-Warrenville

AMERICORPS MEMBERS

Colin Herzog
Literacy Volunteers of Illinois

Carol Taylor
IYC-Warrenville

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Neisha McNeal
Madison Palmer
Don Singeri

NEWSLETTER

Colin Herzog
Editor

Literacy Volunteers of Illinois
641 W. Lake St, Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60661
P: 312.857.1582
F: 312.587.1586
lvillinois.org
info@lvillinois.org

MLK Day of Service: A Day On, Not Off

In 1994 Congress passed the King Holiday and Service Act, which designated the National MLK Holiday as a Day of Service. The Corporation for National and Community Service was charged with leading the effort and LVI staff and VOCAL AmeriCorps members did their part by participating in a variety of service projects honoring the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.—three were organized and led by VOCAL members: a community pantry and clothing drive at La Casa Norte; cooking and cleaning at the Fisher House; and, engaging children in a host of arts and crafts at the Kewanee Public Library. Members engaging in the projects continued a legacy of service not only since the start of the MLK Day On Not Off but MLK’s own legacy of “beloved community.”

Our largest gathering for service came with the strength of 18 members strong for Lakeview Pantry’s Community Pantry at La Casa Norte. VOCAL encompassed roughly 95% of the volunteer force that assisted with distributing 6,900 pounds of food on MLK Day. Members provided various services ranging from food preparation, cooking, distribution, cleaning as well as clothing donation organization, set up and distribution.



Lakeview Pantry runs weekly pantries in Chicago in its mission to eliminate hunger and poverty. It worked in partnership with La Casa Norte at their northern Humboldt Park neighborhood location. La Casa Norte focuses on serving families confronting homelessness and provides services in an effort to improve lives. VOCAL is proud to have

sent in three groups of members into three separate shifts.

The first shift consisted of setting up a clothing store to provide community members with access to free clothing. Members sorted incoming donations, labeled and placed clothing on hangers, arranged sizes, size labeling in preparation for incoming community shoppers. The second shift cleared the clothing storeroom and assisted service participants with community pantry grocery shopping. Community members took their pick from food donations to take with them. Members helped guide visitors with choosing items and identifying the location of items within the market. The final shift assisted in coordinating food preparation, providing food, refreshments and seating visitors at open locations. The ended with a general kitchen and dining area clean-up which ended a seven-hour volunteer service effort.



The day began earlier for the five members and staff serving at the Fisher House in Hines, Illinois. The Fisher House, which is on the grounds of the Hines Veteran Administration Hospital, is one of a network of comfort homes where military and veterans’ families can stay at no cost while a loved one is receiving treatment. While the House receives support from the Fisher Foundation, which provides the bulk of funding to its network of homes, still the houses rely heavily on the human, financial and in-kind resources of volunteers. Our contribution on this day consisted of purchasing, preparing, cooking and serving breakfast for the families and veterans themselves who were lodging there. It was a bountiful display consisting of scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, Monkey

MLK Day of Service: Continued

was a bountiful display consisting of scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, Monkey Bread (it was again a big hit), mixed fruit, orange juice and coffee.



After clearing tables and cleaning the kitchen, members and staff helped clean the house. While the House has staff and regular volunteers who tend to some of these details, they were *off not on* for this day and so VOCAL members stepped up to the task of cleaning stairwells, as well as vacuuming, dusting, and polishing anything and everything located in the House's common living areas. Members and staff served earnestly and left with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Meanwhile in Kewanee, the second floor of the Kewanee

Public Library was buzzing with activity as youth and adults throughout the city joined together to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. Eight local AmeriCorps members assigned to the YMCA, Salvation Army, Abilities Plus and the Sunshine Community Services Center were at numerous stations where the youth participated in activities such as reading, making crafts, building things, coloring pictures, answering questions and writing about how Dr. King would handle various situations. After completing the activities, each child received a free book and a piece of birthday cake or cookies. Check out the Facebook page for the Sunshine Community Services Center for more pictures.



- Gabriel Perez

Member Quarterly Meeting

The AmeriCorps experience provides an opportunity to tune into the needs of the community that one serves but it also tunes into the needs of the Member. VOCAL Members gathered on Friday, December 6th at the Literacenter for our Quarterly Meeting. The meeting provides an open space for Members to share their experience at their respective host sites with fellow members that perhaps they have not seen since initial orientation meetings. Members discussed the service they were performing, shared their rewards and challenges and opened up the conversation to other members who had helpful input or similar experiences.

The discussions were facilitated by the VOCAL program directors, which did a great job in deepening the conversations. After each member's presentation, fellow members were given the opportunity to ask questions, offer advice, or simply connect with what was being said. It was a great way to hear about the service done by members at large that at times is not noticed because of the widespread nature of volunteering at many host sites in Chicago and around the State. Members enjoyed the time what was spend talking about team synergy, future service event opportunities, potential networking opportunities and how to improve giving each other feedback in regards to their mutual service.



Team synergy received a boost with the inclusion of a VOCAL Team Leader coordinating team gatherings. Colin Herzog, Program Associate at LVI assisted in organizing a Member holiday gathering right after the Quarterly Meeting. Member led, holiday food, snacks, games and the viewing of two holiday movies were enjoyed. Members got to let loose and strengthen an esprit de corps within VOCAL. Members reported enjoying their time together and look forward to another event coming soon.

- Gabriel Perez

Member Training: Setting Boundaries

With any relationship, whether it be professional, personal, or the sometimes murky waters in-between, knowing where to set the boundaries is an important skill to cultivate, and it was this very skill that the members learned about in this session. On January 3rd, Keighty Ward of Literacy Works led the members to reflect on not just what their own boundaries were, but how they would react once those boundaries had been violated. and contrast that with how they felt when someone else's boundaries had not been respected. The initial responses to those scenarios ran a gambit along the spectrum of passive and more confrontational, and proved to be an effective way to instigate a conversation about how to communicate one's boundaries and the factors that doing so many entail.

Particularly, the members had to consider the boundaries that came from themselves as people, the boundaries that they hold themselves at their host sites, and the additional boundaries they uphold as AmeriCorps members. In situations such as a client requesting aid with loading money to their Venra cards, being asked to explain the Census questionnaire to clients, or clients coming to them with personal struggles, members had to figure out how to balance all three of these sets of boundaries.

When confronted with a situation that exceeds the boundaries, members learned about a convenient tool to help defuse some of these scenarios: create resource guides to direct these clients to, based on area of need. With thorough preparation, members can successfully manage all three sets of boundaries in most situations with informed referrals or delegation; likewise, by doing so, it assists with reaffirming to the members themselves what those boundaries are. Whether it be requesting not to be called outside of office hours or directing a client to a source that can more thoroughly assist them, understanding, navigating, and communicating these boundaries better prepare our members to help engage and care for their communities. It is a team effort, and respecting each other's boundaries is a crucial part of a successful team. Members left feeling excited and reflective, and are looking forward to learning all they can, to become the best volunteers they can be.



Member Training - Universal Design

On Friday, February 7th, the VOCAL* AmeriCorps members participated in a training in Universal Design, led by Keighty Ward of Literacy Works. Following up on their previous training regarding setting personal and organizational boundaries, this time around, the AmeriCorps members got to learn about a rather different type of boundary, one that is more explicit and easy to forget: physical boundaries.



From the layouts of a conference room or classroom and their impact on students' methods of entry or navigation, to even how many assumptions were made in designing basic, everyday objects, it was made clear how isolating and exclusionary these design choices could be, which segued to the concept of Universal Design: building in plans to make content accessible for everyone—or, at least, as many people as possible. The implications being that, should a person come along who may need a wheel chair, have limited sight, or may be mute, many of the members' standard plans would be upended, as they had not considered or prepared back-ups for that possibility.

While acknowledging that it may not be possible to plan or build in accommodation for every scenario, Ms. Ward introduced the process of Universal Design, the steps being: identify the application of the device/activity; define the universe or who will use it; get feedback from consumers or students; adopt and apply guidelines based on that feedback; make plans for extra needs; train and support relevant personnel in the methodology; and evaluate the feedback

With this approach in mind, the members were encouraged to apply it to their classrooms and their assignments. Together in groups, they even applied the steps to assess real life promotional flyers and touched on the concept of harm reductive language as well. Ultimately, the AmeriCorps members walked away with some valuable ways to approach their service more holistically.

Member Spotlight: Gabi Mulder (she/her/hers)

Gabi Mulder (she/her/hers) is a second-year AmeriCorps member serving with Literacy Works as a Program Associate. Originally from Toledo, Ohio, she went to the University of Chicago, where she double-majored in Gender and Sexuality Studies and Sociology. After she saw the listing for Literacy Works' AmeriCorps position on Handshake, she applied to her current position. She assists with the Literacy Works Community Literacy Program, which offers professional development trainings for adult literacy tutors and staff. Her duties include handling training registrations, assisting onsite during the trainings, and prepare and maintain the Tutor Essentials trainings that that help prepare English as Secondary Language and Adult Basic Education tutors.



Currently, she is a part-time member, as she is in graduate school, finishing up a Master's in Women and Gender Studies, in addition to working another job. While she loves working with the team at Literacy Works and getting to know people in the adult education, with all of her positions, it can be difficult to feel like she has enough time to get all her work done. As a result, when she is not helping at her host site, she is normally in class, at her other job, or working on homework. When she does have some free time, she likes to see plays, have baking and board game days with her friends, and hang out with her sister. After her service, she will be finishing her degree, and will continue to work with a teen dating violence program.



Literacy Works

Literacy Works is recognized in Chicago and beyond as a leading expert in adult literacy. Literacy Works' mission is to advance equity by promoting literacy education and the use of clear language. Literacy Works trains volunteer literacy tutors, builds the capacity of adult literacy professionals through continued training opportunities, and improves access to critical information by implementing clear language practices. Their vision is that one day, all people will realize their full potential.

Member Spotlight: Temothy Potts



Temothy Potts is a third year AmeriCorps member serving with the Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition as a program assistant. Born and raised in Chicago, he attended Harold Washington College. He learned about AmeriCorps from a former member, whom he had known from grammar school, and after being a part-time member in his first year, he has been full-time ever since. His general duties are assisting other CCLC members with their duties, representing them on coalitions, and assisting with the Digital Literacy, Health Literacy, and Career Pathways programs.

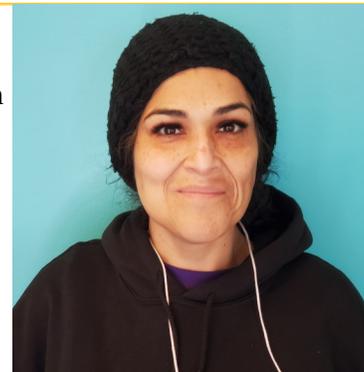
Being an assistant, he finds himself having to equal out time for the CCLC team members, as often all are working on their projects at the same time and also want assistance. Still, he takes on the challenges, and finds the work environment at the Chicago Literacy Alliance rewarding. He appreciates the colleagues and enjoys networking with the other CLA members and the organization members of the CCLC. After AmeriCorps, he plans on continuing to work in the nonprofit sector. When he isn't serving at the CCLC, he enjoys cycling, graphic design, and working on pretty much anything related to technology.



The changing worlds of technology, career readiness and healthcare impact all of us, but for the 500,000 adults in Chicago with low basic skills, these shifting landscapes present even more of a challenge. Throughout the country, literacy coalitions serve the important roles of filling in the gaps between programs and building the infrastructure of programs that serve low-skilled adults. CCLC and our members design and implement programs that create opportunities for adults to build their skills and realize their dreams.

Member Spotlight: Cecilia Garcia

Cecilia (CeCe) Garcia is a third term AmeriCorps member with Cento Sin Fronteras. She was born and raised in Chicago hailing from the southwest side. Prior to AmeriCorps, Cecilia was a medical assistant and was involved with youth outreach within her community. She learned of AmeriCorps through her Pastor and joined AmeriCorps as a result of it.



CeCe believes being involved with AmeriCorps is not only a great way to continue her community outreach but also develop professionally and meet a diverse group of people. She sees her role at Centro Sin Fronteras as one of advocate. In this capacity she supports families dealing with the repercussions of the broken immigration system: providing emotional support by accompanying them to hearings. Another big part of her role at Centro Sin Fronteras is creating a greater awareness of the issues that immigrant communities are facing in Chicago. She finds it important to shed light on these issues, especially in neighboring communities that do not know what is happening in neighborhoods right next door to them. In the end, she says, it is all about making people feel empowered and through empowerment help them gain confidence. She finds seeing her community progress extremely rewarding. Sometimes she sees large improvements other times they are small victories but even in small victories, students still gain confidence and independence through learning English. She finds the challenges to be when her students lose motivation because of small roadblocks.

Outside of Centro Sin Fronteras, CeCe enjoys reading and listening to alternative rock and music from the 60's and 70's. After service, she plans to continue being an advocate for her community but pursue higher studies. She sees herself getting her nursing degree, continuing her passion for nursing.

Centro Sin Fronteras (Center without Borders) was founded by Pastor Emma Lozano in 1987 to keep the legacy of her brother slain community activist Rudy Lozano alive. It is one of Chicago's oldest existing Mexican organizations. The mission of Centro Sin Fronteras is to provide outreach, education and services to principally low-income immigrant populations. Based in Pilsen at the Lincoln United Methodist Church, Centro Sin Fronteras offers services at various locations in numerous Chicago communities as well as some suburban communities.

Member Spotlight: Miriam Perez

Miriam Perez is a third-year member at Centro Sin Fronteras. She joined AmeriCorps after learning of the opportunity from her pastor. She is currently serving as a Youth Health Coordinator with Centro Sin Fronteras in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago. Miriam is from Celaya Guanajuato in Mexico, and graduated from Robert Morris University, with a major in Health Fitness Management. She earned a scholarship to Robert Morris University, playing Division I basketball during her undergraduate career. Before AmeriCorps, Miriam worked with Chicago Public Schools as a youth coordinator.



On an average day, her duties usually consist of working with youth in different schools through a medical health program, as well teaching English as a Second Language classes. She helps train youth to do medical tests for common health problems, raise awareness of symptoms for illness such as diabetes, and how to live a healthier lifestyle in the communities. With her duties, she has had to overcome challenges, and in the process, she has learned that once you are organized, your work is not challenged. Still, through all the hard work, for her, the reward of her work is helping

people and seeing their hearts fill with joy.

Once Miriam completes her year of service, she plans to go back to school for a master's degree. In the meantime, whenever she is not on call for Centro Sin Fronteras, she likes to continue to help people by offering free health screenings to the community, be a part of change, and help save lives.

Upcoming Dates

Sunday, March 7th– Saturday, March 14th
AmeriCorps Week

Wednesday, March 25th
Adult Education Legislative Awareness Day
Illinois Adult and Continuing
Educators Association (IACEA)
Springfield, Illinois

Wednesday, March 18th
Northside Literacy Coalition Meeting
Indo American Center

Thursday, March 19th
South & Westside Literacy Coalition Meeting
The Arturo Velasquez Westside Technical Institute

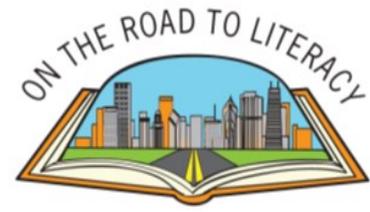
Friday, April 3th
AmeriCorps Training

Sunday, April 12th
Easter

Saturday, April 18th
On the Road to Literacy Conference

Week of April 19th - 25th
National Volunteer Week

29th Annual



Saturday, April 18th
9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Tutor and Adult Learner Conference And Awards Presentation

UIC Center for Literacy
1040 W. Harrison
Chicago, IL

Opening Session
Ben Greer

Illinois Community College Board

Keynote Speaker

Roberto Carmona
Road Scholar

Illinois Humanities Council

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Happy Birthday!

Belated Wishes

January

Tanya Lozano 1/03

Nayla Rodriguez 1/07

Carol Taylor 1/20

February

Keay L. Crandall 2/17

Hope Wetlesen 2/26

Autumn Zigterman 2/26

Happy Wishes

March

Yoraima Chavez 3/05