



VOCAL NEWS



Literacy Volunteers of Illinois

In This Issue ...



AmeriCorps

New Americorps Logo



A Salute to Veterans



We Welcome New Staff

And More ... !

Faced With Apathy, I Will Take Action ...

Hundreds of AmeriCorps members statewide gathered virtually on Friday, October 23rd to take the AmeriCorps oath of office and pledge to "... get things done for America". The event was Opening Day!

Usually held in Springfield each October with members converging from all parts of the state, the virtual event this year was peppered with some of the same activities of past Opening Days – welcome, keynote speaker, AmeriCorps oath -but given its format, markedly different as well.

The two-hour session featured a message from Barbara Steward the CEO of AmeriCorps, an introduction to and an in-person message from Serve Illinois' new Executive Director, Noelle Ayoka Samuels, a few trivia games to provide some levity, and keynote remarks from Dr. Alex Gee, Lead Pastor of Fountain of Life Covenant Church, a multiracial, multi-generational and multi-class congregation in Madison, WI, who is also the founder of The Nehemiah Center for Urban Leadership Development, a non-profit organization that inspires, develops and mobilizes emerging African American leaders to become partners in revitalizing and transforming their community. Dr. Gee's remarks *Making Sure Your Help Doesn't Hurt* embodied the core of the event helping members to give pause and reflect on the value and effect of AmeriCorps service and the needs of the community in which they will serve. His message of keeping economic and racial justice equity at the forefront of service resounded with members.

The highlight of the day was the taking of the AmeriCorps oath, led by Chester Spellman, Director of State and National AmeriCorps Programs for the Corporation.

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

While a gathering of 800-plus AmeriCorps members and a parade through downtown Springfield from the Convention Center to the Old State Capital for the Oath was not in the cards this year, the virtual event was a great kick-off to what we anticipate to be a different, but nonetheless, great year !



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*Larry Durfee
Program Coordinator
IYC-Harrisburg*

*Danielle Johnson
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*Teresa Urfer
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Warrenville*

*George Mendoza
LVI Staff*

*Kurt Mohr
LVI Staff*

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From the Executive Director ...

On behalf of the board and staff of LVI, I extend a warm welcome as we begin this new program year, and a new three-year program cycle. This is our 18th year of the VOCAL*AmeriCorps program and our 24th year of AmeriCorps programming and throughout it all it has been nothing short of amazing. We witnessed our first class of 20 members take the AmeriCorps Oath in October 1997 and from that time through the end of our last program year in August we have had 899 individuals engaged in service - 229 were members of Project UPLIFT, which was the precursor of our current VOCAL program, while the remaining 670 served in the VOCAL program, which began in October 2003. As a result of the efforts of these members and the 6,000-plus volunteers they recruited, over 45,000 individuals have been provided with an array of educational and job search and placement services at a wide variety of community and faith-based agencies throughout the state, including the Illinois Youth Centers in the Illinois Department of Justice.

As we enter this new program year, which we know will be very different, we thank the Serve Illinois Commission for their continued support, and, most importantly, the funding and thank all of you – members, host sites, and program supporters for being a part of our organization.

Fast Facts for Program Year 2021

Primary Focus area: Economic Opportunity

Objective: Employment

Interventions: One-to-one and small group tutoring in basic literacy skill development; Classroom instruction in ESL, GED, pre-GED and ABE

Number to be served: 1,000 Economically Disadvantaged Adults

Interventions: Structured job seeking and job placement sessions and job clubs; One-to-one assistance with job applications, resume development, job searches, mock interviewing and education and career transition counseling.

Number to be served: 750 Economically Disadvantaged Adult

Secondary Focus area: Education

Objective: Education

Interventions: One-to-one tutoring and mentoring and other educational enhancement activities for at-risk and incarcerated youth.

Number to be served: 325

Authorized Members: 37 (25 FTE) -

- Full-time (1,700 hours) - 15

- Part-time (900 hours) - 18

- Minimum-(300 hours) - 5

A Salute to Those Who Served

Serving Those Who Served is a Serve Illinois-led Week of Service to honor and thank our nation's veterans and active service men and women and all of their families for the sacrifices and commitment shown by them. The week is an annual activity of AmeriCorps programs in Illinois in honor of Veterans Day, but this year, organizing and identifying service projects was – like everything else - a challenge. Nevertheless various virtual and in-person activities focused on honoring our nation's heroes emerged that offered our members opportunities for engagement. These included - a digital letter writing campaign, providing a forum for veterans to share their military life experiences, and learning more about the sacrifices of a seldom heard of sub-group of veterans and celebrating their feats through a virtual ceremony that marked the opening of a new veteran's memorial dedicated to them in our nation's capital.

The digital letter campaign is an ongoing signature activity of Operation Gratitude, a volunteer-driven organization whose mission is to forge strong bonds between Americans and Military and First Responder heroes through volunteer service projects, acts of gratitude, and meaningful engagements in communities nationwide. Through this campaign VOCAL members joined thousands of others in extending a thank you to our nation's heroes and send encouraging words regarding their acts of valor and service.

Also on the docket for the day was the opening of the National Native American Veterans Memorial, which is a part of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC. It is the first National Memorial acknowledging American Indians who served in the armed forces and dedicated themselves to defending our nation. Many Americans are unaware of the exceptional service performed by American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native veterans. Members recruited friends, family, students, and colleagues to both participate in the digital letter writing campaign and view the opening of the National Native American Veterans Memorial. The Memorial was released on Veterans Day, November 11th. Audiences were also invited to view a virtual exhibit of the opening, listen to comments on the importance of the memorial and also gain exposure to historical teaching tools that may be used to teach others.

While those were virtual activities, we had a couple of in-person sessions too. Member Kurt Mohr assisted his site at IYC Warrenville with a special event honoring veterans who work at the facility. Attended by school graduates and staff, four veterans came forward to talk about their life experiences in and out of service. "My main takeaway from all of the veteran speakers was how positively they viewed their experiences," wrote Mohr. Kurt was behind the scenes but assisted with event logistics and refreshments.

And, in Kewanee the YMCA, through the efforts of member Katie Cameron, held a special Veterans Day event working with after school program children. Katie led an art project with youth creating patriotic flags. Students spent part of the day learning about how and why we dedicate a day to veterans. A discussion also included surveying the room to ask if children's parents were vets or were currently serving. One child's father, who is an active military member, took his gifted flag home with him.

A Brief History of Veterans Day

Veterans' Day originated as "Armistice Day" on November 11th, 1919 the first anniversary marking the end of the first world war. Congress passed a resolution in 1926 making it an annual observance, and it became a national holiday in 1938. Then-President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed legislation in 1954 to change the name to Veteran's Day to honor all those who served in War or Peace.

Number of military veterans in the United States in 2019: 17.4 Million

Number of female military veterans in the United States in 2019: 1.6 Million

Source 2019 American Community Survey

New Name...New Logo CNCS

This past September the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) the federal agency that houses a myriad of grant-based programs including AmeriCorps, released a new brand strategy for the future that includes both a name change and a new logo. Paying homage to its flagship initiative, the agency will now be known as “AmeriCorps” and will unite all national service programs - AmeriCorps VISTA, NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps), and State & National programs, as well as the Volunteer Generation Fund, under the AmeriCorps name, along with the three programs that cater exclusively to volunteers 55 years and older under the Senior Corps name – Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP – which will be promoted under the banner of AmeriCorps Seniors.

With the new name and brand strategy, the agency also unveiled a refreshed logo, which they say pays tribute to the iconic AmeriCorps brand, while updating it for the digital age. Seen here, the logo blends



the letter ‘A’ with an American flag to symbolize the way AmeriCorps members and volunteers inspire and improve communities through service, creating a visual representation of the agency’s role in uniting Americans. A redesigned americorps.gov website is on the horizon for next year, a preview of it which ‘reflects AmeriCorps’ new brand architecture, messaging, and look” has already been launched. Grantees are being asked to update their materials to reflect the new identity within the next three years.

Welcome New Serve Illinois Staff

The Serve Illinois Commission on Volunteerism and Community Services, more commonly called Serve Illinois, is the state agency charged with leading volunteer efforts in our state. This includes co-sponsoring regional volunteer conferences, in northern, northeastern, central and southern Illinois as well overseeing –which includes funding and monitoring – a wide portfolio of AmeriCorps programs – over 50 this year of which the VOCAL program is one. The Commission is Governor-appointed; its work is carried out by a professional staff. We welcome two new additions to the Commission’s staff and introduce you to them



Noelle Ayoka Mota Samuels, who goes more simply by Ayoka, joined the Serve Illinois Commission this past fall as the new Executive Director. Members may remember meeting her at the virtual “Opening Day” back in October where she provided a warm welcome to all. As the Commission’s ED, Ayoka is responsible for the administration and leadership of all aspects of the commission which includes oversight of AmeriCorps programming, volunteering (including volunteering for disaster preparedness), community service program support, intergenerational initiatives and social innovation. Prior to joining the Commission, Ayoka served, for the past fourteen years, as the Director of the Gary

Comer Youth Center in Chicago’s Grand Crossing community, providing support and opportunities for over 4,000 youths and their families annually. She has served in the nonprofit sector professionally since 1993. Ayoka has a Bachelor’s from the University of Illinois and a Master of Non-Profit Management degree from Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies.

Karen Pendegrass joined the Commission in October as the AmeriCorps Programs Manager, a position that has her overseeing the program and grant administration. Prior to assuming this position, she served for the past three years in the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Immunization Program. She has worked at IDPH in various positions for over 23 years. Prior to working for the State of Illinois, Karen worked in the social services field at the Gateway Foundation substance Abuse Treatment Centers as the Quality Control Coordinator and the Family Service Center as a Case Worker. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Child, Family and Community Service from the University of Illinois at Springfield, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Master Exercise Practitioner Program (MEP) certification and is an Air Force veteran.



New Leadership in the Show Me State

Congratulations to Scott McFarland, who after 14 years with Serve Illinois, moved on to new challenges as well as a new city and state, to become the Executive Director of the Missouri Commission on Community Service. Scott joined the Serve Illinois Commission in 2006 as a graduate student intern and during his tenure with the Commission served in various positions including AmeriCorps Program Manager, Deputy Director, and for the last six, Executive Director. Throughout this time, I had many opportunities to work with Scott as a Commissioner, AmeriCorps grantee, and Illinois Conference on Volunteer Administration (ICOVA) Chair, among still other roles and saw at first hand the care, concern and commitment that he had shown to all in the service field here in Illinois as well as nationally through his work with America's Service Commission. He provided great leadership to Serve Illinois staff, Commissioners, grantees and others within our service circle and is a true champion of national service. Missouri chose well!



- *Dorothy M. Miaso, Executive Director*

Change of Venue for Gabriel Perez

After 30-plus months of serving as the Member Coordinator of the VOCAL* AmeriCorps program, Gabriel Perez, left LVI in early December to take on a new challenge of serving as the Career Navigator at the American Job Center in Pilsen with our partner agency, Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition (CCLC). Gabe was the face of LVI to our members these past few years and we appreciate all of his efforts on our behalf. We wish him well in his new role and look forward to working with him as he assumes the role of host site supervisor in his new position with CCLC.

Member Perspective: November Training

For the month of November's member training, held on the 6th, the wonderful Keighty Ward gave a lesson on *Reflective Practice*. What is Reflective Practice? Well there are many schools of thought on reflective practice. However the main idea of reflective practice is learning from the experience of past and future lessons by self assessing during and after the lesson. When doing so you should be examining how students are reacting, if they are having trouble, if they are enjoying the lesson, if they are engaged in the lesson and so on. The next step is considering ways of improving the lesson by using your observations and planning new methods or approaching the subject from a different perspective, etc. After that you should put the ideas into practice and then lastly start the process all over again. I am a big fan of reflective learning as it encourages the growth of not only the teachers but the students as well since the lessons themselves will become tailored to the class as the teacher reassesses and builds on their experiences with that class and or set of students. I found the lesson given by Keighty Ward very eye opening. Self assessment and reflection is something that I would consider myself to do regularly but the lesson made me think on how to build on that and encouraged me to put the ideas into practice in not only teaching but also daily life. I would like to thank Keighty Ward and I look forward to the next lesson, I am certain that a lot of other Americorps members feel the same. Thank you very much Keighty!

- *George Mendoza, Program Associate*

Member Spotlight: George Mendoza

My name is George Mendoza, I am twenty four years old and I was born and raised in Chicago by two immigrant parents who came from Mexico. Growing up I was raised in a very poor household that solely spoke Spanish. At a young age I was obsessed with the sciences, reading, as well as drawing and dreamed of becoming a Marine Biologist or an artist. I would spend the majority of my childhood either reading whatever books on biology I could find at the thrift store or drawing. Unfortunately my love for the arts waned due to the discouragement of my parents and I abandoned any hope for being an artist and decided that since I enjoyed science I would go into a STEM field for a well paying safe career.



After graduating high school I attended a semester at Carthage College as a computer science major, I did not enjoy it at all and felt the material was too monotonous. So I went to Wright Community College and used the opportunity to try out different classes and was able to rekindle my love for art. With the encouragement of my professors I switched from a science major to an art major with the intention of transferring to the School of the Art Institute. However, I was denied a transfer due to my debt to Carthage College. I did not allow that to get me down and joined a certificate program for web development at Northwestern; I felt that the program was a compromise between art and the sciences. It is also a field that would allow me to pay off my debt and then get my degree. After finishing the program I worked at a print shop for a year, but then I saw a job posting for Americorps and applied. It seemed to be the perfect opportunity to accomplish one of my goals of helping out and serving the community.

Thankfully I got accepted into Americorps and my title is communications and marketing. I have enjoyed every minute and have met very wonderful people. It is a very rewarding experience to know that I am doing something that helps the community and it will open up various opportunities. The only challenges that I feel at the moment are dealing with the pandemic as it makes it hard to have any person to person contact with the community and to plan any events. After my service I plan to continue my education and either go to school for industrial design at the Illinois Institute of Technology or the School of the Art Institute. In the future I see myself working as either a designer or in urban planning and becoming a leader in my field and my community and helping however I can.

Tutor Tip: Multiplication Number Battle

This fun and easy to play game enhances number recognition and multiplication skills. It is a great way to wind up your tutoring session, or anytime you need to take a break from what you and your student are working on.

Number of players: groups of two

Materials: Deck of cards, face cards worth 10, Ace worth 1

Winning: When all of the cards have been flipped over, whoever has the most cards is the winner

How to Play: Players split the deck evenly, then simultaneously flip over their first top two cards

Example:

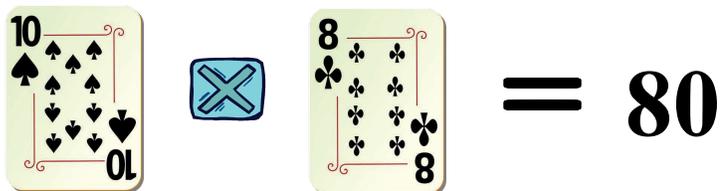
Player 1 flips over a 3 and a Queen; multiplied, their product is 30

Player 2 flips over a 10 and an 8; multiplied their product is 80, so this player takes all four cards.

If the products of the cards have the same value, those four cards are placed in a center pile. The next hand is played normally and the winner of that multiplication number battle takes the center pile as well.

When all the cards are used, each player counts those in their pile and the one with the most cards wins !

This game is from Acing Math (One Deck at a Time) from The Positive Engagement Project.



Virtual Training from Literacy Works

Tutoring ESL FOR adults with low literacy

January 12 5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Are you tutoring an adult who does not read or write in their native language? How about a newcomer to the US or to education in general? What about a learner who speaks a non-written language? This is the training for you!

The Diversity of English

January 13 5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

In this workshop, we'll discuss what it means for English to be a global language and the implications that has for our work. We'll explore some of the common variations spoken in the United States and what we can do to foster more linguistically inclusive classrooms. We hope you leave this conversation with a clearer understanding of the important relationship between addressing the diversity of English and strengthening our work as anti-racist educators.

Using Lessons from 2020 to Bolster Adult Literacy Programs in 2021

January 21 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

In March 2020, we all scrambled to learn Zoom, move our services online and adjusted to working from home. That was a lot of work! Before we go back to what we were doing pre-pandemic, we want to consider how these temporary alterations might actually create a more successful program for future learners. We will discuss strategies for adapting our work during 2020 to post-pandemic learning and demonstrate the ways that we can learn from a very tough year to build stronger programs going forward.

Program Year 2021 VOCAL* AmeriCorps Members

Madilyn Atkins

World Relief Chicago

Linda Bolls

Abilities Plus, Kewanee

Kaitlyn Cameron

Kewanee YMCA

Jaila Carey

Literacy Works

Alvin Cole

Sunshine Community Service Center

Veronica Del Toro

Sunshine Community Service Center

Amy Dyer

World Relief DuPage/Aurora

Xochitl Figueroa

Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition

Mary Findley

Kewanee YMCA

Breana Henderson

Salvation Army

Brittany Hetzel

World Relief DuPage/Aurora

Lydia Kelsey

Instituto del Progreso Latino

Sierra King

Touch Gift Foundation

Frank Leong

World Relief DuPage/Aurora

Jason Li

Sunshine Community Service Center

George Mendoza

Literacy Volunteers of Illinois

Kurt Mohr

Literacy Volunteers of Illinois

IYC-Warrenville

Gabriela Napolitano

World Relief Chicago

Blake Oelhafen-Chelbowski

Literacy Chicago

Valerie Painter

Sunshine Community Service Center

Janet Pilarski

Kewanee YMCA

Nayla Rodriguez

Centro Romero

Cora Rusk

Kewanee Public Library

Jackson Smith

Centro Romero

Rosa Vidal

Waukegan Public Library

Hope Wetlesen

World Relief Chicago

Welcome and thank you to all of the members who have taken it upon themselves to help out their communities!

Upcoming Dates

JANUARY 18, 2021

Day On, Not Off – MLK Day of Service

9:00AM-1:00PM

*VOCAL Americorps at Fisher House
Hines VA Medical Complex*

12:30PM-4:00PM

"Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader"

Project YES! Virtual Online Family Literacy Fair

LVI SOCIAL MEDIA



www.Twitter.com/LVillinois



Visit www.Facebook.com/lvillinois
click "like"

Join the VOCAL AmeriCorps Facebook Group



Follow us on Instagram
[@literacyvolunteersofillinois](https://www.instagram.com/literacyvolunteersofillinois)

LITERACY CHICAGO
is excited to announce
Voices of Literacy
Monthly Series

Wednesday, January 27, 2021
6:00-7:00pm

- Featuring Guest Readers -
*Lt. Governor of Illinois Juliana Stratton
Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle
Chicago 35th Ward Alderman Carlos Rosa*

*Chicago Authors
Christian Cook
Dr. Garrard McClendon
Janet Sutherland*

Each evening is an inspiring and interactive
virtual happy hour and literary adventure.

Play games, win prizes, and have fun!

\$12 a session or all 3 for \$30

REGISTER TODAY ON EVENTBRITE.COM/LITERACYCHICAGO



September

Jaila Carey - 9/01

Rose Vidal - 9/12

Lydia Kelsey - 9/17

Linda Bolls - 9/19

Mary Findley - 9/25

Amy Dyer - 9/27

Janet Pilarski - 9/28

October

Kurt Mohr - 10/11

Brittany Hetzel - 10/15

November

Kaitlyn Cameron - 11/10

December

Brianna Henderson - 12/15

Cora Rusk - 12/21

January

Jackson Smith - 1/04

Nayla Rodriguez - 1/7

**We wish a Happy Birthday to all of our members who's birthday has passed
as well as our upcoming Birthdays!**