

May  
2016

# VISTA Insider

The Illinois Affordable Housing Support Project Newsletter  
Supported by Housing Action Illinois

## SAVE THE DATE!

- May 10<sup>th</sup>: On the Table
- May 12<sup>th</sup>: Celebrate Home, Northwest Side Housing Center
- May 18<sup>th</sup>: VISTA Supervisor Orientation
- May 26<sup>th</sup>: #ThrowbackThursday Fundraiser, Latin United Community Housing Association
- May 31<sup>st</sup> Monthly Report due

**Specials Thanks To:**  
Stephanie Heckman  
Jay Cook

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## A Letter from the Editor

April began as a giant whirlwind for our VISTA Leaders this month. We had to put Opportunity Listings together, finalize details with new host sites, put together our Spring Appreciation Event for our VISTAs and start interviewing candidates for the next cycle. Talk about multi-tasking! While each of those tasks brought their own challenges (and mild frustrations) it was also a learning opportunity. Putting together opportunity listings for positions necessitates learning about the position through the lens of the supervisors who will be running it. There was a lot of back and forth dialogue that went into the crafting of these listings. One wrong word could throw off the essence of the position.

Interviewing candidates has been similarly interesting. You always hear about how VISTA members come from all different walks of life, but as you recruit for new positions you really get the sense of what that actually means. There's been a lot of "Wow" moments when candidates have talked about their experience with service and what lengths they have gone to in order to serve others in their communities. As we go into the last month before our current members move on to the next phase of their lives, it's heart-warming to know that next year's members will be nothing short of spectacular.

Robert McDonald

## Updates and Reminders

**Interested in becoming an IAHSP Member:** If you or somebody you know is interested in joining the IAHSP team, be sure to keep an open eye out after April 8 for available positions! You can email [vista@housingactionil.org](mailto:vista@housingactionil.org) for more information.

**On The Table:** Rachel Contos, one of our VISTAs, has put together an On The Table discussion. All On The Table events will be held on May 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Celebrate Home:** Northwest Side Housing Center is hosting a fundraiser this month. Follow the link for more details <http://www.nwshc.org/celebrate-home-2016/>.

**#ThrowbackThursday:** LUCHA is hosting a fundraiser this month at the Emporium Arcade Bar in Logan Square! There will also be a local pizza competition at the fundraiser! Follow the link for more details: <https://www.facebook.com/events/950697351711796/>.

**Peer Support Calls:** We are going to have our second round of peer support calls this month. VISTA Members should keep an eye on their inbox for a Doodle Link to coordinate times.

# HOLLA! VISTA MEMBER SHOUT-OUTS for April 2016

**Perla Rodriguez**, VISTA at Champaign County Regional Planning Commission, worked on Centralized Intake, a project that will help streamline shelter services in Champaign County. It launched in April.

**Alfreda Baran**, VISTA at Mercy Housing Lakefront, built relationships with 3 organizations to help bring resources to MHL residents.

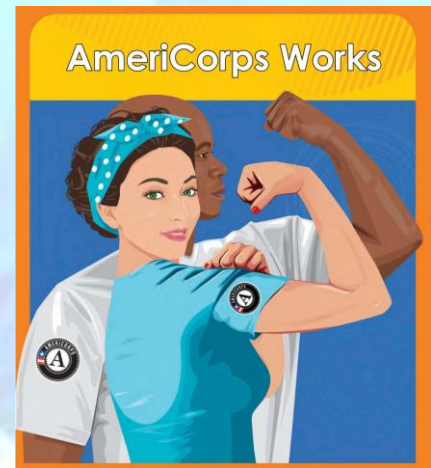
**Carrie Simpson**, VISTA at South Suburban Housing Center, participated in a Housing Expo to explain her agency's availability as a resource to members of the community.

**Natasha Russi**, VISTA at

Spanish Coalition for Housing, helped her organization obtain \$305 worth of in-kind donations to raffle off at an event.

**Jasmine Gunn**, VISTA at Claretian Association, worked with staff at her site to put together a 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner that ended up raising \$20,000 in donations.

**Lauren Madison**, VISTA at Lawyer's Committee For Better Housing, created a guide for tenant organizers about how to use the new KCRO Foreclosure Alerts System



## Happy Birthday! Happy Birthday!

May 6<sup>th</sup>, Stephanie Heckman



# VISTA to VISTA

## with Stephanie Heckman

### About Stephanie

#### Where are you from?

Stephanie grew up in Springfield, Ohio and attended Ohio State University (OSU) in Columbus, Ohio, where she obtained her Bachelor's degree in Strategic Communications.

Accepting an AmeriCorps position, Stephanie initially moved to Chicago in 2014. Settling in the Hyde Park area, Stephanie commuted to work (via public transit) to a charter school on Chicago's west side.

In August, 2015, Stephanie accepted an AmeriCorps VISTA position with Latin United Community Housing Association (LUCHA) in Humboldt Park as their Marketing and Development Assistant and moved to a new apartment in the Logan Square area. She is now close enough to work to walk or ride her bike.

#### What do you do for fun? // Do you have any hobbies?

A bright, articulate, clearly fun loving young lady, Stephanie shared a virtual host of things she enjoys doing. Below are just a few: She loves to read books, but also follows a few favorite websites and blogs.

- She loves animals and volunteers (time permitting) at local animal shelters. She also shares four rescue cats with her boyfriend.
- Now living in Logan Square, she likes frequenting the many eclectic shops and restaurants. In fact, she smiled pretty widely as she described some of the great craft beers she's tried at some of the local pubs.

### Latin United Community Housing Association

### Stephanie Heckman



- She also shared that she enjoys taking in an occasional stand-up comedy show.
- In addition to riding her bike to work, Stephanie enjoys bike rides along the nearby 606 trail and the Lakeshore Path.

#### If you could choose to live anywhere in the world, where would that be?

- Stephanie's plans include moving to the West Coast, however, she is also interested in exploring more global opportunities. She'd like to experience more of the world, mentioning wanting to possibly live for a time in the United Kingdom (the "UK"), Europe, or South America.

#### Future plans?

- Stephanie's current VISTA assignment concludes in mid-August. She has started looking for new opportunities in the non-profit sector and might stay in the Chicago area at least for a while longer, but, has not yet decided on what organization she would like to join. She is looking for a position in communication, marketing, or outreach.

#### Tell me something people might find interesting about you?

- Stephanie has maintained a strict vegan dietary regiment for nearly 10 years. She enjoys cooking and is having a lot of fun trying new and unique recipes from around the world.

# VISTA to VISTA...with Jay Cook

## Where are you from?

- Jay is originally from the Chicago suburb of Downers Grove.
- He moved to Southern California and eventually Sacramento, living in California for 25 years.
- In California, his experience included working for the State of California Department of Housing & Community Development where he worked on many interesting initiatives such as the Community Development block grant, neighborhood stabilization, disaster recover initiatives, and the American Recovery and Investment Act.
- Jay also worked for many years in the real estate and banking industries, including CitiMortgage in Northern California and Regency Savings Bank in Oak Park, Illinois.
- In 2015, he moved back to the Chicago suburbs to be closer to his family.

## What do you do for fun? // Do you have any hobbies?

- Jay is a very busy, hardworking guy! Aside from his full-time VISTA position, he also works part-

time in mattress sales and attends graduate school full-time.

- He is currently pursuing his Master's in Public Policy and Public Administration from National Louis University, with an expected graduation date of Spring 2017.
- In his graduate school program, Jay is intrigued with the concept of Housing Choice Vouchers (which are typically used by renters) being used for first-time homebuyers. He believes this program is important because it could lead to community wealth building. He is currently working on a research project about the issue.
- Fun fact: Jay first heard about the VISTA program through directly contacting the Executive Director of Housing Action Illinois on LinkedIn! He was not familiar with AmeriCorps or VISTA until that conversation.

## Family?

- Jay lives with his wife, a public school teacher in the suburbs, and his pet cats.
- He has 31-year-old daughter who is the



## Jay Cook Hope Fair Housing Center

military and currently lives in Hawaii.

- Jay's three grandchildren, all from his daughter, range from one to seven years old.
- His son, age 28, also lives in the Chicago suburbs.

## Future plans?

- Jay's goal is to obtain a position with the Federal Government of the United States. He plans on taking advantage of the Non-Competitive Eligibility for federal jobs that VISTAs receive after service. He would like to stay in the Chicago area and would like to work for a federal housing program, such as HUD.

## Tell me something people might find interesting about you?

- Jay comes from three generations of preachers! He is the first generation to choose not to become a preacher and instead devote his life to housing and economic development work.



All labor that  
uplifts  
humanity has  
dignity and  
importance  
and should be  
undertaken  
with  
painstaking  
excellence.

~Martin  
Luther King Jr.

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In April, the White Sox donated tickets to the IAHSF so that we could thank our VISTAs for serving with us over the past year. The game was a close and it didn't rain! That's a win in our book.

## NEXT MONTH...

- Our VISTAs in the news: Let us know if you or any of your work is featured in a news article.
- Let us know if there's an article you would like to write!
- Would you like your own section in the newsletter? Advice column, crossword puzzle, quiz or activity idea section don't be shy—let us know!

*Send to: [vista@housingactionil.org](mailto:vista@housingactionil.org)*

## About Us...

Illinois Affordable Housing Support Project is an AmeriCorps VISTA team made up of twenty-one member organizations throughout the state of Illinois, including: Access Living, Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County, Champaign County Regional Planning Commission, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, Chicago Rehab Network, Claretian Associates, Corporation for Supportive Housing, HOPE Fair Housing, Kenneth Young Center, Lawyers Committee For Better Housing, Latin United Community Housing Association, Mercy Housing Lakefront, Mid Central Community Action, Northwest Side Housing Center, Respond Now, Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity, South Suburban Housing Center, Spanish Coalition for Housing, Chicago Lawyers's Committee, Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH), Housing Action Illinois.