

**January
2016**

VISTA Insider

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

SAVE THE DATE!

- January 15th, Host Site Application Deadline
- January 18th, National Day of Service (MLK Day)
- January 29th Monthly Report due
- January Site Visits

Specials Thanks To:

Alfreda Baran
Matthew Wrobel
Natasha Russi

The New VISTA Newsletter!

A Letter from the Editor

Being a VISTA member is a huge commitment made by our Illinois Affordable Housing Support Project members, and we really wanted to reflect those experiences to the general public. Over the past few months, the VISTA Leaders for IAHSPP have looked at various successful and effective support teams and what we found is that they use a lot of the same tools, one tool of which is a VISTA Newsletter of some variation.

We're still in the testing phased, but we hope you find this new tool engaging, useful, and as a device to learn more about the project and the IAHSPP 2015-2016 VISTA Cohort.

Happy New Year!

Robert McDonald

New Year, New Updates

Peer Support Calls: In February, we will be starting a series of bi-monthly group calls where members will be able to connect with each other about their service year experience. Keep an eye out for email updates in January.

Spring VISTA Retreat/Appreciation Day: May 6th, 2016 is the day schedule for our the IAHSPP VISTA Spring Retreat. It's a little bit away, but please mark it on your calendars!

National Day of Service: January 18th is commonly referred to as a national day of service! This is a chance for VISTA members to go out and do some direct service! If you still do not have a plan for volunteering, we will be announcing group opportunities within the first week of January.

Professional Development Training: Starting in February or March, we will start offering professional development trainings. The trainings will be offered through webinar format, and will go over various topics relevant to VISTA service. The curriculum for these trainings comes from Arizona Serve (the intermediary organization VISTA Leader Willie served through last year).

Follow us on Facebook!

<https://www.facebook.com/housingactionvistas/>

HOLLA! VISTA MEMBER SHOUT-OUTS November and December

Dasia Skinner, VISTA at Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, organized a press conference with 17 volunteers.

Samantha Michaels, VISTA at Corporation for Supportive Housing, is currently developing Speak UP, a series of tenant leader trainings on various topics and issues.

Rachel Contos, VISTA at Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County, raised \$360 through a #GivingTuesday fundraising campaign.

Michelle Gibson, VISTA at Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity, created a new website for her organization.

Brandon Grigsby, VISTA at Respond Now, worked on a successful grant proposal for \$20,000 for his site through the Grant Healthcare Foundation.

Lauren Madison, VISTA at Lawyers Committee for Better Housing, is developing a Lockout Manual that will assist attorneys, landlords and providers during illegal lockouts of tenants.



Have you noticed our VISTAs doing any really cool work they should be recognized for? Is there a project you are really excited about that we didn't mention? Send us an email at vista@housingactionil.org and we'll be to include it next issue!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

A special "Happy Birthday" shout-out to some of our VISTA members! Happy belated birthday to those we missed in December!

Brandon Grigsby, December 22nd

Amanda Dilulis December 25th

Lauren Madison December 25th

Dasia Skinner, January 7th

VISTA to VISTA...with Alfreda Baran and Matthew Wrobel

Matt: I'm originally from Michigan, I moved to Chicago three years ago. I went to school for film. I like to take an activist perspective on the film work that I do, even though it was mostly fiction.

Alfreda: What part of Michigan are you from?

Matt: Metro-Detroit. I'm originally from Sterling Heights.

Alfreda: I'm a Chicago native. I worked in the federal government for about 20 years as a financial analyst and a paralegal. This is my second AmeriCorps position. Before, I was a tutor on the West Side in a charter school. I applied to this and, fortunately, I got it. It's very interesting. [Mercy Housing] is supportive housing. I help people with getting jobs and

doing resumes. They have a really good financial education program. I reach out and build relations with other organizations that might do trainings or have job.

Matt: Have you felt the difference between [government] work and non-for-profit work?

Alfreda: Financially. Not as a VISTA, but I'm seeing how the lack of a state budget here is affecting people and they had to lay off people. It's very different. You don't have the security you may even have in the corporate work or the federal government.

Matt: That's true. I think that right now it is a very unique thing to Illinois. Our site is actually really fortunate because we don't take a lot of state grants, for whatever reasons.

Alfreda: When I think of AmeriCorps VISTA, I don't think of media specialist. So that's a unique position.

Matt: It's interesting, too, because it depends on the day where the importance really lies. Sometimes that looks like getting out events or about classes that we hold. A lot of the time, it's just about creating more awareness around the things the community has access to. Part of my job, I'm trying to market the office to a certain degree. One of the things we do is a monthly spotlight where we work with people who have had successful outcomes with preventing foreclosure.

Alfreda Baran, is Chicago Native. She is currently serving as Financial Literacy Coordinator at Mercy Housing Lakefront.

Listen to Alfreda and Matthew talk more about their work and the issues areas in their communities over at the Housing Action YouTube Channel!  <http://bit.ly/1TpKuaO>

Matt: Whether it was food service or working on film sets, there isn't a lot of sitting. I found myself, now, spending a lot of time at a desk. I'm often surprised when I get home and I am stressed in a mental way and not a physical way. That's a very new thing for me. Do you feel there is a different stress to non-profit work than other work you have done?

Alfreda: Yeah, there can be. I think everyone is geared for results. You want to see good outcomes. I think nonprofits are more vulnerable to money issues and sustainability issues. Sustainability is an issue for residents too.

Matt: I think a lot about whether it's harder for organizations to work together when everyone is struggling for the same pot of money.

Matt: Has there been a connection between your work at the charter school and your work

now, as an AmeriCorps member?

Alfreda: Well, yeah. This maybe easier to some degree, since you are working with adults. Although, when you get through to a sixth grader, that is also very rewarding, especially when they are improving with their reading and a light bulb goes off. That's more an immediate result you get, even if it takes a long time.

Matt: Especially with two years and your different positions, are there any key things you think VISTAs, or people who are considering AmeriCorps in general, should know to make their time successful?

Alfreda: I think that whatever their expectations are, they should expect things to be totally different. You probably found that, too. What you think is going to be important may not be important. I think you have to go in with a really open mind if possible, and maybe a curiosity too. Come in

asking, "Well, what can I do?" And in that respect, maybe coming in with a problem-solving approach will help, too.

Matt: Absolutely! I find that more often than not, that communication is so valuable on every level. It helps people have a better understanding. Like, I'm really outcomes based. I'm a few months behind on getting my oil changed and nobody told me what the ramifications for that could be. So, it clicked that I need reasoning. Sometimes with the speed of things going on there is an urgency, but not a reasoning. Now I'm comfortable asking, "What's is the reasoning of this?" so that I can have purpose in the work I am doing. you are able to speak to what you need to succeed, I think that is incredibly valuable. I think some folks definitely go to the wayside when they are unable to communicate certain things.

Matthew Wrobel is originally from the Detroit Metro-Area. He is currently serving at Northwest Side Housing Center as the Marketing & Outreach Coordinator

VISTA Thought Corner

New Year, New You!

The New Year is just around the corner and we're all at different points in our VISTA service. Some of us just started, and others of us are reaching the 6-month mark where we're most at risk of burn out. In the latter camp, the biggest question I'm carrying with me into the New Year is: how will I take care of myself for the next six months? Along with this question, I'm thinking about New Years resolutions, and one really important thing they create an opportunity for: intentionality.

In counseling and therapy, intentional spaces are crucial to approaching the seemingly insurmountable task of healing. For people who make resolutions, the New Year serves as an intentional time, when you get to reflect on and reconsider the things in your life that may be keeping you stuck in place. As such, New Year's resolutions can provide a really important point of entry into developing sustainable self-care practices for your VISTA service.

When I say self-care, I mean the practices that allow you to put yourself and your needs first in order to address and recognize barriers you experience to being fully present and secure in the spaces you're engaged with. Those spaces might be your relationships or your work or time you spend alone; wherever you are and whatever you're doing, self-care is about learning for yourself what makes you feel validated, capable, and safe, what refills your tank when it's empty. These practices are different for the different things you do, and you probably don't need the same things to address a conflict at work as you do for a conflict with your family, for example.

That variability is what makes intentionality so vital to sustainable self-care. If these practices aren't flexible or adaptable, they tend not to be sustainable. New Year's resolutions offer a convenient chance to practice by focusing on a specific aspect of your self-care, whether it's being outside enough when you're in an office all day or doing your laundry more often or budgeting for buying yourself presents on the infamous VISTA stipend. Self-care practices are as diverse as the situations that call for them, and it can be really hard to identify specific needs when everything is piling on.

So, start with one or two, and be patient as you learn about your self-care needs. It's a process, and you're worth it. VISTA service is hard, and sometimes it's also hard to be forgiving with ourselves about that. I've heard this phrase from a few VISTAs and it's always an important reminder for me: *you can't pour from an empty cup*. In order to do good work, you have to be good to yourself first, and replenish the tenacity, excitement, and generosity of spirit that brought you to that work in the first place. You're wonderful and you're doing wonderful things. Stay fierce and happy New Year!

Credit to:

**Natasha Russi, AmeriCorps VISTA
member at Spanish Coalition for
Housing**

*Change
is
inevitable.
Growth is
optional.*

-John C. Maxwell

Proudly
Supported By:



A stronger Illinois begins at home



Pictured from left to right: Carrie Simpson, Clara Kent, Celia Cullom, Amanda Diulus, AnaPatricia Marquez, Matthew Wrobel, Samantha Michaels, Natasha Russi, Jasmine Gunn, Rachel Contos, Brandon Grigsby, Cathleen O'Brien.

Some of our VISTAs couldn't make it to our VISTA Retreat in November, but those who did rocked it!

NEXT MONTH...

- The VISTA Book Nook: Please send any book/movie/activity recommendations for next month's newsletter!
- 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

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.