

# PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

*"I've been a staff member with the National Service community for 13 years now. What I thought was a platform became my purpose."*

~Shannon Stober  
PRC VISTA & VISTA Leader  
2003 & 2004

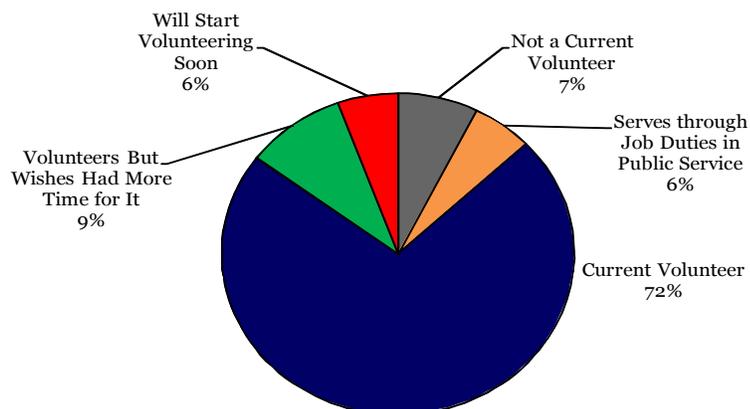


The VISTA project started alongside the Prevention Resource Center in 1996 with the intent to implement programs at the community level and to assist in the development of collaborative community prevention councils which promote social welfare and public health through cooperative programming. The first community VISTAs started in early February of 1997. These 14 members were a diverse group, including 4 Montanans and coming from as far away as Massachusetts and New York. Since its inception, the PRC has hosted over 400 VISTA members in communities across Montana from Lame Deer to Eureka and everywhere in between.

Prevention Resource Center VISTA Alumni were surveyed in 2015 about their lives after VISTA and the impact that national service has had on them. The results found that the majority of PRC VISTA Alumni:

- ⇒ Work in the Public Service Field through government agencies or non-profit organizations.
- ⇒ Volunteer their time to serve others.
- ⇒ Were highly impacted by their year(s) of national service.

**PRC AmeriCorps VISTA Alumni  
Volunteering Patterns**



*"It (VISTA Service) helped me gain a greater understanding of poverty and empathy with those experiencing poverty. It made me more sensitive to economic inequality and the deeper issues behind the problem. It taught me how to be frugal and how to appreciate what I have."*

~Sarah Bhimani  
PRC VISTA Member  
2010 & 2011



# BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF THE NORTHERN CHEYENNE NATION VISTA: ADAM PAYNE

SERVICE LOCATION: LAME DEER  
SERVICE YEAR: 2009



- **What was your VISTA project?**

One of my main tasks for the year was to help the Club rewrite documents. I also assisted with securing grant funds. The vast majority of that funding went into the building the Club occupies including having the Club's gymnasium insulated (approx. \$75,000). I also helped pave a new teen center to be added to the building. I was to start Keystone Club, a leadership club for teens, going again. I was also able to help coordinate volunteer efforts and fix an old bus that can be sold to bring in funds to go toward a new bus or van for the Club.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

I wanted to serve; I wanted the experience of living somewhere new.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

I became more aware of and sensitive to poverty, the issues that impact people living in poverty, and the organizations that serve those populations. Since during my VISTA service year I also lived as a racial minority for the first time in my life, I learned a great deal about senseless racial tensions. In the end my service year exposed my own mindsets, prejudices, and tendencies to me, allowing me to make myself a more caring, productive citizen.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Adam continues to serve his community through his work in county government at Georgetown County Parks & Recreation.



# MONTANA TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION COALITION VISTA: ELIZABETH WOLFE

SERVICE LOCATION: HELENA  
SERVICE YEAR: 2011



- **What was your VISTA project?**

I worked with the Montana Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalition as a communication liaison regarding prevention. I created awareness about teen pregnancy prevention by working with the Teen Council to provide resources to foster care youth, colleges, and other community group. A major project of the Teen Council was the creation of a YouTube video for parents and educators to help talk to youth about reproductive health.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

A friend of mine told me about it and it sounded really interesting. I found a job with an organization I really admired and ended up loving that kind of work. After I was finished as a VISTA, I continued that work with the Peace Corps.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

It exposed me to different communities and cultures. The work was incredibly rewarding and I learned so much with the Peace Corps and about prevention work. It impacted me so much; I am still doing prevention work.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

After returning from the Peace Corps in Vanuatu, Elizabeth is now working with Employee and Family Resources whose mission is to help people manage life's challenges so they can reach their full potential. Due to being new to her community, she has yet to start volunteering once again.



# MONTANA FOOD BANK NETWORK

## VISTA: EMILY DUNKLEE

SERVICE LOCATION: MISSOULA  
SERVICE YEAR: 2009-2010



- **What was your VISTA project?**

During my time as a VISTA at the Montana Food Bank Network I worked on outreach for public food assistance programs. My focus was on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). We worked to increase participation among SNAP eligible households and promoted the program around Montana. During my service year I also worked to increase awareness of and access to SFSP sites around Montana.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

I graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in Health Promotion/Applied Health Sciences in December of 2008. Job openings in the public service sector/public health and promotion realm were few and far between. A friend of mine served as a VISTA between undergrad and grad school and mentioned it as a viable solution to navigating the dismal job market. So I applied to VISTA jobs within my field of study and landed at the Montana Food Bank Network.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

My VISTA experience helped get me to where I am today. During my VISTA year I gained valuable knowledge about public food programs and made many connections within the public health community in Montana. Today, I serve the Montana community as the state Program Manager for the Summer Food Service Program/School Nutrition Programs Specialist at the Montana Office of Public Instruction. I absolutely love my job and what I do and I believe VISTA helped get me here.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Emily continues working on food related issues with the Montana Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Programs. Currently Emily wishes that she had even more time to volunteer and give back to the community.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL  
COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS  
VISTA: EMILY TETRAULT

SERVICE LOCATION: HELENA  
SERVICE YEAR: 2009-2010



- **What was your VISTA project?**

I prepared a report for the state about the resources available and the demographics of homeless individuals. I helped start a non-profit addressing the needs of the homeless with items from creating promotional materials to developing the Board of Directors. I worked on organizing events to provide those who are homeless or imminently homeless with essential goods and services.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

I wanted an opportunity to not only continue community service I was involved with but see a new part of country I had never been to before.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

Since my two terms as a VISTA member, I have stayed in the nonprofit field working in human services. My career has been focused on community education and fundraising for a number of different community organizations. Any time I talk with college students, I still always tell them about the opportunities with VISTA because it was such a wonderful opportunity for me.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Emily continued her national service by serving as a VISTA Leader in South Dakota. She continues to serve her community through volunteering and working at the Easter Seals Midwest that is an organization whose mission is to help individuals with developmental disabilities learn, live, work and participate in the community.



# MONTANA FOOD BANK NETWORK

## VISTA: ERIN CARLSTROM

SERVICE LOCATION: MISSOULA  
SERVICE YEAR: 2013-2014



- **What was your VISTA project?**

Worked with schools and community organizations around the state to grow participation in the School Breakfast Program and Summer Food Service Program. Six alternative school breakfast models and 3 Summer Food Service Programs were started during my VISTA term. Together these new programs reach over 300 children across Montana.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

After graduating from college I knew I wanted to stay in Montana and I knew I wanted a job where I could serve people and help them. VISTA was a good first step to take in a life that I want to use to help others.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

Before serving as a VISTA I knew that I wanted to use my life to help others, but I was not sure how I wanted to help. After serving in a hunger related area I have decided I would like to continue helping others through helping to end hunger.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

After her term of service, Erin was hired on at the Montana Food Bank Network where she continues to work in areas of hunger and food access. Erin continues to give back to her community through service.



# ANACONDA FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER - BOYS & GIRLS CLUB VISTA: JAMIE ROSSLER

SERVICE LOCATION: ANACONDA  
SERVICE YEAR: 2010-2012



- **What was your VISTA project?**

During my first year I helped the Family Resource Center determine the feasibility to turning their existing after-school program into a Boy & Girls Club so as to be more inclusive. During my second year, I assisted the FRC in developing and executing a diversified resource development program to ensure the longevity of the newly established Boys & Girls Club.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

At first it was to develop job experience after graduating university with a Liberal Arts degree. I decided to serve a second year because I saw the great potential of the organization with which I was serving as well as the community of Anaconda.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

My years as a VISTA gave me the space to explore and shape my current professional path.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Jamie continues to serve and work in Anaconda. Currently, she works with the Anaconda Environmental Education Institute and is self-employment.



# DRUMMOND SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM VISTA: JASARA ROSENDAHL

SERVICE LOCATION: DRUMMOND  
SERVICE YEAR: SUMMER 2013



- **What was your VISTA project?**

As a VISTA I coordinated a Summer Food Program for Drummond, Montana. This included outreach, community integration and development of the programs menu and activities.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

I decided to serve as a VISTA because it offered me the opportunity to take the degree that I had recently graduated with and apply it with work in helping others.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

My VISTA service taught me the basics in all virtually all of the skills that I currently use as a program coordinator. On a more personal level though, what I found most valuable from my time as a VISTA was the relationships that I built with the children who took part in the Summer Food Program and the community members who were so supportive and positive.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Jasara now works at Thrive as a program coordinator. Thrive to create a thriving community by helping every child succeed and grow through having a strong family. Jasara continues to be active in her community through service.



# MONTANA NO KID HUNGRY VISTA: JESSI SHEAVA

SERVICE LOCATION: HELENA  
SERVICE YEAR: 2012-2014



- **What was your VISTA project?**

Worked to build participation in child nutrition programs including Summer Food Service Programs, Afterschool Meals, and Cooking Matters at the Store, nutritional shopping classes for parents, throughout Montana to ensure kids were nutritiously fed.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

Transition period between college and career life. I also wanted to get more experience in the health and nutrition fields and make a difference in the lives of children.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

It shaped me professionally. I came into the position with a very unclear idea of what I wanted to do and upon leaving my service site I was certain of the direction I wanted to work in. My experience in AmeriCorps also has really come in handy in many areas of my current position. I now seek out volunteer opportunities in the community much more than I would if I hadn't served in AmeriCorps, I think.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Jessi now continues to work in areas of hunger and nutrition at the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona and stays engaged in service to others in her community.



# HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL

## VISTA: MARTHA EBERLE

SERVICE LOCATION: HELENA  
SERVICE YEAR: 2007-2008



- **What was your VISTA project?**

Provided organizational and programming support to the network of Citizens' Councils within Helena as well as the Helena City Council. I organized training materials, recruited new members, served as a liaison to other local nonprofits, helped run neighborhood meetings, reported at City Council meetings for the neighborhoods, wrote a newspaper column about local neighborhood issues, and produced a TV show about local issues.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

I wanted professional work experience in an office setting, and I wanted to live in a new part of the country. I also wanted to offset some of the costs of my student loans from my undergraduate degree.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

My service had a profound impact on my understanding of local government and the public process at the neighborhood level. It has been a huge help to me in my career as a landscape architect and urban planner. I understand how to run a public meeting, how to solicit useful input from neighborhood leaders, and how to get results for our municipal government clients and move urban development projects forward in a way that is fiscally, politically, and socially responsible.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Martha is currently engaged through service in her everyday work at SmithGroupJJR; she works in the landscape architecture, urban planning and civil engineering areas. She typically plans an event or two per year for her office.



# PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER

## VISTA: MARY ASBACH

SERVICE LOCATION: HELENA  
SERVICE YEAR: 2002



- **What was your VISTA project?**

I was a VISTA Leader at the PRC...so basically, I served as support for the VISTAs, and worked on recruitment/retention/reporting/event planning activities. I was also co-coordinator of ACMAC that year, during which we tried to make some organizational changes that allowed more national service projects to have representation on the council, and I also wrote the grant that got us some funding for Youth Service Day in April for the first time.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

I had just graduated from college and was flush with idealism. AmeriCorps had been on my radar for several years, and it seemed like an ideal time to dive in. I chose VISTA because I liked the idea of being a catalyst for building sustainable change, and I chose Montana because it sounded like a great adventure.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

Hugely. It both tempered my idealism, and enhanced it -- the challenges I faced made me more pragmatic, but they also made me more convinced than ever that if people put their minds to something, anything is possible. I made friends that I still hold near & dear to this day, and still often recall the many nuggets of wisdom that Vicki Turner gave me, particularly "assume goodwill."

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Mary is currently at Northland College where she still engages in community service.



# BELGRADE PUBLIC SCHOOLS & PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER VISTA: NICOLE (GOTSCHALL) WATT

SERVICE LOCATIONS: BELGRADE & HELENA  
SERVICE YEAR: 2011-2013



- **What was your VISTA project?**

In my first year of service I helped to start a Key Club in the local high school, helped a non-profit receive its 501 (c) (3) status, increased participation in the library's Teen Book Club, developed Game Day at the local library, helped raise funds for youth in the community, and so much more. In my second year I served as a VISTA Leader bringing awesome groups of people to Montana to serve.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

I knew that serving would change my life and it did. Also, who wouldn't want to move to Montana for a year to help people? It's called Big Sky Country for a reason.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

The people I met and the work I did changed my life forever. With every position I've taken since my first year of service I've become more and more confident in what I want to do with my life. The people I met are still good friends, despite not seeing many of them in almost two years.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Nicole now works with the Community Action of Eastern Iowa and will start volunteering in her new community shortly. After her first two VISTA terms with the Prevention Resource Center, she served a third term of VISTA service with the Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry VISTA project. In her third year, she left service after ten months due to unhappiness (basically spent that time doing nothing) and she learned in her third year that Montana does have a truly unique way of approaching VISTA service.



# ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH VISTA: PARRISH RAVELLI

SERVICE LOCATION: GREAT FALLS  
SERVICE YEAR: 2004



- **What was your VISTA project?**

I gathered adolescent health data, organized it into a matrix based on a model of risk and protective factor models, and then used that framework to then organize all youth serving organizations. The goal was to increase sustainability and impact while reducing overlap.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

I had just graduated from college, didn't have much of an idea of what I wanted to do professionally, and wanted to travel. I also had a friend who had joined down in Atlanta, GA who helped talk with me about it.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

Significantly. I have continued to work in the human service field, have continued to refine my work around sustainability and results-based accountability, and have taken steps to expand my work into a field of advocacy and social justice.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Parrish is always involved with community service and now works with the Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!) which a nonprofit organization "that empowers youth, in partnership with adults, to create community change."



# OPPORTUNITY LINK, INC.

## VISTA: SAMANTHA RYBICKI

SERVICE LOCATION: HAVRE  
SERVICE YEAR: 2012



- **What was your VISTA project?**

I implemented two programs. For the Community Service Volunteer program I communicated with local courts to place MIP offenders with nonprofits in the area, and I helped develop a digital volunteer tracking system for the program that is still used today. I also coordinated the Workin' With Tradition soft skills training program. I organized Train-the-Trainer workshops, coordinated with the local tribes to set up student training, and promoted the program throughout the region.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

I needed experience in order to be qualified for higher level jobs. I wanted to come to Montana, and I wanted to better understand the career path I wanted to take.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

I was able to create sustainability in the programs that I worked on, I was really able to connect with my host community, and I was hired on full time at the end of my VISTA year. Going into VISTA was one of the best decisions I have made in my life. It really helped me to build my character, gain valuable work experience, serve a community in need, and be able to move forward in my career.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Samantha was hired on by her host organization Opportunity Link, Inc. where Samantha works with the Vibrant Futures program there. She has stayed engaged in service through co-founding the Havre Trails group and currently sits on the Hill County Community Foundation board.



# MONTANA TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION COALITION VISTA: SUZANNE (ABEJON) GARDNER

SERVICE LOCATION: HELENA  
SERVICE YEAR: 2010



- **What was your VISTA project?**

I developed a communication strategy for the Montana Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalition where I established a monthly newsletter as well as various other communication responsibilities including but not limited to a teen pregnancy prevention campaign. I also worked under my supervisor and the coalition's steering committee to implement several strategic planning initiatives (outreach, education, etc.).

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

I wanted to make a positive difference in the communities I served. I wanted to put my efforts and skills towards something I believed in and could be proud of.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

I feel that I view the world a different way now. If I hadn't been a VISTA for three years, I don't think that I would understand what it takes to step into a community and help to bring about positive change. The beautiful thing is that the truths and skills I acquired are not only helpful in the US, but the world over. You have to be willing to listen. You have to accept that community members deserve to have a voice and they know a great deal more about what their community needs rather than an outsider. You have to be humble. You have to ask for help. You have to be willing to seek out other and be willing to earn their trust.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Suze has served with 2 other National Service organizations: Colorado Youth Corps Association and Economic Development Corporation of Fresno County. She served as the Education Coordinator for a youth corps where she designed an education program and its curricula and assisted in it's implementation and evaluation with the youth corps. In her third and final year, Suze served as the Regional VISTA Leader in Fresno County where she put on quarterly meetings and facilitated training. She provided support and resources to all the VISTAs her region (as well as their supervisors) and she helped recruit for VISTA positions through the intermediary organization. Suze continues serving in Ghana, Africa at a teaching hospital.



# MT OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

## VISTA: VERONICA WILLETO

SERVICE LOCATION: HELENA & BILLINGS  
SERVICE YEARS: 2011-2012



- **What was your VISTA project?**

I mainly provided support to OPI's Schools of Promise program. My primary responsibility was to increase the engagement of students, parents and community in Lame Deer, Pryor and Frazer, Montana through partnership building, resource development, and the capacity building of community liaisons and student councils. I also provided support to help launch OPI's Graduation Matters initiative and Wrap Around initiative.

- **Why did you choose to serve as a VISTA?**

As a recent graduate, I wanted to gain professional experience in the field of public service and AmeriCorps VISTA gave me that opportunity. I also wanted to be a part of the important work of alleviating poverty in America, particularly addressing the epidemic of poverty in American Indian communities. I appreciated the way in which AmeriCorps VISTA encourages solutions to poverty to be community and locally based. I was not entering a community to tell them how to address poverty, but I was there to provide support to the local people doing the work and to work alongside them to build up their work. I also decided to serve as a VISTA because I wanted to experience living in another part of the country and get to know another tribal nation other than my own. AmeriCorps VISTA gave me the opportunity to learn about the Northern Cheyenne, Crow, and Assiniboine and Sioux tribes.

- **How did your VISTA service impact you?**

My VISTA service made a significant impact on me in many ways. It provided me with the professional experience that I needed to launch a career in public service. I learned important skills that I value and still use today such as building partnerships. Also, as a VISTA I was able to create a network of mentors across the state of Montana and beyond that I continue to go to and learn from, not to mention friendships that I cherish. My VISTA service also helped me discover my passion for working with American Indian youth and helped build my confidence in my ability to empower them to make a positive and lasting difference in their communities and tribal nations. There are so many other ways my VISTA service has impacted me. These are just a few of the major ones.

- **Are you currently engaged in service to your community?**

Veronica currently works with both the Pryor Public Schools and National Indigenous Women's Resource Center and continues to stay engaged in service related to children through being involved with the Montana Afterschool Alliance steering council.

