Families in Transition VISTA Program

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About FIT VISTA

AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a national service program dedicated to fighting poverty. VISTA members spend one year serving at not-for-profit or government organizations building programs, raising awareness, leveraging funds, recruiting volunteers, and more. Each year, the Families in Transition (FIT) VISTA Program recruits dedicated individuals to join the team with the goal of improving the quality of life for the most disadvantaged members of our community. The FIT VISTA Program is organized and run by Families in Transition-New Horizons (FIT-NH), which partners with organizations called service sites across the state to provide projects for VISTAs. FIT-NH also supports VISTA members by hosting monthly meetings and professional development trainings, tracking VISTA progress and impact, and offering general VISTA support.

Click the images above or search FITNHVISTA on any of the social media platforms.

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Dear Friends,

Another year of service came to an end for the FIT VISTA Program, and what a whirlwind it has been. We are excited to share stories from the 2017-2018 program year that help demonstrate how our members are fighting poverty with passion and making a difference for low-income individuals and communities across the State of New Hampshire.

This year was a year of growth for Families in Transition (FIT) with the merger with New Horizons, the opening of Hope House in Wolfeboro, and the groundbreaking of the Hollows Community Garden. Several of our VISTA members were key in helping with these major events and many more go off without a hitch.

On behalf of our VISTA supervisors and all of our service sites, thank you to our 2017-2018 VISTA alumni for your dedication to fighting poverty within New Hampshire and completing another successful year of service. The skills you have developed and relationships you forged will make a lasting impact on the communities you’ve served. It has been a true pleasure watching you grow professionally and see all that you’ve accomplished for your service sites!

In Service,

Julie Lynch
Families in Transition-New Horizons
Manager of Volunteers and FIT VISTA Program

“The life of a man consists not in seeing visions and in dreaming dreams, but in active charity and in willing service.”

-Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Our 21 VISTA members served in six communities at 15 different nonprofits and government agencies across New Hampshire. Click on each organization’s name to be directed to their website for more information.
2017-2018 At a Glance

21 members served 40,761 hours

$1,020,290 raised in Cash and Grants  $208,528 raised as In-Kind Donations

3,036 Recruited Volunteer Hours  716 Volunteers Recruited

1,699 Students with Improved Academic Behavior  1,130 Individuals Receiving Emergency Food
Arts in Reach

Arts In Reach (AIR) is a nonprofit that provides mentoring through the arts to teenage girls in the Seacoast area. AIR empowers teenage girls through innovative teaching and mentoring, utilizing accessible arts programming as the platform for success. They develop girls’ creative freedom and power of voice in a positive setting where teenage girls thrive. AIR offers eight annual programs in dance, theatre, songwriting, singing, visual arts and creative writing. They balance positive youth development and artistic goals, value the process of creating art over the product, and commit to making programs accessible to lower income teens by charging no fees and assisting in transportation.

AIR had two VISTAs this year: Melaney Brown, the Program Development VISTA; and Katie Lusa, the Business Development and Community Outreach VISTA. Melaney recruited teens, served as program assistant, and ran the Advance on AIR program for older teens. Katie worked on fundraising, special events, and social media.

CASA of NH

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of New Hampshire is a statewide nonprofit organization that recruits, trains, and supervises volunteers who advocate in court for children who’ve been abused or neglected by their parents. There are more than 500 volunteer advocates around New Hampshire who make sure these children’s best interests are being represented during court proceedings, but there is always a need for more volunteers to help carry the caseload. Especially now due to the influx of cases caused largely by the state’s addiction epidemic.

There is one AmeriCorps VISTA serving at CASA this year, Conor Murphy, the Communications Assistant VISTA. When CASA has fundraising events Conor helps with planning, promotional efforts, and works directly with the Director of Development to create materials to present to potential sponsors.
Member Spotlights

Maggie Shope
Special Events & Fundraising VISTA
Families in Transition-New Horizons

“I chose to serve a year as an AmeriCorps VISTA to grow both professionally and personally. I was fortunate to work for an organization that placed a large amount of trust on their VISTA members. The responsibility I carried in several events has made me a stronger leader. My time in New Hampshire was filled with travel, experiencing new things, and most importantly learning on a deeper level the problems surrounding poverty and homelessness which exists in our nation.”

Lauren Bombardier
Events and Fundraising Manager
Families in Transition-New Horizons

“I chose to be a VISTA because I saw an opportunity at The Palace Theatre and loved the idea of working in a theatre full time. Not only that, but I truly enjoy working with kids and theatre education is one of my passions. VISTA has made a positive impact in my life because while serving at my host site, I have also found many opportunities to serve throughout Manchester whether it be at New Horizons, or Upreach Equestrian Center. I have learned a lot about all the good that is taking place in our community, and how we can keep it growing.”

Meghan Durkee
Director of Institutional Advancement
Palace Theatre

“Olivia has been an amazing VISTA for the Palace Theatre. She truly has gone with the flow, provided valuable creativity and aided in all aspects of the Palace’s Youth Theatre. We are extremely fortunate to have her working with us for her year of service and look forward to future VISTAs.”

Olivia Opal
Palace Theatre Youth Liaison VISTA
Palace Theatre

“I decided to serve as a VISTA because of the opportunity to gain meaningful experience, and work with individuals who are dedicated to positive change within communities that are struggling with poverty. My host site has allowed me to create and maintain lasting programs that can truly make positive changes by increasing access to comprehensive healthcare as well as enrichment programs.”

Katy Burchett
Director of Social Services
Child Health Services-MCHC

“Katherine developed strong relationships with our staff, volunteers, community partners, and the families we serve. She had a unique ability to pay attention to the direct service level of this work while also attending to the system level issues impacting a program. She brought her compassion, her intelligence, and her warm sense of humor to the work she did.”

Katherine Benoit
Family Enrichment & Volunteer Program Coordinator VISTA
Child Health Services-MCHC

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Katy Burchett
Director of Social Services
Child Health Services-MCHC
Service Projects

Throughout the year, FIT VISTAs participate in AmeriCorps service days. These service events allow the VISTAs to interact directly with the community and lend a hand where help is needed most. AmeriCorps members across New Hampshire come together to be a visible part of the communities that they are living and serving in.

September 11 Day of Caring 2017
Each September, our members participate in a service project for 9/11 Day of Caring. This year’s team joined forces with Granite United Way September 6, 2017. Twenty-four members gathered at Canterbury Shaker Village, a nonprofit that preserves the heritage of the Canterbury Shakers in Canterbury, NH, to help with various projects including sprucing up the place and organizing artifacts. They also had the opportunity to go on a tour of the village, learn about the history, and pick some fresh fruits!

MLK Day of Service 2018
This Martin Luther King Day of Service our members joined the rest of the state’s national service members to participate in the MLK Day Celebration hosted by CityYear. Participants helped with a food drive to benefit the New Hampshire Food Bank, raising a total of 644 lbs.; listened to speeches on the importance of service and teamwork by Mayor Joyce Craig and Rev. Eric Jackson from Brookside Congregational Church; as well as attended workshops and a volunteer fair. Following the event, our members went on to provide further service to the community by helping with organizational projects at local nonprofit organizations.

AmeriCorps Week 2018
AmeriCorps Week is our annual celebration of all things AmeriCorps and thank you to all of our past and present service members for their hard work; this year AmeriCorps week ran from March 12-16. The week ended with a day of service where our members spent the morning serving at service sites in Manchester. In the afternoon we gathered at the State House with the rest of the state’s service members for speeches on the importance of national service by special guests including: Governor Chris Sununu; Representative Mary Jane Wallner; Gretchen Berger, Executive Director of Volunteer NH; Shireen Tilley, CNCS State Program Director for ME, NH and VT; and a select few national service members.
Final Thoughts

Caitlin Cilley-Turko
Community Garden & Volunteer Coordinator
Families in Transition-New Horizons

“This year has been eye-opening, both personally and professionally. I have accomplished things I wouldn’t have thought possible last year, and have learned so much about myself. AmeriCorps has completely changed my life for the better!”

Shannon Fitzpatrick
Migrant Youth Program Assoc.VISTA
NH Department of Education

“What I love about being a VISTA is the ability to try a lot of new things to see what you like and what you don’t. The great thing about being a VISTA is that you can really make the experience your own. No two VISTA positions or years are the same.”

Elena Karis
Food Access Program Coordinator
Claremont Soup Kitchen

“AmeriCorps VISTA helped me realize my passion for public service. My two years as a VISTA gave me a great foundation for a career in non-profit work. I know I have all the tools I need to continue making a positive difference in my community.”

Neil Allen
Communications and Outreach Assistant
TLC Family Resource Center

“In my year as a VISTA, I learned much about running a family resource center. I found the strength to do things I didn’t know were possible, and that my goal of opening a LGBT resource center is what I should be doing. And, I started to become the man I know I should be.”

Molly Thibault
Research Assistant
NH Juvenile Diversion Network

“I loved working with, and learning from the passionate and dedicated individuals who are running juvenile court diversion programs throughout the state. I didn’t know much about court diversion before my year of service, now I’m in awe of the great work these individuals do to keep youth out of the court system.”

Nicole Smith
Communications & Graphic Design
Families in Transition-New Horizons

“Serving as a VISTA has allowed me to explore a new corner of the US, make new lasting friendships, and significantly expand my portfolio as a designer. It’s pretty incredible to be in a position where you are able to simultaneously better yourself and better the community around you.”
Where Are They Now?

Meghan Bolton is the Community Outreach Coordinator at Nashua Soup Kitchen & Shelter.

Melaney Brown is the new Program Manager at Arts in Reach in Portsmouth, NH.

Elena Karis is a Case Manager at West Central Behavioral Health in Claremont, NH.

Neil Allen is an Administrative Assistant at TLC Family Resource Center in Claremont, NH.

Katherine Benoit is working on her Master’s Degree in Social Work at Simmons College.
Where Are They Now?

Katie Lusa is the Director of Development at The Complex Performing and Creative Arts Centre in Putnam, CT.

Conor Murphy is studying at New Hampshire Technical Institute to be ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) certified.

Tarah Begeron is welcoming a new baby into her family this coming April.

Leo’el Jackson will be attending the Carsey School of Public Policy for a Master’s Degree in Community Development in 2020.