

HealthReach Community Health Centers



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Celebrating AmeriCorps Week, March 11 – 17

McKenzie Gray, AmeriCorps VISTA member, shares her year of service experiences thus far

WATERVILLE - The week of March 11 – 17 marks Annual AmeriCorps Week, a celebration of the amazing work the AmeriCorps program and its many partner organizations are doing across the USA! For the past 7 months, I have been serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA member at HealthReach Community Health Centers. At HealthReach, a system of 11 Federally Qualified Health Centers in Central and Western Maine, I have been working on our Youth Initiative to reduce the rates of obesity in the children in the local communities served by our health centers. The goal is to promote increased physical activity and improved nutrition in children and families.



One major obstacle many face in making good nutritional choices is accessing healthy foods. In response, HealthReach began hosting Food Mobiles at our Belgrade, Bingham, Mt. Abram, Rangeley, and Whitefield locations. At the Food Distributions, we offer free food donated by the Good Shepherd Food Bank to anyone in the community who self-identifies as in need of additional food resources. As part of my role as a VISTA, I recruit and manage the volunteers who distribute food at the events and develop promotional material for the events. To enlist more volunteers, I often rely on the local Lions Clubs who are always eager to help out. Since beginning in July, I have mobilized 47 volunteers for 13 Food Mobiles serving over 1,200 households!

VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) was formed in 1965 by Lyndon B. Johnson as the domestic version of the Peace Corps. The aim was to mobilize volunteers to help fight poverty in their own communities. Since then, over 220,000 individuals have served with the VISTA program across the country in urban, rural, and suburban communities. VISTA members are placed in local non-profit organizations to increase the capacity of these organizations to address issues associated with poverty. In Maine, there are over 50 VISTAs serving this year across the state. From York to Lubec and Presque Isle, VISTA members in Maine are working on a diverse range of project areas including students' success in school, access to healthy food, senior services, and community revitalization.

In serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA, I have been amazed to witness the great work going on at the local level across the state of Maine. It has also been a wonderful opportunity to learn and grow as I explore a future career in healthcare.

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HealthReach Community Health Centers is a group of eleven Federally Qualified Health Centers in Central and Western Maine. Dedicated providers deliver high quality medical and behavioral health care to citizens in over 80 rural communities. To ensure access for everyone, HealthReach accepts Medicare, MaineCare and major insurances. In addition, an Affordable Care Program is available to uninsured and underinsured residents as well as assistance with applications for programs that help with the cost of health care and medications including the Health Insurance Marketplace. A private, non-profit celebrating a 43-year history, HealthReach is funded by patient fees, grants and individual donations.