

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DPI VISTA and AmeriCorps members strengthening communities

MADISON — The Department of Public Instruction is supporting 23 full-time AmeriCorps and VISTA volunteers in communities across the state. Their work focuses on economic development and job recovery as well as recruiting volunteers in schools and libraries, tutoring students, and organizing community service projects.

“We are very fortunate to be able to have these individuals doing needed work in communities around Wisconsin,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. “The type of work these volunteers are doing is very important particularly during the difficult economic times of recent years.”

The DPI was awarded more than \$325,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds from the Corporation for National and Community Service to support 16 AmeriCorps members and seven VISTA members. The DPI provides technical assistance and support to the AmeriCorps and VISTA members and their sites.

The VISTAs with the DPI’s Recovery VISTA project are serving in public libraries in Ashland, Fond du Lac, Madison, Racine, and Shiocton. They are working to assess community needs and partner with local job and volunteer centers to provide support and resources to low-income individuals and specifically, the unemployed. Evers noted that public libraries are an ideal partner in this grant as their work to provide needed support and resources to job-seekers is in more demand in tough economic times.

“These libraries have utilized their VISTA members to organize workshops on job searching and write grants for materials and supplies,” said Evers. “They are also expanding outreach efforts and partnering with local nonprofits and service agencies to provide support for individuals and families in need.”

The AmeriCorps members working across the state are focusing on direct services through tutoring and mentoring youth, generating volunteers, and fundraising for local organizations. These members are working to strengthen communities by addressing their local and immediate needs involving education.

“DPI’s AmeriCorps program provides an opportunity for committed and passionate individuals to address community needs,” added Evers. “The AmeriCorps members are working to enhance the capacity of Wisconsin’s schools, nonprofits, and local organizations to serve families and improve lives.”

(more)

The Corporation for National and Community Service was established in 1993 to connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and their nation. At its inception, the corporation was directed to manage three main programs:

- The newly created Senior Corps, which incorporated the longstanding Foster Grandparents, Retired and Senior Volunteer, and Senior Companion programs;
- The newly created AmeriCorps, which incorporated the longstanding VISTA program (created in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty); and
- Learn and Serve America, formerly known as Serve America.

Each member makes a year-long commitment to serve on a specific project at a nonprofit organization, school, public agency, or in the case of DPI VISTAs, a public library. In return for their service, members receive a modest living allowance and health benefits during their service and have the option of receiving an Education Award after completing their service. Nationally, about 75,000 AmeriCorps and VISTA members are placed each year in low-income communities around the country.

A list of the DPI AmeriCorps and VISTA members and their project sites follow. They will continue their service through August 2010.

VISTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fond du Lac Public Library: Sara Byrnes and Josh Cowles • Madison Public Library: Jim Handorf • Racine Public Library: Elizabeth Lowrey • Shiocton Public Library: Heather Knops and Jane Parker • Vaughn Public Library, Ashland: Colleen Douglass
AmeriCorps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CESA 12, (Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, Iron, Price, Sawyer and Washburn counties): Jackie Moore, Katrina Filipczak, and Brian Chandler • Goodman Community Center, Madison: Ron Alexander, Cesar Behena, Corey Hanger, and Michael Vineburg • Grantsburg Schools: Dawn DeRocker • Jackson County Extension, 4-H: Brittany Johnson and Aaron Epps • Lussier Community Education Center, Madison: Terry Benford • Madison School Community Recreation, Madison: Jennifer Smith and Rachel Deterding • Rib Lake Schools: Elizabeth Anderson, Brad Guler, and Laura Hoffert

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2009_62.pdf. More information about the DPI AmeriCorps and VISTA programs can be found at <http://dpi.wi.gov/fscp/vistahmp.html>.