

HealthReach Community Health Centers



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04/23/2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Celebrating #VISTA50, #HealthReach40, and a Legacy of National Service

By Eva Greenthal, AmeriCorps VISTA at HealthReach Community Health Centers

WATERVILLE - With four to five VISTA members serving area agencies at any one time, Waterville has an unusually high volume of VISTA support for a city of its size. AmeriCorps VISTA members make a year-long, full-time commitment to serve a specific project at a nonprofit organization or public agency. They focus their efforts to build the organizational, administrative, and financial capacity of organizations that fight illiteracy, improve health services, foster economic development, and otherwise assist low-income communities. VISTA members currently serve at Kennebec Valley Community Action Program, Hardy Girls Healthy Women, Colby College, and HealthReach Community Health Centers.



Eva Greenthal with a Strong Elementary student

I knew I would be in good hands when I joined the team as the 18th AmeriCorps member to serve with HealthReach since 1994. This year marks an impressive milestone for both AmeriCorps VISTA and HealthReach. Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) members have been building capacity for nonprofit and public agencies that serve low-income communities for 50 years, and HealthReach has been offering high quality, affordable, patient-centered healthcare in the medically underserved communities of Central and Western Maine for 40 years. I am honored to celebrate these wonderful anniversaries and to serve with an organization that has such a longstanding tradition of national service.

Last July, I raised my right hand and recited the AmeriCorps pledge along with three hundred other new VISTA members at my Pre-Service Orientation in Boston. Having driven to Boston from my home near Chicago, I had yet to see the state of Maine and the communities I would be serving. Nevertheless, I pledged, "I am an AmeriCorps member and I will get

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things done!” and tried to envision the change I would make working to prevent childhood obesity and promote healthy lifestyles in rural Maine. Now, as I near the end of my service term and reflect on these words, I feel confident that I have fulfilled this pledge.

In my brief time with HealthReach, I have contributed to numerous programs and initiatives. My primary role has been to develop and implement a childhood obesity prevention initiative for the eleven Federally Qualified Health Centers that make up HealthReach. HealthReach seeks to promote health and reduce obesity by advocating nutrition and physical activity to our child and adolescent patients and their families. Each HealthReach Health Center now actively participates with the *Let's Go! 5-2-1-0* statewide childhood obesity prevention program. Our providers counsel every pediatric patient on habits and goals related to nutrition, physical activity, screen time, and sugary drinks at their annual well child checks. I have helped plan free Cooking Matters classes for nearly 100 participants in ten of our communities. I initiated a partnership between HealthReach and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Eat Well Nutrition Education Program to offer free nutrition counseling and one-on-one cooking lessons to low-income patients motivated to improve their diets. In the fall, I assisted with the Food For All Farmstand which sold 600 lbs. of fresh, locally-sourced, low-cost produce to low-income rural residents each week for six weeks. More recently, I have developed and offered lessons and programs in local schools, and by the end of my VISTA term I will have delivered programs on nutrition and physical activity in at least six schools.

My experience as a VISTA has been enriching and transformative. I have gained invaluable professional development and life experience while helping HealthReach achieve its mission of improving the health of its patients and communities, and working towards VISTA's goal of eliminating poverty. I am proud to be an AmeriCorps VISTA and to live the legacy of national service.

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