



## [The Bright Side Episode 9: AmeriCorps](#)

Produced by  
CEDAM

Underwritten by  
Michigan Community Service Commission  
Michigan State Development Housing Authority

**Carolyn Bloodworth** Welcome to The Bright Side, the show where we shed light on the people, places and stories that make Michigan great. Hi, I'm Carolyn Bloodworth, your host for today's episode about AmeriCorps in Michigan.

AmeriCorps is a program funded by the Michigan Community Service Commission, and organization which I have the honor of serving as Chair.

Today we're at Hunter Park GardenHouse in Lansing, where AmeriCorps members are teaching the neighbors about healthy lifestyles and growing food.

AmeriCorps is a national service program where members provide intense, results-driven service to thousands of individuals in need by dedicating a year of their life in service. AmeriCorps members help people all over the state in almost any way you can imagine: mentoring youth, growing food, building affordable homes, and improving local communities. Today we will take a first-hand look at what AmeriCorps looks like in Michigan where members are serving, and how they are positively impacting communities throughout the state.

Our first video introduces you to the AmeriCorps program. We will meet key stakeholders in the programs, as well as past and present members of Michigan's AmeriCorps.

---About AmeriCorps---

**Stephanie Howells** I'm an AmeriCorps member with the Urban Safety Project out of Wayne State University in Detroit.

**Michael Powe** I'm an AmeriCorps VISTA serving with the United Way at the Southeast Michigan site.

**Paul Stanford** AmeriCorps member, a part of the Michigan Foreclosure Prevention Corps.

**Lia Spaniolo** I'm an AmeriCorps member with the Power of We Consortium.

**Akim Pizana** I'm an AmeriCorps and I'm stationed out of Grand Rapids.

**Alexander Kemp** And I serve at the American Red Cross.

**James Hartrick** Gleaners Community Food Bank in Southeast Michigan.

**Denise Peterson-Short** Michigan Primary Health Care Association.

---1,022 AmeriCorps members served in Michigan (2012)---

**Evan Albert** AmeriCorps is an opportunity for people to serve their country. We have many people in America that want to serve their country and their nation. Why not serve as an AmeriCorps members, serving locally for your local community to address and respond to local community challenges and needs.

---AmeriCorps members can serve full-time or part-time for one year.---

**Malcolm Moorer** When I heard AmeriCorps was about just building the city or different regions of the city, I went ahead and said this could be a good experience for me. This could be something good for my resume, this could be good for me to contribute back to Detroit. But, as the months passed, I started to think I'm doing more than just building the structure – the physical structure of Detroit – I'm actually interacting with these people in a positive way.

**Benjamin Oliver** I just don't think there are many other experiences I could have had that could've been so... with such breadth of enrichment personally and professionally in my life.

**Jonathan Colo** I mean, we're not heroes, but we are people volunteering our time full-time to just help out the community and do something for America.

---50,300 Children mentored---  
---41,570 Volunteers recruited---  
---1,150,840 Hours of service---  
---\$24,581,900 Value---

**Lyke Thompson** The AmeriCorps is absolutely central to all of this because they're the people on the ground doing the actual organizing of the block clubs.

**Giancarlo Guzman** Without the AmeriCorps, we would not have been able to do our business promotion. We would not have been able to do our community-based organization promotion.

**Shay Kraley** The AmeriCorps members are instrumental to the success of our program. Through the AmeriCorps, we are able to provide services to more families.

---Michigan AmeriCorps members will earn \$3.5 million in education awards.---

**Christopher Lewis** You get an education award, that's a big thing too. So on top of the volunteer work, you get the education to help you.

**Stephanie Howells** I definitely want to stay in community work and not-for-profit.

**Tiffany Nelson-McKay** I'm applying to Wayne State University grad school, social work grad school, so I'll use my education award for that. So that's right on time!

---AmeriCorps lead to jobs.---

**C.J. Felton** I think out of the dozen or so members in total that have served here, we've had four go on to join our staff after their service was completed.

**Jon Barth** Definitely this is something worth putting on a resume. I think that I've gained so much from it.

**Tamika Davis-Moore** It helped me to decide that this is what I want to do.

---AmeriCorps members are more likely to stay in the community they served---

**Steve Tobocman** And out of where I did my AmeriCorps in 1995, I ran for and was elected to the state legislature in 2002 to represent Southwest Detroit. So I've really had some incredible opportunities over the last 20 years and frankly it really did start with AmeriCorps for me.

I grew up in the state but had left for college and worked in Washington D.C., came back from grad school, but the first job I had here in the state of Michigan and the first time I really ever hung out in the city of Detroit was through the AmeriCorps program.

It's an entire package and I certainly hope it's around for others to have the kind of opportunities that I had.

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americorps.gov  
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**Carolyn Bloodworth** While AmeriCorps programs can focus on a variety of issues, one program, AmeriCorps VISTA, is focused specifically on poverty. AmeriCorps VISTA has been in existence for nearly 50 years and engages members across the country in fighting the causes of poverty. In Michigan, more than 200 individuals are dedicating their time to AmeriCorps VISTA service this year, including the members in this next video.

---AmeriCorps VISTA---

**Narrator** The AmeriCorps VISTA program is one of several volunteer programs supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency dedicated to improving lives and communities through service and volunteering.

VISTA members serve throughout the United States and in Michigan.

And you're becoming an AmeriCorps member today?

**Mark Byrd** Yes.

**Evan Albert** Today we had the privilege of providing an orientation training to approximately 35 freshly-minted AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates.

**Ruth Wright** I really enjoy the opportunity to volunteer through the AmeriCorps VISTAs. It helped me to be able to come into an area with children who are in need.

**Justin Walton** I'm serving in the AmeriCorps program because this is my home community. I grew up just outside of Flint and I have a year until law school and I thought a year of service would be a great way to spend it.

**Charles Hall** VISTA gave me a perfect opportunity to see... get my feet wet to see if this is something I would like to do long-term. And so far I'm enjoying it. I love it to death. I have a lot more joy from doing this than for the past ten, eleven, twelve years doing retail management.

**Evan Albert** We have VISTA Summer Associates serving all over the United States. Flint has the distinction – the happy distinction – of being one of the largest Summer Associate cities in terms of VISTAs places in the entire country.

**Tauzzari Robinson** Without them we would not be able to serve as many kids as we do serve. So it's been a joy to have. It's been a huge benefit to the city of Flint and the Boys & Girls Club, so we're really excited to have the Summer Associates here this year.

**Jamie Gaskin** It's so difficult when we don't have enough folks to really match up with the kids and spend individual one-on-one time. But when we have a program like the VISTA program, each one of those volunteers is trained in mentoring and can really spend quality time with the young people and really be the type of people that can change the trajectory of a kid's life.

**Mark Byrd** After this I plan on putting it on my resume. Hopefully I can continue on to the full year program and then continue to my career in athletics, hopefully. So that's the goal.

**Tyler Robbins** This is my second year. So I... last summer I did really enjoy it. And because of this program it actually helped me change my major in college as well.

**Giancarlo Guzman** I've had a couple of the VISTAs talk to me about changing their majors in to doing more community-based work and how else they can contribute to improving the quality of life for the people in their community.

**Eric Huffman** We've been promoting the summer feeding sites in the Southeast Michigan region and it's correlated to the free and reduced lunch program that students get throughout the school year.

**Malesha Gross** Once they leave school, they miss out on that lunch that they get during school. So what we try and do is help the children who don't get as much food during the summer. We try and feed them.

**Giancarlo Guzman** For some of these families, that's \$400 a month that they could possibly be saving by utilizing these programs that they may or may not know exist.

The site here today that we're at already told us that they doubled the number of kids that they had at any day during the summer. So that's one of the ways that we're able to improve the number of children that are being fed through this work.

**Malesha Gross** I'm starting to see how important the things that we do, how important our outreach really is and how it can really help someone in need.

**Eric Huffman** Being able to go out into areas that I wasn't too familiar with before and learn how to communicate with different types of people has definitely been a benefit that I've received from being a VISTA.

**Michael Powe** I get everything you just said: leadership skills, confidence, job experience. Being around all of these kids and their happy faces and their laughter and their smiles, you feel that and it makes you actually want to get into it more and just see how much more you can do for your community.

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AmeriCorps VISTA  
[americorps.gov/vista](http://americorps.gov/vista)

Flint National Service Accelerator  
[flintservice.org](http://flintservice.org)

United Way for Southeastern Michigan  
[Liveunitedsem.org](http://Liveunitedsem.org)

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**Carolyn Bloodworth** For our next video, we'll head to Grand Rapids, where Michigan's AmeriCorps members are part of the solution to Kent County's educational crisis. Through their service, AmeriCorps members in the Schools of Hope program are helping young students and their parents to increase their literacy skills, as well as their chance for future educational success.

---Schools of Hope Program---

**Shay Kraley** Family literacy is the idea that learning is most effective when it takes place with parents as well as kids. We know that low literacy tends to be cyclical within families. If you see kids who are struggling readers, often their parents struggled and their parents as well. In our case, the Literacy Center, through our AmeriCorps teachers is providing ESL [English Second Language] instruction to the adults.

**Benjamin Oliver** The reason why I joined AmeriCorps, I mean there's several reasons. One of them was I really became interested in helping to solve the literacy gap that exists in our community. When I heard about the program, it kind of all came together as a way for me to gain my experience teaching adult ESL but also sort of with a mission of helping to elevate the reading levels in our community and empower individuals in our community who sometimes can struggle because of language barriers.

**Olivia Courant** Was it hard to live here not knowing much English?

**Juan Vazquez** It was very hard. It was just, you get all frustrated because you're going places that you hear people talking and you don't even know what they're saying. Then I hear about the English classes, which you sometimes don't have time or you're just afraid to go because you go, 'English, English is not for me,' but then you don't know easy it is until you get there. Until the teachers and people explain to you how everything goes. So like when I say picking up English little by little, word by word every day, you get there.

**Benjamin Oliver** It's really good to see the students meet their goals, to see them progress and become empowered and more confident members of the community. It's a powerful sight to see your parents trying to improve themselves.

**Juan Vazquez** I've got three boys and a girl. They speak English and we speak Spanish at home. It's awesome to speak English now. I mean, it's... yeah, I can help them with homework. I can be with them on school conferences and stuff, which before I had to wait for a translator, you know. And not just school, but some other clinics, hospitals and stuff. Yeah, now we don't have to wait that much. We have to... I be able to help them in school, talk to the teachers, and watch a movie with them in English.

**Shay Kraley** Last year, actually over 230 adults were... participated in our program. And what we're finding is when kids' parents participate in our program, about 70% of those kids are able to meet their on-target reading growth, whereas when kids' parents do not complete our program, only about 50% of those kids are making their reading growth. So we're not only impacting the adults, but it's having an effect on the kids as well.

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Literacy Center of West Michigan  
[literacycenterwm.org](http://literacycenterwm.org)

Schools of Hope  
[hwmuw.org/Schools\\_of\\_Hope.php](http://hwmuw.org/Schools_of_Hope.php)

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**Carolyn Bloodworth** Now we head to Detroit, where members of the Wayne State University AmeriCorps Urban Safety Program are helping to create a safer Detroit through vital neighborhood revitalization projects and more.

---AmeriCorps Urban Safety Project  
Wayne State University Center for Urban Studies---

**Song Lyrics** Hey, what are we waiting for? We've come too far to let this go. It's time to show them what we're all about.

**Tiffany Nelson-McKay** Our major priority is to minimize crime in the Midtown or Wayne State area. The way we do that is by organizing block clubs. Block clubs create a united front. It gives people a sense of unity and it gives them a voice.

**Jon Barth** Neighborhoods that don't look so nice are easier targets and that encourages a lot of crime and it encourages people to act in ways they wouldn't otherwise act in nicer neighborhoods. So what we're doing is helping them clean up the neighborhood.

**Greg Fenech** We're doing a board up and we're doing a cleanup of the area. We're gonna have a barbeque afterwards. Basically getting the community out, get involved.

**Jermaine** People out here cleaning up my block, so I just came out and just wanted to help too, you know? It'll be better looking when we finish with it. Get all the grass cut and everything.

**Scott McGlenn** I just moved here. The idea of getting involved with the city, meeting people, helping out and seeing what the city's all about. It's very surprising that people are getting together and doing this. It's good.

**Lyke Thompson** In the Midtown area around the University, we've reduced crime by 38% across the last three years. And when you cost that out, that's a savings of nearly \$49,000,000 across that period. The AmeriCorps is absolutely essential to all this because they're the people that are on the ground doing the actual organizing of the block clubs on a day-to-day basis.

**Malcolm Moorer** A lot of these people, they don't know their neighbors on either the side or front and back. And we kind of make that bridge to get people to join each other and say, 'Hey, this is happening in my neighborhood and it's either positive or negative - can you help me out?'

**Jon Barth** Everything else sort of stems from that, right. So we start the block clubs and then we get them to do board ups and cleanups and things like that. And so the first couple of block clubs I attempted to start, very little luck. And then I started on this block, the one we're on right now, the West Philadelphia block. And I started talking to residents and they were interested. I scheduled a meeting and fifteen people came out and they said, 'Hey, the alleys behind this block are terrible. Let's clean them out.' I generally didn't think that we'd even make a dent. It was a cold, snowy February day and fifteen people came out and they were all into it and they were all really excited and we cleaned out those alleys.

**Malcolm Moorer** Each nail you put into a board... I don't know... It makes the community look better, and I like that.

**Christopher Lewis** I take pride and I feel like, wow, I'm really helping progress my city, my community, my surrounding neighborhoods with the AmeriCorps work.

**Jonathan Colo** You get to meet so many awesome people, some that have been here forever, some that have just moved here. I mean, there's families that have been here generation after generation.

**Tiffany Nelson-McKay** We're out in the community and it's not just words. We're showing that we care. So, people say things all the time, but when you're out and you're in the gist of things, you're getting it done, they *see* us making a difference and I think that just adds to the good of the program.

**Song Lyrics** We won't take this anymore.

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AmeriCorps Urban Safety Project  
cus.wayne.edu  
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**Carolyn Bloodworth** We've already seen how AmeriCorps members in Michigan are helping kids learn, providing food to families in need, and reducing crime in urban neighborhoods. As we will see in the next video, Michigan's AmeriCorps members are also striving to end homelessness in our state by reducing the number of foreclosures and helping to keep Michigan families in their homes.

---Michigan Foreclosure Prevention Corps---

**C.J. Felton** Foreclosure is not just devastating to that particular family, but it's also devastating to the community that they live in. Housing values go down. We've seen cities that have had to drastically alter their budgets.

**Rachel Diskin** The Michigan Foreclosure Prevention Corps is a group of twenty AmeriCorps members who are addressing the foreclosure issue in the state of Michigan. They are kind of the first person that a client sees when they need help with foreclosure. They also do outreach and education about foreclosure in their local communities.

**C.J. Felton** Wow, it's been a fantastic opportunity for us. Paul Stanford, who is our current member, was our first member with the Foreclosure Prevention Corps. He joined us in October and at the time we did not actually have full time foreclosure prevention services at Community Housing Network.

**Paul Stanford** So basically my job here was to start the AmeriCorps – well, start the foreclosure prevention program at Community Housing Network. They decided to hire an AmeriCorps member and also a housing counselor to begin the program.

When the program first started here, we were getting flooded with a lot of calls. One of the first main people that called me, she contacted us and her sheriff sale was three weeks away. So what we did was we jumped right on it. We ended up getting, being able to get that sheriff sale postponed. After that, she ended up receiving a permanent loan modification and it was very reasonable for her. So she called us, thanked us, you know, and it's only at the department the two of us so she thanked both of us individually. So it was really a great opportunity.

**Steve Tobocman** And these AmeriCorps members answering the phones and going to community meetings and churches and knocking on doors really connected *thousands* of Michigan homeowners facing a very scary future with foreclosure to the resources they need at foreclosure counseling organizations.

**C.J. Felton** We could not work with as many people in foreclosure prevention as we do were in not for our AmeriCorps member. Paul really handles all of the front end work and we are anticipating that Paul's going to join us on October 1st as a foreclosure prevention counselor down in our Wayne office.

---Community Housing Network plans to hire Paul as a housing counselor after his AmeriCorps service.---

Paul is getting certified as a housing counselor at NeighborWorks and MSHDA.---

**Paul Stanford** It's been a huge success for homeowners in Oakland and Macomb counties and I'm excited to do the same for people out in Wayne County also.

**Rachel Diskin** In addition to the Michigan Foreclosure Prevention Corps, there are other AmeriCorps programs working on housing throughout the state of Michigan.

**Matthew Butterfield** There was an apartment complex and the owner had not been paying his taxes to the city, but the tenants were. So one day we got a call from the mayor saying that the city had shut off the water and the electricity for the apartment complex. It was a complete shock for the people living there because they had been paying everything on time. Like they thought... you know, they were just kind of getting by. And so I kind of took it upon myself to make sure that we got these people rehoused and we got the funds for them. And it was a successful program. A lot of those people are happily housed right now.

**Tamika Davis-Moore** Over a period of three months we worked with her with housing searches and trying to find someone that would rent to her with her limited income and getting her back into mental health services. And so we just recently housed her last week and she was just so overjoyed. Yesterday we went to see her. We took her some small household items and she made the comment that God had dropped angels out of heaven to help her. And I said, 'No, we're not angels; we're just good people trying to help out.'

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Michigan Foreclosure Prevention Corps  
cedam.info

Community Housing Network  
Communityhousingnetwork.org  
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**Carolyn Bloodworth** Each year, Michigan's AmeriCorps members from across the state gather together for a two day service project where they demonstrate the power and dedication of AmeriCorps in Michigan. This year's event drew more than 300 members to northern Michigan where they got things done in Traverse City and the surrounding area.

---Russ Mawby Signature Service Project---

**Carolyn Bloodworth** Well, today is part of a region-wide effort here in the Traverse City area where we have over 300 AmeriCorps members doing the Russ Mawby Signature Service Project. They are removing some invasive species and putting some siding together and working at a playground at a local Traverse City School – different and wonderful things throughout the Traverse City area.

---Russ Mawby Signature Service Project  
300+ AmeriCorps Members  
2 Days of community service---

**Akim Pizana** Today we're doing a couple of service projects for the weekend where multiple AmeriCorps members are at different sites just helping in the community. And right now we're just helping doing the landscape.

**James Hartrick** I have a team of AmeriCorps from around the state and we all gave up a couple days here to come serve at various sites around Traverse City. We're doing some landscaping, cleaning the gutters, cleaning the sidewalks so they don't have to do some maintenance tasks, so they can really focus on their primary mission of helping transition these families and individuals into stable homes.

**Denise Peterson-Short** Well, what we did today is plant trees. And these trees have... the DNA of these trees has been modified to match the DNA of the trees that are already here, so they have a wonderful chance of thriving.

**Stephanie Howells** We are helping out with a Habitat for Humanity home as part of AmeriCorps week. So we are helping to put siding on this home and paint the borders for a family to move in hopefully soon when the house is done.

**Alexander Kemp** And we have a multitude of AmeriCorps members helping out at Camp Arbutus. And right now we're helping out with the specific cabins as far as siding and also clearing the trail.

**Carolyn Bloodworth** Well AmeriCorps, we have over 1,000 AmeriCorps members providing service in a whole host of different activities around the state. They're working on foreclosure issues, senior issues, housing, homelessness, food, nutrition, neighborhood development. They're providing a great deal of work that needs to be done in our state.

**Akim Pizana** Just giving back to the community. Letting the younger individuals see that older people are involved in the community and just... it's my give-back for all the older individuals that taught me certain lessons in life. This is my way of helping community.

**Denise Peterson-Short** Well, I'm one of the older members of AmeriCorps so it is the most awesome thing I've ever done. It's so rewarding because I'm giving back to my community. I feel like I'm giving back to my country. And it matters. Every day, what I do matters. And it's just a privilege.

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Russ Mawby Signature Service Project

mi-ssp.com

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**Carolyn Bloodworth** As we've seen today, AmeriCorps members throughout our state are getting things done in Michigan. From gardening and food, education and housing, to environmental cleanups and neighborhood safety, AmeriCorps is a proven and effective strategy for creating positive community change in our state. If you want more information about AmeriCorps as a solution, or if you are interested in serving as a member, visit [michigan.gov/volunteer](http://michigan.gov/volunteer).

I'm Carolyn Bloodworth. Thank you for joining me on The Bright Side. To find more positive Michigan stories or to watch this episode again, visit [brightsidetv.com](http://brightsidetv.com).

---Outtakes---

**Paul Stanford** They would like for me to become a certified housing counselor also.

**Olivia Courant** Whoa, are you serious?! That's so awesome.

**C.J. Felton** He's going to Cincinnati in two weeks. [others in background making surprised comments]

**Olivia Courant** AmeriCorps. I mean, without them, how... would the program be as successful?

**Lyke Thompson** Not a chance.

**Olivia Courant** Would you be able to reach as many people?

**Giancarlo Guzman** Absolutely not.

**Olivia Courant** How has Ben been helping you? Is he teaching you, or...?

**Juan Vazquez** Ben, yeah, Ben has, uh... *Ben has been* [laughs] very nice with us.

**Carolyn Bloodworth** AmeriCorps is a proven and effective strategy, and – [door behind Carolyn opens]

---Credits---

**Host**

Carolyn Bloodworth, Michigan Community Service Commission

**Producer**

Olivia Courant, CEDAM

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Michigan Community Service Commission  
Michigan State Housing Development Authority  
Wayne State University Center for Urban Studies

**Music**

Tyler Vander Maas – The Bright Side Theme  
Marc Teichert – “Colors of an Orchestra”  
Josh Woodward – “Go” and “Revolution Now”  
Keffy Kay – “Picture”  
Steve Grams – “Where Are You Now”  
Revolution Void – “Someone Else’s Memories”  
hjcrbass – “Bossa Nova Loop”

**AmeriCorps VISTA**

Additional footage by Flint National Service Accelerator

**Schools of Hope Program**

Still photos by Literacy Center of West Michigan

**Russ Mawby Signature Service**

Still photos by Michigan Community Service Commission

**bottledvideo.com**

Stock footage

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