

ISSUE BRIEF:

Stories of Americans With Disabilities in National Service



People with disabilities volunteer for the same reasons that anyone else does—to give back to their communities, to improve their surroundings, and to be active and engaged in life. Some national service participants who have disabilities volunteer with organizations that serve other people with disabilities, while others focus their efforts on helping to meet a wide range of critical community needs. The individuals profiled here represent a small sampling of the many people with disabilities involved in the Corporation for National and Community Service's Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs.



AMERICORPS★STATE AND NATIONAL

Steve Hoad

*AmeriCorps Alumnus 2001
AmeriCorps*VISTA Alumnus 2003
Augusta, Maine*

Disability: Blind

Steve Hoad served with the Maine Conservation Corps in Augusta as a coordinator of volunteers on a statewide basis. The program, called SERVE-Maine (State Environmental Resource Volunteer Effort for Maine), identifies volunteers for outdoor or natural resource projects sponsored by government agencies or nonprofit groups. As a person who is blind, Steve thinks it's important for lots of organizations, including the Corporation for National and Community Service, to address inclusion. Steve feels his contributions are important for the additional reason that, in his opinion, "... people with disabilities have been left on the sidelines and pushed into isolation by a couple of different ideas that people seem to have. One is that because maybe someone looks different or acts differently or speaks differently, that they're not as smart; and the other is that

because someone is disabled, they can't contribute anything, they need to be helped. Those two ideas become very exclusionary."

AMERICORPS★VISTA

Dawn Facka

*AmeriCorps*VISTA Alumna 2001
Anchorage, Alaska*

Current Location: Charleston, South Carolina

Disability: Hearing Impaired

Dawn Facka, a service-learning coordinator with AmeriCorps*VISTA, advocates for people with disabilities and serves as a role model for young men and women with disabilities that come to serve in AmeriCorps Programs. In addition, she teaches others about the importance of inclusion and facilitates disability awareness and diversity training to AmeriCorps*NCCC members. She strives to create a work environment that is welcoming and understanding to those individuals with disabilities by advocating for community involvement and supporting organizations that support and help individuals with disabilities. She says that "If AmeriCorps, had not opened the doors of

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opportunity to me, I most likely would still be ashamed and embarrassed of who I am and [how] society has labeled me. I would still be apologizing to people who did not tolerate or accept my hearing loss. I can't begin to show my gratitude ... to AmeriCorps for showing me another world."

AMERICORPS★NCCC

Joe Tierney

*AmeriCorps*NCCC Alumnus 2001 and 2002
Charleston, South Carolina*

Current Location: Boston, Massachusetts

Disability: Traumatic brain injury

Joe Tierney dedicated two years of his life to service with AmeriCorps*NCCC. During these years he tutored children, built houses, designed and built wheelchair ramps, surveyed and mapped a historical graveyard, blazed trails, worked at a camp for children and adults with disabilities, and much more. Of his time there he writes, "Throughout my service I met some amazing individuals, traveled to some fascinating locations, and learned a variety of skills, but most importantly my service gave me the opportunity to recover, the ability to experience life with a smile. I made the decision to join AmeriCorps because I felt an obligation to give back, I understood that I was very fortunate to have recovered and that I would have never done it without the help of many thoughtful, committed, competent individuals."

LEARN AND SERVE AMERICA

Jared (not his real name)

*Learn and Serve America Alumnus 2002
Hampshire, Massachusetts*

Current Location: Hampshire, Massachusetts

Disability: Significant disabilities

Jared (not his real name), a high school student with significant disabilities, participated fully in a water quality testing initiative through a school-based service-learning project in Western Massachusetts. During the project, Jared spoke of all that he learned about water quality and the effects on the environment. His family and teachers were impressed with the project because it provided Jared with a meaningful experience to give back to his community as well as taught him vital life

skills. His mother speaks of the project as being one of the few opportunities Jared has had to mingle with other students outside of special education.

RSVP

Dean Homerick

RSVP Volunteer

Current Location: Lexington, Ohio

Disability: Debilitating arthritis

Dean Homerick began service as an RSVP volunteer as soon as he became eligible—the day he turned 55. He is involved in environmental issues and emergency operations. He volunteers regularly at the Columbus Zoo, participating in education programs to teach children about animals, as well as volunteering at a local nature center and at the Ohio Bird Sanctuary, where he edits a monthly newsletter. He also volunteers for the American Red Cross and is the volunteer coordinator for the Richland County Emergency Operations Center, charged with alerting volunteers in the event of an emergency.

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

The Corporation for National and Community Service provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through three programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. This year, more than 1.6 million individuals will participate in the Corporation's programs, helping thousands of nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, schools, and government agencies build their capacity to meet critical local needs in education, the environment, public safety, disaster relief, and other areas. Together with the USA Freedom Corps, the Corporation is working to build a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility in America.

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