

# Planting success for the future

AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associate Report 2023



AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates are national service members who can assist with both direct and indirect service during an 8- to 10-week term. As part of the federal agency AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates serving with our project contribute vital support to local organizations working to feed and nurture children and families when traditional school-based meals aren't available.

We have had an AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associate program since 2009, leveraging national service members to help connect food-insecure children with healthy meals and safe summer programming. Through our AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associate program, you can find an 8- to 10-week, full-time position focused on creating meaningful change for people living at or near poverty.



# 2023 RECAP



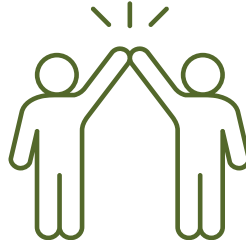
63

Vista Members



25

Service Sites



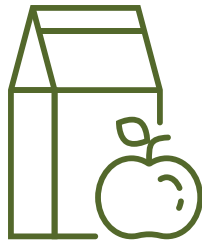
364

Volunteers Recruited



282,142

Meals Served



59,725

Snacks Served



48,620 lbs

Produce Distributed

“One of the things that I think is so wonderful about the program, is the opportunity it affords for the members themselves. The summer program is particularly appealing for college students as a meaningful way to spend their summer and earn money towards their tuition with the education award.”

- Maureen Allen, Director of Community Service for OAF

## Over the last 5 years



4

Summer member transitions to year-long positions, to continue their service experience



19

Summer members returned to complete additional service terms (up to 4 terms)

## SINCE INCEPTION IN 2009 OUR NETWORK HAS...



Hosted 1,036  
AmeriCorps VISTA  
members



Served  
7,821,258  
meals



Served  
463,735  
snacks



Recruited  
3,378  
volunteers

From 2018 to 2023, there was a **200% increase** in the number of pounds of produce harvested by AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates.

By partnering with local organizations who grow and produce, we are able to help support our local farmers, increase food security, and decrease food waste.



# VISTA Voice

"My greatest success is meeting and walking alongside of many people from diverse backgrounds. I really enjoyed seeing their point of view while being in service to fulfill their needs. I learned about cuisine from different parts of the world and a bit of native tongues from both the immigrants and refugees alike. As an AmeriCorps member, I am extremely overjoyed to have been of service to my local community. I have learned a few new skillsets such as business in a Farmer's Market, how to harvest vegetables, a few phrases in another language, and a bit of tutoring ESL style. During my term of service, I have contributed to harvesting 2,876lbs of vegetables. It was hard work, but the smile of gratitude is very rewarding! Knowing that I contributed to making a positive impact and change in Hilliard, means the world to me! Thank you for the opportunity to serve as a VISTA!"

- Isanami, VISTA Summer Associate at Cornerstone Christian Fellowship in Franklin County, Ohio



"Our VISTA member worked at two separate summer feeding sites; she increased the daily attendance from 16 (last year) to 62 (this year). That increase helped children in rural communities obtain nutritious meals throughout the summer months. Last year the total number of meals served at these two sites was 624, with our VISTAs help, this year we have increased that total number to 2,750."

- Washington-Morgan Community Action Program in Washington County, Ohio

"Our VISTA members were an invaluable addition to our farm team this summer. Not only were they incredibly helpful with daily farm tasks as well as assisting in our meals program they also helped to increase our reach as well as services. We were able to add tea blends to our farm sales, recruit more volunteers, run a more robust social media presence, send out a bimonthly newsletter, and increase the number of places we sell too. The VISTA members were vital to our program in every sense."

- Solidarity Farms in Lorain County, Ohio

"During the summer our VISTAs contributed tremendously to our capacities to manage the Hardy Center better, but in doing so they uncovered a tremendous number of additional opportunities. We look forward to your assistance next year as we can make the Hardy Center even better. Thank you so much for your partnership with us."

- The Hardy Center in Franklin County, Ohio

"Our AmeriCorps VISTA service at The Foodbank had a great impact on the operations here at The Foodbank's Urban Garden. As a VISTA, he spent the majority of his service helping with our hydroponic greenhouse operations which allowed us to increase our output of lettuce for our neighbors from approximately 1,000 heads to 1,200 heads of lettuce distributed each week. We were also able to add an additional day of greenhouse volunteer opportunities which in turn allows us to distribute lettuce three days a week instead of two. He was able to assist with the planting of a variety of crops and helped in the harvesting and distribution of thousands of pounds of fresh produce from our outdoor beds this season. Overall, he was an incredibly valuable member of the team and was a key part of our success this summer! We greatly appreciated his service!"

- The Foodbank Inc. in Montgomery County, Ohio





# VISTA Voice



“The summer AmeriCorps VISTA crew focused their efforts this summer on volunteer mobilization, food production, increasing food security, leveraging donations, sustaining community partnerships, and hosting youth programming. AmeriCorps VISTA members mobilized volunteers for the garden through significant social media outreach, campus news, direct communications with students living on campus, and correspondence with local community members. We hosted 32 community gardeners, including faculty, alumni, staff, and neighbors with plots. They cultivated over 50 different varieties of produce and harvested 2,208 pounds to donate. They hosted two Farm Stands on campus to disseminate food for free to students and raise funds for the garden by collecting donations from faculty and staff.”

- Otterbein University in Delaware County, Ohio

"We have worked with Summer VISTA Members for over 9 years. They have been a valuable asset to our program working with children who live in a high poverty area. The VISTA Member's contribution has afforded us the opportunity to serve the broad community with food support for children and families every year during our youth summer program."

- Thea Bowman Center in Cuyahoga County, Ohio

"Our VISTA did an excellent job keeping the operations of our community garden that delivers produce to the local food pantry humming throughout the summer, and also did good work in improving aspects of our organization and communications and increasing our long-term capacity with things she put in place. Our VISTA created a new system for volunteers to access information about our vegetables and how to care for them so they can be more confident and empowered to work more independently as they participate more. She also worked closely with the food pantry to survey those receiving food for new crops to include later in the year and in the future, especially those that may be less common in our area, but favorites of those who have lived in other parts of the world."

- Gahanna Congregational Church in Franklin County, Ohio



"This week, a lady came to the park and asked me to hand out little flyers to each family. As I looked through the flyer, I found out that it was actually a back to school supply giveaway as well as a back to school haircut. Parents could take their children to a salon in Defiance on a specific day and time and receive a completely free haircut and wash, then pick up a brand new backpack complete with anything they may need for school. I was so overwhelmed with joy and gratitude for these people as I know how much many of my families could benefit from these programs. I am so grateful for these people, they make a difference in lives. What got me was at the end of our conversation, the lady thanked me for what I do every day for the kids and reassured what a difference I was making in their lives. I never really thought about how other people look at me, but it turns out, many people look at me the way I looked at this lady and what she does for the kids. I think that is really special."

- Courtney, VISTA Summer Associate at Northwestern Ohio Community Action Commission in Defiance County, Ohio



"I love that I was given the opportunity to help the children grow their passion and teach them something new."

- Jeriel, VISTA Summer Associate at Oberlin Community Services in Delaware County, Ohio