

February 2009 Edition, The Heart Line

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SUCCESS Corps Member Helps During Ice Storm



SUCCESS Corps Ginetta Ward serves with the Berea Community Family Resource Center. Ward, along with her family, volunteered to help during the 2009 Ice Storm. Read her story below.

On Wednesday, Jan. 23, I received a call from my church requesting volunteers to help assist with the opening of a new emergency shelter at Shannon Johnson Elementary School in Berea. I knew that this would be a great opportunity for me to help my neighbors and the local community. My son, sister-in-law, nephew and I went to the school to get further instructions on how we could volunteer. Once arriving at the shelter, it was thrilling to see many of my friends and church members willing to volunteer, too.

After I was asked to assist with registration and completed my training, I began talking with some of the other volunteers. I was very impressed to see the wide variety of people who came out to help. There were children of all ages -- parents, pregnant mothers, grandparents, elderly, college students and church groups. I also had the privilege to meet staff from the local and corporate businesses that were either catering meals or dropping off large donations. It was heart-warming to see that in an economic time when money is tight, that people were willing to dedicate time, money and items from their businesses to help fellow citizens in need.

It was neat to watch how students, who came to volunteer, played with the children who needed a friend. Adult volunteers sat and talked with some of our guests who needed reassurance during this time of hardship. The volunteers that I served with made every effort to get to know the guests and to make them feel at ease in the shelter. Even at mealtime, volunteers sat with the guests to eat together. There wasn't a division between service people and people in need. I do believe that helped make the guests feel more comfortable and safe.

I had the honor of meeting many families that were without electricity or heat, and I was able to develop a bond with them. I may never have met them without this experience, but they have truly made an impact on my life. I can say with confidence that my community cares for its citizens, during a crisis or otherwise. I am proud of my city and honored to be an AmeriCorps member!

Submitted by Angela Baldrige, SUCCESS Corps program director

AmeriCorps Program Spotlight: Prevent. Prepare. Respond.



The "Prevent. Prepare. Respond." AmeriCorps program (PPR), sponsored by the Louisville Chapter of the American Red Cross, began in 2007. PPR members serve in support of the three key components of disaster capacity building: community disaster

education, volunteer recruitment and training, and emergency shelter partnership. This year the program really hit the road running!

Two uninvited guests showed up in September 2008, Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, creating significant changes in the Red Cross and AmeriCorps landscape. On the very day when PPR AmeriCorps training was to begin, 1,500 evacuees from New Orleans arrived in Louisville and were transported to the South Wing of the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center for an eight-day stay. So instead of learning about disasters from textbooks and PowerPoint presentations, PPR members leaped into action with the vigor and enthusiasm we've come to expect from them.

All assignments were taken with the seriousness of a heart attack. Members staffed the dormitory area where 1,500 cots bedded men, women and children, helped them at night to find toilets, and retrieved water for crying children and providing almost 11,000 overnight shelter stays. They worked the food line twice a day, making small talk with clients while loading their plates with a generous serving of food and getting a big smile and an occasional "God bless" from hurting clients who received 126,000 meals and snacks.



Other members helped distribute 5,000 comfort kits that included toiletries, washcloths and other hygiene products. Still others assisted in setting up 3,000 cots and providing 6,000 blankets for both Gustav and Ike clients. When the evacuees returned home, PPR members spent the next week breaking down cots and disposed of the blankets

How did the members themselves feel about the experience? Michelle Robison, of Day City, Calif., whose husband serves in the Coast Guard in Louisville, said "On my first day I walked in to have an experience like no other. I was expecting the normal first day filled with paperwork and training, but this is not how I thought my first day and week would play out."

Michelle went on to describe her duties. "My first job was serving beverages during the lunch period and keeping the line flowing. The rest of the week included working in the cell phone area, interviewing volunteers and staff to compile information for a blog and working in the laundry/shower area assisting clients." Michelle's favorite assignment was helping clients call home from one of 40 cell phones donated by Verizon. "Watching the faces of clients light up when they were able to reach a loved one really gave me a sense of purpose," she said.

Matthew Hellmich, another PPR member and the only native of Louisville, said, "Throughout the week, I gained experience in a variety of tasks related to running a Red Cross shelter. The week proved to be highly valuable as a training exercise, as the first hand experiences in actual shelter work outweigh what can be taught in a classroom."

Member, Anastasia Karpoukhina, who was born and lived in Moscow, Russia until age 13, said it in one sentence, "Little did I know that this day would turn out to be one of the most remarkable days of my life."

With just a minimum of training it was stimulating to see how quickly PPR members assumed responsibility and carried out their duties with boundless energy. An equally proud moment was the return of 80 percent of last year's PPR members who served as shelter workers. This action helps solidify the previously held belief that their year of involvement with AmeriCorps made them much more attuned to community service work.

Submitted by Joe Proctor, Prevent. Prepare. Respond. program manager

Foster Grandparent Program Wins Award



The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) together with the MetLife Foundation announced

in November 2008 that the Foster Grandparent Program operated by Audubon Area Community Services, Inc. was a recipient of the 2008 Award of Achievement in Older Volunteer Program Management. The program joins twelve other programs nationwide honored for their best practices in effective recruitment, training, retention and recognition of volunteers aged 50 and older and is the only program from Kentucky to be recognized. Audubon Area's Senior Companion Program, a sister program, received the same honor in 2007.

Sandy Markwood, n4a's CEO, "Older volunteers offer incredible resources to community agencies. By learning more about how their services are sought and used, we hope to help other organizations harness the energy of older adults who stand ready to give back to society. We are delighted to partner with MetLife Foundation to recognize the promising practices of outstanding volunteer programs."

Foster Grandparent Program Director Robyn Mattingly announced the program would be profiled in a best practices publication that will be shared with volunteer programs nationwide.

Audubon Area's Foster Grandparent Program engages volunteers age 60 and older and serves Daviess, Hancock, Henderson, McLean, Ohio, Union and Webster counties. Volunteers provide mentoring and supportive services to children in schools, Head Start centers and child care centers. For more information, please call (270) 683-1527.



Submitted by Robyn Mattingly, Senior Service Corps Director, Audubon Area Community Services, Inc.

Homeland Security Corps Member Reflection



Ginger Schnepf serves with the Homeland Security Corps at the Big Rivers Chapter of the American Red Cross. Please read her story below.

In my time at the Big Rivers American Red Cross, I have seen compassion, dedication and commitment to our community in ways that I have never seen before. I've learned life lessons that I had previously overlooked. Now, when I think of the times that I have complained about my house, I think about the family of five that lost their home a week before Christmas. Another story that really sticks with me is about a man in Owensboro that lost both of his arms in a tragic accident. The chapter was holding a fundraiser to give away a Ford Taurus mocked up NASCAR style, unrelated to him or his situation, but when the 6-year-old girl picked out of the crowd at the BBQ festival drew his name, there wasn't a dry eye in the crowd. When I get frustrated with my husband, as we are all prone to do at some point, I stop and think about the man that lost his life in a home fire and the family that is left behind to pick up the pieces. The characteristics that I see in the selfless volunteers that devote hundreds of hours away from jobs and family to helping others is remarkable and even after my time with AmeriCorps is over, I will continue to volunteer with the Red Cross because of the unbelievable feeling just helping someone else gives.

I was given the opportunity to serve with the Louisville Chapter during Hurricane Gustav, where, at one point, there were over 3,000 people sheltered from the hurricane. It was up to the Red Cross to make sure that they were fed, had bedding, communications, nursing services and children services. While I was there, I worked harder than I have ever worked in my life, but when I went to bed that night, I didn't even feel tired. I felt like I actually had made a difference that day in people's lives. And it was a feeling I knew I didn't want to lose.

My time here has never felt like work (except the paperwork, of course). I feel like I come into a family every morning that works together to serve our community. A big part of my service assignment has been to educate people in disaster preparedness. I've walked the streets in some of our mobile home parks in the hopes that some of the information I give them will help save them during a disaster. The feeling of wanting to prevent a tragedy had already taken root by the influence of the other members, staff and volunteers.

The AmeriCorps experience has been a wonderful one for me. I was asked to serve for a minimum of one year, but I see a lifetime of volunteer work ahead of me. That feeling of just helping one person move beyond the disaster is one that I never want to lose. AmeriCorps came into my life as a full-time service opportunity and a way to help pay my student loans, but I've learned and lived so much more. For that, I don't have the right words, except you just have to live it to understand it!

Submitted by David Clark, Homeland Security Corps and Senior Connections program director

"Lose yourself in generous service and every day can be a most unusual day, a triumphant day, an abundantly rewarding day."

– William Arthur Ward, American writer (1921-1994)

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