

The TUTOR

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Building Blocks of a Strong Literacy Project: Kansas City Seniors for Schools

by Sarah E. Torian

S

eniors for Schools volunteers in
Kansas City,
Missouri,

are enthused. They are preparing to return for their second year of tutoring in two of the city's elementary schools: Crispus Attucks School and Woodland School. They are enthused because, after less than one full school year, the 22 members who contribute 15 hours each week have witnessed the success that their tutoring efforts can bring about in the minds and attitudes of the 90 children they tutor. They also realize



Senior volunteers Maxine Brooks (left) and Juanita Jordan tutor two students.

that their Seniors for Schools project, which hit the ground running last fall, rests soundly upon the support of strong relationships with outside organizations that promise to sustain the project and its successes for years to come. The project receives this support from many different sources such as community organizations, the schools, and the Corporation for National Service.

The Kansas City project is part of a nine-project national demonstration

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DEAR NATIONAL SERVICE PROJECT LEADER,

The summer may be a time when school is out and children are on vacation, but we know literacy projects are not on vacation. Program staff and volunteers are busy planning for the start of the next school year or running summer projects. Since many projects use the summer months to search for ways to be more effective, we have designed this summer issue of *The Tutor* to highlight many of the

national resources available to projects for training or project design and improvement as well as **community resources** that can provide the much needed local support for any service project.

Read on to learn more about how to use these resources to develop a more effective program as you prepare to enter the next school year.

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The TUTOR is your source
for
topics of interest to
education-focused
National Service projects.

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Northwest
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Kansas City Seniors

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program, called Seniors for Schools, that enlists the services of men and women over the age of 55 to serve in teams and make a significant contribution to help children learn to read. This project is an integral component of President Clinton's "**America Reads Challenge**," working to ensure that every child can read well and independently by the end of third grade. The eight other Seniors for Schools projects are in Boston, Massachusetts; Cleveland, Ohio; Leesburg, Florida; Minneapolis, Minnesota; New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Port Arthur, Texas; and Portland, Oregon.¹

When asked, "What is the key to your project's success and strength?" Kansas City Seniors for Schools project director Kimberly Jordan declares, "All I can say is: Relationships! Relationships! Relationships!" Relationships with the community and funding organizations provide both financial and technical support for the Senior volunteers; relationships with the principals, teachers, and school staff exponentially increase the volunteers' potential for effectiveness in tutoring children; relationships with and among the volunteers form the backbone of the project; and relationships with the Corporation for National Service provided the initial funding and continue to provide resources. These all blend to form a successful literacy project that makes strong strides towards meeting President Clinton's goal of helping children get a solid foundation in reading.

Community Support

Even before Jordan joined the project in the summer of 1997, a strong foundation for the project was being laid in its relationships with local organizations. A vital relationship that forms the structural base of the Senior volunteers' success is with the project's sponsor and parent organization, the

YMCA of Greater Kansas City. Gail Vessels, YMCA Vice President of Public Affairs, drafted the proposal that originally brought Seniors for Schools to the Kansas City school system. Vessels remembers applying for the grant and the importance of working with the schools, "Before writing a word of the proposal, we met with Principal Earl Williams. Knowing the schools, he brought the design for the project. We bring an expertise in working with volunteers and an expertise in youth development. Ours has really been a beautiful partnership."

The YMCA continues to handle the business-related aspects of the project—stipend payments, screening of potential volunteers, and grant writing. The YMCA also supplies free memberships, Sprint phone cards and movie passes as incentives to bring Seniors into the classrooms. Of course, as Attucks volunteer Shirlyne Richardson explains, it is their volunteer experiences that keep them coming back. "I definitely intend to go back," she says. "It is such a rewarding experience and it gives me a chance to share in some children's lives and to help make a difference."

For other literacy projects seeking support from community organizations or foundations, Jordan suggests, "Invite them to come by, to observe the director, the tutors with the children, tour the schools, talk with the principal. Keep them aware of who you are and what you are doing. Then, when you do seek funding, they will know that your project is a worthwhile program to fund."

Nurturing Relationships in the Schools

The central point of any literacy and tutorial project is the school or other site in which it is based. Inside those school doors lies a wealth of resources that are essential to any successful project and effectively tapping these resources requires "Relationships! Relationships! Relationships!"

Did You Know That National Senior Service Corps Volunteers Make Up The Largest Service Stream in National Service? Here's more....

- Senior Corps includes Foster Grandparents, Seniors for Schools, Senior Companions, and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).
- 80,000 children, teenagers, and their families are supported by the services of Foster Grandparents.
- Nearly 24,000 Foster Grandparents contribute 21.6 million hours of service annually at an estimated value of \$262 million.
- Nearly 450,000 RSVP participants serve through more than 60,000 public and nonprofit community organizations.
- RSVP participants provide over 80 million hours of service annually to communities across the country at a value of about \$1 billion.

Jordan's relationships with the two schools' principals demonstrate two important strategies for working well with schools: 1) Choose a school whose principal wants the project, and 2) Demonstrate early and confidently the benefits the project can bring to students without also bringing headaches and an increased workload.

As mentioned above, Crispus Attucks School principal Earl Williams was involved in the Kansas City Seniors for Schools project from the beginning. Crispus Attucks School did not have the lowest test scores or highest poverty rates. What it did have was a supportive principal who already enjoyed a strong relationship with the community and who was also very willing to build a strong relationship with the project, its staff, and volunteers.

Having a supportive principal helped make the project successful in its first months, thereby opening doors to another school, Woodlawn School. It was, however, still necessary to bring to Woodlawn's principal, Evelyn Williams, early in the planning stages, an organized presentation of what Seniors for Schools could do for her students and how its trained volunteers would create a boost—not a burden—to her teachers and staff. This presentation began with an introductory letter and follow-up phone calls. Later, Jordan met with Williams to discuss the Seniors for Schools project. By being prepared and up front, Jordan got off on the right foot with Woodlawn's principal, ensuring that they would enjoy a strong supportive relationship while the Seniors worked in the school. This initial effort has paid off. As Erma Saunders, a Senior volunteer at Woodlawn explains, "The principal at a school really sets the tone, and Principal Williams is very enthusiastic and supportive of our work."

Although it is extremely important to have a good relationship with a school's administration, the teachers are also an important resource for both project directors and volunteers. After making her initial presentation to Principal Evelyn Williams, Jordan reached out to the rest of the school staff. "After sending the teachers a memo about Seniors for Schools, I went in to talk to many of them, the rest of the staff, and the children."

All the staff is important to meet. They will all be important, directly or indirectly. Jordan adds, "The Title I teachers are the most important because they have the reading scores of all the children and can be very helpful by offering additional training for volunteers. The custodial staff is also important because they know where everything is and they have the keys to get you there."

Jordan spends all week in the two schools. She keeps an office in Crispus Attucks School and is offered access to a phone, fax machine, and copiers. She feels that maintaining visibility among the school staff is an important part of a successful literacy project.

Support From CNS

The Corporation for National Service (CNS) can also be an important resource for a literacy project. In the fall of 1997, Jordan realized that too much of her time was being taken up with administrative duties, so she applied to the Corporation for two AmeriCorps *VISTA members, one for each school. AmeriCorps *VISTA members serve as a branch of CNS service efforts by going into small community-based organizations or projects in order to expand their capacity. CNS boosted the project enormously when it accepted her application. The two AmeriCorps *VISTAs serve as Volunteer Coordinators for the schools. They facilitate meetings, conduct trainings, interview volunteers, conduct student assessments, work with the school staff, and manage the two school sites—all work that Jordan had been responsible for previously. This has freed her to concentrate on program development, budget matters, and serving on YMCA teams and committees.

By keeping organizations like the YMCA and school staff aware of and involved in the project, and by maintaining a good working relationship in schools, the Kansas City Seniors for Schools greatly increases its effectiveness in tutoring children. ■

¹ For articles on other Seniors for Schools projects, see the following issues of the Tutor: Port Arthur, TX (June, 1997); Philadelphia, PA (September, 1997); New York, NY (Winter 1997); and Portland, OR (Spring, 1998). The remaining four Seniors for Schools sites will be profiled in coming issues of the Tutor.

Looking for Senior Volunteers???

Brainstorm for every free route to reach potential volunteers! Kansas City found success using these channels:

- Place ads on cable access channels.
- Draft radio public service announcements
- Place classifieds ads
- Hang flyers in schools and throughout the community.
- Attend local events that would attract seniors (Grandparent's Days at schools, for example.)
- Ask school staff if they know interested retired teachers or paraprofessionals.
- Look for ANY newsletter distributed in the area – company, library, community center, school, etc. Ask to place your "ad."
- Ask to place notices in local business flyers.
- Make announcements at all community organizations—Rotary Clubs, Junior Leagues, American Association of Retired Persons, etc.
- Make announcements at all religious institutions within 5-10 miles of the school(s).

Broadening Basic Skills: Literacy Evaluations

Kansas City Seniors for Schools volunteers use the Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills to assess both the reading level of entering tutees and the progress made as they continue to receive help from the Seniors.

The Brigance model takes a comprehensive look at the student's skills in five areas. The Reading Readiness section determines a non-reader's literacy foundation. Do they know their alphabet? The difference between uppercase and lowercase? The Word Recognition section ranges from very easy words to difficult ones, placing a child on a literacy spectrum that extends from pre-k to twelfth grade. The Comprehension section evaluates how much content the child actually digests when reading or being read to. The Word Analysis section measures the degree to which the tutee understands components of words such as prefixes and suffixes. The fifth and final section of the Brigance model is Functional Word Recognition. It is a list of four hundred basic sight words. This section measures the breadth and extent of the tutee's knowledge of words.

The Kansas City Seniors are trained to administer the test. They take turns role-playing before they conduct the initial assessment test with each tutee. This thorough pre-evaluation requires one month, but provides an understandable score that highlights the specific areas of strength and weakness for each child in ways the tutor can readily see.

The Senior volunteers are also trained to develop targeted lesson plans for the tutees using the Brigance evaluation. Project director Kimberly Jordan cannot say enough about the skills of the Senior volunteers. "The tutors are extremely effective," Jordan explains. "They have received so much training from me and from Title I teachers—training that extends from being reading partners and guided tutors to diagnostic tutors who teach reading strategies and reading skills."

As is true with many children, reading

comprehension is the section of the Brigance test that reveals the most difficulties for the tutees in Kansas City. The Senior volunteers, therefore, really focus their help on developing comprehension skills. When the children are reading or being read to, the tutors repeatedly engage in conversation about the story—"Why is the little boy climbing the tree? What do you think the mouse is looking for?"

The Kansas City Seniors for Schools volunteers are encouraged by the progress they have witnessed. Jordan offers one second grade boy as an example. He scored an abysmal 57 out of 400 in the Functional Word Recognition section of his pre-assessment test. After a short eight months of tutoring, this young boy had increased his score over 600 percent to an impressive 361 out of 400!

The Senior volunteers witnessed striking improvements in many of their tutees. Of the children who took the pre- and post-tests, well over half improved by one grade level or more in the two portions of the Brigance evaluation that measured by grade level. Sixty-one percent improved at least one grade level on the Word Recognition section and 68 percent moved up one grade level or more on the Reading Comprehension section.

Reflecting on the tutees' improvements, Jordan says, "These assessments show the impact that one-to-one tutoring attention has on students. Also, by evaluating all the children, it shows repeated success—consistent improvement across the board. That's important."

Along with improved scores and the development of a stronger foundation in literacy, the tutees began to see reading as enjoyable and fun. Shirlyne Richardson was encouraged by the change in attitude she witnessed during the year she volunteered. "The more I worked with the children, the more confident they became. They happily anticipated their sessions saying, 'What do we get to read today?!' and 'Can we read now?!' Seeing that made it really worthwhile for me."

Keys to Teaching Literacy: America Reads Conferences

by Shelly Ohl



“Gloopy is a borp!?” No, this is not a typo! While in Albuquerque at the America Reads conference, I was introduced to the LEARNS partners and the Literacy Core. Judith Gold (faculty member and LEARNS Project Director at the Bank Street College of Education), facilitated an interactive workshop on literacy. She gave participants insight into the reading process, children’s skill development and diverse learning styles, creating a successful tutoring program, and also provided materials for program libraries. “Gloopy and Blit” was one hands-on tool which encouraged us to reflect on the strategies new readers use to make sense of a text. We were asked to read a passage and make sense of nonsense words using context clues and other reading strategies. The exercise set the stage for discussions about reading, what children need to become readers, and how tutors can support the process.

I am the director of the **Northwest Service Academy (NWSA) Education Awards Only¹** program in Vancouver, Washington. This fall, we are faced with the challenge of placing 180 AmeriCorps members in Washington and Oregon schools to tutor young people in reading. The Literacy Core workshop highlighted areas that we need to focus on prior to beginning the new program year.

Here are some of the things I learned.

1. Reading is very complex. Readers use meaning (semantics), structure (syntax), and visual (graphophonic) cues to make sense of the print. Successful readers are capable of self-correction, self-monitoring, and cross-checking to read well.

2. To ensure success, readers need to practice, practice, practice! They need to practice at home and at school. One-on-one tutoring can help to make the difference in the school environment. What are some things a tutor needs to be successful and confident?

- Tutors do not have to have a degree, but they do need a “bag of tricks” and good training prior to their tutoring. They also need on-going support.

- Tutors in a school need to have an identified staff person or connection within the school system acclimating them to the school’s culture and giving regularly scheduled feedback.

- Tutoring sessions need to be structured to include various re-reading activities, word analysis, writing, and the introduction of new stories. Sessions should be coordinated with classroom activities and a relationship built with the child’s teacher.

- Quality materials, a work plan, and a backup plan should always be at the tutor’s disposal. Tutors should

have time to prepare and practice for the sessions.

- Assessment tools must be in place. The tutor should be trained in how to use the desired system, and expectations should be shared up front.

- Finally, celebrate, celebrate, celebrate! Celebrate the accomplishment of a book read, a word pronounced correctly, and milestones met. Who doesn’t feel good about themselves after some sort of celebration? For a child, it could be as simple as playing a word game, or for the tutor, a certificate. Whatever the reward, it must be sincere!

3. Tutors are a key piece to the reading puzzle.

- Getting to know the child is the first step. It is important to be responsive to their interests. For example, if a child has a puppy, the tutor could use reading material about dogs. The relationship between the tutor and child should never be underestimated.

- Social interaction is also essential in learning to read. Beginning readers need to see others reading and modeling things as simple as how to hold a book.

- Before the child reads, have her look over the book and make predictions about the story based on the pictures.

- While reading to the child, pay attention to behavior. Is he asking questions? Does the child try to guess what will happen next?

- After reading, have a discussion about the material. Ask how the child might tell the story to a sibling or a friend. The tutor is a model of reading skills and appropriate use of language.

- The sessions need to be scheduled consistently.

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The Literacy Core’s “Bag of Tricks”

- To help the children monitor their own reading, ask them to “Say that again” or ask “Does that sound right?”

- Wait time is precious. Allow the child time to figure out the word. A few seconds of silence can often be more painful for the tutor than the child.

- Say to the reader, “Look at how the word begins. Say more of the word. Do you know another word that starts that way?”

- Ask “What can you do to help yourself? Can you predict the word? Go back and re-read the sentence for meaning.”

Bridging the Gap Between Home and School

by Sarah E. Torian

Founded in 1979, the **National Institute on Out-of-School Time's (NIOST)** mission is to improve the quality and quantity of school-age care programs nationally through collaborative work with communities, individuals, and organizations, and to raise the level of public awareness about the importance of children's out-of-school time.

Based at the Center for Research on Women at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, NIOST believes that, in order to help children—especially those affected by economic and educational disadvantages—make the best use of their out-of-school hours, it is imperative to increase caregivers' effectiveness through training.

After more than 10 years of providing workshops and training sessions to projects in 42 states, NIOST was selected this year to offer its experience and knowledge by assisting Corporation for National Service (CNS) projects across the country.

There will be five workshops—one in each of the five regional clusters—over the next year, led by both local and national trainers. The workshops will be free of charge to all streams of CNS projects. They will be designed to train project members to serve as trainers in their own projects, increasing the project's sustainability. The dates, locations, and registration

information for these training sessions will be announced at a later date—check NIOST's web site (listed below) regularly for updates.

NIOST will also serve projects by offering limited onsite training and technical assistance as well as remote access assistance—phone, fax, and online.

Over the course of its one year contract, NIOST will: publish a newsletter full of tips, suggestions and strategies; provide monographs to highlight the research developments at NIOST; and design and produce a manual for CNS sites that want to create or improve an out-of-school care project.

CNS senior training officer, Jewell Bazilio-

Bellegarde, explains the selection of NIOST as a service provider, "NIOST is one of the foremost institutions in increasing the quality of children's out-of-school time. NIOST really wrote the book on what a quality out-of-school program looks like, so we are excited to offer their knowledge and expertise to our volunteer projects."

NIOST is in the process of beginning its year of service with CNS. Until its 1-800 number is established, more information on how your project can benefit from NIOST's trainings can be obtained at their website: www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW, or by calling Ellen Gannett at 781-283-2547. ■

"Out-of-School Time made sense because it embraced the greater and wider range of options for older children's care."

—Ellen Gannett, Assistant Director,
National Institute of Out-of-School Time

Keys to Teaching Literacy

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The America Reads sponsors gave each participant a wealth of resources. We received sample tutoring plans, a list of "best books," literacy training topics, basic booklets that outline successful tutoring programs and techniques, a handbook for cross-age tutoring, and much more.² The workshop tapped into

the different learning styles that we all have and related that to how one works with children on reading. Today, the stage has been set by President Clinton and the America Reads Challenge. It is up to us to take strategies like these back to our local communities, schools, and classrooms to aid the effort of creating a more literate society. ■

¹National Service programs with "Education Awards Only" do not provide stipends for members' service. Instead, they provide payment through education.

²These resources will also be available to attendees of the America Reads Conference in Columbus, Ohio, August 24-26, 1998.

Shelly Ohl has been director of the Education Awards Only program at NWSA since the summer of 1997. Previously she served as a team steward at a NWSA residential service site for three years.

Cleveland Seniors Provide "Books for Kids"

Cleveland's Seniors for Schools volunteers held four successful book fairs during April and May. After a book drive that lasted almost a year and amassed more than 3,000 *gently* used books, the Seniors gave books to more than 450 children and about 200 parents in the four Cleveland schools in which they tutor. Realizing that many of the children they were tutoring did not have any books in their homes and knowing that access to books and encouragement to read are keys to success in later school years, last year they set a goal of putting books into the hands and homes of their tutees. This spring they made great strides toward meeting that goal.

During the four book fairs, the Seniors, children, and their parents met and mingled in the cafeterias, libraries, and gymnasiums of the four schools. As they snacked, browsed through, and chose books, they learned of educational resources available to them in their community.

To gather the 3,000 books, the volunteers placed announcements in newsletters and newspapers, hung flyers across town, and *talked*. Edward Cunneen, Cleveland RSVP Board Member

and creator of the "Books for Kids" program, knows the value of word-of-mouth outreach! "The idea really catches on. You just need to keep talking about it. *No one* will turn you away. Everywhere I went I told people about 'Books for Kids.'"

The city and county public libraries were also an important resource for books.

Seniors for Schools Project Director Joy Banish asked the libraries for books which were no longer in circulation and, when the libraries planned their book sales, they filled boxes with books that they either gave or sold at a great discount to the project. The Seniors also asked the libraries' acquisition officers for the names of their contacts at book publishing companies. They wrote

letters to the publishing representatives, explaining the goals and structure of the program, and requesting any donations they could make.

Reviewing the overall success of the book fairs, Banish says, "They were an excellent opportunity to involve parents in our program and get them more involved in reading to their children while also ensuring that children have access to the tools that will make them successful readers and successful students."



Cleveland Children and their parents select books at Seniors for Schools Book Fair held April 1998.

Tips for Book Fair Success

1. Publicize – Publicize – Publicize! Contact public libraries, bookstores, community groups, and publishers. Hang flyers throughout the community.
2. Find a retired librarian to sort the books by grade level and to remove outdated, damaged, or inappropriate books.
3. Schedule the event *with* the school—before or after school is usually best.
4. Send flyers home with the children.
5. Hang posters throughout the school, encouraging children to come and to bring their parents.
6. Make sure *all* school staff is aware of the event—teachers, librarians, custodians, gym teachers, and cafeteria workers—especially if the event is in the gym or cafeteria.
7. Ask public libraries to send a staff member to talk to the parents about library events, library cards, summer reading programs, book clubs, etc.
8. Seek the help of high school students, teen center members, and Learn and Serve projects. They can unload books, set up tables, greet parents and children, and help children select books. It offers a great experience to them and to the children.
9. Sort books on tables by grade and place signs accordingly
10. Serve Food!!! Continental breakfasts in the morning or cookies and punch in the afternoon. Ask local grocery stores to donate the food.

Partners Are a Resource: Reflections of an America Reads Conference Attendee

by Teresa Mountainsheep

I recently attended the America Reads conference in Philadelphia and was impressed by the variety of people I met.

There were retired and present teachers, parents, project coordinators and directors, students, and grandparents—all sharing experiences and learning from one another to enhance their efforts to increase children's reading. I was there as a Student Coordinator representing **Little Big Horn College in Crow Agency, Montana**, where I am pursuing a degree in Elementary Education. This past year I was a part of the **Learn and Serve**¹ program and an America Reads **Federal Work Study (FWS)** volunteer, tutoring students in kindergarten through second grade.

Crow Agency is a town on the Crow Reservation (population 8,000) in rural Montana. Little Big Horn College has been a part of the reservation since 1980. This past year was the college's first year with Learn and Serve, and FWS America Reads, so these programs are still in an expanding and developing stage. As we grow, we continue to run into some setbacks, but we have also found successes.

The focus of the Learn and Serve project that I was working with was tutoring in Hardin Elementary School. We enjoyed a very productive first year with the children there. Ms. Strom's second grade class had a great breakthrough; five children learned 300 new words! Most of the students came in reading below first grade level and finished at second grade level, ready for third. The other children also made significant strides too.

Partnering to Form 4-H Club

Building and maintaining strong partnerships is a significant part of the literacy and youth development efforts going on in Crow Agency right now. We are working on several projects whose successes will depend upon working with others, both locally and across the state. As a part of this summer's Learn and Serve project, I am working with others in hopes of forming a 4-H Club on the reservation. We hope to earn our charter by October. This proposal builds on the youth rodeos and rodeo camp that we have already developed. We have posted flyers to build awareness, located donors for the stock, and have even found some professional rodeo riders to offer instruction. Partnering with a county extension agent, we have held summits, where we learned from the experiences of other communities. Experienced local teachers helped us to design effective lesson plans.

Partners in Problem Solving

Building strong partnerships is also an integral part of my summer internship at school. I am working

with school officials to develop a program for training FWS tutors before they enter the classrooms. We will assemble a committee to build a strong communication and support link between the various participants of the tutoring efforts to facilitate problem-solving and provide positive reinforcement and acknowledgement of the tutors' good work.

I feel very fortunate to have been able to attend the America Reads Conference training sessions. I feel that now I can help my community, using the help and expertise of others to face the America Reads Challenge. ■

¹Learn and Serve is a federal initiative based upon the idea of "service learning." As a grants program, it supports teachers and community members who involve young people, kindergarten through college, in service that reinforces school studies.

Teresa Mountainsheep has been involved in national service literacy and youth development projects at Little Big Horn College for the past year.

Tips from the Partnership Core

In the Partnership Session of the America Reads Conference, led by the Southern Regional Council (one of the three LEARNS Partners), I learned numerous strategies:

1. Identify groups/people (school teachers and staff, parents, community members and organizations, etc.) that have a compelling interest in the area's youth. Invite them at the beginning and design the project together.
2. Provide your volunteers with a variety of training experiences: orientation, shadowing others, ongoing staff development alongside teachers, and opportunities to lead sessions. They can be effective leaders in assessing needs, developing relationships, and designing and modeling programs.
3. Remember: resources are more than money! Don't look to businesses, community organizations, and people only for financial resources. They can also provide volunteers, program development strategies, and free word-of-mouth advertisement.
4. Use stream leaders, state commissions and offices, and peers in your region as sources of help and guidance. The Training and Technical Assistance Providers engaged by the Corporation for National Service can help you throughout the development of your project.

Making the Most of Multi-Stream Service In Schools

by Cynthia Haley

Nonprofit school service programs benefit from diverse project teams in which members bring a variety of skills, personal motivations, and types of life experience to the table. Those same differences, however, can create interpersonal and organizational challenges that can compromise a team's effectiveness—if the team does not address and plan appropriately.

How can the staffs of organizations providing support to schools help national service members achieve working harmony, despite significant differences in age, education, experience, and reasons for involvement?

An Ambitious Management Goal

Organizers of **DC Reads**, Washington's grassroots answer to the America Reads Challenge, deal with these issues daily in a program that unites national service members, college students, and community volunteers into a city-wide educational team serving in 16 public elementary schools and helping over 400 students learn to read.

DC Reads was organized by **Communities in Schools of Washington, D.C. (CISDC)**, DC Public Schools, the Corporation for National Service, and six institutions of higher education: American University, Catholic University of America, George Washington University, Georgetown University, Howard University, and Trinity College. This fall, two additional universities will join the collaborative, making DC Reads a key contributor to literacy activities in the District.

Five Vital Programs

Five programs of national service intersect in the DC Reads program. Thirty-two **AmeriCorps*VISTA** members coordinate all DC Reads activities in the 16 schools, and 44 **Foster Grandparents** serve as first-grade classroom helpers. Additionally, dozens of **Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)** members tutor alongside the universities' **Federal Work-Study (FWS)** students—many of whom participate in programs funded partially by a **Learn and Serve** grant. In one of the schools, **National Civilian**

Conservation Corps members function as a twice-a-week tutoring team. All of these national service efforts are increased by close to 100 community volunteers who, although not a part of a national service program, volunteer as tutors in the schools once a week.

Helping 800 Children Learn to Read

More than 400 first-graders received tutoring in the DC Reads program during 1997-98 school year. This September, the number will jump to more than 800 when the program expands to include both first- and second-graders. DC Reads affects thousands more children through school-wide family outreach activities,

Foster Grandparents' classroom work, and AmeriCorps *VISTA members' efforts to help schools attract more community resources for general classroom usage.

Orchestrating this kind of large-scale effort is no easy task, given the varying needs, objectives, and working styles of individual project workers. "The key to bringing diverse teams of service members together is developing the strengths, skill levels, and abilities that each adds to the mix," says Monica Swann, CISDC's deputy director. "Some members bring value in areas that are hard to quantify, like knowledge of a community or great networking

skills, or just sheer ambition and enthusiasm. It's important for managers to recognize that those types of qualities are very valuable."

Bringing Out Each Other's Strengths

DC Reads organizers design each school's team to ensure that community volunteers and members complement one another. "You'll find that some Foster Grandparents are natural leaders who are very effective at managing groups, while others are better at soothing children," Joe John Shell observes. Shell, the DC Reads coordinator for Washington's Foster Grandparent program, adds, "You'll find that the various types of volunteers add strength to others. That's why it's critical to diversify."

"Without my experience in [national service], I wouldn't have had a chance to work with people who have such diverse backgrounds—like getting to collaborate with RSVPs and Foster Grandparents,"



AmeriCorps VISTA member LaMonica Smith and students at Webb Elementary School celebrate together at a DC Reads year-end event

says Jamie Deason, a *VISTA who is completing her second year in national service—first as an AmeriCorps member in her native Atlanta and now, as an AmeriCorps *VISTA member with DC Reads.

Drawing upon her experience in both AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps* VISTA, Deason cautions managers not to make instant assumptions about members' skills. "We had some people with a Masters in Education, some with high school educations or GEDs, and some with Bachelor's degrees. People made assumptions in the beginning about what each member would bring, but, as it turns out, many of the workers with graduate degrees lacked the important life experiences that some others had. Everyone brought something important to the table that no one else could add. Address assumptions and differences right up front, in a way that doesn't involve value judgments," advises John Pinter, a technical assistance provider with the Catholic Network of Volunteer Service (CNVS). "But don't make the mistake of falling into easy stereotypes about age, gender, race, or other differences."

Training Together

Jeanette Feely of DC's RSVP office, Shell, and other managers stress the importance of joint meetings and training sessions for members in all streams of service. "RSVPs and *VISTAs should have more opportunities to train together with reading specialists right in the schools, not just at headquarters. And joint meetings throughout the year will help build rapport and a common sense of purpose," Feely says.

*VISTA member Mari Johnson agrees. "Foster Grandparents, RSVPs, and *VISTAs all have different concepts of what DC Reads is. Everything boils down to communication and having a common understanding of policy."

"We can speak for three years about diversity and not come up with the 'right' answers in training people to deal with differences," CNVS's John Pinter concludes. "What organizers need to do is to raise people's comfort level with each other. Recognize that every diverse team will have to address issues of personal differences. What's important is to work through them head on, not to automatically view these issues as potential problems."

*Cynthia Haley has been the development and media coordinator at Communities in Schools since May 1998. Previously she served Communities in Schools as an AmeriCorps *VISTA*

RESOURCES

TRAINING ACTIVITIES

■ MOSAICA: 202-887-0620, Website: www.mosaica.org/natl.htm

INTERGENERATIONAL GUIDANCE:

■ National Council on the Aging: 202-479-1200

AMERICA READS AND EDUCATION ASSISTANCE:

■ LEARNS Partners (see page 12)

National Service Programs

AMERICORPS *VISTA

- Since its organization in 1965, 110,000 *VISTA volunteers have joined forces with 15,000 sponsors to strengthen low-income communities.
- Currently, more than 4,000 members are serving in nearly 1,000 projects.
- Volunteers commit to one year of full-time work to build the capacity of community-based organizations.

NATIONAL SENIOR SERVICE CORPS

- Senior Corps helps people age 55 and older find service opportunities related to their interests.
- Over 500,000 Seniors now serve their communities through Senior Corps.
- Seniors for Schools is a national demonstration project that actively supports America Reads in nine U.S. cities.

FEDERAL WORK STUDY

- President Clinton proposed in 1997 that the number of FWS students increase to 1 million, with 100,000 serving as tutors to help young children learn to read well by the end of third grade.
- There are now 1,000 colleges and universities involved in the America Reads Challenge FWS program.

NATIONAL CIVILIAN COMMUNITY CORPS

- National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) is a 10-month residential national service program for people between the ages of 18 and 24.
- NCCC members are based on five campuses across the country and serve on a variety of team-based projects lasting from one day to six weeks.
- NCCC projects frequently focus on the environment, recognizing that diverse solutions will be required to meet our nation's diverse challenges.
- Approximately 1,200 NCCC members serve about 500 projects each year. About 18 percent are education-related projects.

LEARN AND SERVE AMERICA

- Learn and Serve supports service learning programs in schools and community organizations that engage youth from kindergarten through college in addressing education, public safety, environmental, and other human needs.
- Service learning is a method by which students improve academic learning and develop personal skills through structured service projects.
- Nearly one million young people are currently participating in Learn and Serve America programs.

To find out about service opportunities in these programs, call 1-800-942-2677 or visit <http://www.cns.gov>.

Terrific Training Opportunities: Department of Education and America Reads Challenge Conferences

The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and the America Reads Challenge are sponsoring a series of sixteen conferences across the country between July and September, 1998. These conferences will focus on tutor training for school, community, and university and college partnerships that are involved in or planning to implement quality reading tutorial programs.

The free, two-day conferences are designed specifically to meet the needs of projects that involve, either exclusively or as a partner with other service streams, **Federal Work-Study Programs**. Leaders of such projects are encouraged to attend along with other members of their project team. At the conferences, these team members will be given opportunities to work together, applying key concepts they learn, and to draw upon effective practices in the design, implementation, and strengthening of their specific reading tutorial programs, all with the support of trained facilitators and leaders. One goal of conference organizers is to send the project teams home with a concrete plan of action that they can begin to implement on the following Monday morning.

Although the agendas will vary somewhat at each conference according to the hosting regional educational laboratory, the same valuable resources will be available at each conference. All attendees will receive an interactive conference binder to use as a working tool in the development and strengthening of reading programs with a bibliography of key resources, reprints of DOE and America Reads Challenge articles, and planning tools and matrixes that will serve as an effective resource. CNS representatives will be at each conference with samples of Department of Education resources and guides that projects can order later. Conference speakers and facilitators will work directly with partnership teams in the development of work plans for the teams to carry back to their projects.

Topics to be explored at the conference include:

- Research-based principles of good reading instruction.
- Tutor management and support.
- Model programs and best practices.
- Effective tutor training.
- Developing and maintaining tutorial partnerships.

Conference Dates, Locations, and Contact Information

Note the following locations, dates, and conference contacts to find the Department of Education conference that is most convenient to your project. The Regional Educational Laboratories, research and development organizations supported by contracts with the U.S. department of Education, will be hosting the conferences. Contact the hosting laboratory nearest your program for more information on schedules and registration or visit the web site at: <http://www.nwrel.org/americanreads/>

Detroit, MI • July 23-24

North Central Regional Laboratory (NCREL)
Gaye Zarazinski; 630-571-4700; gzarazin@ncrel.org

New York, NY July 27-28

The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown (LAB)
Elizabeth MacDonald; 401-274-9548, x 322

Boston, MA • July 30-31

The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown (LAB)
Elizabeth MacDonald; 401-274-9548, x 322

Chapel Hill, NC • July 30-31

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)
Beth Garriss; 800-755-3277; bgserve@aol.com

Nashville, TN • July 31-August 1

Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL)
April Noble; 703-558-2241; noblea@ael.org

Minneapolis, MN • August 6-7

North Central Regional Laboratory (NCREL)
Gaye Zarazinski; 630-571-4700; gzarazin@ncrel.org

San Antonio, TX • August 12-13

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
Dr. Stephen Marble; 512-476-6861; smarble@sedl.org

Chicago, IL • August 13-14

North Central Regional Laboratory
Gaye Zarazinski; 630-571-4700; gzarazin@ncrel.org

Denver, CO • August 13-14

Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory
Michael Arnold; 303-632-5501; Marnold@mcrel.org

Phoenix, AZ • August 27-28

WestEd
Beverly Farr; 415-565-3009; bfarr@wested.org

Atlanta, GA • August 27-28

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)
Beth Garriss; 800-755-3277; bgserve@aol.com

San Francisco, CA • August 31-September 1

WestEd
Beverly Farr; 415-565-3009; bfarr@wested.org

Washington, DC • August 31-September 1

Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS)
Evelyn Klein; 215-204-3000; eklein@astro.ocis.temple.edu

Seattle, WA • September 9-10

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)
Jana Potter; 503-275-0120; potterj@nwrel.org

Los Angeles, CA • September 9-10

WestEd
Beverly Farr; 415-565-3009; bfarr@wested.org

Orlando, FL • September 10-11

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)
Beth Garriss; 800-755-3277; bgserve@aol.com



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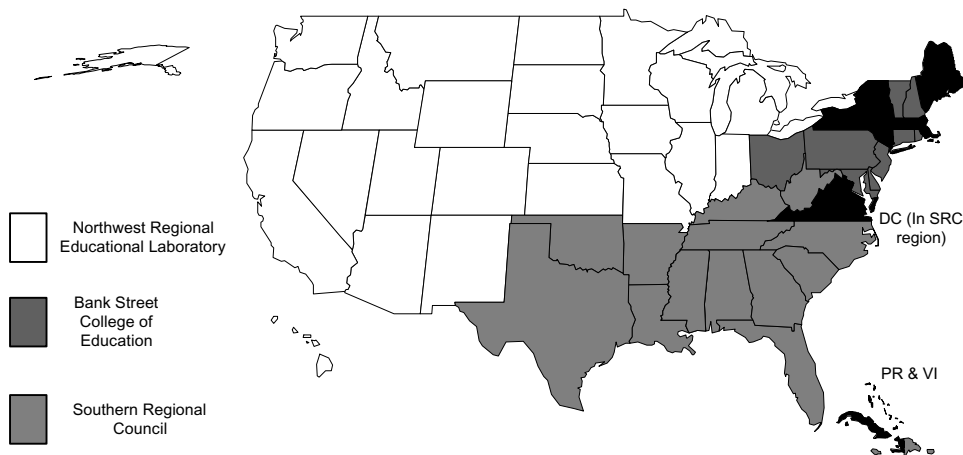
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LEARNS Partners Invite You to Call:



Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory:
 For training and technical assistance if you are in the Western region (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, MT, ND, NE, NM, NV, OR, SD, UT, WA, WI, WY).
 Contact: Nancy Henry and Leslie Haynes
 101 S.W. Main St., Suite 500
 Portland, OR 97204
 (800) 547-6339, ext. 613
 (503) 275-0443 (fax)
 email: henryn@nwrel.org;
 internet: www.nwrel.org

Bank Street College of Education: For training and technical assistance if you are in the Northeast region (CT, DE, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, RI, VT).
 610 W. 112th St.
 New York, NY 10025
 (800) 930-5664
 (212) 875-4616
 (212) 875-4547 (fax)
 internet: www.bnkst.edu

Southern Regional Council: For training and technical assistance if you are located in the Southeast region (AL, AR, DC, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, OK, PR, SC, TN, TX, VA, VI, WV).
 133 Carnegie Way NW, Suite 900
 Atlanta, GA 30303
 (877) 253-2767
 (404) 522-8764, ext. 24
 (404) 522-8791 (fax)
 internet: www.src.w1.com/learns
 email: amcss@mindspring.com

WHAT DO THE LEARNS PARTNERS HAVE TO OFFER YOUR PROJECT?

- Ongoing **technical assistance** through easy toll-free access to a LEARNS partner. Call the partner serving your state (see map) at the numbers listed above.
- Limited onsite **training assistance** provided by peer experts in response to cluster, state, commission, and multi-program requests.
- A quarterly newsletter, **The Tutor**, including monographs addressing effective literacy practices.
- A LEARNS **web site** with research-based practices and downloadable resources for your literacy project (active September 1998).
- A series of eight, three-day, in-depth **literacy trainings** with companion guides and videos designed to meet the needs of national service programs and their constituents—volunteers, directors, coordinators, school partners, etc. Cities to be announced (Fall 1998).
- Training design and delivery for three national America Reads **training events**.

The Southern Regional Council is a non-partisan, non-profit organization which works to promote racial justice, protect democratic rights, and broaden civic participation in the Southern United States.

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