

Resilience AmeriCorps Academy Biographies

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Aubrey Cooley

Where is your hometown?

Galesburg, Illinois is where I was born, but I was raised almost all of my life in Fort Worth, Texas and consider it my hometown.

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study?

I graduated from the University of North Texas in December 2015 with a Bachelor's Degree in Emergency Management and Planning with a minor in Public Administration.

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

I served as an AmeriCorps VISTA Team Lead for CitySquare, a nonprofit in Dallas, Texas over this past summer. I provided educational enrichment, play and a nutritious meal to youth in low-income neighborhoods through their Food on the Move program, which provided meals and activities to the children in low income housing and mobile homes. It was the hardest job I ever had, since summer in Texas guarantees temperatures in the 100s, but the children I served inspired me daily and made my experience spectacular.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

I will be increasing disaster preparedness in vulnerable communities in areas of high disaster risk, with limited English proficiency. Building partnerships with key community partners in the community and conducting outreach to local agencies and organizations. I will be addressing the poverty that the community residents face and the disaster risks and what the community residents see as threats.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

What resilience means to me is, that no matter what happens to you, your family, your community, and no matter what your socioeconomic status is, there is hope and a solution to whatever you are facing. It also means that you will end up stronger and better after rebuilding so if there is another drastic event, you will be more prepared and it will not knock you off of your feet. I hope to convey that to the community that I spent my life in and will be serving through AmeriCorps. I want to better understand their situations, and to build partnerships with community partners who have the same passion as I do, which is to make their communities thrive.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

In college I studied Emergency Management, and what inspired me the most was studying vulnerable populations. After seeing the absolute loss vulnerable populations can go through, especially in a disaster, I wanted to make a difference and be a part of building resilient communities. The service I'm doing as an AmeriCorps VISTA member through the Disaster Resilience Project is the service I want to make a career out of and I'm extremely excited to see what this year will teach me.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I hope to learn as much as I possibly can about Disaster Response, vulnerable populations, and community outreach. I'm really looking forward to building relationships and make my hometown prepared as possible.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

After my year of service I hope to find a job, preferably a nonprofit, that really reflects what I did in AmeriCorps. I want to travel, volunteer and hopefully make a difference in my community, whether it's here in Fort Worth or somewhere else!

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Ayanna Woodberry

Where is your hometown?

Hometown: Florence, SC

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

Attended Pace University in New York City. Graduated from Virginia Union University with a B.S. in Biology in May 2016. Currently attending Graduate School at the University of South Carolina, studying Public Health

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

No, this is not my first time serving in AmeriCorps. This will be my second time serving in AmeriCorps (first time as a VISTA). My first AmeriCorps term was with the City of Richmond, VA (AmeriCorps State). My project site was Camp Diva, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering teen girls ages 11-17. My tasks included developing and scheduling programs that support the mission of Camp Diva, engaging and mobilizing volunteers, representing Camp Diva at public events and meetings, and assisting with fundraising events.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

In October 2015, Columbia, South Carolina experienced a series of devastating floods. Even after a year, communities are still struggling to get back on their feet. As a result, I will be working to develop programs and tools to better equip low-income communities in the Columbia area, to prepare for and address the risks from substantial disruptions. In addition, I will be conducting a needs assessment in order to determine those risks and needs. I will then use that data to create a preparedness plan for the area.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

Resilience is more than just preparing the community for a disaster. It also involves increasing the capacity of a community to be able to adapt to a changing environment. I am helping to build community resilience during my year of service by developing a preparedness plan that takes the changing environment and needs of the community into account.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

I have always had a passion for assisting the under-served. My father, Leo Woodberry is very active in the community, so it is just a natural part of life for me. I want to make giving back at a lifelong commitment.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I would like to complete my year of service knowing that members of the Columbia community feel more prepared for substantial disruptions. I also hope to implement some of my program ideas that could help to decrease many of the different vulnerabilities, such as: poverty, health status, and levels of literacy.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

I am interested in serving another term with AmeriCorps, while I complete my MPH in Public Health. My ultimate goal is to attend Medical School. I would like to continue to be active in the community while specializing in pediatrics and opening up a free medical clinic for community members who do not have insurance.

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Edwin Torres

Where is your hometown?

Spokane, WA

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

Gonzaga University. BA in Spanish and Latin American Studies

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

1st time serving in AmeriCorps.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

My service objective is to build resilience capacity in communities at high risk of natural disaster and to provide effective disaster preparedness for populations with limited English proficiency, who tend to experience an increased level of trauma, unpreparedness and exclusion during a disaster.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

To me resilience means having the awareness of how disasters can affect you and taking the necessary measures of preparedness. It also means having the knowledge to know what your resources are in the case of a disaster and proactively engaging with other people and resources to better prepare for any emergency. I hope to build community resilience by helping to create effective avenues of communication between vulnerable populations and organizations that aid in times of disaster.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

I had previously served with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps abroad and loved the experience. I believe service can be a life defining moment for an individual and is an act of true citizenship and love for one's country and community. This position offered me a chance to share my gifts and talents for a greater community cause.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I hope to be able to create an effective network of volunteers, organizations and communities that can begin to unite and discuss ways to help each other in preparation for any disaster. What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

After service I would like to return to school to earn a master's degree. I am not exactly sure in what but I am leaning toward the medical field.

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Gabrielle (Gabi) Hane

Where is your hometown?

Warrenton, MO

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

I graduated with a B.A. in Intercultural studies with a concentration in elementary education and a minor in Spanish from Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri. I went on to obtain a Masters of Public Administration degree with an emphasis in local government from Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri.

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

This is my first time serving with AmeriCorps. As a VISTA, I am building disaster resiliency in Greene County, Missouri with Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

The goal of our disaster resilience program is to provide access and opportunities to grow in individual and neighborhood disaster preparedness and planning to all Greene County residents, including those with limited English proficiency (LEP). I partner with local community organizations, neighborhoods, and emergency management to foster communication between parties, develop materials, and facilitate workshops.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

Resilience is not merely the ability to return to normal; resilience implies a fortitude that enables an individual or community to overcome difficulties with courage through pre-planning and teamwork. By bridging the gap between neighborhoods and emergency management, we bring parties together and spark discussion that will incorporate the needs of all community members during disaster planning.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service? When I lived abroad, I often wondered what I would do if a crisis or emergency arose. No one had explained to me how the government handled emergency situations or if there were local organizations that would assist in times of need. Language and culture can hinder the safety of individuals and communities. I desire to break down those barriers by providing a clear and communicable message of hope which is accessible to all.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I have three main goals for my first year of service. First, I desire to help five neighborhood associations start the disaster planning process and open direct communication channels between the neighborhoods and the local Office of Emergency Management and Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD). Second, I will form a sub-committee for the Greene County COAD with representatives from vulnerable populations (low-income neighborhoods, non-English speakers, those with access and functional needs, etc.). Finally, I look forward to continuing to build partnerships between agencies to provide free monthly workshops on disaster preparedness and resilience in English and Spanish.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

After finishing my year of service, I plan to assist NGOs in the start-up process create structure and develop policies and procedures. There are two organizations that may need my assistance, one of which would be a disaster response organization in Indonesia.

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Johannes Dreisbach

Where is your hometown?

Marquette, Michigan, 49855

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

University of Michigan – Ann Arbor
Political Science and Creative Writing

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

No. Did a VISTA year in Denver, Colorado from August 2013-2014. Worked with an education advocacy organization called A+ Denver (recently rebranded as A+ Colorado), where I helped write and edit reports showing where Denver's schools were failing. Also ran the organization's social media accounts.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

I am working in the Mayor's Office in Chicago, working on the Resilience team (part of 100 Resilient Cities). I have helped write reports, and will be developing a volunteer impact project in the city as well.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

Resilience is the ability to be faced with a challenge and persevere. I hope to help Chicago's homeless population during my year, but my project is still in the development stages.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?
N/A

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I hope to create a successful volunteer program in the city that continues and grows after my year of service has ended.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

Undecided. Grad school or career.

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Julia Pedrosa

Where is your hometown?

Alexandria, VA. But I moved to Brazil when I was 3 years old and just came back to the U.S. for the AmeriCorps VISTA program and to pursue my Master in Public Administration. Even though I was born in the U.S., most of my life was spent in Brazil. I'm glad to be back at my home country to serve.

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

University of Brasilia, Brazil. Bachelor in Communications and Journalism.

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

Yes.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

I work with disaster resiliency for the Latino community of Kansas City. My goal is to integrate Hispanic organizations with Emergency Preparedness communities, building a strong network that could better inform local Latinos on how to prepare for disasters.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

For me, being resilient is about progress. Resiliency is not just about overcoming a disaster or a bad situation and coming back to how things were before – it's about using that negative experience as leverage to build an even stronger community, with more opportunities and happiness.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

I really identify myself with the Latino community and it was a dream of mine to help Hispanics living in the U.S. to have more equal opportunities. When I heard I was going to work with Latinos I was really excited to serve and be a part of this amazing program.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I hope to be able to integrate the Latino community into the rest of Kansas City. We are all neighbors, everybody here deserves the same amount of opportunities. Hopefully, by creating a

more resilient Hispanic community in Kansas City, the opportunity gap will close a little and we're all going to be stronger as a hole.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

I hope to complete my Masters in Public Administration and work for a nonprofit, preferably still related to Latino communities in the U.S.

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Kelsey Byrne

Where is your hometown?

Wayne, PA 19087

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

Princeton University 2014, Politics | University of Southern California 2016, MPP

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

This is my first time serving in AmeriCorps.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

For my year of service I am working with Enterprise Community Partners on their Most Vulnerable Populations team. I am expanding a program called Enterprise Homes Plus that connects residents of affordable housing to critical and quality services in their neighborhood through a mobile tech-based platform. Additionally, I am developing and implementing a framework for how Enterprise can serve as a platform for income and wealth building. Through these activities, I am helping to address concentrated poverty and inequality in New York City.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

Because of the work that I am doing, I think about resiliency through an economic and housing lens. I am building community resilience by ensuring that home is a platform for opportunity and a place where individuals and families can feel financial secure, personally secure, and healthy.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service? My previous volunteer work and passion for community/economic development inspired me to serve as an AmeriCorps.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I hope to create a place-based network of support for residents of East Harlem and ensure that the program is scale-able and can be easily replicated. I also hope that all of the preparation work is in place for Enterprise to continue work in the income and wealth building area for residents of affordable housing.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

After my year of service, I hope to stay within the community/economic development and housing industry in New York City and build upon the lessons, knowledge, and partnerships I have gained from working with Enterprise Community Partners.

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Lars Anderson

Where is your hometown?

Rockford, IL

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

Valparaiso University
Civil Engineering

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

Yes, this is my first service year.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

As part of the larger Resilience AmeriCorps initiative, I am seeking ways to enable resilience building in the greater Austin community, especially within disadvantaged populations. Sponsored by Lutheran Services in America and placed at Upbring Disaster Response, I am tasked with developing a program that provides a resilience toolkit and training to people in my growing network. The toolkit will then be shared through conventional avenues as well as additional trainings provided to the networks of people willing and already trained. The toolkit will be adaptable to both populations in recovery and populations yet informed on the recovery process. Mine will be a pilot program which may be further reviewed and improved by future VISTAs.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

Scholarly definitions aside, resilience means understanding and combatting that which is or may harm a person's ability to live well. Certainly, potential events threaten this ability daily and differently in the lives of individuals in community, but we can learn ways to cope, and in more than just a psychological way. I am hoping to build resilience by tapping into and strengthening specific coping mechanisms, and creating that which I detailed above to accomplish this continuously, especially after I leave.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

Such an important question to reflect on. Several mentors have inspired me to seek a calling and a purpose which connects my academic learning, community service, and career aspirations and

I've been constantly seeking and being affirmed that my position here in Austin is doing so. This year is an intentional commitment to community service, and I intend my work to be informed by my learning and to bring me closer to my aspirations.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I hope to create a pilot program which accounts for specific characteristics and needs of the community and contains a teachable training and adaptable toolkit. I hope to adequately test its ability to build resilience and provide the necessary information to the person who will continue the program.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

This year seems like a great opportunity to find out! I've yet to make any, but intend to work within the larger sphere of global humanitarianism. I'm captivated by the concept of resilience and already anticipating its potential influence in my career aspirations. I'm taking full advantage of the personal networking this year is affording me.

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Laura Jenkins

Where is your hometown?

St. Charles, MO

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

B.A. in Psychology from Concordia University in St. Paul, MN

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

This is my first time serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA!

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

My role is to help build the capacity of Lutheran Family and Children Services of Missouri by developing and implementing community need assessments and congregational inventories for those communities with the highest percentage of households living below poverty level in Jefferson County, Missouri. Some of the problems we will be addressing will be on reoccurring floods, disaster preparedness, unmet needs, and lack of resources within the communities.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

For me resilience is a community's ability to prepare, survive, and adapt to stresses and shocks. Resiliency is built through empowering communities in their efforts before a disaster strikes, learning through experiences, and acting on lessons learned post disaster. Through LFCS I hope to help develop a Community Resilience Network that will help support and meet the needs of the community.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

I have always had a heart for helping those in need and have found it alarming that many of the resources that are available are only located in highly populated, urban areas. It is troubling to me that the people in rural populations are often left out because of a lack of resources and funding. The resources that are available in these areas are often limited and difficult to access. This can enable the poverty cycle to continue in many communities. I know that it is difficult but I want to make an impact on those communities and to help them know how to access the limited resources that are available to them. I also want to be a part of the conversation that helps bring the issue of poverty to the forefront of communities like Jefferson County, MO.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

In the upcoming year I will focus on building strong relationships between Lutheran congregations and their communities to help support and meet the needs of those stricken by poverty within Jefferson County. These congregations would assist in providing life changing resources to help those in poverty to be more informed and better prepared before disaster strikes.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

After my year of service I plan to pursue a Master degree in Public Administration and continue to work with underserved communities through non-profit organizations. My ultimate goal is to work with foster kids that are aging out of the system become self-sufficient.

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Leigh Scudder

Where is your hometown?

I am from New Fairfield, Connecticut, and continue to live there.

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

I graduated from Western Connecticut State University in 2013 with a BA in History.

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

This is my first time serving in AmeriCorps. Specifically I am a Resilience AmeriCorps VISTA at the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery in New York State, working out of New York City. Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

I am involved in projects concerning both social and physical resiliency in the state. These include:

1. Implementation/support of the NY Rising Community Centers Pilot Program – The purpose of this program is to support community based organizations around the city who provide social services, by strengthening their ability to serve their communities immediately following a disaster. Additionally, this program helps fund retrofits (i.e. generators, flood barriers) for essential community facilities so they will function better post-disaster.
2. I develop maps using geographic information systems (GIS) to support both project implementation and communication.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

To me resiliency is future-proofing your people and your places. It is ensuring that a disaster, shocks, and stresses do not define where you live and the people who live there.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

I was inspired to serve because:

- I see New York as one of the finest states in this country, and New York City as a global city with unmatched diversity. What better place to make transform into a beacon of resilience?
- I am interested in a career in urban planning. There are many ways one could kick off this sort of career, but I think that a unique government office that engaged in a

grassroots planning process from the very beginning is a unique, ideal, and a formative experience for a planner – especially since I am approaching the work as VISTA.

- Finally, I was interested in the unique partnership between NGOs and federal agencies that developed the Resilience AmeriCorps initiative.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

After I finished my service, I hope to begin my graduate education the following fall.

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Sara Chin

Where is your hometown?

Oceanside, NY

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

State University of New York College of Environmental Science & Forestry (SUNY ESF), Syracuse, NY

Environmental Resources Engineering

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

This is my first time serving in AmeriCorps.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

I am working with the NY Rising Community Reconstruction (NYRCR) Program at the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery (GOSR) in their implementation of project plans developed through community engagement across the state of New York. These plans are focused on recovering from Superstorm Sandy, Tropical Storm Lee, and Hurricane Irene – and on building resilience to future severe storms. The problems that I am addressing through the projects I am working on include the disproportionate effect of severe storms, sea level rise, regular precipitation, and high tide events on residents of low-to-moderate income.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

To me, resilience means to be as least debilitated as possible by – or, ideally, to be completely unaffected and even benefit from – shocks and stresses. This requires a community-wide understanding of local shocks & stresses and knowing how to prepare for consequential threats & hazards. Part of this preparation must be embedded in the infrastructure that supports the community – however, community members must also know how to respond in emergency situations.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

I graduated from my undergraduate program with a certification as an Engineer In Training (EIT) and a need for an experience that would guide my career decisions. I was hesitant to embark on

an engineering career without feeling anchored in my aspiration to work on some of the most historically neglected and – in my opinion – most urgent issues: climate change and sea level rise. I wanted my experience to help me connect with communities that are most severely impacted by these issues. At my site, I've been able to gain insight on what it's like to mitigate the consequences of climate change and sea level rise from the perspective of a state office. I would like to use this and future experiences to work on preventing or alleviating these consequences by making changes to their root causes.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

With my remaining time in my service year, I would like to provide sufficient support for several watershed-level projects that are currently undergoing implementation through my site – including the compilation of materials that could guide the development of a workforce development program that would train people in skills required to maintain these projects and facilitate mobility to higher-level technical careers.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

My plans after I finish my year of service are to work on resiliency projects as an engineer (i.e. designing low-impact coastal protection, living shorelines, and stormwater management systems; or enhancing water supply/water treatment facilities to be more resilient to shocks & stresses; etc.) and possibly attend graduate school with the goal of becoming certified as a Professional Engineer (PE). At some point after receiving my PE license, I might consider changing career paths towards developing policy to facilitate and encourage best practices that would contribute to community resilience.

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Sarah Malwal

Where is your hometown?

Hometown: Fargo, ND

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

Currently attending North Dakota State University. Studying Human Development and Family Science specializing in Adult Development and Minor in French. Will be graduating May 2017.

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

Yes, it's my first time serving in AmeriCorps. I'm glad I chose to be serving AmeriCorps.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

I started with two projects; one is disaster preparedness and Growing Together Community Gardening. The state of North Dakota has been experiencing floods, tornado and blizzard. Due to that I will be working with the New American community in preparedness for such weather conditions. I have started conducting the needs assessment with the New American community leader on preparedness. Also with community gardening. The community garden in Fargo will be replicating to Grand Forks and Bismarck the capital of North Dakota. I will be working with Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota in Grand Forks and Bismarck to replicate the community garden.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

Resilience, to me it's means to rebuild, recover quickly, to improve. It's more than just preparing community for upcoming disaster. I'm helping the community by assessing their needs to increase resilience in our community.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

I was introduced to AmeriCorps by a friend who served as AmeriCorps Promise Fellow. I have always had the passion to do something for my community and She introduced me to AmeriCorps VISITA. I fell in love with the program so I decide to become a member. Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I hope to replicate Growing Together Community Garden in Grand Forks and Bismarck. I would like to have the New American community to be educated and prepared for disaster. Improve resilience in our community and decrease poverty.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

I am looking forward to continue in my education and take on what I have learnt during my service as an AmeriCorps VISITA member to improve our communities. I would be interested to join in a second year to serve as a VISITA member.

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Tamaria Kelly

Where is your hometown?

Buffalo, New York

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

MPA (Master of Public Administration) and Certificate in Nonprofit Management and Leadership from Binghamton University

B.A. in Sociology and Certificate in African American Studies from University at Buffalo

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

No, this is not my first time serving in AmeriCorps. This will be my third time serving in AmeriCorps (second time as a VISTA). My first AmeriCorps term was with Western New York AmeriCorps from 2009-2010. At WNY AmeriCorps, I served as an educator for middle school girls at the NativityMiguel Middle School of Buffalo under the Recovery AmeriCorps Builds Lives through Education (ABLE) program. For 2014-2015, I served as a Middle School Success Project Coordinator under the AmeriCorps VISTA program sponsored by the United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County. As an AmeriCorps VISTA, I worked closely with key community stakeholders to coordinate professional development opportunities. Also, I supported county-wide strategies to increase student graduation rates.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

As the Resilience AmeriCorps VISTA Leader for Lutheran Services in America, I am responsible for managing and supporting a network of VISTA members. I have been working with VISTA members at LSA member organizations to build resilience in low-income communities. The VISTA members are hosted and sponsored by members of the LSA Disaster Network, including: Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota, Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota, Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota, Lutheran Services Carolinas, Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri, and Upbring. The program will improve the ability of low-income communities to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse shocks and stresses, including natural and human-caused disasters, by implementing a variety of activities that will support the communities through assessment, risk mitigation, preparedness, volunteer training, and disaster services improvement.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

For me resilience is a journey; a thoughtful process that requires time, effort, and dedication. I lead Lutheran Services in America's Resilience AmeriCorps VISTA cohort to support community resiliency in their communities by conducting community-need assessments, risk mitigation, volunteer training and spread awareness of disaster preparation.

Who/what inspired you to serve?

I was inspired to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA Leader based on my past AmeriCorps experiences. I was interested in providing guidance to my fellow AmeriCorps members who are eager to improve the nation through public service. I am completely committed to the ideals of AmeriCorps. Volunteering for AmeriCorps has led me towards some of my ambitious goals as a public servant. I knew the AmeriCorps VISTA program will continue to allow me to gain real-world insight into many social issues that American cities endure.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

As the first Lutheran Services in America (LSA) VISTA Leader for the Resilience AmeriCorps VISTA program, I hope to build a solid foundation of support for current and future LSA Resilience AmeriCorps VISTA members.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

I want to take the social aspects of what I have learned from AmeriCorps to the next level. I am interested in working for the federal government. I would like to work for a federal agency that fits the skills I have acquired from my education, AmeriCorps VISTA, and work experience.

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Tasia Limonius

Where is your hometown?

Bronx, NY 10467; Loganville, GA 30052 (born and raised in the Bronx, high school and college in GA)

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

Kennesaw State University- Human Services and Business Management

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

No, I served a year in FEMA Corps. My team and I were able to work at the Area Field Office in Colorado Springs, CO for round 1, Sandy Recovery Office in Queens, NY for round 2, and the Joint Field Office in Jefferson City, Missouri in round 3. We were trained in Public Assistance which focuses on the repairs of public facilities.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

I am the Team leader for a team of 10 (once at full capacity) who will be working on disaster preparedness capacity building for LEP communities. It is my duty to provide resources for them, support them, develop them as leaders, and help them through their service through being a mentor, liaison, educator, and ambassador.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

Resilience means to me, being able to recover from a difficult or tough situation. In disasters, that is always the goal, to help people get pieces of their lives back to how it was. Through my service this year, I will be helping my team help build resilience in their communities by providing training opportunities, resources, idea sharing, brainstorming on events and ways to engage communities, and help get a vested interest about preparedness.

Who/what inspired you to serve?

I have always had a strong love for service and have always felt as though it was my duty to give back in any way that I can. I grew up in the church, so I started doing community work and volunteering at a very young age. My family and our story inspire me to be better and play a part in every community that I can. For me, service is love, and it is a way to bring light to dark situations and hopefully make a real difference. It is not a burden or hindrance, but simply an honor to give beyond yourself and care for everyone else on this earth. Service is my life.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I hope to have helped my VISTAs accomplish both their professional and personal goals and to help them through all of the hardships that may be happening during their service year. I want to help them be successful at their job and make it through the year with no regrets.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

After the program, I hope to start grad school and hopefully start an amazing job. Where you may ask? Well, let's see where the wind takes me!

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Tavis Leighton

Where is your hometown?

Minneapolis, MN

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

I graduated from Yale University in May 2016 with a B.A. in Economics.

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

This is my first time serving with AmeriCorps.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

I am working with Camp Noah, an organization that engages with children in areas affected by disasters. Camp Noah runs summer camps that teach resilience and preparedness skills, and give children a safe space to tell their stories. My job involves designing and implementing a complementary seminar for adults in these communities. This will help parents to build resiliency skills both for their and their children's wellbeing.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

To me, resilience is a measure of how well a community can cope with adverse circumstances. Camp Noah helps to build community resilience both by teaching preparedness skills, and by helping individuals and groups to build confidence in their ability to overcome these circumstances. In my role, I will expand the reach of this message within communities.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

I am serving with AmeriCorps in order to ground myself in what is important in life.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I would like to design a program that addresses the needs of parents after disasters.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

I do not have plans for what I will do after I finish my year of service.

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Trevor Riley

Where is your hometown?

Cedar Rapids, Iowa

What is your Alma Mater? What did you study? (if applicable)

University of Iowa. Environmental Planning and Philosophy

Is this your first time serving in AmeriCorps? If not, give us a brief overview of your previous service experience.

Yes.

Just a few sentences of what you are doing for your service and what problems will you be addressing in the community you are serving in.

I'm working with Chicago's Chief Resilience Officer to develop a strategy for resilience as well as creating a capacity building program to empower and support vulnerable communities. My goal is to address civic engagement issues and facilitate better communication and cooperation between community-based organizations and city agencies in order to better address the issues plaguing Chicago's neighborhoods.

What does resilience mean to you? How are you helping build community resilience during your year of service?

The ability to withstand disruptions to systemic harmony and develop and implement strategies to make our communities stronger.

Who/what inspired you to serve? Or what inspired the development/extension of your service?

I was unsure which direction to take after college, and figured that committing to a year of service through AmeriCorps would be a good way to offer support to some of our country's most vulnerable communities while deliberating on my future.

Tell us what you hope to accomplish in the next year.

I hope to develop a mini-grant program based on the Love Your Block model which would accelerate community-based neighborhood revitalization initiatives.

What are your plans after you finish your year of service?

I intend to find work in community organizing in order to continue developing the capacity of resident-led efforts to transform their communities.

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