

ISSUE BRIEF:

Stories of Americans With Disabilities in National Service



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



LEARN AND SERVE

Nick (not his real name)

Current Volunteer, Tucson, AZ

Disability: Developmental Disabilities



Everyone Reads Service Learning Project engages students ages 18-21 from Project Accessing Post-Secondary Settings (APS), a transition program for students with developmental disabilities in the Tucson Unified School District, to work cooperatively with the instructional staff at Davis Bilingual Magnet Elementary. Twice a week, students from Project APS spend two hours with the Davis students reading picture books and creating art projects. Nick, who did not feel comfortable reading because of a speech disability, practiced at home with a book. His first reading was met with wild enthusiasm by the first-graders. He has since read the book to many other groups

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and dramatically increased his self-confidence when speaking in front of a group. The Davis first-grade students are enthusiastic to work with Nick and other APS students in their classrooms. Through this active participation in Project APS, high school students with disabilities like Nick, who are typically the recipients of service and support, now have the opportunity to contribute to their community, regardless of their disability.

AMERICORPS STATE AND NATIONAL

Michael Tada

AmeriCorps Alumnus 2001, Oahu, HI

Disability: Developmental Disabilities

Michael Tada served in AmeriCorps for a year in 2001 at Goodwill Industries as a mentor. Serving in AmeriCorps gave him an opportunity to let people know that just because he has a disability does not mean that he cannot do it. "I can do anything anyone else can do! I want to give back to the community that has given me so much," explains Michael.

Serving in national service was also a stepping stone to gainful part-time employment. Since October 2006, Michael has worked part-time at the Hawaii Center for Independent Living as an advocate and is president of the Self-Advocacy Advisory Council (SAAC). He is currently the SAAC liaison to the APPLAUD project, a National Service Inclusion Project. Michael also helps out with fundraising needs at Easter Seals on an ongoing basis.

AMERICORPS VISTA

Jane Jordan

Current Volunteer, Holmes, PA

Disability: Blindness

Jane Jordan is an AmeriCorps VISTA at PathWaysPA serving Delaware and Philadelphia counties, where she works on media and communications to promote projects that increase self-sufficiency for low-income individuals. She is totally blind.

"My service as an AmeriCorps VISTA has constantly challenged me to improve myself and has taught me that I am a strong person. I am learning valuable job skills that I can transfer to any other job. I also get the satisfaction of knowing that my articles, published in several newspapers, and my interviews, produced on local radio shows, have informed people who need assistance to obtain resources such as food stamps and TANF assistance that will meet their basic needs."

SENIOR CORPS

Millie Rusk

Foster Grandparent since 1999, Laramie, WY

Disability: Blindness

Millie Rusk volunteers as a Foster Grandparent for Cathedral Home for Children. She is legally blind. Although she has no grandchildren of her own, she is affectionately called Grandma Millie, which makes her very proud. Grandma Millie volunteers in elementary schools in Laramie. She has an Atlas 600 Reading Machine that allows her to tutor children in reading and writing at the Thayer and Beitel schools. The children love to have the help of Grandma Millie and look at her special reading machine. She has received many accolades from the school where she has volunteered. In fact, when one school celebrated reading more than 2,000 books, the Cat in the Hat made an appearance and read a short poem that included a sentence about Grandma Millie. Everyone over the past eight years has felt the love, dedication, and compassion that Grandma Millie brings to the classrooms.

“ *My service as an AmeriCorps VISTA has constantly challenged me to improve myself and has taught me that I am a strong person.* ”

AMERICORPS NCCC

Joe Tierney

AmeriCorps NCCC Alumnus 2001 and 2002, Charleston, SC

Current Location: Boston, MA

Disability: Traumatic brain injury

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

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

The Corporation for National and Community Service improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs, the Corporation provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities. For more information, visit www.nationalservice.gov.

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