



**WEST VIRGINIA'S PROMISE**  
THE ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH

AmeriCorps Promise VISTA  
Reflections from my year of service  
2008-2009

**West Virginia's Promise AmeriCorps VISTA Project**

The West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts supports West Virginia's Promise-The Alliance for Youth. West Virginia's Promise is a statewide organization supporting the Five Promise's of the national organization America's Promise; Caring Adults, Safe Places, Healthy Start, An Effective Education and Opportunities of Help Others.

The America's Promise Alliance grew out of the Presidents' Summit for America's Future in 1997, at the gathering in Philadelphia, Presidents Clinton, Bush, Carter and Ford (with Nancy Reagan representing President Reagan), challenged America to make children and youth a national priority.

West Virginia's Promise Statewide Director, Pamela Dugan is the Project Manager of the AmeriCorps VISTA Project.

AmeriCorps\*VISTA is a national service program that addresses the problems of poverty by providing people of diverse backgrounds and ages with an opportunity for full-time community service. VISTAs serve for a year term, addressing the needs of disadvantaged communities by developing permanent infrastructure for organizations and securing resources for human and civic development.

VISTA members serve to coordinate and develop new and existing programs to improve the lives of children and youth in West Virginia. The members identify stakeholders; bring groups together to form partnerships and secure grant funding for youth serving programs.

In our first year, 5 AmeriCorps VISTA members within the West Virginia's Promise project have generated the following resources for their communities:

- Number of new volunteers recruited: 294
- Total hours of service performed by community volunteers: 2,143
- Dollar value of cash resources: \$13,100
- Dollar value of non-cash resources: \$27,091



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**County:** *Wood*

- 1. Why I decide to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA...** I decided to serve as an AmeriCorps Promise VISTA because I wanted a chance to give back to my community.
- 2. During my term, I...** during my term, I have met some wonderful people and made connections that will hopefully last a long time. I have truly enjoyed my service.
- 3. ...made the biggest impact on me. (Why? How?)** – The thing that has made the biggest impact on me is meeting the youth from the Gustke Shelter because of the things that they have endured during their childhood. I met one particular youth who has been in the system since he was 11 months old and his own mother had turned him onto heroine at a very young age. This child was at the shelter for quite a while but now living with his dad and has emailed me to thank me for being there. The youth are taught by a teacher in the building where my office space is located which has allowed me to get acquainted with many of the children and hear their stories.
- 4. I've gained...** I have gained a lot of understanding about why youth struggle with school and home life and how I can help just by being his friend.
- 5. My future plans...** My future plans are to serve another year as an AmeriCorps VISTA and then hopefully find a position working with the youth.







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**County:** *Wood*

- 1. Why I decided to serve as an AmeriCorps Promise VISTA...** I decided to serve as an AmeriCorps Promise VISTA because I wanted to learn more about my community and give back to my community cause I felt my community had given so much back to me in many different ways.
- 2. During my term, I...** Have learned so many different things, I feel the things I learned made the biggest impact on me by making me more mature and meeting so many positive influences.
- 3. I feel the things I learned .....made the biggest impact on me** by making me more mature and meeting so many positive influences.
- 4. I've gained...** Maturity, self confidence, and have learned a positive way to react to situations and to be a able to make a positive statement to youth and my peers.
- 5. My future plans...**are to attend college and get a masters degree in social work. This experience has let me know that I do want to work with youth!





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**County:** *Marion*

1. **I decided to serve as an AmeriCorps Promise VISTA** because I am very passionate about children and feel that the America's Promise Alliance Initiative is imperative to the success and well being of our children. I also wanted to dedicate a year of service to help the children, youth and families in my community and raise awareness of this initiative.
2. **During my term**, as the AmeriCorps Promise VISTA I was also able to serve as the Partners in Prevention Team Leader for the Marion County Family Resource Network. I have also coordinated several community events from family fun nights to community baby showers to a regional America's Promise Alliance High School Graduation and Dropout Prevention Summit. I have also attended various community events to display community collaborations.
3. The one responsibility that has made the **biggest impact on me** throughout my year of service was planning the America's Promise High School Graduation and Dropout Prevention Summit. I planned this day-long event for a region consisting of nine counties that was held at the I-79 Technology Park Research Center in Fairmont, WV. The summit was part of the WV's Promise statewide initiative to increase the number of students who graduate from high school and are college ready and raise awareness of the dropout crisis occurring both statewide and nationally. The planning and coordinating of this event was a task that was unfamiliar to me as I had never planned and coordinated an event so large. I had a limited budget so I had to ask for donations and was able to secure both the facility and the catering through donations. It was my greatest impact because I began planning the event shortly after beginning my VISTA ship and spent many months planning it. It was my biggest accomplishment throughout my VISTA ship as it was a great success.
4. During my time as a VISTA, **I've been able to gain** experience, networking capabilities, contacts, and other professional knowledge as well as the capability to design programs, brochures, and display boards. I've also had the ability to gain awareness of the area and the resources available to the community members. I've been able to increase my experience in planning and coordinating various community events.



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5. **My future plans** are to conclude my term of service as a VISTA as scheduled. After which time will I begin the position of Program Coordinator with AmberView.







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**County:** *Marshall*



1. **Why I decided to serve as an AmeriCorps Promise VISTA...** Two strong values of mine are volunteerism and life-long learning. I was familiar with VISTA and wanted to know more about this wonderful organization. So, in order to truly learn about it, I became a VISTA to serve my country and The Youth Club of Marshall County.
2. **During my term, I** am doing more partnership building. I have spent much time learning about the Dropout Prevention by attending Summits around the state. I hope to assist the county schools by collaborating with other organizations to promote efforts to combat this problem.
3. **...made the biggest impact on me. (Why? How?)** The various Summits made the biggest impact on me because I did not want to take the time to travel to the different locations but I'm so happy I did. I learned what different counties are doing in order to curtail this problem. I also met and made many contacts around the state.
4. **I've gained...** an appreciation for West Virginia's Promise and AmeriCorps by just doing it! The Youth Club of Marshall County offers caring adults, safe places a healthy start, an effective education and opportunities to help others.
5. **My future plans...** I still have six months to complete my one year term as an AmeriCorps VISTA. The Youth Club is a good organization and I hope I will see growth during the upcoming year.





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**County:** *Greenbrier*

- 1. Why I decided to serve as an AmeriCorps Promise VISTA...** I decided to serve because I wanted to use my year off from school in a good positive way to help others within my community but look at it as a lifelong learning experience. Being able to serve with WV's Promise has made me realize how effective the 5 promises to children/youth really are. I've loved every part of being a VISTA (except maybe doing reports) I've had the opportunity to meet so many different people and form great relationships with some.
- 2. During my term, I've** traveled the state; met new people; formed new connections with people; organized and hosted a regional High School Graduation and Dropout Prevention Summit in Greenbrier County. I covered region seven which involved Pocahontas, Webster, Fayette, Raleigh, Nicholas, and Clay Counties. I'm glad I had the opportunity to organize and plan this event; it was a great learning experience but also great to hear some of my fellow classmates talk about their views on the crisis in our region and talk about what got them through high school.
- 3. ... Made the biggest impact on me. (Why? How?)** My biggest/greatest impact throughout my service would have to be coordinating my own regional dropout summit. It was a great accomplishment for me for I have never planned or coordinated an event. Another impact for me is/ was being able to travel around the state of West Virginia to the regional high school dropout summits. Just having the opportunity to hear the youth speakers was just mind blowing to hear and think about what they've gone through. I could never imagine living like some of the youth have. I now keep an open mind about how someone has lived or what they've witnessed or may have experienced. You may think you know a person but you'll never truly know them until you've walked in their shoes.
- 4. I've gained...** a lot of self respect, self confidence, and learned not to be so judgmental about a first impression; even though a first impression says a lot about your character.
- 5. My future plans...** are to continue helping others in the best way that I can and know how. I plan to attend New River Community College in the fall and further my Nursing degree at Dabney S. Lancaster community College in Virginia. I would love to do another AmeriCorps VISTA position in the future it was lots of fun and a great experience for me. I hope/ will



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continue to have a good connection with my supervisor Pam Dugan. She has been a great inspiration to me.

