



UWEX AmeriCorps*VISTA Success Story

My Home in Bad River

By Kateri Bender, VISTA Member

There is a small rural community that's on an old reservation where I call home; its name is Bad River. This place seems to never change as I've grown up to see. The struggles and the lifestyles all seem to continue, but what does live on is hope. It is this sense of hope that I wish to spread through the community. What better solution than to be given a chance with that very opportunity to work with the communities own youth.

Birch Hill is a place where many children roam and play day and night without too much to look forward to. All the surroundings consist of neighboring houses, a shabby basketball court and a small play ground, with only a set of swings. This small park hangout is next to a house sized building called the community house. It is a place where kids can show up, play games, sign up for computers, join activities and be part of field trips.

It is here where they can experience trips and activities that may not otherwise be available at home. These children need mentors or people that they can look upon for advice. I've taken on a role as a community member and also as a VISTA to be a role model and someone who gives their time and effort toward positive activities for youth.

During this summer I have been a part of the community house and have gone on small trips, such as going berry picking which used to be a huge part of our tradition. A UW Extension worker named Joy helped to demonstrate how to use these fresh local berries to make healthy snacks they can use at home. UW-Extension office offered to loan out their dehydrator to use for fruit rollups along with the kettles to use for jarring our strawberry jam.

Using culture to express ideas and creativity is one way that seems to hit home for everyone and I being from a culturally active background myself. Sometimes we would just have out markers and paper and just come up with patterns that they would come up with themselves to use someday as a design for an outfit that they could use at one of the cultural



Pow-wow events. I would be away at one of these very events and I would occasionally see these kids there, enjoying the dances. They would greet me with hugs as they were familiar with me as being someone they see at home in the community and also as a dancer at the powwows.

One hot afternoon we ventured off picking up trash as I tried to express the importance of keeping our Earth clean as was tradition living off the land. I was told that some of the discussions I had with the kids about saving water and saving energy were topics that some used afterward. Marissa, a ten year old told her mother about the lesson about washing with cold water and taking the lint out after each use. When I heard that, I thought to myself that yes I did make a small difference. Sometimes that's all it takes is just a small step to spread change to one child. I take great pride in what I have accomplished and feel that I have set a good boundary and set of footprints for future students to follow. I shall continue to do so and hope that I can be of value for someone to look up to. I hope that the community house shall not be taken for granted, so that it will continue to get kids interested in quality skills and culture so they may live in a place where they will be glad to call home.