

Success Story
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Americorps Summer Vista & 4-H program

Someone once gave me this quote and I love it, as it puts into plain words how much this Summer Vista program has been a success. Sir John Lubbock said, "Earth and sky, woods and fields, lakes and rivers, the mountain and the sea, are excellent schoolmasters, and teach some of us more than we can ever learn from books." No book has taught me more than being in the garden itself, rather than reading about it.

How my Americorps and 4-H work this summer has been a success story?

Well, to start off, the following details are in no way complete or will describe every moment fully. I have heard of 4-H, but had certain mental images of cows and pigs, until this position was offered me. It was a name and icon with no understanding of what it stood for. When my service began, I really did not know much about gardening and was, admittedly, very nervous about the care of any type of plant for the Washburn School Garden and the New Day Shelter's garden. And, almost three weeks into the program went by and my perception of my job description was vague for both gardens. Not only that, I was also doubtful about teaching children about gardening since my background is in Native American Studies and anthropology, and my work with children has been inside a museum doing guided tours and checking out library books. It was a very intimidating task, with limited time.

At first, I was under the impression that my job consisted of computer work, and not so much garden maintenance. Most of the weeds looked edible to me. The principle of St. Louis school wanted the time with the

children to be educational, and this required the creation of simple curriculum every week. Thankfully, fellow Summer Vista Melissa Helman and I have made it through the summer successfully growing beautiful crops with help from teachers and kids in Washburn.

The New Day Shelter program was quite different than Washburn's. The staff did not know what my position really was. With questions answered, I have worked on a basic garden manual and have seen a diverse group of women and children focus their energy in a positive way. For example, one parent and her children volunteered to paint signs for the garden and donated much needed manure. She also organized a task force of other children to collect drift wood and rocks from the beach for the garden. Her and her children's smiles are my success.

This summer I have been honored to learn the basics of cultivation of fruits and vegetables from children, teachers, and fellow Vistas. But, the real "success" is to witness children and parents get excited about growing food and know the next generation has the seeds to continue in this work.