

## UWEX AmeriCorps\*VISTA Success Story

### Sprouting Seeds: In The Root Of A Summer Cycle.

by Melissa Helman, VISTA Member

The narrative isn't literally about sprouting seeds. The story is about using imagination to tell a story of great patience and hope. It is about a small taste of Anishinabe culture through various youth perceptions on tradition and culture; The faces of 4-H kids while they dive into the waves of Lake Superior; and the dedication of youth in the Washburn School district that have genuinely cared for the food in their school garden. The story is about the sprouting of three seeds into one vibrant flower.

"My Auntie lost her job last week, she doesn't know how she will pay for her rent" said Dude, a young boy from Birch Hill Community House, a center for youth on Bad River Reservation. "Looks like we are going to have to grow some food to eat because she doesn't know how she'll pay her bills" he says a few seconds later. Only able to listen, I sew my second bag together for the elder's and youth gathering the children will attend in a few days. "Oh" I say as my heart fills with sadness.

A few days later I find the children and I outside watering the plants we raised from seeds. I look to the south and see the traditional three sister's garden bed created from all native and saved seed for generations, the raised garden box beds made from a previous VISTA, and the joyful faces of the youth. Just a visitor and worker in the area, I have been able to dive headfirst into the



lifeways of the people. Just a small step into the culture of ancient teachings, I look toward my fellow team members for support and understanding.

Just one day after this event, I move to the Washburn School garden where another VISTA Melanie and I work with students from St. Louis School summer program on maintaining the school garden. The switch of environment is extremely dissimilar but the youth are the same; vibrant, intelligent, and creative. The energy and excitement of growing food is inside of the children naturally and it is a privilege to be able to see them grow in just two months. They are tiny seeds that have sprouted into full blossomed garden caregivers.

My job involved a lot of variety, but centered on youth, gardens, and their natural ability to create, grow internally and together as a network. The success I saw in the children's faces regardless of some of their economic or cultural situations was strengthening and comforting. The UW Extension support network made their resources, personal space and busy lives available and accessible during my VISTA experience. If it weren't for a lot of their generosity I could not have completed a Birch Hill Curriculum resource book filled with program development, activities we did with the children, and a step by step process of how to organize a summer program. The food in the school garden might be covered by estranged weeds, and the energetic children from the 4-H program might not have conquered their fear of kayaking along the shore of Lake Superior. Without support and care of those I worked with, my VISTA experience many have stayed in the shell of ready, but un-sprouted seed.