



GETTING THINGS DONE

A collaboration of the 2015 RurAL CAP VISTAs

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Thank you from your
VISTA Leader



Coming Together: 9/11 Service Projects

This year on September 11th, RurAL CAP VISTAs hung their capacity building hats up for a chance to come together and get out into the communities they serve to provide some hands on direct service to those who are in need. The Anchorage VISTAs chose between teaching financial literacy in an elementary school and helping weatherize and prepare new and unfinished homes with Habitat for Humanity.



Spotlight: Christy McDonald, ANTHC VISTA

Flying Ravn on a village visit



Holding an iceberg/ VISTA AK-style



Planning session at YES in Slana



In July-
Sept
Christy..



VISTA in Alaska: Everything Is Connected

-Built **11** community partnerships

-Created educational materials that reached **77 people** in rural Alaska

- Increased **17** individual's knowledge of the relationship between healthy homes and respiratory health

-Added **17** new beneficiaries that received services in the VISTA 6 Focus Areas.

Amazing Project Corner:

-Co-facilitated sessions at YES (Youth Environmental Summit)

-Wrote & Illustrated a **Children's book** about handwashing for the National Tribal Water Center (NTWC)

-Edited & illustrated a **coloring book** for the NTWC.

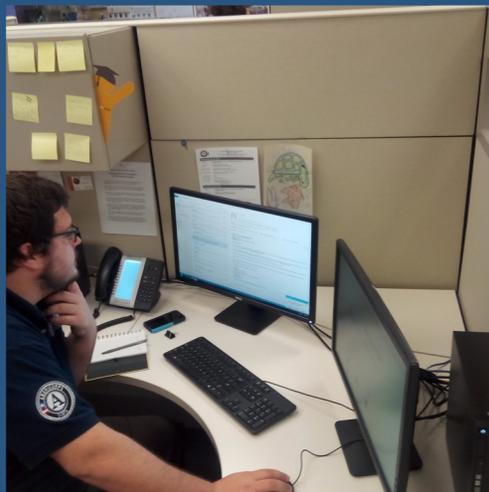
- Organized a project to shoot an **educational video** about heat ventilation systems (HRV's) in the traditional Yupik language

In August, I went on my first solo trip to a rural village to do educational outreach. I traveled out to Koliganek to visit a few homes and to provide the homeowners with educational resources about the importance of continuing to use their vents, range exhausts, and dry wood especially in the upcoming winter months. After my visits, I had to wait around for my plane, which was scheduled at 4:45PM, to come in. Since I typically travel with a co-worker and always follow their lead at this point, I was not sure what I should do with my few hours of wait time. I ended up heading back to the home of a woman who had offered to give me a ride to the airstrip when the plane did arrive. She was happy to see me back and welcomed me into her home. We sat and talked about our lives and what brought me to her village, which is quite a long story after explaining that I'm a AmeriCorps VISTA member from Pennsylvania. She brought out some dried halibut, some pilot bread, and made salmon spread and insisted I eat my fill. She even gave me a few jars of salmon to bring home. She then took me over to her mother's house where family members were gathered to eat some pike's heads. I got to try some pike's eggs and cheek, which were both very tasty, and some pike's liver, which I am glad I tried, but will pass on next time. We sat eating and talking until about 6:30PM without my plane arriving yet, so we decided to go up and wait at the airstrip. Eventually my plane came and I was able to leave Koliganek and get to Dillingham for the night. Because of the delayed plane, I missed my flight back to Anchorage, but I really did not mind at all.

Because of that delayed plane, I got to meet an incredibly welcoming woman and her family. I got to enjoy fresh salmon spread and pilot bread, and got to try dried halibut and pike's head, which is not something I would have gotten to try otherwise. ANTHC works to achieve it's vision that Alaska Native people are the healthiest people in the world. As a VISTA, I got to learn about this rural community and more about how Alaskan rural communities work in general and also formed a relationship with this sweet woman who I hope to meet again one day. This experience is a personal highlight of my VISTA service year and has gone on to help me understand my project's and communities' needs better. Being from Philadelphia and working out of Anchorage, it can be hard to understand how villages work, but having these moments and connecting with people in their homes and over their traditional foods, is the best way, I can think of, to learn more and serve better.

-Christy McDonald, VISTA at Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

Spotlight: Nick Mauro, ACT VISTA



At work, researching Grants



Having some Alaskan fun

In July- Sept Nick..

- Built **24** new partnerships which played a part to reach **108 clients** to participate in Alaska Children's Trust's health education programs
- Additionally contributed in **17** people who increased knowledge of between ACES and health
- Helped organize **1** Train the Trainer event in anchorage, & planned **5 free** Paper Tiger movie premiers around Alaska.
- Managed **17 volunteers** at ACT events.

A quick shout out to Nick Mauro for his amazing work at Alaska Children's Trust in August and September. Nick helped organize 5 free premiers (Juneau, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Palmer, and Homer) of the powerful documentary 'Paper Tigers' around the state of Alaska. This powerful film reached over 300 people in Alaska so far. Here is an article about the profound effect that the film and the panel discussion had on those who have participated:http://www.frontiersman.com/arts_entertainment/fighting-toxic-stress/article_392695fe-7361-11e5-b1c8-eb818e9a18fc.html

Also, thanks to Nick's efforts in promoting Alaska Children's Trust's Child Abuse Prevention Grant, they received about 53 applications (usually they get only 20) and were able to award \$150,000 to 18 organizations. For a list of the grantees: <http://www.alaskachildrenstrust.org/>

Great job Nick!! Keep up the amazing work!!

Paper Tigers, directed by James Redford, is an exciting new documentary that shows the level of impact trauma-informed practices can have on our children and youth. Paper Tigers looks at real life examples on how we can help our children heal from trauma and how healing is ultimately a more effective and cheaper response than punishment. The film is rated PG-13 for Adult Language and Content. [Check out the trailer for the movie](#)

Amazing Project Corner:

- Assisted in selecting ACT's child abuse prevention grants. with his outreach
- Created an Lending Library to loan out the **Paper Tiger DVD** to the community
- Coordinated a Fairbanks fundraising event that raised **\$12,695** for Alaska Children's Trust
- Consolidated over 8 years worth of **volunteer** information into a centralized database.
- Working as an outreach advisor for the UAA **Stalking the Bogeyman** Committee



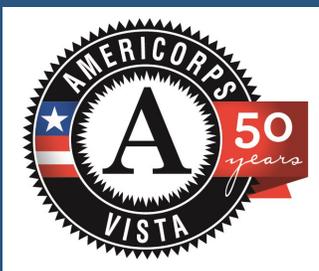
Spotlight: Anna Wong, The Resource Basket VISTA

In July- Sept Anna...

- Built **10** community partnerships
- Supported and provided training to **45** community members with the Resource Basket training platforms.
- Added **86** new resources to the Resource Basket website Opportunities and Resources Tabs
- Provided **3** trainings to the Alaska communities, Resource Basket staff members and fellow AmeriCorps volunteers

Amazing Project Corner:

- Serves on the RurAL CAP Advisory Board
- Created a **Welcome to Alaska Guidebook** for future VISTAs
- Was able to connect to AmeriCorps members and fellow VISTA members to write a piece for the Resource Basket Success Stories blog.
- Registered **49** participants for the 'Connecting Generations through culture' webinar in August



Basket Weaving with Sam Johns at RPC in Nome



Habitat for Humanity

Keeping Busy Transferring Knowledge

Many great things have happened in the busy month of September. As I near the end of the VISTA term, I am working to pass on the knowledge passed onto me! This month in addition to training RurAL CAP and Resource Basket staff on how to use the WordPress platform for website updates, I have also passed on the Adobe Connect How-To document to those who will continue using the platforms, I helped establish with this program in the past year. Another amazing opportunity I had this month is to work on creating a positive youth development toolkit geared specifically towards those working with youth in Alaska.

Having travelled to rural Alaska and heard the stories from those who live there, I am in the position as a VISTA at Resource Basket to connect the communities to the resources that empower their youth to succeed. Adding to the growing arsenal of opportunities that the Resources Basket offers to youth-serving such as grants and trainings, I hope to finalize content and begin weaving together all of my projects so that it can be passed on as a resource to those who directly work with the youth such as the new members of the RurAL CAP AmeriCorps Resilient Alaska Youth (RAY) program.

-Anna Wong, The Resource Basket VISTA



The
**Resource
Basket**

Spotlight: Henry Hundt, AYDC VISTA

Reflections on Perception

As VISTAs, we are charged with trying to make lasting, capacity building impacts on our site's community by leveraging personal aspirations toward specific needs. However, this process has an innate contradiction, that is, what a VISTA might see as best, may not be mutually shared by his or her site host. It is seemingly crucial then, that any project which hopes to enact significant lasting change must address this controversy of perception – often the success of the project depends on figuring out this puzzle.

Over the past month, I have been administering a survey regarding the resource library restructuring at Anchorage Youth Development Coalition. The idea behind the survey was to step back from the need (a new resource library) and ask why the need exists and what existing solutions people had. The survey, which was very successful in terms of response number and quality, asked for perceptions and feedback from staff and coalition members. The goal is to now take this data and structure it into a navigational tool for the development of the resource library. In my mind, this exercise was a success because it was not only a task that went well in terms of the normal completion criteria (something was accomplished), but it also enabled me to combat the perception biases mentioned above. We all have a great wealth of understanding about the potential we see in the community, but that enthusiasm must be tempered with observation if it is to make a lasting imprint and carried forward by the community after the VISTA's work is completed.

As myself and my coworkers move forward with Anchorage-wide focus groups on mental wellbeing and bullying, the hope is that a similar process will unfold. But here, the conversation about what is best is not just between the VISTA and the host site, but also the host site and all of Anchorage.

-Henry Hundt, Anchorage Youth Development Coalition, VISTA

In July- Sept Henry...

-Built **11** new partnerships which contributed to the total of **35 staff and individuals** receiving youth training through their AYDC association.

-**35** people who increased knowledge of best practices to promote youth success.

-Strengthened **30** organizations through capacity building services

-Recruited **13 volunteers** who served **21 hours** and managed **3** who completed a total of **12 hours**

Amazing Project Corner:

- Serves on the RurAL CAP Advisory Board

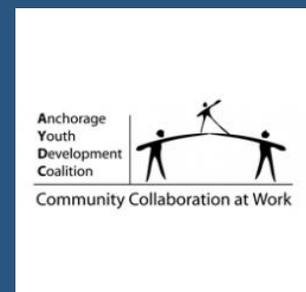
- Created an assessment survey to solicit feedback from the Anchorage community regarding putting together a **Resource Library**.

- Created a structure for and recruited **5** teens for his youth-lead community peer bullying assessment

Volunteer training



Lunch meeting with the team



Spotlight: Kathleen Mcauliffe, Elder Mentor VISTA



14 Elder Mentor Vol in Tuluksac village Putting out fires at Safety Expo in Palmer

Weekly meeting snapshot

**In July- Sept
KC...**

The Scoop: Being a Elder Mentor **WILL** change your life

- Build **15** community partnerships
- Recruited **37** new volunteers to the EM program
- Strengthened **30** organizations through capacity building
- Coordinated **5** Training and other professional development opportunities

**Amazing Project
Corner:**



- Completed the VISTA Blend Volunteer Mobilization course allowing KC to **create a sustainable recruitment program** for the Elder Mentor Program.

-Helped organize the filming of an Elder Mentor **TV commercial**

Working with the Elder Mentor Program and watching the transition of Elders as they begin their volunteer service is always amazing. In August, the elders could not get back into the classroom. One of the elders who is currently undergoing chemotherapy for a third bout of cancer did not want her treatments to interfere with her hours in the school, so she scheduled all her chemo treatments at the end of the day. We encouraged her to take time for herself and rest, but she insisted that the children were her life and she felt better being around the kids. One of the elders went out and bought all new brightly colored clothes because she felt that the kids would like that!

On the first day of school, one of the elders called to thank us for the program, she said her life has already started to change for the better because of what she is doing every day in the school. She said she has not been this happy in years. What a pleasure it is to recruit for and strengthen this program!

In the month of September, I was able to travel out to remote village of Tuluksac to recruit and train elders who are interested in being Elder Mentors. When I arrived, the elders started coming in to the school to hear the presentation on the Elder Mentor program. Every single elder that came in to school, completed an application and was oriented to the program. The elders, ranging from 55-95 years of age, came with a desire to work and help children in the school. Tuluksac is a very remote and needy community that relied on subsistence living. There are very few resources in the village. The elders that signed up for the program were very happy with the benefits this program offers its volunteers and were excited to get started. This is the first time we have gone into a rural community and signed up such a large pool of elders. The driving force behind this amazing success is a very supportive principal in the school, who played an integral role in getting the elders to participate. This village serves as a shining star to other remote villages that have the potential as well to get involved. By following the progress and sustainability of this program in the village, we will further learn the best approach to use in other rural settings, This is a major turning point in bringing the program to rural Alaska.

-KC Mcauliffe, Elder Mentor VISTA

Spotlight: Allison Bril, Ionia VISTA

Ally in one of the set up high tunnels

Ally facilitating a session at Harvest Moon



In July- Sept Ally...

-Organized **31** outreach and nutritional education events, as a result **364** community members increased their knowledge of local foods and nutrition out of which:

- **53** were youth

- **160** were elders

-Collaborated with **31** local stakeholders to host the community educational events

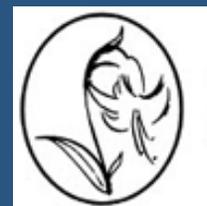
-Recruited **29** community volunteers who performed **298** hours of service

Amazing Project Corner:

-In-kind donations leveraged **\$3,060**, cash resources: **\$200**

-Working with the Kenai Local Food Group, creates and publishes a quarterly **Local Foods Newsletter**

- In addition to the Harvest Moon, Ally organized **5** free community talks on Local foods topics such as Macrobiotics and carbon saturation in Kenai.



Harvest Moon Festival: As it Happened

July 2015

This month we gave a presentation at the Soldotna Public Library about fermentation as a little teaser for Harvest Moon Fermentation Festival. 24 people attended and we were able to pass out posters for the upcoming Fermentation Summit. We were so focused on getting the numbers for these events and blitzing the airwaves and newspapers with the donated adverts. We are grateful to the Kenaitze Tribe for printing them for free for us. We are keeping our fingers crossed for a large Kenaitze tribe presence as well as families from all over the Central Peninsula to come out this year.

Last year the turnout was rather small—about 160 people came out. This year my personal goal is to have at least 300 people attend the various tours, classes and talks we worked hard to organize. The good news is that the donated advertisement templates for the festival will be able to be used year after year after I am done with my service year. We have received some very positive feedback on the program so far, so let's hope that folks come out this year!!

August 2015

Harvest Moon Local Food Festival exceeded our expectations. The keynote speakers were brilliantly spoken, charismatic and well received; the numbers of participants more than we had hoped. Feedback was very positive with lots of comments such as: "I can't believe this is all free", "Thank you so much for all your hard work, this was incredible for me", "I am going to start fermenting, now I know how to do it"; "What's happening next year? I can't wait".

Two partnerships came to fruition that hugely add to the Kenai Local Food Connection's ongoing sustainability: The Kenaitze Dena'ina Wellness Clinic (who donated \$500 for our keynote speaker fee, plus over \$1500 in expensive color printing, plus their staff hours and support, plus the use of their gorgeous and extensive facility. Also, the Central Peninsula Garden Club donated \$500 speaker fee plus \$250 facility fee for the use of the Kenai Visitor's Center. We also collected over 200 emails for the KLFC newsletter and almost 15 people signed up as possible volunteers in the future.

RurAL CAP VSITAs in Action



Thank You...

I would really like to thank you all for showing up everyday not because you 'Have to' but because you 'Want to'! We commit one year of our lives to make a difference we learn, grow and challenge our perceptions what is poverty and how we can make a sustainable difference. I stumbled on this beautiful piece by Shawn Murphy this past month and it made me think of how true is rings to our mission as VISTAs.

We Don't Need to Change the World

Leo Tolstoy stopped me in my tracks last week with a powerful reminder about change. He spoke to me, "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." The nobility imbued into changing the world cannot be something done outside ourselves. No. Changing the world is noble because it begins with each of us drawing a line in the sand. That line represents our choice to act to make things better for others. On one side is a way that no longer works. The opposite side is a way that redefines.

Tolstoy's wisdom pulls it back to us. To redefine he accurately noted that we can change the world by shifting how we, individually and collectively, look within to assess what we're doing that's not working for the greater good. You define the greater good based on your circumstances. Perhaps it's your team. Or your family.

Changing the world is an outcome of changing how we each respond to and connect with people. It's an outcome based on our choice of the other side that redefines. We change the world by softening our hearts to see how we can become more compassionate. Or more humble. Or more understanding of others. We change the world by a changed heart and actions that help, that make a difference.

We don't need to change the world. The world is what we've created through our choices. What we change is our hearts, our minds, our actions for the sole purpose of improving the spaces in which we live. -Shawn Murphy

Your commitment as VISTAs to making even the smallest difference in the community you chose to serve, makes me proud to work alongside each and everyone one of you! -Anna Boyko, RurAL CAP VISTA Leader