

DPI VISTA Monthly

January 2009

“To desire and strive to be of some service to the world, to aim at doing something which shall really increase the happiness and welfare and virtue of mankind – this is a choice which is possible for all of us; and surely it is a good haven to sail for.”

-Henry Van Dyke

Jane Grinde
Project Director

Betsy Prueter
Project Coordinator

Ruth Anne Landsverk
Family Education Coordinator

Casey Gauthier
Newsletter Editor

Getting Things Done...No Matter Where You Are Serving

This fall, VISTAs Michelle Traxel and Brendan Gants started their service at very different sites. Michelle is working to build partnerships in Spooner, a small town of about 2,500, while Brendan is working in Milwaukee, with a metro population nearly two million strong. For this month's newsletter, Michelle and



Brendan shared their reflections on their different sites, and on the opportunities and challenges that confront them as they pursue the VISTA mission to **Get Things Done.**

Q: How did working in a small town/big city affect the way you began your service?

Michelle: The phrase “everybody knows everybody” is fairly true in Spooner. As a new member to the community, the above phrase sounded more like “Michelle knows nobody.” As I became more involved in extracurricular activities and my mentor took me under her wing, I started to recognize more faces and found more access to resources.

Brendan: In such a large city, just identifying all the resources available in the area is an important starting point. Milwaukee offers a vast array of community resources and organizations working on issues relevant to our mission. The

opportunities for partnerships are endless. If you can imagine a project, you can probably find at least a few other groups in the city doing similar work.

Q: What have you learned about working in a small town/big city that others might be surprised to know?

Michelle: One may think a small town only has a gas station and a bar. Though this may be true in some small towns, Spooner has a lot to offer. To name a few partnerships, we have a community library, a family resource center, a UW-Extension office, churches, many restaurants, a dance studio, public schools as well as a private school. In comparison to a large city such as Milwaukee, these resources may sound limited; however, working with what you've got is the ultimate goal.

Brendan: Ironically, the fact that so many partnership opportunities exist in Milwaukee can sometimes pose a challenge to making any one partnership work. Community groups here, especially well-established ones, are inundated with requests for support. Out of necessity, they often respond by developing very specialized missions or limiting their list of community partners, thus forfeiting accessibility for manageability. The challenge for VISTAs is to identify which partnership opportunities are the most promising, and then to pursue them with determination.

Q: Is there anything about working in a small town/big city that makes VISTA work especially important?

Michelle: In my eyes, being a VISTA in Spooner has given me the opportunity to open more doors and connect to partnerships and challenge myself to find the “not so obvious partnership.” No matter where you serve, there will always be partnerships at your fingertips, you just need to have the audacity to go out there and search!

Brendan: One thing VISTAs working in urban areas soon realize is that many of the families we work with have even more difficulty accessing the resources they themselves need. Often they have little or inaccurate information, which makes tasks like obtaining a job or applying for FoodShare much more difficult. This challenge is one that should strengthen our



resolve to provide these families the tools they need to pull themselves out of poverty. And for those of us working in schools, we need to stress even more the importance of education for their children's

future success, so that it never gets lost in the day-to-day busyness of urban life.

Q: What impact do you feel you are making as a VISTA in a small town/big city?

Michelle: I think my VISTA service is making a large impact in Spooner. To make a large impact, some may think some HUGE things have to happen, but even if I help out one child or one family, I have made a large impact. This gives me hope that all VISTAs, no matter where they serve, will make a large impact and bring our nation one step closer to eliminating poverty.

We all doing powerful work, whether in a large city or a small town.

Brendan: I definitely think my VISTA service has made an impact so far; we've made some real progress in getting parents involved and getting started on some long-term projects. I'm hoping to build on this work in the months ahead, especially by expanding community partnerships and tying our efforts more closely to improving student achievement. I see it as my challenge every day to keep the momentum going at my schools so that the impact we're having can be a large and lasting one.

New Year's Resolutions: VISTA Style

By Betsy Prueter

This is the time when many of us will be adopting resolutions for the New Year. Behaviors we'd like to embrace for the year. Bad habits we'd like to discard. Here's a sampling of some VISTA style resolutions for you to consider. Happy 2009!

1. Avoid saying, "That will NEVER work."

Maybe it can work: if you look at it in a different way or come at it with a different angle. Statements like these bring a lot of negativity to a project. Remain positive and be creative! Sometimes even within an idea you can pull out some good practices!

2. Greet every person in your building with a smile.

It's easy to get caught up in our own thoughts as we're heading to work. But a simple smile or "hello" to everyone you pass in the hall, see in the office, or sit next to in the lunchroom is an important step in building relationships. And we know that relationships are key!



3. Make a concerted effort to reach out to new families in new ways.

Now that most of you are on your way with your volunteer and mentoring programs, Action Teams, and learning nights, it might be time again to recruit some new faces. Even if you've built a solid volunteer base, remember how important it is to include every family at your site in activities or programs, even if they can't physically attend. How can you reach them? How can you get important information to them?

4. Your new mantra: "The Action Team process is not a parent involvement program. It is a STUDENT SUCCESS program."

I repeat this to myself all the time. It's easy to look at our work and focus only on numbers. How many parents volunteered? How many members are on the action team, how many families came to your Family Learning Night? But

let's keep in mind that the reason we're all here is to help improve student success. All of these efforts directly impact student achievement.

5. Learn some neighborhood history.

Maybe you already know about the neighborhood surrounding your site, but chances are, there is still more to learn. How has the area changed? What has remained constant? Where do children and families gather?

6. Shatter misconceptions.

"Parents need a college degree to be able to contribute. Parents who want to be involved should be satisfied with joining the PTO. Principals should make the important decisions for the school." These are just some misconceptions that families or school staff members might have. Raising awareness of the mission and importance of the Action Team can only help.

What's WRONG with these Action Team activities?

By Ruth Anne Landsverk

As we continue to carry out the activities in our One-Year Action Plans, it's good to keep the basics in mind. Everyone loves a critic, so here's your chance to be one. Can you pick out the elements of the following Action Team activities - taken from real Action Plans submitted to DPI - that could use some improving? An upcoming column will feature

examples of "What's RIGHT" with Action Plans that DPI staff have come across.

What's wrong with this activity?

The school will hold a Family Math Night. Teachers and other school support staff will design activities for the night. Parents will be invited to bring treats and to attend.

Answer. Events are most effective when families are involved in all aspects of event planning, especially in decision making. Parents who help plan activities for the night, for example, will be sure to mention that more parents will attend if their children are enlisted to help demonstrate concepts and activities to the large group.

What's wrong with this activity?
The middle school parent advisory council will sponsor a parent forum on awareness of gangs in our community in February. Parents will be informed of it in the February school newsletter.

Answer. Use the "Rule of Seven" when communicating with families. The rule states that schools that communicate seven times and/or in seven different ways usually reach most families at least once. Communicate your school events for families in many more ways and occasions than once in the school newsletter!

What's wrong with this activity?
The Action Team will coordinate fundraising activities such as Box Tops for Education, milk top funding, IGA slip profits, and chili fundraiser.

Answer. This is fundraising, not partnership building. The school should provide some funding for the Action Team to meet and carry out its goals and activities. If additional funds are needed, families should help decide how

they will be raised and how they will be spent. True partnership-building strengthens positive relationships among the people who affect children's learning and lives, not just the solicitation of cold, hard cash.

What's wrong with this activity?
The school will initiate a Readers Theater for fifth graders to present to kindergarten students.

Answer. Where's the family involvement here? How are families involved in designing it, carrying it out, communicating it, using volunteers, and continuing learning at home?

What's wrong with this activity?
Work with the PTO to organize a Back-to-School Night.

Answer. While it's great to involve the school parent group in developing partnership activities, keep all family connections in mind. Not all parents may belong to the PTO, so how will the Action Team reach out to and involve families from all ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic facets of the school community in your efforts?

How Did You Do?

Could you pick out the areas that needed improving in the above activities? Do the activities of your Action Team encompass effective partnership practices? In addition, be sure that your partnership goals and activities:

- **Are child-centered.**
Keeping the learning and well-being of children front

- and center help ensures that everyone is acting
- **Involve many individuals** in organizing and in carrying them out. Saddling one or two people with many responsibilities is unrealistic and not likely to create the widespread sense of engagement that

- partnership practitioners seek.
- **Connect to larger school goals** that benefit students and help move the school forward on its mission.

For more great ideas, visit:
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/pp/index.htm>.

Save the Dates!

January 13-14

New Wisconsin Promise Conference
Madison—*VISTAs register for free!*

January 15

Quarterly Report due
Submit via email to Betsy

January 21

VISTA Check-In
Wisline Web

February 12

Service Learning Conference
Madison Concourse Hotel
VISTAs register for free!

February 12

Governor's Service Awards Dinner
Madison Concourse Hotel

February 13

National Service Conference
Madison, Concourse Hotel

“Hey! That’s a Good Idea!” Corner

1. **Stephanie Jung** is developing a Sister School Program for the Business and Economics Academy of Milwaukee (BEAM). A partnership has been developed between BEAM

and a school in Menomonee Falls to exchange goods and services during the holidays. Schools will exchange donations, food and holiday cards to be distributed to needy families. **[Collaborating with the Community]**

2. **Casey Gauthier**, VISTA with the School District of Rhinelander, is investigating an idea generated by her Action Team: book bins on school buses! She is working with all the bus companies who service the district to implement this program. A creative way to address the district-wide goal of improving literacy! **[Learning at Home]**



3. **Robyn Krimke**, serving in Milwaukee, brought in local celebrities during Book Week at U.S. Grant Elementary School. Guest readers included representatives from local government, business, library, police force, Salvation Army and Fox 6 news! Check out the VISTA blog for more of Robyn's recent events! **[Collaborating with the Community]**

4. **Brendan Gants**, VISTA in Milwaukee, is working to establish a classroom-parent program. Surveys were sent to all teachers to determine needs, and volunteers will be matched based on their interests and skills. This is an

excellent example of connecting volunteers to the school curriculum and involving them meaningfully! **[Volunteering]**

5. **Roxane Hagedorn**, VISTA in Wausau, is developing a volunteer framework for the school district. To involve all stakeholders in this process, she sent a letter and survey to all PTO presidents and volunteer coordinators to ask them for feedback on policy and volunteer recruitment. An excellent example of reaching out to community leaders to engage them in a process that directly affects them! **[Decision Making]**

Brittany answers Dustin's questions

Brittany is serving with the Wisconsin Educational Opportunities (WEOP) program in Madison.



Dustin: Where are you from?

Brittany: Though I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, I consider myself to be from Stoughton, Wisconsin. I moved there when I was in the 5th grade, and I've been a Wisconsinite ever since.

Dustin: Where did you go to school and what did you study?

Brittany: I attended the University of Wisconsin - Madison, and I majored in both political science and philosophy. If I'd had more time, who knows what else I would have studied.

Dustin: What is your favorite kind of food?

Brittany: It's hard for me to narrow down what my favorite kind of food is, since I have lots of favorites. But I guess my ultimate favorite would be the vegetarian smorgasbord my mom prepares each Thanksgiving: macaroni and cheese, green bean casserole, mashed potatoes, collard greens, stuffing and of course, pumpkin pie.

Dustin: Do you have any pets?

Brittany: In my house my roommates and I have two big cats and one puppy. The cats are Benny and Cassius, and the puppy is named Bosley. However, we're looking into possibly adopting another puppy.

Dustin: What is your favorite genre of music?

Brittany: This is a hard one, too! I think my favorite music is often determined by what kind of

mood I'm in at the time. But lately, I've been interested in really different and experimental stuff, like The Knife or Bat For Lashes.

Dustin: What is the coolest country you've been to?

Brittany: The coolest country I've been to would have to be Sweden. Sweden's politics and policy debates are really interesting. It's beautiful, and its people are generally very polite, considerate and well put together. Not to mention that Stockholm, Sweden's capital, is on an archipelago and is often referred to as "The Venice of the North."

Dustin: What are three of your favorite pastimes?

Brittany: Playing on my sister's XBOX 360, playing footbag (hacky sack) outside, goofing off, and being ridiculous with my family and roommates.

Dustin: Where do you like to hang out in Madison?

Brittany: I've mostly experienced Madison as a student, so my favorite places in town are very student-centered. I really enjoy the Memorial Union, which incorporates food, entertainment, and cultural engagement all in one place.

Especially on a nice summer day, the Memorial Union Terrace just can't be beat.



Dustin: What is #1 on your Christmas list?

Brittany: Number one on my Christmas list is a nice, big gift certificate to some geeky store like Best Buy or Circuit City. Who knows all the games, movies and gadgets I could get!

Dustin: If you could meet one living person, who would it be?

Brittany: I would like to meet the Dalai Lama. Every time he comes to Madison, I somehow end up out of town. But if I got to hang out with him, I think he'd have enough wisdom and enlightenment for the both of us.

Dustin answers Brittany's questions

Dustin is serving with the Dane County Transitional School in Madison.



Brittany: What is your favorite restaurant?

Dustin: That's a tough call. Recently, The Old Fashioned, which is on the Capitol Square.

Brittany: Are you more of a cat or dog person? Or maybe something else?

Dustin: Dogs, hands down.



Brittany: Who is your favorite US President?

Dustin: Clinton, but hopefully Obama can take that title from him!

Brittany: What are your favorite bands / musical artists?

Dustin: Right now, Jack Johnson and Amos Lee.

Brittany: Who is your favorite super hero?

Dustin: Batman.

Brittany: What would be your ideal career?

Dustin: Good question!

Brittany: If you could only read (and reread) one book from now until forever, what book would you choose?

Dustin: The Count of Monte Cristo, but I'd hate to have to make that decision!

Brittany: If you could take a vacation to anywhere in the world, where would you pick?

Dustin: Right now I'm feelin' Brazil.

Brittany: Do you have a favorite season? If so, why?

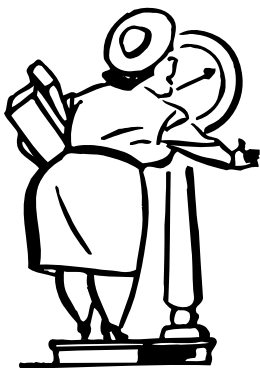
Dustin: Fall, because of the colors and crisp, cool air.

Brittany: How / where do you picture yourself five years from now?

Dustin: All I know is I'll almost be 30. Yikes!

Governor's School Health Award

Governor Jim Doyle and State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster are encouraging schools to apply for the Governor's School Health Award. The award recognizes those schools that promote healthy eating, physical activity, drug-free lifestyle, parental involvement, and staff wellness. Over the last three years 63 Wisconsin schools have received either bronze, silver, or gold awards.



"I am pleased to recognize schools for their efforts to educate students, school staff members, and families on how to make

healthy choices that last a lifetime," Governor Doyle said.

"We know that the most successful schools approach health as a coordinated effort

that involves all school staff, families, and the community," said Burmaster. "Healthier students support healthier communities, which in turn support a healthier Wisconsin."

The school health award application consists of six sections, with each one focusing on an area related to school health.

Interested schools have until March 13, to apply for the 2009 awards. Schools should pre-register for the program via the web, assemble a team to review the school's health initiatives, and then complete and submit the award application.

An award ceremony will be held in May 2009.

<http://www.schoolhealthaward.wi.gov/>

Supervisor Segment

You are a leader to your members/ volunteers and a catalyst for your project. You work in an exciting but demanding position and form a critical communication link between and among members/volunteers, program directors, agency sponsors, and the community. As you've probably already learned, your major job is to *get things done* and to *develop members/volunteers*. Balancing these two responsibilities will be a

continual challenge. To be truly effective, you need to learn to get things done through the members/ volunteers you supervise.

Supervising members/volunteers is clearly more than a job. It is also a commitment to developing one's own capacity and that of others to initiate changes that will result in stronger communities. Building human capacity requires some solid skills on your part—skills in planning, communicating, leading, and problem solving to name just a few. Regardless of whether you are a full-time or part-time supervisor, you are in a key position to make a difference in the lives of both your members and those who benefit from your project.

Help is a key word. You must offer it and ask for it. As a supervisor, you can't do everything required by your organization or program. In large part, you must learn to do your job by getting your members/volunteers and agency partners to do the work. You are not expected to know all the answers, but you should learn where in your team, organization, or community you can go to find them. As you settle into your supervisory position, remember that other supervisors are out there going through exactly what you are—you are not alone. Don't be afraid to ask others for assistance.

<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/files/legacy/filemanager/download/676/01.bbs.intro.pdf>

Recipe of the Month

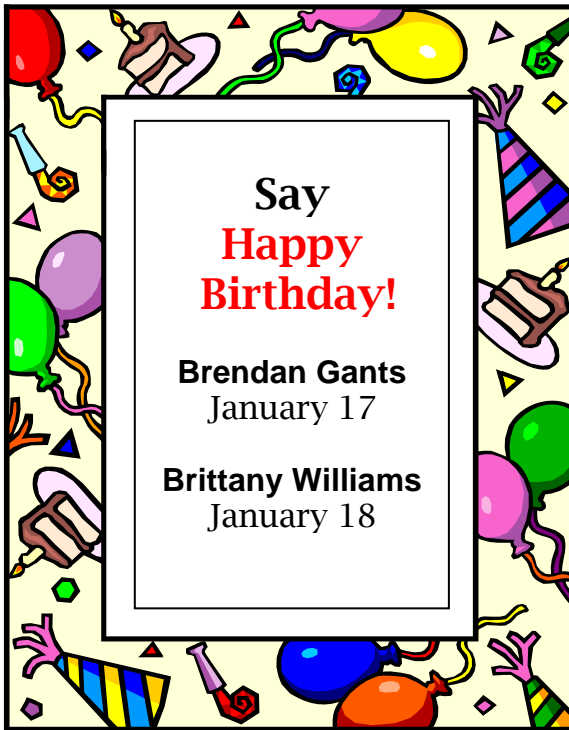
This month, Betsy shares a recipe from a local chef in Madison.



"This soup is rich, filling and flavorful...yet easy to make."

Chef Joel's Butternut Squash Bisque

- 1 large butternut squash, roasted at 350 degrees until done
 - 1 large leek, sliced (white part only) and sautéed
 - 2 large garlic cloves smashed and cooked with the leek
 - 1 cup heavy cream
 - 1 tsp salt
 - 1 tsp black pepper
 - 1 tsp rosemary
 - 1 tsp oregano
 - 1 tsp basil
 - 1 tsp thyme
1. In a large pan cook the leeks, garlic, and all the spices until the leek is golden.
 2. Add in cooled squash.
 3. Cook all together until the squash falls apart.
 4. Add the cream.
 5. Stir until smooth with a whisk.
 6. Place in bowl and add 1 dollop of pesto before serving.



- TIPS allows families to comment and request other information from teachers in a section for home-to-school communication.

Overcoming Obstacles

Jump Hurdle 1: Homework should NOT always be done alone *TIPS homework—given once a week or twice a month in math, science, or language arts—is designed specifically to keep students and their families talking about schoolwork at home.*

Jump Hurdle 2: Just ANY homework won't do *TIPS activities are designed to be challenging and engaging—the type of homework that students will want to explain and share with their families.*

Implementing Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)

(Excerpts from the soon-to-be-released new NNPS Handbook)

TIPS helps solve some important problems with homework:

- TIPS enables all families to become involved, not just those who already know how to discuss math, science, or other subjects.
- TIPS makes homework the student's responsibility and does not ask parents to teach subjects or skills that they are not prepared to teach.
- TIPS asks students to share and enjoy their work, ideas, and progress with their families.



How Do All Partners Participate in TIPS Homework?

Teachers, students, parents, and administrators all have responsibilities for the success of TIPS.

- **Teachers** design the homework assignments or select those that match their classwork, orient parents to the process, explain TIPS and family involvement to students, conduct follow-up activities in class, and maintain homework records.
- **Students** complete the TIPS assignments and involve their parents or other family partners as directed in the activities.
- **Parents** learn about the TIPS process, set aside time each week to discuss TIPS homework activities with their children, and complete the home-to-school communications.
- **Principals** help teachers orient parents to the program and support and recognize teachers, students, and families who use TIPS well.

using science and technology, work with experts, conduct research, and put their ideas to the test to develop an innovative solution. Maximum award: a \$25,000 Columbus Foundation Community Grant and an all-expense-paid trip to Walt Disney World to attend the program's National Championship Week, plus a \$200 development grant to further refine their idea, and a \$2,000 U.S. Savings Bond for each team member. Eligibility: middle-school-age (sixth, seventh, and eighth grade) children; teams do not need to be affiliated with a school to enter.

Deadline: Feb. 9, 2009.

<http://www.christophercolumbusawards.com/>

Horace Mann: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum Fellowships

Horace Mann and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) are offering fellowships to study the life and legacy of our 16th president. Maximum award: \$1,000 fellowship, featuring a five-day institute in June or July 2009 at the ALPLM in Springfield, Illinois. Eligibility: full-time teachers K-12 at a public or private school in the United States.

Deadline: February 12, 2009.

<https://www.horacemann.com/resources/fellowships/default.aspx>

Grant Opportunities

Christopher Columbus Awards: Innovation Generation

The Christopher Columbus Awards Program combines science and technology with community problem solving. Students work in teams with the help of an adult coach to identify an issue they care about and,



Coming Up Taller Awards

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities: Coming Up Taller Awards recognize and reward outstanding after-school and out-of-school arts and humanities programs for underserved children and youth. Maximum Award: \$10,000. Eligibility: programs initiated by museums, libraries, performing arts organizations, universities, colleges, arts centers, community service organizations, schools, businesses, and eligible government entities.

Deadline: January 30, 2009.
<http://www.pcah.gov/cut.htm>

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation: J-Lab Institute for Interactive Journalism

The Institute for Interactive Journalism and John S. and James L. Knight Foundation New Voices grants provide funds to seed innovative community news ventures in the United States. Maximum Award: \$25,000. Eligibility: 501(c) 3 organizations and education institutions, including civic groups, community organizations, public broadcasters, schools, colleges and universities; some preference will be given to projects from former Knight newspaper communities.

Deadline: February 12, 2009.
<http://www.j-newvoices.org/site/story/2009rfp/>

Action for Nature: International Young Eco-Hero Awards

AFN International Young Eco-Hero Awards recognize the individual accomplishments of young people whose personal actions have significantly improved the environment. Maximum Award: \$500. Eligibility: youth ages 8-16.

Deadline: Feb. 28, 2009.
<http://www.actionfornature.org/e-co-hero/ecoheroawards.html>

Allstate: Grants for National and Local Programs

The Allstate Foundation supports national and local programs in three focus areas. Safe and Vital Communities programs address catastrophe response, youth anti-violence, neighborhood revitalization, or teen safe driving. Economic Empowerment programs address financial and economic literacy, insurance education, or empowerment for victims of domestic violence. Tolerance, Inclusion, and Diversity programs address teaching tolerance to youth, ending hate crimes, or alleviating discrimination. Maximum Award: varies. Eligibility: 501(c)(3) organizations.

Deadline: rolling.
<http://www.allstate.com/foundation/funding-guidelines.aspx>

Barnes and Noble Grants

Barnes and Noble booksellers is considering requests for grants from nonprofit organizations that focus on art, literacy, or education (K-12). Applicants must have a plan for promoting the grants program with Barnes and Noble and must be willing to work with the local stores on in-store programming. Maximum Award: varies. Eligibility: nonprofits that focus on art, literacy, or education (K-12).

Deadline: rolling.

http://www.barnesandnobleinc.com/our_company/sponsorship/Sponsorship_main.html

Do Something Plum Youth Grants

Do Something Plum Youth Grants are available to young people who submit creative proposals to further the growth and success of their existing community action project. Maximum Award: \$500. Eligibility: Applicant must be 25 or younger at the time of application.

Deadline: weekly.

http://www.dosomething.org/plum_youth_grant_application