



New Wisconsin Promise

Jane Grinde
Project Director


Ruth Anne Landsverk
Family Education
Coordinator

DPI VISTA Monthly

March 2007

"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant; if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome".

Anne Dudley Bradstreet



Dawn Follendorf
VISTA Leader

Stephanie Hogue
Education Specialist

Partnerships are like rivers...

Dawn Follendorf

Please bear with the lame analogy. I promise there is a point to this article! Partnerships, and the process of building and working with them, are like rivers in many ways. Just think of the typical characteristics of a river. Rivers tend to start out as a tiny trickle and build in intensity as they flow downstream. Laying the groundwork for partnerships, works in much the same way. You start out small by forming friendships with parents, teachers, students and community members. As you continue to develop these friendships, you're able to strengthen and make connections between them which allow the process of building a foundation for partnerships to occur. In time, you feel the partnership moving full steam ahead and making real progress towards the school's improvement goals. Rivers and partnerships like these are exciting to be a part of because of their increasing velocity and their impact on the environment around them!

Rivers, as we all know, cannot pick up speed forever. Instead, it is common for them to experience stretches where their momentum wanes. This could be the result of a change in climate or in the contours of the river. It is normal for partnerships to experience a similar ebb and flow of intensity. A number of factors beyond your control can affect the progress of the partnerships you're building. Perhaps a new semester has begun and students and teachers need a period of

adjustment. At times like these it's important to not let slow moving water become stagnant water. You can do this by proactively seeking out ways to positively impact factors affecting the team that you can control. Think outside of the box to come up with ways to keep the team motivated. Or spend time at your next meeting celebrating your past successes.

Should you encounter slow moving waters, whatever you do, continue to go with the flow of the team. Remember, an attempt to swim up stream will not get you far, and will leave you worn and exhausted at the end. Save energy and time by riding with the momentum of the team and continue to make value adding contributions. I guarantee the team will make more progress this way.

While a river takes years to make changes to its sinuous curves, its impact is long lasting to the river and the environment surrounding it. So to, do the partnerships you're forming take time to create. As you continue to nurture them, keep in mind that the waves of change you're creating will positively impact the school culture and environment for years to come!



**Happy St.
Patrick's Day!**

Save the Dates
Parent Leadership Conference
March 7, Oconomowoc
DPI VISTA Teleconference
March 13, via phone

Birthday this Month:

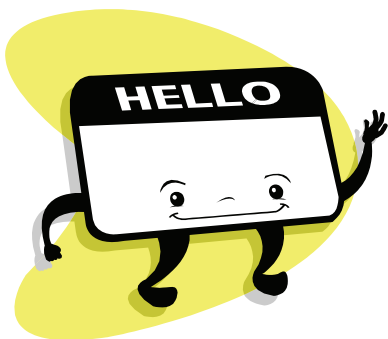
*Be sure to send some
birthday wishes!*

Fortunato Delarosa
f.delarosa@parentspluswi.org
(March 17)



Tips for Getting the Most out of a Conference

Ruth Anne Landsverk



The 2007 Parent Leadership Conference is right around the corner. Many VISTAs will be attending, and it's a wonderful chance to greet familiar faces and make new friends. It's also a great opportunity (conference sponsors hope) to learn about new partnership efforts and to return home re-charged with good ideas. Following are a few things you may want to think about before March 7, conference day, to help you get the most out of this conference – or any other you attend as a VISTA.

- **Start with the end in mind.** What is it that you want to leave the conference with? What questions do you want answered that will help you address the challenges and uncertainties of your own work? Write them down and refer to them during the day. It's easy for goals to get lost in the crush and bustle of the day.

- **Talk to strangers.** Learning is a contact sport, so make contact with lots of people to make your experiences most meaningful. Ask questions. Talk to speakers, conference staff, and the folks sitting next to you at lunch. Ask for recommendations for websites, books and people or schools with efforts or programs you want to learn more about.
- **What's your handle?** What do you want people to know about your partnership efforts and your school in 20 seconds or less? In business, this is known as an "elevator" speech, or a brief, clear response to the question, "So, what kind of work do you do?" in the time it takes to ride an elevator. You probably won't be riding many elevators at the Olympia, but it's always nice to give the conversation a jump-start.
- **Take lots of notes!** You'll want to share the strategies, quotes, and program ideas you hear about during the day with those at home who will be waiting for your words of wisdom.
- **Stay for the day.** The Parent Leadership Conference is designed to tantalize 'til the end, closing with afternoon keynote speaker Ada Rivera, principal of Milwaukee's Pulaski High School, who arrived in this country as an immigrant.
- **Fill out and turn in your conference evaluation.** What hot topic would you have loved to hear about that wasn't on the agenda? How did the information presented at the conference translate into something you can use back home? The conference evaluation form plops the final say about the day in your lap. It's also your chance to let the conference planning committee know what **you** want to happen next year.
- **Set "conference benchmarks."** How about these for measures of valuing your conference experience:
 - I talked with at least three new people about partnership-related topics.
 - I learned at least one useful thing in each session I attended.
 - I had fun!

Have you registered for the conference? Please visit <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/fscp/index.html>. (and scroll down) to register or to download the conference agenda.

Interview with a VISTA

Edwina Matthews (Carver)

Casey Szymanski (Parents Plus)

Casey answers Edwina's questions:



Edwina: What made you become a VISTA?

Casey: It seemed like a great opportunity to be involved with direct service and see what it was like to work in the non-profit/public service sector.

Edwina: What has been your most rewarding experience so far with VISTA?

Casey: Working with families and seeing successful projects through from start to finish.

Edwina: How many projects have you been able to implement as a VISTA?

Casey: Recently at an elementary school I am working with, my parent survey results allowed me to get parents involved as tutors in their after-school community center.

Edwina: Has it been difficult for you as a VISTA, working with deprived families?

Casey: Not getting the buy-in needed from schools.

Edwina: Was it difficult going into the school system setting up an Action Team?

Casey: Very difficult, especially in the middle of the school year – a lot of schools are not very open to outside people and more activities to deal with.

Edwina answers Casey's questions:



Casey: What has been your favorite part or experience being a VISTA?

Edwina: My favorite part, by far, has been working with the parents and the students.

Casey: If you had any advice for future VISTAs what would it be?

Edwina: Definitely to make sure that you really want to do the program. You really have to want to do it for it to be a success and to enjoy it...and to know that you will not get paid (hardly anything).

Casey: What will you do this summer after you are done with the program?

Edwina: This is the million dollar question- I have received a lot of offers from MPS and others to work again. What I really want to do though is publish my book of poetry. It is called "As I see the World" and you can check it out at www.poetry.com/Edwina

Casey: As seen by your e-mail address "grandchildren," you must be a very proud grandmother. How many grandchildren do you have and where do they live?

Edwina: I have three total. Two live in San Diego. One is freshman at UCLA and plays basketball for the school, while the other is in 7th grade. My other grandchild lives here in Wisconsin and is in 3rd grade.

Casey: What is your favorite meal to cook/eat after a long day of VISTA work?

Edwina: Oh, I'm not a cook. I do really love to eat spaghetti though.

Casey: What is your favorite place to eat/shop/go to in Milwaukee?

Edwina: I really like going to Mayfair Mall. I love going to the big yellow dot clearance sales at Boston Store and also eating at the Cheesecake Factory. Whenever my grandchildren come into town, that is where they always want to go.

Casey: Finally, are you a huge fan of winter weather? Do you mind all of the snow as of recently?

Edwina: Oh, I hate it! I hate it! Get me out of here. It makes me really want to move to San Diego or someplace else.

Interview Schedule

April: Anna and Laura

May: Casey and Edwina

Life After VISTA

By Stephanie Hogue



My husband and I decided (somewhat spur-of-the-moment) this past month to replace all the cabinets in our kitchen. It was a huge undertaking (much more so than I'd imagined) and our house looked like a demolition crew had been through it for a couple of weeks, but it felt really good to do something so tangible! It made me think of all of the creative, hands-on projects I undertook in my own time to break up my sometimes monotonous and frustrating service as a VISTA year. I think it is important (especially for VISTAs) to strike a balance between the important capacity-building, sustainable work you're involved in every day and more physical and concrete outlets for your energy. Even better, perhaps you can even find a way to combine the two!

March is Youth Art Month, National Craft Month, Music in the Schools Month, Kite Month, Non-Fiction Reading and Writing Month, and Poetry Month, and there are also many days within March celebrating various artists, so it's a perfect month to get back into the creative habit. I challenge each of you to share your favorite creative activity with your fellow VISTAs, with your sites, and with us at the DPI in some way this month. We even hope to have an opportunity for you to display what you've created (but more on that later, as details materialize). Get out those paintbrushes, hammers, and sewing machines and make things happen!



Recipe of the Month



March is marked by St. Patrick's Day and also Lent, so I wanted to share one of my favorite Irish meals that also happens to be vegetarian (although definitely not vegan) – colcannon. When I was first exposed to colcannon, the idea of potatoes and cabbage sounded really unappealing to me, but it is actually very tasty! Substitute kale or collards to make it healthier (and more green!), or use purple potatoes and red cabbage for a vibrant change.

You also can form leftovers into patties and fry them up the next morning – yum!

Irish Colcannon

6-8 potatoes, peeled and cubed
1 Tablespoon butter
1 cup onions, chopped
2 cups cabbage or kale, chopped
1/2 cup milk
1/3 cup sour cream
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground pepper

- Cook potatoes in water until tender. Drain.
- While potatoes are cooking, melt butter in large skillet.
- Add chopped onion and cook for 5 minutes.
- Stir in kale and cook 5 more minutes.
- Remove from heat.
- Mash potatoes, milk, sour cream, salt and pepper with mixer.
- Stir in cabbage mixture.