



DPI VISTA Monthly



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Save the Dates!

January 6 1:00pm
Optional Webinar: Web 2.0/
Social Media

January 13-14
Every Child a Graduate
Conference, Madison

January 17
Quarterly Reports due by
5:00pm
New VISTAs only: Asset maps,
updated VADs due

January 24 11:00am
Optional webinar: "Using data
to inform what we do"

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. Here's your chance to be a critic. 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: Involve parents in planning activities, too! 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: Don't inform families just once; the "Rule of Seven" states that schools that communicate seven times and/or in seven different ways usually reach most families at least once. Communicate your school family events early and often – and in their languages!

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 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 and collaboration among families and school staff, not the compiling 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, attending it, and continuing learning at home?

What's wrong with this activity?

Work with the PTO to organize a Back-to-School Night.

Answer: There's really nothing "wrong" here; it's just not enough. It's great to involve the school parent group, but not all parents may belong to the PTO. How will the Action Team reach out to and involve families from all ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic facets of the school community?

Could you pick out the areas that need improving in the above activities? Do the activities of *your* Action Team encompass effective partnership practices? Partnership activities are most meaningful when they:

are child-centered. Keeping the learning and well-being of children front and center help ensures that everyone is acting.

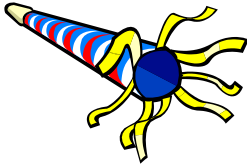
involve many individuals in organizing and in carrying them out. Saddling one or two people with many responsibilities is unrealistic and not likely to result in true family engagement.

connect to larger school goals that benefit students and help move the school forward on its mission.

For more great ideas, visit Promising Partnership Practices of the National Network of Partnership Schools: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/ppp/index.htm>, including practices featured in the 2010 edition from Lincoln Elementary, Wausau; SUPAR, Milwaukee; Washington Elementary, Oshkosh; Grove Elementary, Wisconsin Rapids; and the AmeriCorpsVISTA Program at DPI!

VISTA New Year's Resolutions

by Betsy Prueter



Each year I attempt to develop some possible New Year's resolutions, "VISTA-style" to share with the latest VISTA corps. Some suggestions for the New Year, some strategies to consider, some

lessons to re-learn. As VISTAs, you are faced with big challenges- to build partnerships, build community, build programs, and sustain it all. But as one VISTA said to me last year, "it's not enough to have staff and the site buy-in to the work; you have buy-in personally." I couldn't agree more. So, set some of your own resolutions and make commitments to embrace new ideas or approaches.

1. Shatter Misconceptions

You might hear stories that portray a negative or incomplete picture of families at your school or clients in your job lab. As a VISTA, you are in a unique position to reframe the issue. How can you share another story? How do you bring their voice in to complete the picture?

2. Practice your response to "That will never work."

Have you heard this one before? Likely you have and likely you will again. It can be difficult for someone who has seen so much tried and failed to try it yet again. So be sure to learn from the experiences of those you work with but counter this with some solid ideas of why it MIGHT work and why it's worth trying again.

3. Get to Know Your Community...again.

Have you looked at your asset maps lately? Are there resources that you might not have collected yet? Are there important neighborhood initiatives that you don't know about? Have you spent time in the communities and neighborhoods where your families/clients live?

4. Try again with difficult staff members/ parent/community members.

Think about that one person who has been really hard to reach or just difficult to work with. Either due to miscommunication or differences of opinion, they are still probably someone you need to engage. It's time to try again- with a new approach.

5. Reach out to a new VISTA

Who haven't you connected with yet this year? Email a VISTA you don't know very well just to hear how things are going at their site.

6. Reflect

You probably know by now what a fan I am of reflection – but it's for a good reason. Take some time to reflect about your work and also your own service. Maybe now's the time to start a journal or blog and write down the moments that really made an impact on you this year. You'll really appreciate

FUN-TIVITIES!!!

with Amber Richardson



Burrrr, it's still really cold outside! And dark, and wet, and did I mention cold? Has someone recently asked you if you have a "case of the Mondays" only to find out that it's Thursday? It sounds like someone might be falling into the habits of a gloomy Gus! Or experiencing the symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder, neither or which are good for VISTAs. We all know that leaving for work when it is dark, and going home when it is dark can have an effect on our psyche and the work that we do. That is why this month's Fun-Tivity is meditation; while you are doing it, it can be called a medita-tivity. Deep breathing and relaxation are not just about feeling better but can actually reduce ill health effects too. And for bonus measures meditation is 100% free! All you need to do is carve out some time in your day to sit in a comfortable position making sure that your back is straight to properly align you chakras. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in and out of your nose. Do this several times until relaxed breathing is natural. Focus on the rhythm of your chest and nothing else. Air in. Air out. Continue breathing this way for about 15-20 minutes allowing yourself to think about nothing but breathing. You will feel calmer, your heart rate will be lower, and life will again be good. When you are done with your medita-tivity be sure to thank yourself for taking some 'me' time; you are SO worth it VISTA friend! The first few times may feel a bit silly but I promise that if you give it a chance, taking time for your medita-tivity everyday will make relaxation easier, stressful situations a bit more manageable, and people will stop asking you about your acrimonious disposition because it will disappear. Happy (and calm) breathing!

Recipe of the Month:

Baked Oatmeal

By Becky Smith

Ingredients:

- 2 Cups Oatmeal (not instant)
- 1 Cup Brown Sugar
- 1 Tbsp. Cinnamon
- 1/2 Tsp. Salt
- 1 Cup Chopped Walnuts
- 1 Cup Chopped Apples
- 1 Cup Raisins
- 1 Tbsp. Butter
- 2 1/4 Cups Hot Milk

Directions:

1. Mix ingredients & pour into sprayed 3 quarts casserole.
2. Cover and bake at 350 for 30 minutes.
3. Refrigerate leftovers.
4. In morning, scoop out desired amount into microwave dish.
5. Cover and heat on high for about 1 1/2 minutes.



Volunteering

VISTA: Angela Rumsey
Site: Milwaukee Public Schools, Central Office

Angela partnered with the MPS School to Work program to tap into new volunteers- students! Students will now be helping prepare materials and stuff folders for monthly meetings and other events.

Collaborating with the Community

VISTA: Juanita Peck
Site: Altoona School District

Juanita is starting plans for a potential summer gardening program in Altoona. She is connecting with Master Gardeners, UW-Extension, and the City Administrator to discuss possible next steps.

“Hey! That’s a good idea!”

VISTA: Kathy Lewis
Site: Ashland High School

To spread the word to even more people, Kathy advertised in local newspapers and posted flyers at businesses to advertise the family and community informational meeting about the Creating Caring Communities anti-bullying initiatives.

Evaluating

VISTA: Amanda Vandehey
Site: Wausau School District

Amanda is researching ways to increase family participation at her district-wide events. She sent surveys to families who had signed up, but did not attend, her recent FUN event, in hopes of eliminating barriers for those families in the future.

VISTA: Amber Richardson
Sites: Racine Public Library

Amber is getting her name and project well known in Racine by attending and speaking at several civic and community groups such as Kiwanis, Rotary, young professionals, and more.

Collaborating with Staff

VISTA: Angie Domagalski
Site: Metro Region Site- Milwaukee French Immersion School

Angie worked with the assistant principal at South Division High School to enlist the help of school staff to boost parent membership on the Action Team. Each staff member was asked to think of parents who may be interested in joining the ATP. One parent has already expressed interest!

Communicating

Networking

VISTAs in the News



Kathy Lewis - Ashland High School

An excellent article about Kathy Lewis' "Creating Caring Communities" anti-bullying program was featured in the Ashland Daily Press. Congratulations!

<http://www.ashlandwi.com/articles/2010/11/20/news/doc4ce763cbc7598043921666.txt>

PT3: Parents & Teachers Talking Together

By Ellen Carpenter

Parents and Teachers Talking Together (PT3) is a facilitated discussion between parents and teachers, focused on improving the school and academic success for each of our students. Trained facilitators from Wisconsin's Dept. of Public Instruction (DPI) and Parents Plus of Milwaukee led a three-hour-long workshop at Nuestro Mundo Community School on the evening of December 7th.

We began all together at 5:30pm with introductions and an overview of the PT3 program. Then, the teachers and parents went into separate rooms to address two questions: (1.) *What do we want for our children?* and (2.) *How are we going to get what we want for our children?* With the guidance of our unbiased facilitators, both groups compiled lists of ideas to answer these two questions (using poster paper and sticky notes).

After about thirty minutes of dialogue, both groups made their way down to the cafeteria to eat dinner and continue with the workshop all together. We had a variety of pizzas, fruits, veggies, pies, sweet bread and more, all donated from our community.

Our combined discussion began with an organization of the many great ideas that parents and teachers came up with independently. First we organized the ideas from the first question into categories (i.e., Communication, Cultural Competency, Language Development, Long-Term Goals, etc.). We then distributed colored dot-stickers for each parent and teacher (ten each). These were used as votes for each idea or category to rate the importance or urgency of each. We took about five minutes to allow each parent and teacher the opportunity to distribute their votes however they wanted to. Once completed, we could see which issues parents (yellow dots) thought were most important and which issues teachers (blue dots) thought were most important.

We then looked back at the second question, organized all the ideas into categories, and distributed the voting tokens to rank our priorities for school improvement in the same way that we did for the first question.

Once we had all of our ideas organized, categorized and ranked, we had a discussion about how we would like to proceed from there and which ideas we should pursue. Based on our ranking system, we listed three top priorities for Teachers and three for Parents. From these two lists, we picked three issues which we agreed were both realistic and urgent to start working on. These were (1.) Having our own school building, (2.) Having a system for parent involvement in place and (3.) Having a good system of two-way communication.

Parents and teachers then split up into three groups based on whatever cause each individual wanted to work on. In these three small groups, we began making action plans for the issues, with ideas for concrete steps we can take to make a difference, who would be responsible for each task, and when the task was to be completed. As we only had three hours, the groups had to stop there and go pick up their kids from child care. A few parents and teachers stuck around and continued their planning. Although the program ended at 8:30pm, it was 9:30 by the time everyone left!

This PT3 was very successful. There were a lot of great discussions, ideas and plans to improve the school, with representation from a variety of teachers and parents. It is now up to us to continue the conversations and action plans. Parents and staff are working with the school leadership and Nuestro Mundo Incorporated to further develop our plans to improve the school. The Site Leadership Council will have a January meeting to follow up on these plans and will in the mean time offer support and guidance to parents and staff who have participated in this invaluable discussion. Please contact Ellen Carpenter for more information about PT3 or how it could work in your school!



VISTA to VISTA with Mike Valente and Amanda Vandehey



Mike Valente serves in Milwaukee, WI at Clarke Street School through Parents Plus

Amanda V: What is your favorite childhood TV show?

Mike V: I can't lie; I was a huge Full House fan. I'd pretend I was Uncle Jesse and wear a leather jacket when I'd ride my big wheel.

Amanda V: How old were you when you first heard and believed that Santa does not exist?



Mike V: Wait....what are you saying? Santa's *not* real??

Amanda V: If you could switch lives with someone (dead or alive) for a week, who would you be?

Mike V: Jim Morrison, without a doubt. Although, I have a sneaking suspicion that after a week I'd want off the rock star roller coaster.

Amanda V: If you had a plane ticket to anywhere and you're leaving tomorrow, where would you go?

Mike V: Wow, what an offer. I just came in from the 16 degree weather outside, so I think I'd like to go to Bali. Turquoise water and white sand beach.

Mike V: Although it might be hard right now, imagine it is sunny and 80 degrees outside and you don't work - how would you spend your day?

Amanda V: I love warm weather so I would be outside all day at the lake and then something fun with friends that night... maybe a baseball game or bonfire?

Mike V: Do you have a favorite catch phrase?

Amanda V: So fetch. Haha, just kidding... I say "great" a lot but I can't think of any all-time favorites.

Mike V: What is best Christmas gift you ever received?

Amanda V: A trip to Mexico.

Mike V: When you were a kid, what did you want to



be when you grew up?

Amanda V: I wanted to be a flight attendant, then the pilot, the co-owner of We Care Kennels (my cousin and I were the founders), an English teacher, and an astronaut.

Mike V: What did you do for New Year's Eve in 1999? Were you afraid of major problems with Y2K?

Amanda V: I remember staying up until midnight, but my family wasn't stocking up on water and Spaghetti-O's so I'd have to say I wasn't too concerned.



Amanda Vandehey serves with the Wausau School District

Guest VISTA Article

Submitted by: Toby Altman, a VISTA working in the NKCDC Neighborhood for the Stabilizations/Foreclosure Division, of Philadelphia, PA.

I live in West Philadelphia and work in Kensington, a blue collar neighborhood nestled against the Delaware River in Northeast Philly. Everyday I take the train back and forth across the city, beneath the immaculate offices of Center City, beneath the Schuylkill River, through close-built brick row homes. There was a time, I guess, when trains served as a kind of public square. Trains can force a city to come to terms with itself by unifying its disparate spaces, its unwedded, wary citizens. Trains can reshape a city, a modern city, the way rivers used to: a city bends toward its rails.

Or—in Philadelphia’s case—away from its rails: the whole length of the Market Frankford El is bound by two blocks of blight, vacant lots, empty factories, dusty laundries and donut shops. The subway is populated by people like me: people who can’t afford to drive. We live in a country where ‘public’ is unfortunately and increasingly a second class

(‘class’ itself is a metaphor derived from the classes of train cars); in a country where ‘private’ is practically synonymous with ‘preferred.’ On the subway, in Philadelphia at least, this feels less like the rhetorical posture of tea-partiers and more the reflexive posture of our great cities.



I came to work for AmeriCorps because I believe that people are at their richest, most human when they ride public transportation. Which is a coy way of saying, when they are out of their cars, involved in the everyday political lives of their communities. I work with a partner on a sustainability initiative, Sustainable 19125, which trains residents to go door to door, talking to their neighbors about how simple sustainable actions—planting a street tree, installing a CFL bulb—can improve their quality of life and the quality of their neighborhood. We see our work as a form of community building, a way of developing new community leaders, increasing the connections between neighbors. And I see our work (however small its impact may be) as a way of reclaiming some of that lost public space which went with the reign of the trains.

Book Corner What VISTAs are Reading!

Only Revolutions

By Mark Z. Danielewski

It is part novel, part poetic puzzle. This is the only book I know that offers the perspective of another narrator by simply flipping it over and starting from the other end. Perplexed as to what I mean? You might want to get comfortable with that feeling and then check out [Only Revolutions](#) today.

Recommended by Mike Valente

The Match King

By Frank Partnoy

It is a non-fiction book about Ivar Krueger, who on Wall Street in the 1920s and made a fortune creating match monopolies. He also developed investments that were strikingly similar to the financial instruments and derivatives that lead to our most recent economic disaster. Eventually, he committed suicide and his investors lost millions of dollars. It's a fascinating story on its own, but in the context of what happened after the sub-prime mortgage debacle, it's even more interesting.

Recommended by Emily Caragianis

The Glass Castle

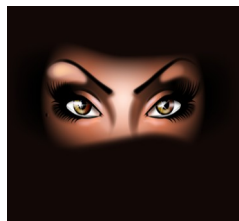
By Jannette Walls

[The Glass Castle](#) is a real page turner. It's probably the most thoughtful and sensitive memoir I can ever remember reading - told with such grace, kindness and fabulous sense of humor. If I could give a book ten stars, it would be [The Glass Castle](#).

Recommended by Amanda Vandehey

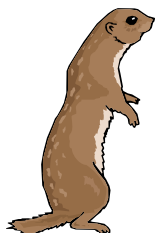


~~Clarissa~~, Brittany and Mike Explain It All



Mystery VISTA

My favorite sandwich is a vegetarian rueben with homemade sauerkraut.



If I could choose any animal for a pet it would be a giant otter. We'd do a lot of frolicking along riverbanks and snack a lot.

My personal motto is Semper Fun.

If you think you know who I am, send an email to Emily Caragianis eacara01@gmail.com. The winner will receive an excellent prize.
Good Luck!

Dear Brittany and Mike,

Is my use of FoodShare ethical? I sometimes go shopping with my roommate who is not on FoodShare, I buy her food, and she gives me the same amount of cash in exchange. I really need the cash for other non-food purchases, but sometimes I feel like I'm cheating the system.

-All About the Benjamins

please note, this month Brittany and Mike split up to explore the many issues involved

Dear 'All about the Benjamins'

Well, 'Ben', you might feel like you're cheating the system, because, well, you are. Even though the exchange is with your roommate, you are, in effect, selling your FoodShare benefits. According to the application form you sign when requesting FoodShare, intentionally trading or selling benefits can result in being barred from FoodShare.

No, this column is not being written by guest writer, Debbie Downer – those are the rules you agreed to. That said, I can definitely relate to the temptation to trade. It is so easy, and who is it really hurting anyway? Well, to answer that, I suggest you go beyond the 'letter' of the law and consider the unique 'spirit' of the no selling rule as it pertains to VISTAs.

Believe it or not, the meager monthly stipend is rooted in something more than state and federal budgetary concerns. It is part of the VISTA experience. We come into contact with poverty in hopes that we may be more effective in our fight against it. As you may have realized during your time as VISTA thus far, poverty limits your choices. Many expenditures once considered routine - a night out on the town, that morning latte, gas for a weekend road trip - are now out of financial reach. It is definitely not easy, and no doubt means 'going without' from time to time, but I firmly believe your VISTA year will be better off for it. So I urge you to limit one more choice; the choice to exchange FoodShare benefits for cash.

Dear 'All about the Benjamins'

While I agree with most of what Mike has said, I also understand that no one likes following rules just because "rules are rules," especially when you don't see the purpose of said rules. An argument could be made that even if you managed to trade in all of your FoodShare benefits each month and get their full value, the increase in your monthly cash flow wouldn't be that significant. It surely wouldn't be enough to lift you out of the bowels of poverty that the VISTA program insists you endure. You'd probably spend most of it on food anyway, and still live modestly enough to learn valuable lessons about poverty. Other arguments could also be made about the effectiveness of FoodShare, considering that there aren't allowances (under FoodShare or other government programs) to cover things like hygiene products, which even if they're not quite as necessary as food, are still closely tied to one's health and well-being.

As Mike mentioned above though, when you applied for FoodShare you agreed not to trade or sell the benefits you received. Therefore, while I think responsible adults have the right and obligation to make moral decisions that are not always in line with what is touted by authority figures, they should also be prepared to face the potential consequences of their choices. If caught and barred from using FoodShare in the future, will you be able to manage your budget? If you feel like you're living above the means of a VISTA, do you think your commitment to service at your site, and what you stand to learn from the program will be compromised?

These are the kind of questions you need to ask yourself before you make this moral decision. You're entering ethical territories that are pretty complex, and that hit on many of the social and bureaucratic issues that affect poverty. Still, as active citizens we have a duty to fully engage in issues that challenge our moral stances, while owning up to the decisions and conclusions we come to.

Grant Opportunities & Important Resources



Grants

Grants Alert

This site lists a number of education-related grants and funding opportunities. Check often for updates and new listings.

www.grantsalert.com

Lego Children's Fund

The LEGO Children's Fund provides grants for collaborative programs, either in part or in total, to organizations that focus on early childhood education and development; technology and communication projects that advance learning opportunities; or sport or athletic programs that concentrate on underserved youth. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: 501(c)3 organizations. Deadline: January 15, 2011.

[http://](http://www.legochildrensfund.org/Guidelines.html)

www.legochildrensfund.org/Guidelines.html



Innovation Generation: Christopher Columbus Awards Program

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, using science and technology, work with experts, conduct research, and put their ideas to the test to develop an innovative solution. Maximum award: \$25,000 to bring the team's idea to the community and an all-expense-paid trip to Walt Disney World to attend the program's National Championship Week. Eligibility: middle school-aged (sixth, seventh, and eighth grade) children; teams do not need to be affiliated with a school to enter. Deadline: February 7, 2011.

[http://](http://www.christophercolumbusawards.com/)

www.christophercolumbusawards.com/

Music Is Revolution Foundation

A mini-grant program for Music Is Revolution activities designed by teachers to implement, support, and/or improve their ability to provide

quality music education for their students.

Eligibility: Public school teachers of children in grades K-12 may apply for funding. Students and/or parents may participate in the writing of the application. Deadline: January 15, 2011. Maximum Award: Up to \$500.

[http://](http://www.musicisrevolution.com)

www.musicisrevolution.com

Community GroundWorks

While this site has a Dane County focus, the *Youth Grow Local* and *Youth Garden Portal* sections offer a variety of resources, curricula, and contacts for everyone to get started with a school garden project.

[http://](http://www.troygardens.org/)

www.troygardens.org/

Count Me In Too

New South Wales, Australia has a website called "Count Me In Too" which has great parent math resources, and are translated into many different languages! Based on the principles of Math Recovery, this website is a great resource for handouts and games.

[http://](http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/countmein/index.htm)

www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/countmein/index.htm

Resources

Kids Gardening

Great resources for starting a school garden. Lists many grants and funding opportunities as well as a monthly newsletter that will give you more current updates and opportunities.

[http://](http://www.kidsgardening.org/)

www.kidsgardening.org/

