



DPI VISTA Monthly

November 2008

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Jane Grinde
Project Director

Betsy Prueter
Education/Grants Specialist

Ruth Anne Landsverk
Family Education Coordinator

Casey Gauthier
Newsletter Editor

Life Lessons for a VISTA

by Betsy Prueter

Recently a friend forwarded me an article from *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (my hometown paper!) entitled “Life Lessons” by Regina Brett. As I read through it I was struck by how many of these lessons were particularly relevant to VISTA work. I found these seven in particular to be inspiring in their simplicity and their message.

1. WHEN IN DOUBT, JUST TAKE THE NEXT SMALL STEP.

Your roles as VISTAS can probably seem overwhelming at times. You may have a lot of questions about what you’re doing, where your projects are heading, or what your end results may be. But it’s important to take things one step at a time (even if it’s small one). We need to keep pushing so that our small steps will turn into big steps.

2. YOU DON'T HAVE TO WIN EVERY ARGUMENT. AGREE TO DISAGREE.

VISTAs work with a lot of different people with their own personalities and their own perspectives. Pick

your battles and seek out collaboration: even with individuals with whom you disagree. Just because you don’t agree doesn’t mean you can’t work together!

3. DON'T COMPARE YOUR LIFE TO OTHERS. YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THEIR JOURNEY IS ALL ABOUT.

I might rephrase this to say: “don’t compare your VISTA experiences to other VISTAs.” Share your experiences, yes. Learn from each other’s experiences, absolutely. But know that you are all in unique situations with unique roles. You are all making valuable contributions- but each in a different way!

4. DON'T AUDIT LIFE. SHOW UP AND MAKE THE MOST OF IT NOW.

Carpe Diem! Seize the Day! VISTA is about action. It’s about engagement. It’s about involvement. So take the initiative and make the most of this year. It will be of tremendous value to you in years to come.

5. NO MATTER HOW YOU FEEL, GET UP, DRESS UP, AND SHOW UP.

Some mornings it's extra hard to get out of bed. It seems like a perfect day to hit snooze....again. You're tired. You're frustrated. You've got a million other things to do. But we made a commitment. To our sites, to our supervisors, to our communities, and really, to ourselves.

6. TAKE A DEEP BREATH. IT CALMS THE MIND.

If our frustrations look like they might get the best of us, step back.



SAVE THE DATES!

November 7th
Poverty Simulation, Milwaukee
Email Robyn Krimke to register!
krimkerb@milwaukee.k12.wi.us

November 11th
10am-3pm, Regional Meeting,
Oshkosh

November 14th
Measuring Your School-Family-
Community Partnerships due
(via email)

If you're being pulled in too many directions, take a moment to close your eyes and breathe. If an event you planned didn't go as planned. If an Action Team meeting seemed unproductive. Take a deep breath. We're all going to face our fair share of challenges and obstacles. But let's learn from these obstacles, regroup, recharge, and get right back to work!

7. IF YOU DON'T ASK, YOU DON'T GET.
As VISTAs, you should be pushing boundaries. Asking hard questions. And if there's something that doesn't make sense to you, you need to ask why. If you think you have a solution or a suggestion: you need to express it. Because if you don't, the moment will pass.

November 18th
10am-3pm, Regional Meeting,
Wausau

November 24th
10am-3pm, Regional Meeting,
Madison

December 4th-5th
Building the Heart of Successful
Schools Conference, WI Dells

December 11th
10am-11am, Supervisor
Teleconference

December 19th
11:30-12:30, VISTA
Teleconference

“Hey! That’s a Good Idea!”

1. *Kim Yoder* is working to convert an old home economics room into a Parent Resource Center at Kosciuszko Montessori School in Milwaukee. This Center would provide materials, trainings and resources to families. A Resource Center is wonderful way to encourage parents to feel more comfortable in the school and allow them to have a voice in how the Center would most benefit them! **[Parenting]**

2. *Stephanie Jung* has taken advantage of an excellent online resource: <http://www.edpubs.com>. This website offers free publications for parents on school choice, college access, NCLB, etc. All VISTAs should know about this resource! **[Communicating]**

3. *Casey Gauthier* has partnered with the Sweet Dreams Project, which offers programming to parents on the importance of healthy sleep habits of their kids. <http://site.sweetdreamsproject.com>
A great partnership that focuses on the emotional, physical, and academic success of students!

[Collaborating with the Community]

4. *Renee Hinn* is working to recruit volunteers for Lincoln Elementary School in Oshkosh at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. Remember, partnerships with institutions of higher education are good ways to find volunteers and build sustainability into your programs! **[Volunteering]**



5. *Kelly Karls*, serving at the Howe Neighborhood Family Resource Center in Green Bay, recognizes the critical importance of partnerships to sustainability and resource sharing. She notes particularly the value in partnering with other VISTAs in your area. Be sure to look up local Campus Compact VISTAs (working primarily on community partnerships and service-learning) as well as other local VISTA projects. They are probably looking for YOU! **[Collaborating with the Community]**

KEEP YOUR ACTION TEAM CONNECTED TO ONGOING SCHOOL GROUPS AND EFFORTS

BY RUTH ANNE LANDSVERK

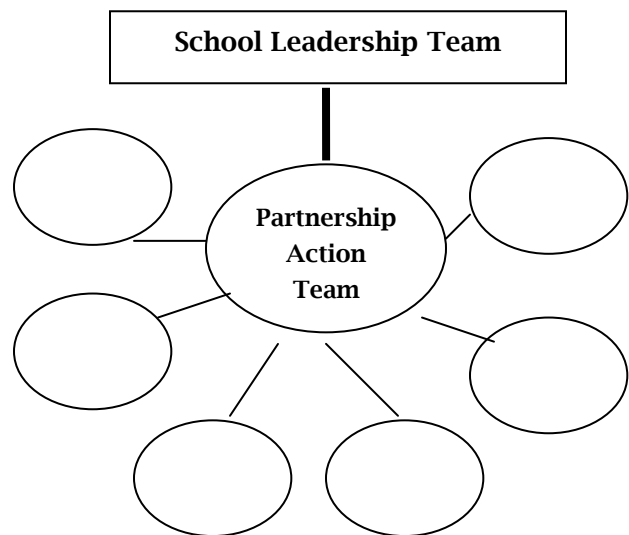
Among the tougher tasks an effective partnership action team faces is the ever-present challenge of keeping partnership goals and activities connected to the larger, ongoing goals of the school. It's easy to come up with a whole roster of wonderful partnership activities such as school open house, family learning nights, parent group meetings, etc. It's more difficult to keep all of the various groups in your school that deal with families -- Title I, REACH, special education, PTA, to name a few -- informed about and contributing to partnership efforts. Below are two tools your Partnership Action Team may find useful to help members keep track of "who's doing what" and connecting them to school-wide student goals for student learning and well-being.

Make it a priority for your Action Team to communicate to other school groups what it's planning to do, what it's done, and how it furthers student learning and other school goals. We're all in this together!

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

1. What groups in your school community work with families?
2. What major activities or events do they conduct for or with families?
3. What grants, programs, or initiatives is the Group funded by or connected to (i.e., Title programs, NCLB, special education, REACH, VISTA)?

4. What important annual school goal(s) do partnerships help achieve (i.e., improve student math achievement, attendance, school environment)?
5. Who will report the Partnership Action Team's activities to other groups? Who will report the other groups' activities to the Action Team? How or in what form (i.e., report via e-mail, in person, etc.)?
6. How often/when do the groups meet?
7. In what ways could the Partnership Action Team work with other groups to support family involvement in children's learning? How could other groups help the Action Team achieve its goals? What resources can be shared?



Casey Answers Chris' Questions

Casey is serving in the School District of Rhinelander.



Chris: Where did you grow up?

Casey: I was born and raised in Florence, WI.

Chris: What is your family make-up?

Casey: Growing up, there were my parents and my twin brothers who are 16 months older than me.

Chris: What has been your most rewarding experience as a VISTA to date?

Casey: That's hard to say. It's all been pretty rewarding, but it's really the little things: the little thank yous, the little smiles, etc.

Chris: Who in your life has been the most supportive of your choice to be VISTA?

Casey: My mom has been incredible. She has supported my decision and supported me a little financially when I've fallen behind. She's wonderful.

Chris: What do you think is the main thing you are doing as a VISTA to build capacity?

Casey: I have some pretty great volunteers from various places in

the community that I know will continue to volunteer when asked.

Chris: What has been your biggest struggle in your VISTA role?

Casey: I went through a period of time where I couldn't find much to do, so I was bored. I realized that not every day will be exciting and I just had to make the most of things. I also sometimes struggle with knowing if I'm making a difference or not, but I know through the little things, that I am.

Chris: What are plans after your VISTA assignment concludes?

Casey: I have no idea yet! I've started looking at jobs, but it's hard to apply so many months in advance. I'd like to stay in the Rhinelander area, as it is a wonderful community, but I guess we'll see.

Chris: Do you plan to go any further with your education?

Casey: Part of me wants to go to grad school for journalism. Another part of me wants to get an education degree or a social work degree. I have so many thoughts of things I want to do!

Chris: Who at your site do you feel you have the best connection with? Will you try and maintain that relationship when you are finished at your site?

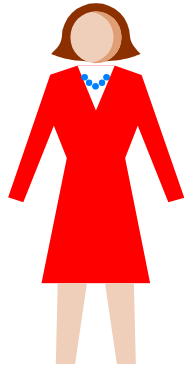
Casey: I've made a great connection with my supervisor in the past few months. There are also a handful of other people at my site that have been so great to me. I wouldn't mind keeping in touch with these people after I move on.

Chris: What would you tell someone else about becoming a VISTA?

Casey: I would say, “Why not?” I mean, it’s a year of your life doing nothing but good. Why wouldn’t someone want to do that? And there are such a variety of things one can do with VISTA. There’s something for everyone!

Chris Answers Casey’s Questions

Chris is serving with the Wausau Early Childhood Program.



Casey: What inspired you to become a VISTA?

Chris: The idea of giving back to the community that I live in and that I am raising my child in was important to me. These children and families (that I work with) will be my child’s generation and peer group.

Casey: Have you established any really great partnerships at your site yet?

Chris: I have been overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity of the individuals and organizations in the Wausau community. I have been working with North Central Technical College staff on a variety

of projects, received donations from the National Guard, Eastbay, County Market, Home Depot, and Raasch’s Car Care Center. I have also been getting new volunteers to help with programming (childcare) at parent events from Wausau West High School.

Casey: How do you pull yourself out of bed on the mornings when the last thing you want to do is go to another day of work?

Chris: I love what I am doing! My VISTA assignment has become a perfect fit for me with my education and non-profit work background. My advice is to make your project your own as much as you can. When you feel like you are a part of what you are doing then it makes it easier to be enthusiastic!

Casey: What is your education?

Chris: I have my Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Minnesota in Child Psychology with a minor in Psychology. I also returned to school to acquire my teaching certification grades 1-8 through Marian College based in Fond du Lac.

Casey: How is your relationship with your supervisor and co-workers?

Chris: Everyone at my site has been very helpful and supportive of all the events that I have planned and they all help out as much as possible! My supervisor is fantastic, has an open door policy with me, and is willing to help with everything.

Casey: What issues are you focusing on at your site?

Chris: My VISTA project is focused on family, community, and school involvement. I have been planning both parent events as well as events that get the whole family involved!

Casey: Where do you see yourself five or ten years down the road?

Chris: I hope in the next 5-10 years to either have a full time paid position similar to what I am doing right now or to be teaching in an elementary school.

Casey: What is your favorite quote or words of wisdom?

Chris: This is my favorite story/quote and is some days my inspiration:

“An old man walked up a shore littered with thousands of starfish, beached and dying after a storm. A young man was picking them up and flinging them back into the ocean. ‘Why do you bother?’ the old man scoffed. ‘You’re not saving enough to make a difference.’ The young man picked up another starfish and sent it spinning back to the water. ‘Made a difference to that one,’ he said. You make a difference every day.”

Casey: Who in your life has had the biggest impact on you?

Chris: My mom!

Casey: What is your ideal vacation spot?

Chris: Some place, any place tropical on the ocean with a beautiful beach.

Go Green: Tips from the VISTA State Office Staff

- **Think before you print.** Do you need a hard copy of that email or can you just store it on your computer?
- **When possible, email documents rather than faxing them.**
- **Cover sheets on faxes to us are usually not necessary.** The fax machine is secure and only seen by the 3 of us.
- **Carpool to trainings- extend the conference networking time!**
- **It is only necessary to send one copy of information to the office- we will circulate it.**
- **Bring your own water bottle to trainings and meetings; rather than using plastic bottles or cups.**
- **Email rather than mail newsletters, and recognition invites, etc.**
- **Print brochures and media materials as needed rather than storing hundreds of extra copies.**
- **E-mail the link to news articles about your volunteers, rather than a sending a hard copy of the article.**
- **Keep this list going...share other green ideas you have!!**

Recipe of the Month

Renee shares this recipe that her grandma gave her. She says, "There is nothing remotely healthy about this dish; it's pure comfort food. I particularly recommend it for winter potlucks."



Baked Hash Browns

Serves: 6
Prep Time: 30 minutes
Oven Temp: 350 degrees

Ingredients:

4 cups frozen hash browns (thawed)
1 cup chopped onions
¼ teaspoon garlic salt
1 can cream of chicken soup
1 cup sour cream
2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
2 cups corn flakes
2 tablespoons melted butter

Directions:

Spread thawed potatoes in an 8x8" square pan. Mix onions, garlic salt, soup, and sour cream. Spread on top of potatoes. Sprinkle on cheese. Melt butter, mix well with corn flakes, and spread on top.

Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour. Cover with foil for the first half hour, and remove foil for the second half hour.

Check this out!

<http://www.iowaparents.org/earning-at-home>

This website has some wonderful, downloadable resources on parent involvement for VISTAs to reproduce and use, including:

-- *Proven Practices for Families to Increase Student Achievement*

-- *Involving Parents: Best Practices in the Middle and High Schools*

-- *Questions to Ask Your Kids After "How was your day?"*



Grant Opportunities



Science Teachers: Sylvia Shugrue Award

The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) Sylvia Shugrue Award for Elementary School Teachers honors a teacher who has established (or is establishing) an interdisciplinary, inquiry-based lesson plan. The lesson plan must fully reference information sources and any relevant National Science Education Standards and benchmarks found in The Atlas of Science Literacy. Maximum award: \$1,000, plus up to \$500 to attend the NSTA National Conference on Science Education, March 19-22, 2009, in New Orleans. The recipient will be honored during the Awards Banquet at the NSTA Conference. Eligibility: full-time elementary school teachers (grades K-6) with a minimum of three years' experience.

Deadline: Nov. 30, 2008.

<http://www.nsta.org/pdfs/awards/Shugrue.pdf>

Mathematics Council Grants to Improve Students' Understanding of Geometry

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Improving Students' Understanding of Geometry Grants seek to enable students to better appreciate and understand an aspect of geometry that is consistent with the council's Principles and Standards for School Mathematics. The project should include applications of geometry to, for example, art, literature, music, architecture, nature, or some other relevant area, and may integrate the use of technology into the teaching of geometry. Maximum award: \$3,000. Eligibility: K-8 teachers who are

NCTM members as of Oct. 15, 2008, and are teaching at a school with an NCTM K-8 membership as of Oct. 15, 2008.

Deadline: Nov. 14, 2008.

<http://www.nctm.org/resources/content.aspx?id=1324>

ALA Cavendish Award: Library Programming

The American Library Association's Marshall Cavendish Excellence in Library Programming Award recognizes a library whose programs have community impact and respond to community needs. Eligible programs include: support of educational programs, library programs for children and adults, reading and literature programs for children, library programs for young adults, programming for multi-ethnic groups, community outreach, literacy programs, and programs and services for people with disabilities. Maximum award: \$2,000 and a citation of achievement. Eligibility: school or public libraries.

Deadline: Dec. 1, 2008.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/awardsgrants/awardsrecords/cavendishaward/cavendishaward.cfm>

Foundation for Technology Education: Professional Development

The Foundation for Technology Education Greer/FTE Grant encourages professional development of classroom teachers and supervisors in technology education. Maximum award: \$1,000 to offset the expenses of attending an International Technology Education Association Conference. Eligibility: technology education teachers or supervisors for grades 6-12 who are members of the International Technology Education Association.

Deadline: Dec. 1, 2008.

<http://www.iteaconnect.org/Awards/grantgreer.htm>

Foundation for Technology Education: Quality Teaching

The Pitsco/Hearlihy Foundation for Technology Education Grant recognizes and encourages the integration of a quality technology education program within the school curriculum. Maximum award: \$2,000. Eligibility: K-12 teachers who are members of the International Technology Education Association.

Deadline: Dec. 1, 2008.

<http://www.iteaconnect.org/Awards/granthearlihy.htm>

Reader's Digest Foundation: 'Make It Matter' Grants

Reader's Digest Foundation "Make It Matter" Grants will identify people whose stories of giving back inspire others. The foundation will donate funds to a nonprofit organization that is associated either with a particular story or cause. Selected stories will appear every month in a new "Make It Matter" column in Reader's Digest and at www.rd.com, beginning in April 2009. Maximum award: \$100,000. Eligibility: Anyone can submit a story; grant recipients must be 501(c)(3) organizations.

Deadline: Jan. 1, 2009.

<http://www.efundraising.com/Readers-Digest-Foundation.aspx?partner=grantsalert>

Thomson Gale: TEAMS Award

The Fifth Annual Thomson Gale TEAMS Award recognizes and encourages collaboration between teachers and media specialists to promote learning and increase student achievement. Maximum award: \$2,500, Gale products (approximate value: \$500), a one-year subscription to Library Media Connection,

and Educator's Professional Bookshelf (approximate value: \$500), from Linworth Publishing. Eligibility: K-12 public and private schools in the United States and Canada.

Deadline: June 15, 2009.

<http://www.galeschools.com/TEAMS/>

Surdna: Art Teachers Fellowship Program

Recognizing that art teachers often lack the time and resources to reconnect with the artistic processes they teach, the Surdna Arts Teachers Fellowship Program offers grants to enable selected teachers to make art with professionals in their disciplines and stay current with new practices and resources. Maximum award: \$5,500. Eligibility: all permanently assigned full- and part-time arts faculty members in specialized, public arts high schools.

Deadline: Nov. 14, 2008.

http://www.surdna.org/programs/programs_show.htm?doc_id=326426&attrib_id=12040

SeaWorld/Busch Gardens: Environmental Excellence Awards

The SeaWorld/Busch Gardens Environmental Excellence Awards recognize outstanding grassroots efforts by students and teachers to protect and preserve the environment. Maximum award: \$10,000. Eligibility: all schools (grades K-12) and community groups.

Deadline: Nov. 28, 2008.

<http://www.swbg-animals.org/conservation-matters/eea/about.htm>