



AmeriCorps #GetsThingsDone in Tennessee: 2018 AmeriCorps Week Profiles

In the spring of each year, the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) (CNCS) leads the [AmeriCorps Week](#) campaign, an opportunity to share and celebrate the nationwide impact of AmeriCorps in local communities. Throughout the week, programs across the country shared stories of success using the hashtag #GetThingsDone. [Volunteer Tennessee](#) celebrated by highlighting a few of the outstanding AmeriCorps members serving in the Volunteer State.

- **Nick Branch– [Emerald Youth Foundation](#)**

Nick grew up in JustLead, Emerald Youth Foundation's youth leadership program, and became an AmeriCorps member because he wanted kids to have the same experience he did. Not only does he enjoy making an impact on children in the community, but he also loves serving alongside the other AmeriCorps members and volunteers. Nick has been an AmeriCorps member since August and sees his role as building relationships. He has been surprised how quickly he felt comfortable working with the kids and how easily those relationships have formed.



Photo courtesy of Emerald Youth Foundation

Diversity is something that Nick has been challenged by and appreciated this past year. He said all the kids are very diverse in how they think and act, and it has been a challenge to figure out what works best for each of them. Nick is making a significant impact with children across Knoxville, and he will continue to be an excellent role model.

- **Sierra Martin– [Emerald Youth Foundation](#)**



Photo courtesy of Emerald Youth Foundation

Sierra has been serving with Emerald Youth as an AmeriCorps member for three years. Being a friend and mentor to the kids at the Mount Zion Baptist JustLead program is her passion. Day to day she serves with the children teaching art, theater and health.

One of her biggest surprises and joys serving with AmeriCorps is the bond that she has built with kids. She loves the mutual trust that has been built and the ability to be a positive role model in that community. This past year a standout moment for Sierra was a positive change in a relationship with a student. The relationship started off very challenging, but by continuing to be positive and consistent she was able to earn respect and form a close bond with the student.



- **Landon Woods – [Hands On Nashville](#)**

Landon Woods, Environmental AmeriCorps Member at Hands On Nashville (HON), always had a strong interest in socio-economic issues. To get involved, however, he needed a point of entry. “It’s easy to live in a bubble,” said Landon. “My AmeriCorps position has allowed me to engage communities and people that I hadn’t interacted with previously.”



Photo courtesy of Hands On Nashville

As part of the HON team, Landon shapes environmental and sustainability programs and projects by building capacity for local organizations aligned with such impact areas. He also plans collaborative projects to address critical environmental issues, such as water quality, invasive species, access to natural places, and preserving Nashville’s urban forests. Landon sees AmeriCorps as a great learning opportunity. “Knowledge without practical experience can be a waste,” he said. “The AmeriCorps position at HON allowed me to not only make the immediate impact I wanted, but also allowed me to participate in the bigger conversation concerned with affordable housing and poverty in Nashville”.

HON recently partnered with Rebuilding Together Nashville to extend HON’s Home Energy Savings (HES) Program. Program volunteers help weather-proof local homes, which lowers utility bills for residents while creating sustainable change. Working with one client in a fast-changing West Nashville neighborhood, the project gave Landon insight into the project’s true impact: the small changes added up to big savings for the homeowner, who expressed her gratitude to Landon and his crew. AmeriCorps has fortified Landon’s plans for grad school. In six months, he’ll finish the program prepared to use his knowledge for social good.

- **Debra Burroughs- [Porter-Leath](#)**



Photo courtesy of Porter-Leath

“I started my first term as an AmeriCorps member in August of 2016. I was anxious, excited, and a little nervous because I was entering into a new era that included my past experiences working with children 3-5 years old, being in a new environment, and surrounding myself with new people. Although, I have over 23 years of experience working with children, I knew this was going to be different.

During my first term, I served at Covington Pike Head Start. There were some challenging moments, but I was determined to get each child to be a success! This year, during my 2nd term, I am at Delano Head Start. I’ve learned so much and have shared so much with my fellow AmeriCorps members. We all enjoy each other’s company, share information, and just have fun! On the other hand, I have dealt with children with different personalities which requires me to work harder. One thing that has helped me, is to set aside extra time to give more attention to those that are in need the most. I love working with the children no matter if they cry or say they don’t want to. I don’t give up! But if I see that it is not the best day to work with them, I will wait until another day to see if they are having a better day. This experience has confirmed that children’s brains can soak up learning as long as we’re putting the right stuff in them. Although, this is a good program, AmeriCorps members may have to go the “extra mile” not because of recognition, but because of our willingness to help in every area of learning.”



- **Jessica Shaw- [Porter-Leath](#)**

“My name is Jessica Shaw and I am a 2nd time AmeriCorps member. This experience has been one that has impacted my life greatly. Before applying for the program, I had enrolled at University of Memphis with a major in Human Development and Learning, not knowing that soon I would be getting hands on experience and a real look into my future by being an AmeriCorps member.



Photo courtesy of Porter-Leath

I am currently serving my second AmeriCorps term at Frayser Head Start. I also am blessed to have an awesome AmeriCorps team here with me at my site that share the same passion for “Getting Things Done” as I do. Everyday is completely different from the previous one and it never gets boring. I always have something to work on with my enrichment sessions and I also get to keep my art skills up by helping decorate for the various activities that the sites have going on. Some days have its challenges, but they definitely make me a better member, because I am learning every day, how to deal with different things that I will have to face in my own career. Being in this program has helped me build more confidence in myself, enhance my communication skills, learn how to handle many different personalities, and better adjust to changes more quickly.

I would highly recommend this program to anyone with a passion for serving and a love for bettering children. The stipend helps and the education award I receive after completing the program is great, but seeing these little people every morning and watching them learn and grow is the greatest award.”

- **Jonathan Ramirez - [Project Inspire Teacher Residency](#)**



Photo courtesy of Project Inspire

There are currently 21 AmeriCorps members serving and learning in Chattanooga’s schools through the Project Inspire teacher residency. AmeriCorps member Jonathan Ramirez was no stranger to the inequities faced by his students on his first day of class. He had worked with several local nonprofits, including the local YMCA, where he discovered his passion for working with students while supporting an afterschool program. Around that time, he began looking for teacher preparation programs, even considering ones as far away as Arizona and Illinois. But when he heard about Project Inspire, he decided “Why should I go to another part of the country to make a difference, when I can do that right here, in my own community?”

He’s now a teacher resident at East Side Elementary, focusing on improving his 1st graders’ literacy skills and becoming the best teacher he can be. It’s a tough job, but his students inspire him. At the beginning of the year, one of Jonathan’s students was struggling to learn English and keep up with his schoolwork. But seeing the hard work his student put in every day reminds Jonathan, “He’s trying his best everyday, so why shouldn’t I try mine?”

After his year as an AmeriCorps member, Jonathan will continue teaching in high-need schools in Chattanooga. He’s already accepted a position at one of the highest-need elementary schools in Chattanooga for the upcoming school year. In a community where only 45% of k-8th grade students are proficient in reading, Jonathan, with his intentional training and practice in improving literacy, will make a huge difference in lives of many students for years to come.



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[Volunteer Tennessee](#) is a 25 member bipartisan board appointed by the Governor to encourage volunteerism and community service. Volunteer Tennessee pursues its mission through administration of AmeriCorps grants, training and collaborations and coalitions with public and private organizations interested in volunteerism and service. Connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

AmeriCorps is a program of the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) (CNCS), a federal agency that engages more than 5 million Americans in service through its AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Volunteer Generation Fund programs, and leads the President's national call to service initiative, United We Serve.