



#AmeriCorpsWorks in Tennessee: 2017 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 #AmeriCorpsWorks. [Volunteer Tennessee](#) celebrated by highlighting a few of the outstanding AmeriCorps members serving in the Volunteer State.

- **Ashley Cavender, Erin Giebner, Kari Simmons-[Appalachia CARES](#)**

Ashley Cavender, Erin Giebner, and Kari Simmons are serving with Jonesborough Locally Grown, a nonprofit in Northeast TN, with the goal of educating the public about the importance of sourcing food locally and making local products accessible. These three Appalachia CARES AmeriCorps members incorporate service-learning into this mission by hosting and engaging the community in programs such as: 100 mile dinners where guests enjoy a four-course dinner made only with ingredients grown within 100 miles; the Boone Street Market, where locals can access locally grown and made items and sign up for CSA's; the Jonesborough Farmers' Market, where they are able to outreach and provide education to citizens looking to reduce their environmental footprint by buying local; and a variety of other activities such as cooking classes, farmer lecture series, and community events. Through their service, Ashley, Erin and Kari are gaining valuable skills and knowledge in the agriculture, business, and sustainability industries, while providing valuable resources and education to the residents of Northeast Tennessee.



Photo courtesy of Appalachia CARES

- **Kaché Brooks- [BRIDGES USA](#)**



Photo courtesy of BRIDGES USA

Bridge Builders® full-time AmeriCorps member, Kaché Brooks, has committed to serve 6th – 12th grade youth for a year in the mid-south region. Kaché began her service as a Bridge Builders® alum looking forward to meeting new people, learning about BRIDGES and its impact in the community, learning more about herself and her capabilities, and most importantly, how she can be an asset to the team! She brings a brilliant and positive energy into her service as she facilitates hundreds of youth through leadership development, challenging team building experiences and courageous conversations tackling community issues. Kaché says her AmeriCorps service within the Bridge Builders program has grown her awareness of local social justice issues, strengthened her connection with her hometown and forced her to step out of her comfort zone as she works hands on guiding youth towards social, emotional and perceptual learning.

She has enjoyed providing students with a different kind of classroom experience through the experiential education learning model used throughout the Bridge Builders® program.



- **Janelle Mulvaney**– [City Year Memphis](#)



Photo courtesy of City Year Memphis

“A friend of mine grew up with City Year in his school and told me about the impact they had on him and I knew that this is where I had to be. It was the best decision I ever made. Last year I served in a community very similar and close to mine. I grew immensely. This year I decided to remove myself from my comfort zone and came to serve in Memphis. I have learned more about myself and this country than I ever thought possible. This year we have gotten to engage with many community members during different service projects. We have gone to the food bank, done service at the Civil Rights Museum as well as planted gardens. All these different opportunities have shown me the power of community. I have learned how to network and collaborate with a diverse group of individuals who share common goals. I have also learned the importance of truly immersing yourself into the community you serve to ensure you are being culturally competent.”

- **Xavier McDougald**– [City Year Memphis](#)

“Throughout my service with City Year, as a 1st year AmeriCorps Member and a Team Leader, I have exponentially grown in my personal and professional life. I have become more aware of my own areas of improvement and more confident in regards to my strengths. Before my second year with City Year, I felt as though I was an advanced communicator; however, I have learned that I could grow so much more, and I appreciate my current role within City Year for showing me that. I have never considered myself a team player, and now, being a team leader, I can better recognize how that can be detrimental to collaboration and leadership. I am now learning when and how to ask for help, how to delegate tasks, and how to hone in on the strengths of my teammates. I pride myself in being a lifelong learner, and City Year has helped me to learn so much about myself, education, and leadership. Now, I’m impassioned to take on the world. I want to further my education and study law to continue serving disenfranchised communities. “



Photo courtesy of City Year Memphis

- **Laura Bean** – [Emerald Youth Foundation](#)

“Coming out of college, I knew I wanted to the opportunity to jump directly into serving my community. Having just spent four years studying community work inside a classroom, I wanted to actually get involved in the "messy" day-to-day of community work and learn from experience. Knoxville is a relatively small city; I knew finding a job that would allow me to get hands-on service experience at a local non-profit would be difficult. One day while at a job fair, I heard about AmeriCorps and spent hours that night looking at how many opportunities to serve there were! My motivation for this service work is always the people: if I can make just one person feel loved, valued, and understood through my service then it is worth it.”



Photo courtesy of Emerald Youth Foundation



- **Alison Neel – [Impact America](#)**

“My time serving as an AmeriCorps Member has provided me with so many valuable experiences! I was able to take part in three very different service initiatives with my nonprofit organization, Impact America - Tennessee. These initiatives provided me with an extraordinarily diverse set of professional skills and exposed me to parts of the Memphis community that I never would have seen otherwise. Not only did AmeriCorps allow me to develop my resume, it expanded my understanding of, and compassion for, the world around me.”



Photo courtesy of Impact America

- **Jenny Li – [Impact America](#)**



Photo courtesy of Impact America

Jenny Li is a 2016-2017 AmeriCorps member from Los Angeles, California. After graduating from Amherst College with a Bachelor of Arts in English, Jenny decided to serve an AmeriCorps year with Impact America-Tennessee. She chose this particular nonprofit because she was passionate about its initiatives, and she was eager to move to Memphis, Tennessee, a region so different from where she had grown up. Throughout her AmeriCorps year, Jenny works on three initiatives. The first is FocusFirst, for which she visits daycares and pre-schools to provide free vision screenings to young children. The second initiative is SaveFirst, for which she supervises a VITA tax site that offers free tax preparation services to working families. Finally, she will produce a short documentary for Impact America’s Stories from the Line initiative. From her time with Impact America, Jenny has strengthened her skills in project management, documentary making, client service, and leadership.

- **Olivia Besel – [Memphis Teacher Residency](#)**

“I am an AmeriCorps resident with the Memphis Teacher Residency. As for my activity within the program, I have gotten to serve in a high needs neighborhood in Memphis though co-teaching 5th grade Social Studies at a local junior high. The skills I have gained through teaching are seemingly endless at this early stage in my career. Many of these skills I have obtained simply through interacting with 55 ten year olds on a daily basis. They have taught me joy in the mist of work. They have taught me how to be a team player, how to think on my feet, how to be flexible, and how to be warm yet firm. My fifth graders are intuitive, quick, hilarious, and full of wisdom that exceeds the 10 years they have been around. I can converse with them, I can laugh with them, and I can even paint my nails the same color as them so we match at school. I have also gained the skill of patience. Some of my students learn at a rate I can hardly keep up with, while others need more time. No matter the rate in which they learn, they are completely worthy of my adoration and deserve all of my patience. Each and every one of my students is a unique creation with a tender heart and a beautiful mind.”



Photo courtesy of Memphis Teacher Residency



- **Aubrey Daniel - [Project Inspire Teacher Residency](#)**

“Growing up in an affluent area, my public school education held incredible opportunities for me to learn, grow and affect change in my community. Naively, I thought that this was true for everyone in public school until I met my husband, who had grown up in a poor inner city public school system. The lack of opportunities and the ease with which my



Photo courtesy of Project Inspire

bright, talented husband fell through the cracks was disturbing to say the least. When our son was born, I realized I had to do more than just feel bad about it, I had to be a part of making a change. I chose to serve in AmeriCorps because of my passion for closing the gap for this generation of children, including my own. I have been so excited to be a part of the Project Inspire teacher residency program through AmeriCorps. During my time serving, I have gained knowledge that will allow me to be a part of closing the education gap, including tools and techniques learned through a master's degree program, a full year learning from an amazing veteran teacher, and time spent with other teacher residents and educators discussing how to better the public education system for our children in Chattanooga.

- **Olivia Oseguera - [Project Inspire Teacher Residency](#)**

"My own story about falling in love with science was the result of teachers who opened a curious young mind with inspiration. It was my teacher's creativity and enthusiasm for inspiring young freshman that made the class enjoyable and rewarding. I was able to build an incredibly strong foundation in the sciences, which led to my success in all subsequent science classes and into my future graduate studies and career. I hope that one day I can be the teacher that demonstrates enthusiasm and creativity with the next generation of students, and give everyone a chance at exploring new ideas and loving to learn."



Photo courtesy of Project Inspire

- **Ella Junior – The Relay New Teacher Pathway – [Relay Graduate School of Education](#)**



Photo courtesy of Relay Graduate School of Education

Ella Junior returned to her hometown of Nashville after graduating from the University of Alabama. She taught preschool and was really interested in teaching elementary school, but didn't see a pathway to make the transition. Ella learned about the Relay Tennessee Teaching Residency, which would allow her to provide direct service in a Nashville Classical Kindergarten classroom, while earning a Masters of Arts in Teaching from the Relay Graduate School of Education.



Her plan is to become a lead teacher record next year and continue her career as an elementary teacher in Nashville. Ella shared her reflection on her students' performance and how much growth they have made. The scholars came into Kindergarten not knowing how to control their bodies or read. Now they are developing their motor skills and reading high level books. One scholar entered Ella's classroom at the lower level of the class, and now he is writing adjectives in his sentences!

- **Emmalee Windle-[Teach For America-Memphis](#)**



Photo courtesy of Teach for America-Memphis

“When I think of my students this year at Frayser and all of the students I have had the privilege of serving through Jumpstart during my time at Northwestern University, I think of their smiles when they, too, realize their hard work is finally paying off. I think of the endless number of strengths they reveal every day. I think of the resilience they possess to persevere through incredibly trying times. There are many people who look at Frayser—or other low-income neighborhoods— and only see the challenges. They see the tremendous amount of work that must be done. Given my own experiences to date, I can empathize with those who may fear that they do not have “the right tools” to best serve and partner with this community. As an AmeriCorps member, I have learned that this is a fruitless mentality to bring into any community. I cannot have a positive impact on my students unless I can see, and tap into, the vast resources and strengths my students and their families bring to the table and acknowledge my own potential as a leader and their partner in this work.”

- **Meredith Zepf – [Teach for America-Nashville](#)**

Meredith Zepf always dreamed of teaching; however, she never imagined herself in a low performing, high priority school as an educator. During her senior year of college, she interned at a Title I school in a low-income area and absolutely fell in love with the work. Following this experience, Meredith knew she wanted to work in a similar environment, but with more support and training. As a result, she decided to join AmeriCorps and as a teacher with Teach For America. Meredith chose the corps because she knew her work would impact closing the achievement gap and she wanted amazing educators and employees of Teach For America to walk alongside her as she set out on her journey as a teacher. Meredith was most recently recognized in [The Tennessean](#) for raising \$1000 to take 60 of her Kirkpatrick Elementary students to see the film *Hidden Figures*. Though her goal was ambitious, she made it happen. “Everyday in my classroom my students and I agree that we will be brave and experience something new,” Meredith states. Fear and frustration are not barriers in her classroom. “Trying new things look different every day. Some days it’s trying to comprehend a nonfictional science text, other days it’s trying to divide fractions. Sometimes it’s going to the movie theater for the first time...” claims Meredith.

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#AMERICORPSWORKS



[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, Social Innovation Fund, and Volunteer Generation Fund programs, and leads the President's national call to service initiative, United We Serve.