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DPI VISTA Monthly

April 2007

"Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb."

Sir Winston Churchill



Dawn Follendorf
VISTA Leader
Stephanie Hogue
Education Specialist

Volunteer Growth

Dawn Follendorf

With the end of the school year approaching, it may seem particularly difficult to get teachers and volunteers to be involved in school activities that are outside their daily norms. In a recent e-mail frenzy I had recently with Karen Collins, I was reminded once again that "it's all about relationships". Karen finds that it is the leaders and volunteers that she maintains contacts with that remain in the school's clubs and volunteer programs the longest. "The pay is not great - so there has to be a greater connection - they have to get something greater out of their efforts. Validation, growth, fun, belonging, and working for a cause..." ~Karen Collins.

Next time you meet with anyone taking the time to volunteer, be sure to make an effort to get to know them on a personal level. Even though this may mean less time spent taking care of other tasks, taking the time to nourish these relationships could help to establish a life-long volunteer with the school. Ask them about their family, their hobbies, what motivates them to volunteer, and what it is they're looking to gain from the experience. By doing this you will also be better able to provide them with the experience that they are looking for that could ensure the growth that Karen was talking about! This could mean providing them with further training or volunteer development opportunities, providing them with a variety of volunteer experiences, finding them more challenging ones, or just connecting them up with other volunteers!

Karen also told me "We can either bloom where we are planted, or go where we are fed". Because you all have chosen to bloom where you are currently planted, now could be your opportunity to help "feed the needs of others blooming along side of you"!



Important Dates

Quarterly Reports Due

April 13, 5:00 p.m.

Birthday this Month:

Be sure to send some birthday

Lisa Fusco

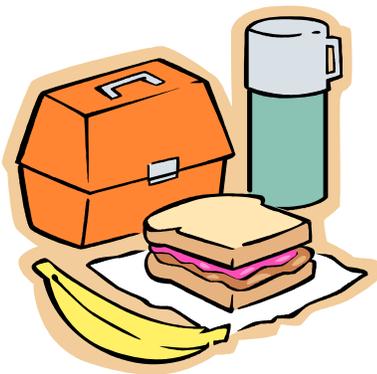
lfusco@waukesha.k12.wi.us

(April 28)



wishes!

Money Saving Tip of the Month: Pack a Lunch!



This month's tip for saving money comes from AmeriCorps office associate Juan Mallach. We thought it was so great we wanted to share it with all of you as well.

The *exercise* of packing your lunch for work has numerous benefits. First and foremost, you are not at the mercy of the lunch lady or what your particular eatery might have in stock. If you want waffles at 2pm, no one will object it is past 11am and only the lunch menu is available! Furthermore, your lunch is at your fingertips, you have just eliminated the lunch line or the commute to locate a suitable lunch spot. Time is money. Also, you ensure you eat what you want by packing your own

lunch. Last, but definitely not least, *you will save money*. You figure anytime you step foot in a restaurant, it is going to cost you at least \$6 and upwards of \$12.

[Here are the top 5 reasons to pack your lunch at least twice a week](http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/nutrition/packing.html) (info provided by http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/nutrition/packing.html):

1. **Control.** Leave the long lunch line (and your hunger) behind. Just sit down, open your lunchbox, and dig in! By the time your friends join you, you'll have finished your homemade veggie wrap and will probably be well into that slice of Aunt Gina's apple pie.
2. **Variety.** It doesn't hurt to cave in and enjoy the occasional serving of chicken nuggets and hot dogs. But if you're eating these foods all the time, your body probably feels ready for a change. A packed lunch a couple of times a week means you can enjoy some favorites that you might not find at school - like a piping hot thermos of your mom's chicken soup; hummus and pita; or some crisp, farm-stand apples.
3. **Planning.** If you have a big game or activity after school, plan ahead and pack some high-energy [snacks](#) to keep you going through the late afternoon. Some ideas: a fruity yogurt with a handful of almonds mixed in, your own "trail" mix of dried fruit and nuts or sunflower seeds, or a bagful of baby carrots. Pack enough of these and you can dip into them between classes so you don't feel tempted to stuff your face at lunch.
4. **Cold hard cash.** A vending-machine candy bar and soda every day can equal the price of a movie ticket by the end of the week. Add an allowance-denting \$5 for a fast-food lunch and a couple of bucks for ice cream and you could have taken your date to the movie, too. If you pack your lunch a couple of times a week, put the money you save aside. Amazing how \$15 a week adds up to \$60 by the end of the month - or more than \$500 by the end of the school year.
5. **That warm and fuzzy feeling.** Remember when your mom or dad used to pack your lunch? Pack yourself a retro lunch featuring your old favorites. Or maybe a doting parent will join your trip down memory lane and pack one for you. (Don't be surprised to find a PB&J, a box of animal crackers, and a note that says, "I love you.")



Interview with a VISTA

Kristina Gomez (Parents Plus)

Dana Reinoos (Parents Plus)

Dana answers Kristina's questions:



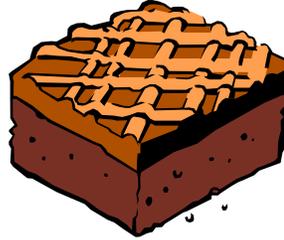
Kristina: Hi Dana! Since you are a newcomer to the DPI VISTA project why don't we let everyone

get to know you a little better?

Dana: I'm a college grad with an English major who completely loves books and film. I live with my family and my dog in Milwaukee. I'm hoping to one day change the world.

Kristina: So Dana, other than me, what has been your favorite part of VISTA service at Parents Plus thus far?

Dana: Well, that's tough, because you're so obviously my favorite part, but as a graduate of Milwaukee Public Schools, I'm really loving getting into the schools and figuring out what I can do to increase parent involvement. It's definitely hard, but I love doing it for a school system that I know from the inside.



favorite part, but loving getting into parent school system that

Kristina: That was probably a hard question for you, here's an easier one: what is one goal you would like to accomplish before your year of service is complete?

Dana: I would like to see all five schools within Pulaski High School have functioning Action Teams.

Kristina: When you're not developing and expanding ongoing collaborative partnerships between schools and their families and communities what are some of your favorite activities?

Dana: I love reading and movies, and also writing, both review and critiques, and original stuff. I am passionate about music, too, and am forever making people mixes.

Kristina: In your month of being a VISTA what has most surprised you/ least surprised you about working at Parents Plus and Milwaukee Public Schools?

Dana: I've been least surprised by the amount of beaurocracy and red-tape surrounding almost everything in Milwaukee Public Schools, and most surprised by the way that there are a lot of people who are really passionate about wanting to change parental involvement - not because I think the parents want to be uninvolved in MPS, but because when I was a student, I didn't even realize that was an issue.

Kristina: Parents Plus has monthly potlucks celebrating birthdays; if you could decide the menu for our entire potluck what would it be?

Dana: Well, it would definitely have to be all vegetarian, starting with a fancy salad with pears and goat cheese. I'd love to have a pasta salad with tons of veggies, and some well-cooked tofu, because I think even meat-eaters could love tofu if it's cooked right. For dessert, definitely brownies.

Kristina: What is one project you would like to pursue during the summer months?

Dana: I am hoping to be able to work on some parent workshops for the parents of incoming freshmen at Pulaski during the summer, which would help their children start high school on the right foot.

Kristina: Lastly, what are you looking forward to most during your remaining 10 months of service?

Dana: I'm looking forward to getting to know people within the schools who want to make a difference, and hopefully helping them to enact the changes they want.

Kristina: I've been thinking of trying to revive English sayings in the office. Which would you like to have a comeback? Godspeed or By Jove?

Dana: By Jove, definitely.

Kristina answers Dana's questions:



Dana: What inspired you to become a VISTA at Parents Plus?

Kristina: I was drawn to the opportunities Parents Plus presented to VISTAs in the DPI program. Not only am I able to work closely with schools and parents, I have a wealth of community resources available to me through the connections at this non-profit. I can now use these resources at the schools I work with and with parents I encounter.

Dana: We all know VISTAs love going to conferences - what has been your favorite one and why?

Kristina: I'm torn on this one. Are we talking workshop-wise or food-wise? I think we all know how a horrible lunch course can take away from even the most wonderful conference.

I'm going to go with the March 7 Annual Parent Leadership Conference, and Dr. Mavis Sanders is my reason why. Her general session speech and the special conference track were not only informational, they were entertaining as well. Also, I was thrilled to hear Ada Rivera speak! It seemed too often I would attend conferences with little or no speakers representing Milwaukee.

Dana: What are your plans for this summer after your VISTA year and beyond?

Kristina: I haven't decided yet and I'm very anxious about it...so thanks for reminding me what a huge decision I have yet to make! Well I do know that I will be tending to my new garden this summer and studying for the GRE. I do have a plan to be enrolled in graduate school by fall 2008 though!

Dana: What is your favorite thing about being located in our brand new downtown office?

Kristina: Everything! I love, love, love my view from the corner of Mason and Van Buren! If I really stretch I can almost see the lake. One downside is that I've recently realized that people can see into the office just as much as I can see out. I guess I was under the impression that we had specially tinted windows.

Dana: What advice would you give a newer VISTA like me about the year to come?

Kristina: I would advise you on a number of things. First is to find those people around you who can be a life saver in times of crisis (people at Parents Plus know I'm referring to T&P). Also, I've found it absolutely essential that we be flexible in our work in order to be successful. So, be sure you're flexible and don't be shy about asking for help. Lastly, make sure you establish a good relationship with someone in the school you'll be working at. It makes things much easier in the long run.

Dana: What's your favorite book that should be turned into a movie?

Kristina: My favorite book has already been made into a truly lovely film by Martin Scorsese (*The Age of Innocence*). One book that I believe has potential to become an amazing film is Ignazio Silone's *Bread and Wine*. The book is set in Fascist Italy and speaks of the need for political liberty and social change in Italy's Abruzzi region and beyond.

Dana: What is the

Kristina: I deferred the unanimous reply.

Dana: If you could

Kristina: None!! This drive 45 minutes to and walk, ride a bike, or use public transportation.



single best thing you can cook?

this question to my family. Chicken stir fry was

drive any kind of car, what would it be?

is a really cruel question as you know I have to work everyday! I would love to not have a car

Dana: Which of the X-Men has the powers you would most like to acquire? Look them up if you have to.

Kristina: I was going to go with Storm, but I don't like the way her eyes look when they're glossed over. I'll go with Jean Grey, but not when she's evil. Telekinesis would be a wonderful ability to have. I'd like to fly as well.

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Spring: a Good Time to Look Back and Jump Ahead!



By Ruth Anne Landsverk

Now that the weather has warmed up a bit, it's time for partnership planners to think about what children everywhere have been dreaming of for a while now: the end of the school year!! Spring is a great time for Partnership Action Teams to review what they accomplished during the school year and begin to plant the seeds for next year's efforts.

Following are some April-May activities recommended by the National Network of Partnership Schools for Action Teams to help sustain successful partnerships:

- Plan an End-of-the-Year Celebration to thank, recognize, and reward those who lead, support and participate in partnership activities. Be sure to recognize achievement of this year's partnership

goals.

- With your Action Team, complete an End-of-Year Evaluation, contained in the Network's handbook, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action (Second Edition)*. Choose the form aligned by types of partnerships (pp. 353-359) or the form aligned by partnership goals (pp. 360-364).
- Complete and return the Network's *UPDATE* survey to renew membership for the next school year. NNPS waives annual renewal fees of \$100 per school if the *UPDATE* is returned by June 30.
- Select replacements for outgoing members of the Partnership Action Team for next year.
- Select a date and place to conduct team training before the school year ends, during the summer or in the fall to prepare new Action Team members and refresh continuing members.
- Revise the Three-Year Outline (p. 339) by adding or adjusting goals and activities for the next three years.
- With the Action Team, prepare to write a new One-Year Action Plan for the upcoming school year.
- Ask the Action Team to develop summer partnership activities that connect families to children's learning and keep family-school communications open and positive.
- Consider applying for a 2007 NNPS Partnership Award and/or submitting a Promising Partnership Practice about your school to NNPS for publication. The newly-shortened award form and promising practice form are both available on the NNPS website: www.partnershipschoools.org.



Life After VISTA

By Stephanie Hogue



Wow - April already? The end of the school year fast approaches, and before you know it your terms will be coming to a close as well! While it certainly isn't time to pack your bags just yet, it

also doesn't hurt to also be thinking about what comes next. I've been really lucky to be able to talk with many of you about your ideas for "Life After VISTA" and I'm really impressed by your forethought (after all, I am not entirely sure I have figured any of it out for myself yet!). I am also struck by the variety of your post-VISTA plans! Whether you are pursuing another service commitment such as AmeriCorps or the Peace Corps, looking to put that Education Award to work for you in furthering your studies, or interviewing for jobs in the public or private sector, I hope that you all reap the benefits from your service as VISTAs long after your terms are over. I thought I would share some resources that will help you do so this month.

Noncompetitive status for federal governmental jobs:

Maybe you've heard that VISTA alumni have "noncompetitive status for jobs in the federal government", but what exactly does that mean? Well, *if* you meet the requirements of a particular governmental position, the hiring official may hire you without considering other applicants. While it certainly does not guarantee you a job, it is a definite boost if you are interested in



civil service.

International opportunities:

Have you been considering joining the Peace Corps after your VISTA term is over? I'm sure you've visited the website (www.peacecorps.gov) for information, but you may want to hear more about it from people who've actually served and returned. Here I have to defer to Dawn entirely - she really is a great resource when it comes to this program.



If you are looking to go abroad, but don't think you can make the 2+ year commitment (or you want to have more flexibility as to where you end up!) you also might want to look into Midwest Teacher Training Program (www.mttp.com) here in Madison. It is an intensive five-week TEFL certification program that really prepares you for teaching English as a foreign language. While it is an accredited program, due to its length you cannot use your education award to pay for it (last I checked). However, I've talked to the people at MTTP several times and have learned that they do offer a 10% discount to former VISTAs. You can also often sign up for positions teaching English abroad and get certified while there, but it is my understanding that having the certification beforehand might get you better placement and more lucrative compensation.

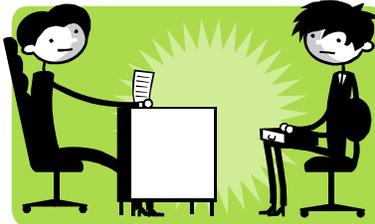
Further education:

If you think you are going back to school, the education award is really useful. To help you stretch it even further, there are schools that match the education award or offer benefits to former VISTAs (http://www.americorps.org/for_individuals/alumni/ed_award_match.asp). Even if you plan on using your education award to pay off loans, this list is worth a look because some schools offer discounts and special offers to alumni regardless of whether or not they use the ed award for their programs.



Help with next or none of these what you'd like to do universities offer separate offices for so get in touch with helpful life-sorting tools.

steps, resumes, and interviews: Maybe all ideas sound good, and you just aren't sure next. In that case, counseling centers at help to anyone, not just students (many have continuing education just for people like us!), a school near you for some guidance and



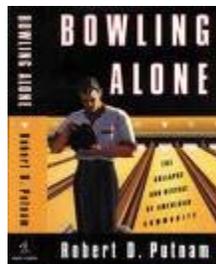
Speaking of which, AmeriCorps provides one such tool, and each of you should have a Life After AmeriCorps book coming your way. There is also a website for AmeriCorps alums (www.lifetimeofservice.org) that provides resources and networking opportunities.



Of course, you can always sign up for another year of VISTA or work with another AmeriCorps program - for some of us (ahem), one year is just not enough!

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Looking at a book! Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community
article by Jenna Baltz



I remember several moments, living in a small western suburb of Chicago, thinking to myself, “This has to be the only place where someone can be surrounded by 7 million other individuals and still feel so incredibly lonely.” The truth of the matter is that that small western suburb of Chicago isn’t the only place in which one can be surrounded by a seemingly infinite number of people, and still be socially isolated in today’s world. Through extensive research, this increasing trend of social disconnection in America has been shown to stretch from urban communities to rural, from affluent communities to impoverished.

The book *Bowling Alone* delves into what has happened to civic and social life in American communities, and the impact of such a decline on the health and well being of both individuals and communities. More specifically, the book focuses on the term *social capital*. The core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value and come with associated norms of reciprocity that work to strengthen communities and develop even more social capital within and among its citizens. “The term social capital emphasizes not just warm and cuddly feelings, but a wide variety of quite specific benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks. Social capital creates value for the people who are connected and – at least sometimes – for bystanders as well”

(www.bettertogether.org). Living without trust and social connections isn’t enjoyable, but consequences of social capital and its absence go well beyond feelings of happiness or a lack thereof. Social capital has been shown to substantially affect child welfare (including student achievement), housing and neighborhood quality, health, and democracy to name just a few. The book then summarizes research looking into the societal contributors to the decline in social capital, and ways in which we can work towards again increasing social capital in our communities.

So what does this have to do with being a VISTA working on developing school, family, and community partnerships? As I read this book, I realized that developing partnerships is embedded in social capital theory. The Epstein framework is based on an extensive amount of research regarding the importance of partnerships in education. The research on social capital gave me a much deeper understanding of why developing partnerships works. Why partnerships increase student achievement, why partnerships extend the educational life of students, why partnerships increase the aspirations of students in schools where partnerships exist. We connect people...school people, family people, and community people. Skills, talents, and ideas come together to create something much more dynamic than would be created if it were each individual entity on its own.

While this may appear to be common sense, developing a deeper understanding has led me to reflect much more on the role that social capital plays in our school and community. We have been using the Epstein framework of six types of involvement, and these have been working indirectly to build and strengthen social capital within our school and families. After reading this book, I believe that strengthening social capital could be used as a focal point in this framework, rather than standing as an indirect benefit of it. If we understand the role that strengthening social capital can play in increasing student success, which the research shows is tremendous regardless of the socio-economic status of the student, we can potentially increase the breadth, depth, and ultimately the success of our partnership programs.

If you are interested in learning more about social capital, these resources are a great place to start:

Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community by Robert D. Putnam

This book provides the research behind social capital, looks into the culprits of declining social capital, and offers some insights for daily living, future policy making, and planning that could work to reverse the trend.

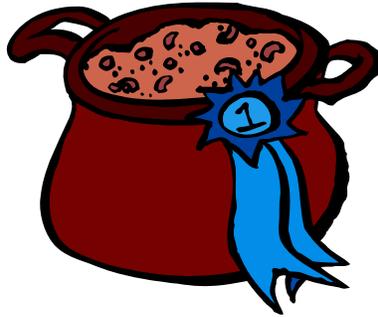
www.bowlingalone.org

Better Together: Restoring the American Community by Lewis M. Feldstein and Robert D. Putnam. This book gives actual accounts of organizations and community groups building social capital across the United States.

www.bettertogether.org

Recipe of the Month

Contributed by Dawn Follendorf



Southwestern Chicken Chili

1 Tbsp olive oil
1 lb. boneless skinless chicken breast-cubed
1/4 cup chopped onion
1 can chicken broth
1 - 4 oz can green chilies
1 -19 oz can white kidney beans (canelloni) –
undrained
spice blend:
1 tsp. garlic powder
1 tsp. cumin
1/2 tsp. oregano
1/2 tsp. cilantro
1/4 tsp. red pepper flakes
shredded monterey jack or cheddar cheese

Heat oil-add chicken and cook 4-5 minutes stirring often. Remove from heat.

Add chopped onion to saucepan and cook 2 minutes. Stir in chicken broth, green chilies and spice blend-simmer 30 minutes. Stir in cooked chicken and beans-simmer 10 minutes-garnish with cheese and onions.

Serves 4.

Have a favorite recipe you'd like to contribute to the **Recipe of the Month** section of May's newsletter? E-mail it to Dawn before the last week of April!