MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY
By: Natalie Bencini

For AmeriCorps members, Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday is not a day off of school or work; it is a day to celebrate, learn and reflect.

This year, Teen Action Zone (TAZ) of Sinnissippi Centers, Inc. in Sterling hosted festivities on Monday, January 20. Ten AmeriCorps members and fifty junior high students gathered at TAZ to celebrate the special day.

The kids were able to choose from an abundance of activities. Among these were crossword puzzles, word searches, art projects and writing activities. Each exercise pertained to Dr. King’s peaceful struggle to achieve civil rights for African Americans and others, and to bring together a very diverse America.

My favorite activity was when the kids wrote in a conversation bubble made of construction paper. The kids had to complete the statement, “I have a dream . . .” with their own goals and aspirations. Then, they decorated the walls of TAZ with the bubbles. It was so heartwarming to walk around and read all the different goals they shared.

After that, we enjoyed snacks and watched the film “Undercover Brother” which depicts several stereotypes of today’s society.

All in all, it was a successful day for the children and AmeriCorps members. Everyone learned a lot while having a great time. It was just another day when it felt so good to be an AmeriCorps member.

REFLECTION RETREAT
By: Faith Stambaugh

On February 1, 2003 the ABC Literacy Program had a Reflection Retreat. During the retreat, we looked back on the last six months to see how we have changed and grown. Also, we looked forward to see what might be next in our lives and in our future goals.

The first activity that we did was to write down, on a 3 x 5 card, one nice thing about every person in our group. Later in the day, we placed the cards in individually marked envelopes, which we could later read in private.

Next we picked two people that would make good leaders or that were good leaders in their lifetime. These two people could be anyone in the world, whether dead or alive. The most common was Martin Luther King, Jr. Then we looked at different leadership styles in the world, and evaluated what style was used by our chosen leaders. There are four main styles of leadership. They are Authoritarian, Consultative, Democratic, and Laissez Faire. After we learned what each one of these styles contained as a leader, we discussed the advantages and disadvantages to each one.

In small groups, we discussed different ways that we could get the communities and the children involved with volunteering within their own communities. Here are some of the ideas that we came up with: helping elderly and the homeless, book drives for children, park and highway clean-ups, getting junior high school kids to work with the elementary children with their reading, teen support groups for boys and girls, having a read-a-thon for anyone who wants to participate, having children go into the nursing homes and read their favorite

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Reflection Retreat (continued)

books to residents, camp counseling, and finally helping out with Habitat for Humanity in their local area. All of the ideas were wonderful and anyone could use them in any town.

One of the final things we did was to nominate those who we thought were winners in our group and why. In our eyes we are all winners and do very important work in our communities.

In conclusion, this retreat taught us a lot about ourselves, who we are, and the type of people that we work with. Everyone is great and deserves a pat on the back for all they do. The Reflection Retreat was a great success and I don’t think it will be forgotten. I myself am looking forward to the “summer” retreat in just a few short months.

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Book Review
By Caroline Singleton

Books have power. The books you choose have an impact on the characters of the children you work with. Why not choose books that will model positive character traits? Go beyond the cute and the politically correct. Instill your young readers with knowledge of right and wrong through the books you share with them. Ask yourself questions such as; “Does this book consistently discourage bad behavior? Are the characters held accountable for their actions? Is there any use of bad language?”

Perhaps it’s time to look for books about real people with great character. Biographies (or autobiographies) of people of character can teach children the true meaning of success and happiness. They can learn how others overcame hardships, persevered and pursued excellence.

February was celebrated as Black History Month. Here are some books that demonstrate the great character of some black Americans.

A Voice of Her Own by Kathryn Lasky tells the story of Phyllis Wheatley, a colonial poet who was also a slave. Another good book on Phyllis Wheatley is Phyllis Wheatly, First Afro-American Poet, by Carol Greene, published by Children’s Press.

Ruby Bridges is a more modern day hero. The story of her childhood bravery is told in Through My Eyes by Ruby Bridges, published by Scholastic. For younger children there is The Story of Ruby Bridges, by Robert Coles, published by Scholastic. Check out Carver: A Life in Poems, by Marilyn Nelson. This book uniquely tells about the great scientist in a way that introduces readers to poetry as well.

Look for books on these black Americans of great character: Mary McLeod Bethune, Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglas.

Happy reading!

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MEET MORE FIRST YEAR MEMBERS
By Julie Johnson

Sherrie Henrichs works at Prophetstown Elementary. Sherrie has been a Certified Nurses Aide for almost 17 years. She learned about AmeriCorps through a client that was a member for two years. Sherrie resides in Tampico with her husband Carl and her two children Josh 13 and Jessie 9. She enjoys doing activities with her family.

Davia Merced works at Challand Middle School in Sterling. Davia enjoys working in AmeriCorps and likes the kids she works with. Her hobbies are playing video games, making her own clothes, and watching the Food and Weather channel. Davia’s favorite quote is “Do. Or don’t do. There is no try.”

Cindi Kozlowski works at Open Sesame in Dixon. Cindy found out about AmeriCorps through the Job Fest at Sauk College. Her hobbies are hanging out with her friends.

Caroline Singleton began working at Sterling Christian School over a year ago. Through the school she learned about AmeriCorps. Caroline enjoys working with her third and fourth grade class. She teaches math and language as well as reading. She lives in Sterling with her pastor-husband and three daughters who also attend Sterling Christian. Reading, drawing and walking with family are among Caroline’s favorite activities. She believes that influencing children with good literature at a young age is important for their development.

Julie Johnson has worked at Sterling Christian School for 3 years. She resides in Sterling with her husband Keith, and her two children Tyler 14, and Macie 12 and their dog Shadow. Her hobbies are playing and watching basketball, volleyball and singing. AmeriCorps was offered at Sterling Christian for the first time this year.

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Book Review
By Caroline Singleton
Wanted: AmeriCorps Members
by Mildred Harding

AmeriCorps Benefits Children (ABC) Literacy program needs people like you who care about the future of our children and their education.

Graduation is getting closer and closer. Rebecca is looking for new AmeriCorps applicants for 2003-2004 year.

First year members can make a difference next year. You already have your foot in the school door so to speak. You already know the ropes. Why not plan to make the second year work for you as well? Also, since you know what AmeriCorps is all about why not pass that information along to your friends and loved ones that might be interested?

Remember what you can earn:

Full-time members put in 1,700 hours of service over a year from August 4 until July 31. They received a living allowance of $9,900 and an education award of $4,725.

Part-time members serve 900 hours from August 4 until May 31st. They receive a living allowance of $5,241 and an education award of $2,363.50.

Reduced part-time members serve 675 hours from August 4 until May 31st, with a living allowance of $3,930 and an education award of $1,800.

Quarter-time members serve 450 hours from August 4 until May 31st, with a living allowance of $2,620 and an education award of $1,250.

If a student at SVCC is taking at least six credit hours each semester, and is income eligible, he or she may qualify to be a reduced part-time or quarter-time work study member receiving $6.15 per hour, with the required hours and education award listed previously for those categories. Work-study members serve from August 4 through May 15.

You might think to yourself, I’m not going to college or back to school for a while. You have seven years to use the education award and another year if you are a second year member. That means a total of 8 years to use both education awards.

If you think you might be interested in joining AmeriCorps give Rebecca White a call at 815-288-5511 ext 313. It’s not too late to plan for the future.

RED CROSS TRAINING
By Katie Pyron

On January 11th a group of AmeriCorps members began disaster-preparedness American Red Cross training. Some will continue on to become Red Cross volunteers assisting in disaster relief and the blood mobile. Both Lee County and Lincoln Land (Whiteside County) chapters are participating in the training. The instructors are Deb Cervantes and Sharon Kersten of the Red Cross.

The first training session consisted of getting to know each other and the various reasons for being there. One thing agreed by all was the need to be prepared in a disaster and the desire to help people. The first lesson covered was “Intro to Disaster Training.” This is a required course to receive further training by the Red Cross. The next part of the training was “Mass Care Overview.” Both classes provide the information needed to understand the Red Cross and its functions and services.

In “Intro to Disaster” information was given on the impact of a disaster to the community, types of disasters, and where the Red Cross fits in. Also covered was how each could use skills to help as Red Cross volunteers. The impact of a disaster can vary depending on the area, the type of disaster, and the people involved. One thing that does not change is how the community, the volunteers, and the various agencies work together to help the community recover.

“Mass Care” is when a disaster affects multiple families and victims. The lesson covered what mass care is, sheltering, preparing food for large numbers of victims, mobile feeding, and how the local chapter works in a mass care situation. As stated above, mass care happens when there are multiple victims. This can be due to an apartment fire, a tornado, or anything that leaves multiple victims.

Sheltering is the opening of a shelter to care for the mass numbers. The shelter is set up to provide a safe environment for the victims until other arrangements can be made. As in any situation with a large number of people there are rules for maintaining the shelter.

The next part is food preparation for large numbers. Sometimes there is a need for the shelter to provide meals for a large number of people for days at a time. The volunteers must be trained in how to provide this care. Mobile feeding is when an ERV or emergency response vehicle is sent into the local area stocked with snacks, cold meals, and drinks for victims who have not made it to the shelter, or do to lack of need a shelter has not been established but victims still need meals. Some ERV’s are equipped to cook hot meals also.

Using ERV’s is another way the Red Cross can get into the community and assess the needs of the victims and their families. They also can direct people to shelters and services. The mobile units also provide bulk distribution of supplies such as cleaning supplies after a flood. This again gives the volunteers a chance to assess the damage.

The Red Cross benefits the community in many ways. To be a volunteer is a rewarding experience that everyone should consider. In addition to becoming a volunteer, some take the training just to feel that they and their family are prepared in the event of a disaster.

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On January 25th the second session of training began. This session covered shelter operations from start to finish, and damage assessment.

Shelter operations begin with a commitment to help the victims. The shelter cycle goes like this: preparation, disaster occurs, pre-occupancy inspection, shelter opens, clients arrive, clients return home, and finally the shelter closes. Even if no one shows up to the shelter, it will still open in the event of a disaster until it is certain the needs of the community have been met.

A shelter is not something that can just pop up over night. The volunteers train ahead of time to be sure that everyone knows what they are suppose to do in the event of various disasters. They do this by conducting drills, in the same manner that fire drills are held at school. They do this so that they can locate any problem areas and have them smoothed out before a real disaster occurs.

Next the training taught how the assessment of damage is done in the event of a disaster. Red Cross volunteers go out into the community and perform surveys of the affected area to establish the needs of the community.

The assessments are done at various levels. A basic assessment lets the Red Cross know if there is a need for a shelter to be set up, and the number of families affected. A more thorough and detailed assessment is next within 72 hours from the first assessment. All of the trainees were given the chance to survey damage done and assess the situation by watching a video. One thing learned is that assessors must work quickly and thoroughly to get this job done.

As the training continues into March, the trainees will all acquire a new respect for the trainers and the many other volunteers that are not seen until the disaster happens. In many ways, hopes are that trainees, trainers and other volunteers will never meet under such circumstances.

AmeriCorps Benefits Children (ABC) Literacy Program is a venture, sponsored by Sauk Valley Community College, whose mission is to help raise the reading levels of children in local schools, and promote volunteerism within the community. If interested, call Rebecca White at 815-288-5511 ext 313, or email whiter@svcc.edu

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