ABC AmeriCorps Off to a Good Start

By Rebecca White, AmeriCorps Director

As of August 1, 2004, the ABC Literacy Program is doing business under a new name. When the program began in 2000, the ABC stood for AmeriCorps Benefits Children, and the members served as literacy tutors in grades K-4.

Over the past four years, the program has grown and evolved in response to the needs of the community. The program’s borders have gone beyond Sauk Valley Community College with a collaboration with Illinois Valley Community College. Four AmeriCorps members are serving in that district south of the Sauk Valley Area.

This year, members are serving children from infants through high school, and expanding services in community-based agencies. Services being provided go beyond literacy tutoring, hence the name change. We are now ABC AmeriCorps, with the ABC standing for AmeriCorps Benefits the Community.

After the temporary cutbacks of last year, our program is back to full strength, with 52 members to serve over the course of the year. Our partners with sponsoring sites include:

Amboy Central School
East Coloma School
Franklin Grove School
Open Sesame After-School Program at Lincoln School in Dixon
Riverdale School
St. Andrew School
Thomson School
Challand Middle School
Franklin School in Sterling
Jefferson School in Sterling
Lincoln School in Sterling
Washington School in Sterling
Sterling High School
Whiteside Area Career Center
Teen Action Zone of Sinnissippi Centers
Teen Turf in Amboy
University of Illinois Extension
SVCC Nursing Mentoring
Even Start of Whiteside ROE
Big Brother/Big Sister
Lincoln Land American Red Cross
Youth Service Bureau of Ottawa
Streator Domestic Violence Shelter

In addition to service in the above sites, ABC AmeriCorps members help with many community service activities, some of which include chaperoning dances, children’s activities during Head Start parent meetings, helping with local public library programs, and in October, assisting with various public Halloween parties. It is going to be a great year!
AmeriCorps Orientation  
Class of 2005  
by Kathy Raymond

This year we had our orientation in August. It was an interesting two weeks of hot and cool mixed. But as usual our director Becki has picked the best of the best and we the forty-eight members of the ABC AmeriCorps group will have a year of fun and learning.

We are a group of young and old, male and female, experienced and inexperienced. This group came together not knowing one another and ended the two weeks with newfound friendships. Some of us may have found out things about ourselves we didn’t know.

The first week of orientation we all got an opportunity to get to know each other. We started the week sitting with those we knew but by the end of the week we had expanded our comfort zones a bit. The planned activities helped us learn some interesting things about one another. We may not know all our names by heart but we do know who is nice, lovable, terrible, and who all can make red in the face or who can sketch a mean design. Our group got an opportunity to find out what color we are: blue, orange, green or gold. I think that sometimes we have to just find out about ourselves in order to understand those around us.

We were given an opportunity to learn some interesting techniques and procedures to use at our sites. Guest speakers came to instruct us in health as well as education issues. Hopefully this aids everyone in working with the children or youth at their sites.

As usual some went away feeling a bit overwhelmed. Some may have left orientation a little bit unsure of what they have signed up for. This group will have an opportunity to really make a difference. I see a group that is as different as they are similar.

As ABC AmeriCorps 2005 we will again GET THINGS DONE.

Quotable Quote: A Dream is worth the nap.  
-Kathy Raymond-

Giving the Books Away  
RIF Book Giveaway  
by Erin Hartman

The first RIF (Reading Is Fundamental) book giveaway for this service year was held recently. The projects were centered around “Make a Difference Day” and the theme was Friendship and Helpfulness. We gave away 875 books to kindergarten, second, and third grades in ten different schools.

The kindergarten classes at Franklin Elementary School in Sterling had a lot of fun with their project. First we read a book called My Friends. They loved the story and found the illustrations very humorous. Then we made posters to hang around the school. On the posters were three flowers with the words “something I learned from a friend is...” written in the center of each one. On the petals the children each wrote something they have learned from a friend. It was very interesting to hear all the different and intelligent responses.

After they completed the project, they each picked out a book to take home. The children, as well as the teachers, were very happy with the selection of books. They are all looking forward to the next project.

There will be two more RIF book giveaways this service year. One is scheduled around Thanksgiving/Christmas with the theme of Family and Holidays, and the other will be around Martin Luther King Jr. Day with the theme of Diversity and Tolerance.

Recently, while browsing through the children’s section at the bookstore, I noticed a new trend. A growing number of celebrities have been writing children’s books. Jamie Lee Curtis, Maria Shriver, Katie Couric, Billy Crystal, Billy Joel, and even Madonna have tried it. I began to wonder if these stories were actually worth reading or are these authors just getting published because they are celebrities? I can’t vouch for all of them, but I did find two exceptional stories.

(Book Review Corner, continued)
Title: It’s Hard to be Five  
Author: Jamie Lee Curtis  

This is an adorable story about a little boy who tells about how difficult life can be when you’re five! He has an awful time being patient with his little brother, being told “No” by his parents and just staying clean. When he arrives at school, he’s so scared, and his biggest problem is just sitting still. But, he adjusts to school and realizes how great being five can really be.

Kindergarteners will definitely be able to relate to the problems this little boy has in the story. They will really enjoy the bright and colorful illustrations that accentuate the humor of the story. Very enjoyable!

Title: The Blue Ribbon Day  
Author: Katie Couric  

This is a heartwarming story about best friends, Ellie and Carrie, who try out for the school soccer team. Ellie makes the team, but Carrie doesn’t. Both friends are very disappointed by this news. But Carrie soon discovers what she is good at (with the help of another friend and her mother) and wins the blue ribbon.

This story teaches children the importance of overcoming disappointment and finding the things you are really good at. The Blue Ribbon is an aspiring story with great illustrations!

Opening Day; Through First Year Eyes  
by Justin Swift  

Opening Day for me was an interesting experience. I did not know what to expect. Everything was rolling along nicely until we realized Katie was stuck in the seatbelt due to bubble gum or glue in the latch. After we passed that minor obstacle we had to contend with the rain. Fate seemed to frown on our little voyage. But our intrepid leaders Becki and Tammy pressed on through the rain to Bloomington.

I had come prepared for a long road trip, with my portable DVD player and action staple Terminator 2. This generated the interest of my fellow van mates, and prompted Tammy to threaten me with chick flick movies on the next trip. This scared the "daylights" out of me.

Upon arrival in Bloomington I gravitated to Wayne, my lone male companion on this trip, to catch up on how he had been. Things were now going smoothly. We all had a lot of fun during lunch, and the keynote speaker gave a warm introduction. I must also note I was impressed by the large amount of AmeriCorps members in attendance.

The breakout sessions I chose to attend were the keynote speaker’s assembly on prioritizing, which I both enjoyed and found informative. My other assembly of choice was pretty much an AmeriCorps powwow where I learned a lot about the beliefs and values of my fellow members. Overall I found it to be a fun experience, and a great time with my fellow AmeriCorps members.

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

-Margaret Mead-

The American Red Cross and AmeriCorps Work Together  
by Abi Hook  

I have learned a lot of things about the American Red Cross. I thought that all they did was set up and run blood banks, but they do much more than that. I was given the opportunity to attend classes given by our area Lee County and Lincoln Land American Red Cross chapters. We have covered sessions pertaining to: Shelter Operations, Mass Care, Disaster Assessment, First Aid, Adult and Infant CPR, and soon to cover Emergency Assistance for Families.

I learned that the American Red Cross is there for
you not just when floods or tornados happen in our area. The American Red Cross is there to help you if your family experiences a fire. They will help you by finding a place for you to stay, getting you clothes to wear and providing you with meals to eat. I always wondered who helped out the people that were hit by a disaster or provided them with meals. Now I know it is the American Red Cross.

By taking these sessions I have learned all that they do and how I can become one who helps others in a disaster. After taking the training that I have, I now feel, and I think that the others who trained with me also feel, that the American Red Cross are the people that are always there to help in a disaster. They are like angels that are not noticed until we need them.

Quotable Quote: “People almost always do great things without knowing how to do them and are quite surprised to have done them.”

-Bernard De Fontendle-

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Kathy Raymond is Editor of “Inner AmeriCorps” Volume 4. ABC AmeriCorps 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 the ABC AmeriCorps office at 815-288-5511 ext 313 or ext 428, or email Program Director Rebecca White, whiter@svcc.edu