

Alternatives, Inc. – Peninsula AmeriCorps Serve and Support

Focus: Human Need
Issue Area: Youth Development

Innovative Elements

- Delivering meaningful service
- Exceptional partnerships
- A real spirit of service
- Potential for replication

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Alternatives, Inc. – Peninsula
AmeriCorps Serve and Support

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Program Description

Alternatives, Inc. – Peninsula AmeriCorps Serve and Support (PASS) enhances life skills, health and wellness, workplace readiness skills, and career preparation for youth ages 13-18 in Hampton, VA. AmeriCorps Members provide instruction in visual art, music, videography, dance and theater. Members also expand service-learning and civic engagement opportunities that build a commitment to service and altruism. The program's comprehensive approach helps young people emerge into powerful and positive leaders by providing opportunities for:

- Fitness and wellness;
- Fine and expressive arts;
- Civic, social and cultural identity; and
- Personal direction and success.

PASS AmeriCorps Members, who are all students at Christopher Newport University, serve at the Hampton Teen Center. The Center operates in collaboration with city government, local public K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, and community nonprofit agencies. Center leadership is based on a youth-adult partnership model, with teens playing major roles in the facility's leadership. In collaboration with Christopher Newport University Center for Service-Learning and Social Entrepreneurship (CNU-CSLSE), Alternatives, Inc. utilizes a vertical-integration model for the PASS program design. Adult leaders at the Center partner with the 12 PASS AmeriCorps Members who in turn partner with the Center's teens.

The AmeriCorps Members use their knowledge, skills and professional passions to engage teens in innovative programming at the Center, designing and implementing programs based on their college majors. For example, a current member who is an art major designed and instructs classes on watercolors and art journaling. Additionally, Members advise the Center's teens on designing and implementing service projects throughout Hampton.

Program Innovations

Delivering meaningful service

With highly committed partners and an innovative program design, PASS has achieved significant successes during its first year of operation.

- AmeriCorps Members recruited 270 volunteers including 55 college-aged students, 80 high school students and 100 adults and young people serving as episodic volunteers.
- Volunteer surveys indicated a 25% increase in pre- to post-test scores to a sense of commitment and altruism.
- Partner feedback indicated that Members contributed to meeting community needs such as hunger, diabetes, gerontology and cultural diversity.
- The program engaged 48 Christopher Newport University students in volunteer roles at the Hampton Teen Center.

Exceptional partnerships

The Hampton Teen Center serves as a centralized hub for the city's youth civic engagement programs, providing PASS AmeriCorps Members direct access to a variety of potential collaborators. PASS partners with other Teen Center groups such as *Word!* magazine, Uth ACT, Green\$mart and the Teen Center Youth Advisory Board. Externally, Members partner

with the Virginia Foodbank, Hampton Health Department, the Diabetes Association, Hampton City Schools and 21st Century Learning Centers and Communities in Schools.

Potential for replication

The innovative strategies demonstrated by Alternatives, Inc. offer great potential for replication. Considering the economic climate that many states face across the country, the PASS program model could be easily replicated and prove very beneficial to other urban areas. Alternatives, Inc., the City of Hampton and CNU-CSLSE all collaborate with national partners to share best practices and to provide local insight that contributes to the national conversation regarding the engagement of young people in public service. Hampton's Youth Civic Engagement Initiative is considered a national model by the National League of Cities and was awarded the 2005 Innovations in American Government Award by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University.



Success Stories

In just its first year of operation, PASS has made a significant impact in Hampton. The program's AmeriCorps Members have served over 500 of the city's teens through service projects, programs, school outreach and general chaperoning of events. The City of Hampton has a national reputation for implementing a systemic approach to youth civic engagement. While the systemic model has included venues for youth in government, youth service-learning, youth activism, youth media and youth social entrepreneurship, it was not until 2009 that a model of youth in national service was incorporated into the mix. The PASS AmeriCorps Members are incredible models to Hampton residents of how young people are giving back to their country through national service. Alternative, Inc.'s long-term goal for PASS is to increase the number of youth and adults in Hampton who volunteer through its civic engagement efforts.

PASS is a collaborative model between city government, local nonprofits and higher education partners, which is a major factor in the program's success. Each entity brings its own expertise and resources to the table, and each entity's expertise is honored and recognized by the others. Furthermore, partnering with Christopher Newport University has allowed PASS to easily recruit and develop college members and maintain a seamless system for member participation. Alternatives' role as program coordinator ensures quality control, effective communication and program management.