



DPI Farm to School Service Reflections



Katherine Rakowski

Life is not the same as it once was and it can be challenging to find meaning during the difficult times of COVID, quarantine, and social upheaval. We are all looking for some sense of normalcy and grounding, something to anchor us and remind us of who we are as human beings. Gratefully, one way in which I find meaning is through growing food for the community, which I have done as an AmeriCorps Farm to School Specialist at the School District of Bayfield by continuing to plant seeds, tend plants, and share food.

The School District of Bayfield holds an established school and community garden space with a high tunnel. Instead of allowing the garden to go uncultivated this year, I was able to dedicate time and energy to growing food for the community. In order to allow for greater connection to the garden space and plant seeds of hope, we sent updates on the garden via the school's Facebook page. During springtime, I sent home seed starting kits to elementary students with the school lunches. We virtually planted bean seeds together and shared photos of students and families with their freshly planted beans!



Food planted at the Bayfield School Garden is donated to the Food Pantry in Bayfield, Wisconsin and the summer lunch program & elderly center at the Red Cliff Tribe. Between these 3 locations, over 200 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables has been donated to the larger Red Cliff/Bayfield community. This means 200 less pounds of food shipped into our small community, and local, organic, fresh additions to the plates of children, elders, and other community members. Free, fresh, locally grown, organic food keeps us rooted in place and is something to be thankful for during these times.



Makalyn Peterson

Well, to start things off... my term of service had a much different outlook than what was originally discussed and planned due to the changing world of the pandemic. I did my best to jump right in and start things off virtually. To say I've learned one thing during this time is an understatement. I have learned many things. There is still an abundance of the support from local farmers, the school, the staff, and the community during these unprecedented times; there are many trainings and webinars available to aid in the lost time of face-to-face meetings; and lastly, everyone has the ability to be a self-motivator if they believe in themselves and reach out to and use the available resources.

Life is what you make it! There is a quote that states, "Life is like a camera, Just focus on what is important, Capture the good times, Develop from the negatives, If things don't work out, Take another shot." – Unknown

This quote paints a perfect picture for our world today. Focus on what is important today – in an AmeriCorps view, it is reaching students, faculty, and the community. Teaching them about the importance of nutrition and the resources there are to buy fresh produce. Knowing there is still a support system for them. Capture the good times – take in the AmeriCorps lessons and learn how to keep yourself and your family happy and healthy. Develop from the negatives – learn from the situations and be adaptive. In the fall, we hope to take another shot!

Madison Soukup

Looking back on my service year as an AmeriCorps member nothing really went the way that I was expecting. While much of that was far beyond my control I am still happy with the experiences that I had and I can confidently say that I will be leaving the year with an immense amount of knowledge and a lasting friendship.

There are two things that stick out to me as highlights of my service year. The first is the experience that I had teaching students about nutrition, agriculture, and all things farm to school. I have taught students in other aspects before, such as swim lessons and basic tutoring, but never in a formal classroom setting so I was nervous as to that aspect of the job. But I truly loved working with and teaching students! Seeing a child's face light up when they tried a new fruit or vegetable or had the opportunity to hold a real, live worm made the entire experience worthwhile! But I am also grateful for the teaching experience because I always wondered if I wanted to be a teacher and through this experience I realized that classroom teaching isn't the best option for me but that I definitely want to work with children in my future career.

The other highlight of my service year was the friendship that I made with the other AmeriCorps member at my host site. I often struggle to make friends and form close relationships with my coworkers, so I am so grateful that Rachel and I became close friends with a relationship that will outlast the one year of service we served together. AmeriCorps service can be a lonely experience when you are not a full-fledged employee of your host site and you are also required to work independently often so it was extremely beneficial to me that I had another AmeriCorps member to work with this past year. Overall, I am very grateful for the opportunities I had this past year, all of the professional work experience that I have acquired, and the lasting impact I made on my Madison community.

I have had the opportunity to connect with students through PDF documents full of information, newsletters, and different hands on activities. The goal was virtual lessons for 6 weeks; however, COVID caused obstacles that prevented the lessons from getting out to students this summer. I am staying flexible and positive. A goal for fall is to try and pair the virtual lessons to a class (i.e. a Foods class). I have also had the opportunity to connect with some staff including the Assistant Food Service Director and the Food Service Manager from Fairview, Pulaski's Elementary School. I have learned a great deal about their Flex Farms, which is where lettuce is grown with LED lights in a circular tower. I have started the lettuce seeds in hopes of filling the Flex Farms for school lunches beginning in fall and helping the community! Lastly, I was able to assist some with the curbside meal service giving me the opportunity to meet and briefly talk to some families and students! It is fun to learn about what students are doing during their summer, what they like about school, and of course... birthdays!



Rachel Leibovich

My AmeriCorps year of service allowed me to figure out my path, pursuing a Master of Science in Environment and Sustainability with Emphasis in Environmental Justice and Sustainable Food Systems. Wow, that's a long title. I will be pursuing this degree at the University of Michigan, but I will be completing my first year of it from Madison, Wisconsin. Why? The Coronavirus. At the very last second, my degree program decided to switch to an online format, leaving me to scramble to find a new apartment. Once I found a new apartment, I realized I would have to move all by myself, in the middle of a pandemic, in the summer, with just my good old 2009 Toyota Highlander. Needless to say, I was not looking forward to it. That is when Madison (Soukup) stepped in. I knew she had a trailer and she had offered to let me borrow it for my move. When I called her to ask if I could pick it up, both she and her boyfriend showed up at my apartment to help me move. We loaded up my car, her car, and the trailer twice. I wouldn't have been able to do it without them.

AmeriCorps has given me so many things - life skills, professional development, trainings and knowledge, and so much more. But the most valuable thing for me was the friends I made. Although we were apart for most of the year, I'm snap chat friends with Morgan and Facebook friends with Taylor and go to the dog park with Sara. We'll stay in touch as each of us goes forth to improve our communities as best we can, and support each other in countless ways - from helping each other move to signing petitions for public change.

I moved from Minneapolis to Madison specifically for this program. I had read so many articles about how difficult it is to make friends once you have graduated college and entered the workforce. Slap a global pandemic on top of that and it becomes almost impossible. Without the friendships I made at AmeriCorps I don't think I would feel as guided or supported as I find my voice in the environmental justice movement.