



WisCorps Service Reflections



Bella Thiesenhusen

Over the last year, I completed a 1700-hour AmeriCorps service term as a naturalist at WisCorps in La Crosse, WI. I had the pleasure of collaborating with 3 other naturalists and Steph Hanna, the environmental education director, on a variety of projects such as disaster relief, educational programs, trash clean-up, and program development. Throughout my time at WisCorps, I grew more confident in my leadership abilities and had the opportunity to further my education of the natural world while sharing my new knowledge with students and community members. Due to the pandemic, our service year was unique as we met the challenges head on and reached out to help our community through volunteering at the Salvation Army, working in the community garden, and completed yard work for those unable to so.

Along with my fellow naturalists, we ran environmental education programs for school groups, developed and created new lesson plans that we utilized throughout the year, created and ran week-long summer day camps, and held events open to the community. Additionally, I was able to practice creating content for WisCorps' social media accounts, which only furthered my knowledge of nature, as well as giving me the skills to produce great, attention-grabbing content. Though my service term has ended, I am incredibly excited to move forward in my career with all of the new skills and education that WisCorps provided me. I will absolutely miss the people who made it such an unforgettable experience and I am excited to see WisCorps continue to expand and make a difference in their community. I had an incredible year learning, creating, and growing with the people who make WisCorps such a wonderful place to work.

Ashley Nowak

In the Fall of 2019, I served in my first AmeriCorps term with WisCorps on a crew focusing on environmental stewardship throughout the state. Physically, I endured the gamut of weather, from high humidity to multiple inches of snow while sleeping in a tent and living with people I had never met before. As far as having new experiences went, almost every day ticked this box. I gained new hard-skills such as using trail-building tools, power-tools, and learning about invasive species in Wisconsin. But even more, I learned what it was to create, and be a part of, a community living inside of a culture of care. Through this experience I gained some new interests, friends that I will have for the rest of my life, and greater confidence in myself. I sincerely loved my time with this crew--mosquito bites and frozen toes included.

Because of how much I loved my time on my first crew, I applied for another AmeriCorps position with WisCorps in the Summer of 2020, where I served as a crew leader focusing on community in the city of La Crosse, WI. I knew this would be a different experience, but I had not expected to personally grow as much as I did. I gained new hard-skills, like learning how to operate a chainsaw and earned my Pesticide Applicator License. At the same time, I also learned about what leadership style I have, how I can motivate unmotivated individuals, and just how comfortable I can be within a flexible schedule. As a part of this team, I not only gained more respect for this organization, but I also appreciated my first experience even more.

The whole purpose of serving in these kinds of roles is to create an effect on the world around you, whether that is in the environment, the community, or a combination of both. However, the impact that you create is equal, if not greater than the impression that these experiences leave on you!

David Wastart

I began my experience with WisCorps as a Field Assistant in the Spring of 2019. It was an incredibly uplifting phone call when I was offered the position only two days after my interview! I had planned on getting out West to Oregon, however life turns things around in an instant and WisCorps took me in with open arms!

My role with the organization has evolved into being an Operations Assistant. I help facilitate Crew Leader and Crew Member training through Spring, Summer and Fall. This year, we did not run a Spring Crew due to COVID-19. This ran us into a bit of friction, as we had a project sponsor that needed a crew for tree planting, with the timing being sensitive. We scrambled a few people from the office as a super crew to go up to Northern Wisconsin near Lake Superior. We worked long, hot days and one in the rain to plant 2,500 trees and 1,500 herbaceous plugs on a 40-acre plot.

Working with WisCorps is not a cookie cut model, it involves adapting and overcoming obstacles that are not always foreseen. With these experiences, I am growing in a way that will help me navigate the rest of my life.