

Thank you, AmeriCorps!

"As my fourth, and final, year of AmeriCorps service quickly approaches, I have started to reflect on my overall experience a lot. While completing my Bachelor's Degree in Conflict Analysis and Dispute Resolution at Salisbury University, I stumbled upon Mid Shore Community Mediation Center. Around this same time, I was seeking an internship for my degree and decided to apply for my internship with them. Little did I know that this is where my AmeriCorps journey would begin. While completing my internship for school, I was introduced to the Youth Based Mediation Services in the Dorchester County Public Schools. Although I was only able to observe a few days of the Youth Based Mediation Services before the students summer break, I fell in love! Right from the start, I could tell that certain students had formed a bond with the "Peace Team" mediators. The "Peace Team" is the name coined for the Youth Based Mediation Services. One thing that I really love about this program is that it is offered in both middle schools and both high schools in Dorchester County. This means that once students transition into high school, or even if they change their middle or high school, the "Peace Team" is a consistent service that is offered to them, with familiar faces, regardless of the school. While thinking about all of these things, and many others, I was captivated by this truly unique program. Once my internship was complete, I talked with staff at the Mediation Center about how I could stay involved and experience more of what they do with the students. Right away, they started talking to me about AmeriCorps and it seemed like a perfect fit. During my first year of AmeriCorps service, I was still in college and I quickly noticed how much more I could relate to the material that I was being taught. Once I had real life experience to connect it to, everything began coming together. That is the moment I knew that I was in the right line of work for me. As my first year of AmeriCorps service was coming to an end, I began looking for jobs. I had just graduated college with my Bachelors degree; the next logical step in life was to find a job that paid me enough that I could stop working my part time job. The more I researched different jobs that I was half interested in; I could not stop thinking about the students that I have been serving, especially the ones that I had formed a bond with. Every single job that I came across, I would compare it to the service that I

was doing in the school system. Although I am not an employee of the school system, or even the mediation center, I can tell the difference that we are making in the students lives. There have been many days that the students will come by just to say hi or to have a quick talk before they start their day; there have been countless times that students will come back and tell us that they are no longer fighting with "so and so" because of our help, these are the moments that really matter. Eventually it clicked - I was not ready to stop AmeriCorps yet, I had only just begun. That is when I decided to sign up for a second year of AmeriCorps service.

During my second year of AmeriCorps service, I remember I had to take on more responsibility. At first, that was very scary for me; I am not used to being the leader. I feel fairly confident working individually, but having people rely on me for direction can be scary; am I telling them the right thing to do? Indirectly, AmeriCorps really helped me become a better leader and more confident in my own abilities. As my second year of AmeriCorps service was ending, I decided to sign up for a third and then eventually a fourth; each year came with new excitement and new challenges for me. As each new year came around, I had more responsibility than the year before, although it was something that I remember dreading at first, I am appreciative of it now and it is something that I always share with potential new AmeriCorps members. For me, one of the biggest perks of being an AmeriCorps member, is you are able to get real life experience, without the intense pressure of finding a 'real' job right out of high school or college. You are able to find a 'job' that you love to do, something you are passionate about, while having a supportive supervisor that can help transition you into what a 'job' is like. As my fourth year of AmeriCorps service is about to come to a close, I am forever thankful for the AmeriCorps experience because I honestly do not think I would be as capable for what my future brings without the experience and self-growth that I gained through my AmeriCorps service."

~Jessica Basom