**Getting Things Done: United Way of Southeast Alaska’s AmeriCorps Program**

**By United Way of Southeast Alaska**

The AmeriCorps tagline describes its mission in three simple words: “Get. Things. Done.”

Indeed it has—and then some. Since its inception more than two decades ago as the centerpiece program of the Corporation for National & Community Service, AmeriCorps has matched more than 1 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds with non-profit organizations, schools, public agencies and other service groups across the country. These AmeriCorps members not only tackle pressing community issues, themselves; they also mobilize armies of volunteers for their organizations.

AmeriCorps enjoys a similarly long history of service in Alaska. Founded in 1994 by Governor Walter J. Hickel, Serve Alaska works with the Corporation for National & Community Service to bring AmeriCorps (and other programs) to the Last Frontier. Part of Serve Alaska’s work entails overseeing and administrating grants for local non-profits to run national service programs as AmeriCorps “hosts.” Last year, the United Way of Southeast Alaska became one of six grantees in the state to receive this designation.

“When Serve Alaska approached the United Way to be an AmeriCorps host, it seemed like a natural fit,” says Romee McAdams, United Way AmeriCorps Program Manager for 2017-18.

“We’re already working with many local organizations,” she says. “That really helps us keep our fingers on the pulse of the community.”

As an AmeriCorps host, the United Way’s responsibilities include the recruitment, placement and evaluation of AmeriCorps fellows—12 positions at nine different sites in Juneau. Placements for 2017-18 include the Southeast Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC-SEA), AWARE (Aiding Women in Abuse and Rape Emergencies), Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) and the Juneau School District.

Technically these are volunteer positions, although AmeriCorps fellows receive a modest living stipend, health insurance (if needed) and, at the end of their service, an education benefit, valid for seven years. The benefit, called a Segal Award, may be applied to current or future post-secondary education (including vocational school) or repayment of qualified student loans. Dollar amounts change from year to year, but remain equal to the U.S. Department of Education Pell Grant (in 2017, that was $5,815).

And though every host in America carries out AmeriCorps’s national service initiatives, each tailors its work to fit a specific local goal. In this case, the United Way has focused its program on lowering ACE, or Adverse Childhood Experience, scores for Juneau youth and adults.

Scientists associate higher ACE scores with increased risk for all manner of health, social and behavioral problems—not only in childhood, but throughout a throughout a person’s entire lifespan. The United Way AmeriCorps program seeks to mitigate this threat by increasing access to care, building community and school partnerships and imparting healthy lifestyle choices. Some fellows help patients navigate various health services; another orchestrates tobacco cessation programming; still others work as youth specialists and early literacy coordinators.

“Obviously, it’s a privilege to continue developing a strong AmeriCorps presence in Juneau. But through this incredibly impactful partnership, our AmeriCorps fellows touch the lives of thousands of local residents,” McAdams explains.

A little math substantiates her assertion. AmeriCorps fellows serve 1700 hours a year. The United Way’s AmeriCorps program has 12 potential fellows. This translates to a whopping 20,400 hours, annually. The most recent value of volunteer time, as estimated by Independent Sector, is $24.14/hr. At that rate, United Way AmeriCorps fellows provide $492,456 worth of direct service to Juneau.

“Even with the living stipend, for these organizations, that’s a very small investment for this kind of return,” she says. “Plus, an extra set of hands also allows them to address ‘big picture’ issues.”

Of course, in addition to the community and the organizations involved, the rewards of the United Way AmeriCorps program also extend to the fellows. For one, there’s the Segal Award. But a year of AmeriCorps service also allows for the development of crucial skill sets, such as communication, strategy, public speaking, leadership, organizational thinking and confidence.

“Especially with the younger members, it really helps build independent, functional adults,” McAdams says.

But, she stresses, AmeriCorps fellowships aren’t limited to college students or recent graduates.

“It can be a great opportunity for stay-at-home parents thinking about returning to the workforce, or recent retirees, looking to stay active,” she says, noting that AmeriCorps fellows older than 55 at the start of service can pass along their education benefit to their children or grandchildren.

And while the 2017-18 class of United Way AmeriCorps fellows hails from across the country, and as far away as Montana, Kentucky and New York, the program actively encourages local Juneau residents to apply.

“AmeriCorps isn’t just for young people, and you don’t have to come from ‘outside,’” McAdams says. “You just need to be motivated, passionate and have a heart to serve the under-served.”

Many of the current United Way AmeriCorps positions will be available for next year and recruitment for fall placement begins this March. Coincidentally, March also features AmeriCorps Week 2018, March 11-17, celebrating the contributions of 80,000 current AmeriCorps volunteers nationwide, and the service of more than 1 million program alumni.

*For more information or interest in serving as an AmeriCorps fellow, visit* [*https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps*](https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps)*. Learn more about the United Way and its partners at www.unitedwayseak.org.*