

Minnesotans show the lasting impact of service

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College Possible™, a local nonprofit connecting full-time AmeriCorps members with low-income students to provide college access and success services, joined the celebration to thank those Minnesotans who have served with AmeriCorps over the past 19 years and to highlight the important impact of this national service program at a time when budget debates put the program at risk.

Every year in Minnesota, more than 2,000 individuals dedicate an entire year of service to AmeriCorps, which has operated in this country since 1994. These individuals are receiving modest living stipends to serve their country for a year, providing services like literacy and math tutoring, job training, food support for the elderly and housing for low-income families. Minnesota's AmeriCorps members leverage \$27 million in private donations and recruit 70,500 volunteers through more than 2.3 million hours of service.

However, at a time when budgets are under extreme pressure here and in Washington, it's important to realize the lasting influences that these volunteers are making on their communities. AmeriCorps Week – March 9th to 17th – celebrated the importance of national service.

“We like to say AmeriCorps is a ‘triple bottom-line’ return on investment for taxpayers – for the recipients of service, the people who serve, and the broader community and nation,” said College Possible Twin Cities Executive Director, Sara Dziuk. “These life-changing services provided by dedicated individuals are cost-effective solutions that would in most cases not exist here in Minnesota without AmeriCorps, especially as cuts are hitting our state and federal budgets.”

At College Possible, every single dollar of AmeriCorps funding is matched by four private dollars that would not otherwise be dedicated to helping low-income Twin Cities students succeed in college, putting themselves and their families on a pathway out of poverty while providing Minnesota with the college educated workforce it needs to thrive.

For AmeriCorps service member Kyle Thomas – one of 52 AmeriCorps members serving at College Possible Twin Cities this year, this isn't just about return on investment; it's about what he sees every day in his service with College Possible.

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“Service has given me the opportunity to help change lives,” Thomas said. “For example, my student Mai has come quite a long way since junior year. She increased her ACT score by seven points, applied to ten colleges, and been accepted to all but one of them. Her enthusiasm and determination help me and the rest of my students strive for our best, and I am so proud to be her coach!”

In 2009, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act received outstanding bipartisan support in the US House and Senate and authorized significant multi-year growth in AmeriCorps, recognizing the cost efficient solution this flexible, high impact model provided communities and individuals. Since that time, AmeriCorps and other national service programs have been on the budget chopping block narrowly avoiding elimination and hanging on to slightly decreasing budgets.

For more information about AmeriCorps and other national service programs, please visit www.CNS.gov