

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

EVALUATION  REPORT

**WASHINGTON READING CORPS:
IMPACTS OF NATIONAL SERVICE
AND THE COMMUNITY**

1999–2000

Prepared by

**Betsy Ward
Changhua Wang**

for the

Washington Commission for National and Community Service



September 2000

**Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
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Submitted by

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Changhua Wang and Betsy Ward

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	1
Introduction	4
Case Studies.....	7
Liberty.....	9
Linwood.....	13
Harney.....	16
Lacey.....	22
Community and Private Sector Contributions	27
Profiles	32
National Service Members	32
Volunteer Reading Tutors.....	44
Washington Reading Corps Students	47
Pre and Post Assessment of WRC Students	50
Key Area Coordinators, WRC Components, and Challenges.....	54
Key Area Coordinator Site Information.....	54
Major Components of the WRC	54
Training.....	56
AmeriCorps and VISTA Involvement	57
Challenges	58
Conclusions	61
Considerations	62

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1997, Washington received the first results of the new statewide reading assessment test that had been given to all fourth-grade students. These results offered some sobering news: only 47 percent of the students met the state's new reading standards. As a response to this, in 1998 Governor Gary Locke and the Washington State Legislature created the Washington Reading Corps to provide intensive and immediate reading instruction to elementary students who needed extra help. This program enlists teachers, school staff, national service members, and community volunteers in a coordinated effort to provide tutoring to approximately 24,000 needy students across the state.

National service members provide much of the backbone for this effort. AmeriCorps and VISTA members are placed in WRC schools to perform the following tasks:

- Serve as full-time reading tutors
- Assist with before-school, after-school, and summer reading programs
- Recruit and train local volunteers as tutors
- Organize family literacy activities
- Mobilize donations such as books and other educational materials
- Provide additional help to further support the WRC effort in their schools

In 1999, the Education, Career, and Community Program of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory was asked to conduct an evaluation study of the Washington Reading Corps, focusing on the roles of AmeriCorps and VISTA members. This study supplements a larger scale evaluation sponsored by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), which consists of in-depth case studies for 20 WRC sites; surveys of WRC teachers; surveys of WRC site supervisors; and pre-, mid, and post-assessments of the reading skills of WRC students.

Major Findings

In the 1999 Regional (WA, OR, MT, ID, and AK) Education Needs Assessment conducted by NWREL, it was reported:

The population is aging, and this has troubling ramifications for public education. First, because a decreasing proportion of households has school-age children, schools are losing direct, child-centered connections with a larger percentage of the population. More than three out of five respondents to NWREL's public survey did not have school-age children in the household. This loss of child-centered constituency means that schools have an increasingly difficult job garnering public support for levies and generating public involvement in schools.

The Washington Reading Corps not only directly serves students with reading problems, but also generates enormous community support for schools. In the process, community members, including those who do not have children in schools, have become more aware of the needs of the schools and are more likely to render their support for public education in the long run.

As a requirement for receiving state funds, schools committed to recruiting community volunteers to participate in their WRC programs. National service members, primarily VISTA members in about 80% of the WRC schools, took responsibility for recruiting tutors from various populations in order to provide the necessary one-to-one or small group tutoring. The thousands of volunteers (nearly 18,000) around the state that committed to tutoring a child in the Reading Corps represent the largest mobilization of community volunteers for any single literacy initiative in Washington State.

Listed below are the major findings based on our evaluation and some of the data collected for the OSPI evaluation of the WRC:

- The WRC has made a significant impact on the students served, evidenced by changed attitudes toward reading, other school-related behaviors, and, most importantly, improved reading test scores. These improvements have occurred in over 200 WRC schools that previously had the lowest reading test scores in the state.
- AmeriCorps and VISTA members have played an instrumental role in keeping the WRC running at many school sites. There is a great improvement of the program compared with the first year of operation.
- Nearly 18,000 community volunteers have become involved in the WRC as tutors, most of whom were recruited by the VISTA members. For many WRC schools, this represents the first time that the greater community has been directly involved in improving the academic achievement of students.
- National service members have played a key role in reaching parents and other community members to garner support for the WRC. Due to the efforts of the national service members in 1999-2000, 994 community or private organizations—big and small, urban and rural—contributed more than a half million dollars to support the WRC across the state.
- National service members involved in the WRC are diverse in their professional and cultural backgrounds, but they share the same compassion for helping young children.
- Participation in serving with the WRC also benefited the national service members in their personal and professional growth. Many of them are likely to pursue their career in the area of education and to continue serving in their communities in the future.

Considerations

The list below, rather than giving specific recommendations, is an offering of our reflective thoughts for the program implementation in the future. We do believe the following questions or ideas have direct implications for all participants in the WRC and we want the staff at the Washington Commission to consider these points in their future collaboration with OSPI for the improvement of the WRC.

Systemic Thinking. Is the WRC a short-term program to deal with student reading problems or is it a long-term collaboration among OSPI, schools, national service organizations, and local community agencies in educating our young people? If it is a long-term commitment, how can schools operate with this as an integral component? How can we enhance teacher roles in the systemic changes without having them feel intruded on by “lay persons” in public education?

Communication. There are many layers of communication involved in running the WRC. Just to name a few, there are communications between OSPI and the Washington State Commission, between the Commission and the Washington Service Corps, between the key area coordinators and schools, between national service members and teachers, and between site supervisors and the national service members. The challenge to the current WRC is how to streamline the communication process and present a clear and consistent message to individual sites. (This process includes various data collection for evaluation and assessment purposes.)

AmeriCorps vs. VISTA. The Corporation for National Service has made a distinction between the roles—and sometimes the training—of AmeriCorps and VISTA members. Because AmeriCorps members perform direct service, they serve primarily as tutors with the Reading Corps. The VISTA role, however, does not include direct service. Instead, VISTAs are to work with the community to bring volunteers into the schools as WRC tutors. Such a distinction is sometimes confusing to school sites. How can we eliminate the burden of this confusion at individual school sites while still preserving the complementary roles of the two streams of service?

Site Supervisors. Site supervisors are supposed to play a very important role in ensuring the quality of the WRC at school sites and to help school staff understand what the WRC is about. Site supervisors should be a major support that national service members can depend on at their school sites. Based on our interviews with key area coordinators, however, it seems that many site supervisors are not as effective as they could be. One major reason is that they don’t have time. How we can get serious commitment from site supervisors is a question to be considered in continuing the WRC.

INTRODUCTION

In 1997, Washington administered its new statewide reading assessment test to all fourth- grade students. The results were shocking: only 47 percent of the students met the state's new reading standards. To address this, Governor Gary Locke and the Washington State Legislature created the Washington Reading Corps in 1998 to provide intensive and immediate instruction to elementary students who needed extra reading help. This program unites teachers, school staff, national service members, and community volunteers in a coordinated effort to provide tutoring to approximately 22,000 students across the state.

By blending public, private, and community resources, the Reading Corps brings thousands of volunteer tutors into elementary schools where reading assessment scores are the lowest. During the first year of the WRC's existence, for example, 11,000 volunteer tutors spent their time tutoring struggling readers. During the second year, this number rose to nearly 18,000. In addition to the contributions of individual community members, many local businesses and foundations also provide direct contributions of cash, in-kind resources, products, and books for children in the Reading Corps.

The Reading Corps program is coordinated through the Office of the Governor, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and the Washington Commission for National and Community Service. The Washington State Legislature provides the funding, while OSPI allocates these funds to approximately 200 schools across the state. Federal funding from the Corporation for National Service leverages the state dollars and supports nearly 400 VISTA and AmeriCorps members in this project. These national service members report to the Washington Service Corps, which, under the leadership of the Washington Commission, provides the administrative support for the national service aspect of the Washington Reading Corps.

National service plays an important role in the Reading Corps program statewide, since 175 of the 213 WRC schools (82%) have AmeriCorps and VISTA members. These members are placed in WRC schools to perform the following tasks:

- Serve as full-time reading tutors
- Assist with before-school, after-school, and summer reading programs
- Recruit and train local volunteers as tutors
- Organize family literacy activities
- Mobilize donations such as books and other educational materials
- Provide additional help to further support the WRC effort in their schools

In 1999-2000, the 175 sites with national service members served a total of 24,039 students. In addition, national service members assisted in generating 17,953 community volunteers who participated in the WRC.

The roles of the national service members differ somewhat: AmeriCorps members serve primarily as reading tutors for targeted students, while VISTAs focus most of their efforts on recruiting volunteer tutors from the community and promoting family literacy. Both AmeriCorps and VISTA members work together to provide after-school reading programs, summer reading programs, and special events such as family literacy nights or service projects that raise the awareness of the community around literacy.

Specific duties of national service members vary from site to site, as does the actual implementation of the WRC program. Since the Reading Corps is not a prescribed curriculum, schools employ considerable leeway in how they execute the program. For example, many schools already have reading programs in place, such as HOSTS or Read Naturally, and the Reading Corps tutors are then trained in these programs.

In addition to programmatic details, Reading Corps sites differ in location, size, and economics. WRC schools span the state—from Neah Bay Elementary on the tip of the Olympic Peninsula to the Washington School for the Deaf in Vancouver, and from Blue Ridge Elementary in Walla Walla to Arcadia Elementary in Deer Park, north of Spokane. The Reading Corps is found in extremely urban schools, extremely rural schools, and all sorts of schools in between. For example, the Reading Corps serves 5000 students in 40 schools throughout King County; it also serves 23 students in a three-room school in Palisades, located in Chelan County.

Reading Corps sites also vary in the economic backgrounds of their students. Schools range from having 15% to 98% of their students with free or reduced lunch. On average, however, WRC sites have somewhere around 60% of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch, indicating that most schools with the Reading Corps program also have a high number of students who live in poverty.

To evaluate the role that national service members play in the WRC, the Washington Commission for National and Community Service asked the Education, Career, and Community Program of the Northwest Regional Laboratory to conduct an evaluation study of the Reading Corps for the 1999-2000 year. This study is supplementary to a larger-scale evaluation sponsored by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), which consists of in-depth case studies for 20 WRC sites; surveys of WRC teachers; surveys of WRC site supervisors; and pre-, mid, and post-assessments of the reading skills of WRC students.

The major questions addressed in our evaluation include:

- What does the operation of the WRC look like with the involvement of national service members?

- What role do national service members play in generating community resources to support the WRC?
- What is the major impact of the WRC on the students served?
- Who are the national service members involved in the WRC and how do they benefit from their participation in the WRC?
- What are some successful stories of the WRC?
- What are some challenges?

To address these questions, we performed the following:

- Visited four WRC sites with AmeriCorps and/or VISTA members
- Analyzed the data the Washington Commission collected on community and private sector contributions to the WRC
- Created profiles of eight national service members based on our interviews
- Looked at the pre- and post-assessment data collected by OSPI on the WRC students
- Surveyed and conducted a focus group discussion with all WRC key area coordinators to find out their major roles, primary components of the WRC training, and challenges facing the WRC.

CASE STUDIES

In April of 2000, an evaluation team of three (two staff members from NWREL and one staff member from the Washington Commission) visited four WRC sites: Liberty Elementary in Spangle, Linwood Elementary in Spokane, Harney Elementary in Vancouver, and Lacey Elementary in Lacey. All four sites are in their second year of the WRC.

The purpose of these visits was to gain greater understanding of the role that national service and community volunteers play in the WRC and to see what impacts their participation is having on students, the schools, and the school community.

The four sites selected for these case studies are examples of schools that utilize national service members in carrying out the WRC goals for the school and the state, and are sites that offer promising or exemplary practices. They are additional to the 20 case study sites that were randomly selected for the OSPI evaluation.

The following is a list of questions we intended to address in our case studies:

- What is the overall structure of the WRC at the site?
- Who are the key players of the WRC at the site?
- What are the specific roles of VISTA and AmeriCorps members? (What would not have happened without VISTA or AmeriCorps involvement?)
- How do VISTA and AmeriCorps members interact with the key players of WRC at the site?
- How are volunteers recruited?
- What do the national service members do to make reading fun or more interesting for students?
- How are volunteers recognized for their participation?
- What support has the WRC received from businesses or organizations in the community?
- What is a typical day for a VISTA or AmeriCorps member? (Is there a typical day?)
- What are some evidences of the success of the WRC at the site?
- In what ways are students changing as a result of tutoring?
- What are the challenges of serving the students at this school?
- What are implications of the WRC or AmeriCorps/VISTA involvement for overall schooling at the site? (What is the impact of WRC/VISTA or AmeriCorps involvement on teachers, administrators, or the school culture?)
- How has the participation in the WRC impacted national service members professionally or personally?
- Does the school have a plan to sustain the WRC? If yes, what does the plan look like? If not, why? What will hinder the sustainability of such a program? Are they thinking about it? What is their current thinking about it?

During our site visits, we had interviews with principals, the site supervisors, teachers, peer tutors, community volunteers, the key area coordinators, and VISTA/AmeriCorps members. We also observed tutor sessions and reviewed any relevant written materials (tutoring logs, lesson plans, newsletters, local newspaper clippings, and so on).

Liberty Elementary

Background

Liberty is in Spangle, a town of 250 residents located 30 miles south of Spokane. The elementary school and connected junior high sit among wheat fields, next door to the high school. An old liberty bell hangs under the school sign, welcoming those who pull into the small complex. Students attend the school from several surrounding counties, since the district incorporates several rural towns and some growing suburban areas of Spokane. Ninety-nine percent of the students ride a bus to school, with some having a bus ride of more than an hour one way.

Thirty-three percent of the students at Liberty qualify for free or reduced meals. Of the 270 students in the elementary school, about 50 are in the Washington Reading Corps. While all K-6 grades are served, most of the students receiving WRC services are in first or second grade. These students are described as “borderline”—not quite qualifying for Title 1 and other special programs, but in need of some assistance.

The motivation for applying for the Reading Corps grant was described by the principal as a need to push and reach the borderline kids in order to boost them to success. Test scores had been low for several years, and the school had been looking for opportunities to increase them. WRC funds were used to purchase a reading curriculum.

Program Logistics

Patti Khusro, the AmeriCorps member at the school, works with teachers, community members, and cross-age tutors. Liberty is serving approximately 50 Reading Corps students this year. Twenty-five percent of these WRC students were in the Reading Corps last year. The other 75 percent from last year did so well that they no longer need the WRC.

Teachers initially refer students to the WRC and these students are then tested using the WRC statewide tests (CBM and the Slosson), administered by the AmeriCorps member. The reading specialist also gives the WRC students a classroom test three times a year.

Students are tutored 2-3 times each week for 30 minutes. Teachers decide the best time for students to leave the class. Often this is during Reading, as the students are not up to level with the rest of the class instruction, or sometimes it is during P.E. There has been some fluctuation in the tutors, but Patti works the schedule to ensure that the students continue to receive one-on-one assistance.

Students in the WRC received permission from their parents to participate. A few parents denied permission at first but then changed their mind and agreed once the program was further explained. Teachers at the school have observed that parents of WRC students are starting to

work more with their children at home. As part of this family literacy effort, Patti has made calendars that she sends home with the students that encourage parents to read with their children.

Role of National Service

Patti serves as both a full-time tutor in the Reading and as the volunteer coordinator. She was inspired to become a member because she wants to be a teacher. She had volunteered previously in the school, since her children attend Liberty. She told us that she had been with her kids at home for many years and this work was her first job outside of the home. The AmeriCorps experience offered her an opportunity to explore a career in the field of education.

A typical day for Patti includes checking the schedule; greeting and bringing the students and their folders to the tutoring place; greeting and helping volunteers; supervising the tutoring (while doing tutoring herself); keeping records of tests and tutoring logs; and working with Judy Brand, the Title 1 teacher for reading and math, on the student folders.

Judy is the designated site supervisor for Patti. She describes her role as one of collaborating with Patti, especially for testing, paperwork, and volunteer appreciation activities. Judy also checks in on the cross-age tutoring; oversees student folders; reviews books; and checks on student assignments. She said that having an AmeriCorps member makes these duties easy for her. She told us that the hardest part for her job is not having enough time with the tutors. Patti fills in that gap for the tutoring program.

The principal noted the qualitative difference in success this year has been having a national service member. Having someone from outside the school has been a unique benefit. “We wouldn’t be able to have the program without Patti,” she said. Teachers have more than a full-time job already and wouldn’t be able to run it. On occasion, there is the rare parent who wants to volunteer, she said, but not full-time, and they can’t be counted on for a year.

Another thing making this year go smoothly was information provided by Celia Lundin, the key area coordinator from ESD 101, who developed a supervisor’s manual outlining the responsibilities of the school for collaborating with national service and having a member placed in the school. This has helped the 33 teachers at Liberty have a better understanding this year of the program and of national service.

Tutors

The rural setting and lack of businesses in this area, coupled with the fact that there is no VISTA at the school, makes it challenging to draw support from outside the school community. The principal hopes to have a VISTA next year to expand the outreach potential. However, Liberty has still managed to have a thriving tutor program, recruiting 73 volunteers this year. Cross-age tutors from the adjoining junior and senior high schools are the primary source of community tutors. Other volunteers include seven adults (parents or retired people) who come in once or

twice a week; staff tutors, including bus drivers and the principal (who tutored during her prep time last year); and a cadre of employees from Costco.

The partnership with Costco was formed in January of 2000 at the suggestion of a parent who works for the company. The Costco volunteers use a phonics-based tutoring program that they are trained by their company to use. The principal and reading specialist at Liberty felt that the program would work well in conjunction with their Reading Corps curriculum, and are grateful for the Costco volunteers that come regularly to the school.

The cross-age tutoring pool currently consists of about 20 junior high students. To recruit them, Patti went to their classes, invited them to participate, showed them videos, and worked closely with those who came for training. Patti feels that the most committed are the ones who are the most social—they seem to feel good about the difference they’re making. Most of the cross-age tutors are girls (only a couple of boys this year), and most are junior high students. The principal said that the high school planned its class schedule before the start of the school year in a way that inadvertently precludes students from opting to be tutors. After our discussion, she said that this is something she would work with the district to improve.

Comments from Tutors

Melissa, an eighth grade student at Liberty, tutors four days a week for 35-minute sessions. She likes working with younger children and wants to work at the YMCA this summer. This experience is helping her to tolerate young students better. When she works with her student Matthew, they talk a little at first and then read. Sometimes they’ll draw pictures about the book or use flash cards. Her parents are pleased that she is helping other kids.

Brittany, also an eighth grader, said she likes kids and wants to learn how to handle them better. This experience, working with second graders, is helping with that. Brittany said her cousins, after learning about her tutoring, said they wished they could do the same. She said her mother also wants her to start working with her brother who needs help with reading.

Both girls talked about the rapport they have built with younger students. They are aware that they are role models and have modified how they talk around students. They have seen growth—the major reason for tutoring, they said, since reading is important for life. At first they were unsure they could help the younger students, but they’ve seen the difference they are making.

The Costco volunteers operate under the philosophy that it is important to reach out to rural schools. Cindy, who trains her colleagues as tutors, informed us that Costco has partnered with 86 schools using this program. The volunteers administer a “Reading Reflex” test as part of the program and they’re finding that the results correlate with the results of the WRC tests (CBM and Slosson).

Volunteers feel like they are seeing gains in the students. One volunteer said that her motivation to tutor comes from remembering the importance of mentors in her own life. Seeing children leave with a smile and having students feel good about themselves were reasons the other tutors cited for volunteering. In their tutoring sessions, the Costco tutors always make a point of ending on a positive note. In addition, the company has also donated incentives to the Liberty students such as backpacks filled with school supplies and books.

Successes

When asked to state aspects of the program that are working well, the staff at Liberty mentioned the following:

- Seeing the benefits for students and tutors.
- Seeing the progress of students and the growth of the junior high students as they witness the children they're tutoring become successful at reading.
- Having the partnership with Costco—this makes the staff hopeful that they can get other businesses to participate.
- Having Patti, the AmeriCorps member, has been great, according to the principal, because of the details she attends to, her organization, the matching she does of students and tutors, the materials she sends home, and the things she does for volunteers.
- Patti remarked that having the kindergarten broken into four groups is a positive thing.

As for wishes:

- More adult tutors would be welcome.
- For next year, a VISTA member is needed to reach out more into the community and to try different recruitment strategies.
- The principal realizes she needs to work with the district more to nurture the cross-age tutoring from the high school.

Linwood Elementary

Background

Linwood is located in the North Hill area of Spokane, an older neighborhood that has become increasingly diverse in population. There are close to 500 students enrolled in the school and about 89 percent of are Caucasian. About 47 percent of the students receive free or reduced lunch. The Reading Corps was a perfect fit for this school, since it had recently lost its Title 1 funding (the school was just under the line of FRL qualifications). Part of the school's mission with the Reading Corps is to create a reading community, and it has a strong commitment from the school staff, community volunteers, and national service members to do this.

Role of National Service

Two AmeriCorps members, Stephen Engelhardt and Kristine Wilson, work with the Reading Corps at Linwood. This is the first year that the school has had national service members to assist with the program. Shari Kirihara, the principal, and Hollace Swan, a retired schoolteacher and full-time volunteer, spoke about the difference it has made to have AmeriCorps members share the work that they did alone last year in starting the program at Linwood and getting the Accelerated Reader program set up. The principal told us that last year she spent half of her time running WRC at her school and it was a major undertaking. With two AmeriCorps members on board this year, she is feeling relieved and is able to spend her time more effectively on other aspects of the schooling at Linwood.

Shari and Hollace said that both Kristine and Stephen exhibit ideal qualities that AmeriCorps members should possess: they have compassion for children, they're lifetime learners, and they're bright, organized, and skilled enough for teachers to trust.

Kristine is a reading specialist with a recent degree from Eastern Washington University. With a husband in the military, her options for teaching permanently in the competitive Spokane school district were limited. The Reading Corps provided an opportunity for her to bring her background to service at Linwood. She said that she has learned the necessity of being flexible in teaching reading to children, learning that a variety of approaches are necessary to reach each child at his or her own level.

Stephen, a former truck driver, told us he had been looking for a change in his career. With job opportunities dwindling in Northport, a small town along the northeast border of Washington, he applied last year for an AmeriCorps position in the Reading Corps. He served his first year at Northport Elementary and his AmeriCorps experience opened a window of opportunity for him. He said the new experience of working with children was a little frightening, but he quickly became ready for more challenges. He decided to move to Spokane to serve a second year, while exploring additional options in education for the future. He said that serving in the Reading Corps has been wonderful, the most rewarding work he has done.

During our interview with him, Stephen left the meeting briefly to make an announcement over the loudspeaker introducing the “Reading Express Train,” an incentive for all students to read for the next 20 minutes. This was part of a literacy week planned by Stephen and Kristine, which included a literacy night, a play performed by students from the high school, contributions from Hastings Books, and an author coming to read to the students.

The principal explained to us that that the AmeriCorps members have “helped change the picture this year to give new life to the program.” She realizes that it is important in the future to continue making little changes. She is heartened to see the value that teachers have felt about the Reading Corps.

In addition to Kristine and Stephen, other dedicated volunteers at the school include parents, retired community members, and students in Linwood’s fourth grade classes who tutor younger students. Whitworth College has also sent volunteers. During the January term, professors prepared 50 education majors in a children’s literature course.

Program Logistics

Kristine, who set up the daily schedule of tutoring, explained that she spoke with each teacher to arrange times for students to receive tutoring. There are 133 students this year in the WRC, even though the whole school is involved. Each teacher targets seven students for services. Teachers administer running records for K-2 students and share these with Kristine. They are observing growth, especially for second graders.

A highlight of Linwood’s Reading Corps is a calendar system that has been established to encourage reading at home. Parents are guided to supply 15 minutes of reading per night with their child. Feedback from 97 percent of the parents has been positive about the program. They have indicated that they liked knowing what they should be doing to help their kids with their reading, that the program gave them a focus, and that they saw changes in their children.

Known to the students as “the Calendar Man,” Stephen collects the calendars and organizes the monthly assembly in which students are honored for their reading achievements. A local restaurant provides free buffet meal certificates to the students each month.

We visited two fourth grade classrooms where the students perform cross-age tutoring with kindergartners and second graders once a week. They work together on spelling, learning the alphabet, sounding out words, and—for many—learning English as a new language. Their teachers reported that good relationships have been formed between their students and the younger ones. “When a week goes by, they ask for their ‘Buddy Reading’ time,” one teacher said.

Several students added their own comments about their tutoring experience:

- “The kindergartners like it!”

- “I like reading Dr. Seuss.”
- “The little kids ask questions, a lot of questions.”

Successes

The principal and the volunteer coordinator expressed the following as indicators that the Reading Corps was working well in their school:

- Parents now have a focus, a specific way to work with their children at home.
- Students have made gains in reading.
- Teachers have indicated that the WRC has given them a breath of fresh air and that reading is again fun to teach.

The two AmeriCorps members also relayed the following indicators of success:

- Children’s attitudes toward reading have improved. Kids want to read with them.
- There’s been dramatic improvement for some of the lowest students.

Harney Elementary

Background

Before going to Harney Elementary in Vancouver, we met briefly with Kim Crossman, the new project supervisor at the ESD 112, who reinforced how well Harney is doing as a Reading Corps school. After arriving at the school, Marlene Harper, the volunteer coordinator (and former VISTA member from last year), greeted us in the staff room as she put finishing touches on Easter baskets she was making for the volunteers. The staff room, decorated for spring, also serves as the check-in place for volunteers.

Harney is a particularly high-needs school, with over 80 percent of the students eligible for free and reduced lunch. This is an increase over last year's 70 percent. In addition, the school experiences a large turnover rate. Currently, more students are coming in than leaving. This year alone the student population has grown from 525 to 600, a 14 percent increase.

Program Logistics

As a VISTA member in the first year of the Reading Corps, Marlene helped establish the WRC program at the school with the two staff reading specialists, Marty Cuculic and Vicki Moody. Recalling the first year of the program, Marlene said it was “a learning year” and that the staff was at first reluctant. But as she kept them apprised of the program's development, they became more supportive. From the start, the support of the principal was strong, a key to the success of the WRC at Harney.

Marlene said that this year things are running much more smoothly for the Reading Corps. “It’s a great program,” said Marty. Vicki, the other reading specialist, said, “We’ve refined our tactics this year.” For one thing, the school has reduced the number of targeted students to 75 this year, rather than 100, which is more manageable. In addition, they’ve changed the target group. The WRC volunteers work with students who read at mid to low levels, but the reading specialists work with the students at the lowest levels who might need more professional help or continuity.

Since this year most of the programmatic issues have already been worked out, this frees Marlene up to work more closely with the community. She feels that because of the commitment of the principal, staff, and volunteers, the program is very successful and is able to reach students. As an example, she points to the mid-year test results, which she said were “great” and “very rewarding.”

A typical tutoring session for Reading Corps students lasts half an hour, and these sessions are scheduled from 9:00-11:00 and 12:30-2:30. Marlene arranged the schedule in conjunction with the teachers. She asked them to choose half-hour blocks in either the morning or afternoon when they could dismiss WRC students to meet with tutors. This system, attributed to some lessons learned from the first year of the WRC, has worked well.

The school does not follow a particular reading curriculum; instead, the two reading specialists have created a more customized approach for the students in the Reading Corps. Following the ideas of the specialists, the tutors read with the students for the first half of the session and then allow the children their choice of literacy activities and games. Usually the tutor and the student meet in the pod space outside the classrooms, though some volunteers work in the classroom if that suits the teacher's needs better. Marlene and the teachers had hoped to have a specific room designated as the Reading Room, but because of space limitations, it became necessary to turn the room into a classroom. The pods are used so extensively (and not just for WRC students) that there is no stigma for students to be taken from the classroom to the pods for tutoring. The noise level, however, can sometimes get high.

The school also provides an optional "Lunch Bunch" activity, which is open to any children, not just WRC students. (Initially it was limited to Reading Corps students, but to respect students' friendships with others not in the WRC, it became open to all students. The AmeriCorps members hold this in the library during lunch recess, offering reading and word games. Usually about ten children of different ages participate, though this slackened during the spring. During the winter and on rainy days, the number of students attending Lunch Bunch was even higher.

In addition to these reading opportunities during school time, Harney has an after-school program two times a week, which involves 12 targeted children in grades 1-5.

Role of National Service

The reading specialists both said that without AmeriCorps members the program might be working, but not nearly as efficiently. Before the members arrived last year, Marty and Vicki had tried to get the WRC program started, but it took enormous effort and was referred to as a nightmare. "When Marlene walked in at the end of October, it was a blessing," they said.

Marlene had applied for the VISTA position in 1998 because she needed a break in her career path. Though once a teacher, she had become a licensed optician. At age 58, with retirement getting closer, she felt she needed to accomplish something great. When she saw the recruitment ad for volunteers, she realized she could serve as a full-time VISTA volunteer. She says the experience has "opened new doors—age doesn't matter in national service." (Now Marlene's 15-year-old grandson is considering joining AmeriCorps when he turns 18.)

After the first year of the Reading Corps, the principal asked the district to create a community involvement and volunteer coordinator position for the school, which Marlene was hired to fill. She also serves as the WRC site supervisor. In this position she works with the reading specialists, the AmeriCorps members, and community volunteers.

Two AmeriCorps members serve at Harney, Danelle Velkinberg and Amy Kleist, and staff members were quick to praise them. "Both Amy and Dani are incredible—they make this

work!” the reading specialists told us. “The AmeriCorps members are in the trenches all day; they have a connection with the teachers that volunteers don’t have.”

Danelle was out sick the day of our visit, but staff members spoke of her dedication to the students and said students have strongly bonded with her. They also praised the work Amy has done this year. Amy and her husband recently moved to Portland from Wisconsin. She had been an accountant but wanted to make a career change and work with children. She found out about the AmeriCorps position with the Reading Corps on the Internet. Next year she will move to Minneapolis, where she plans to go back to school, using her national service education award.

At Harney, Amy has spearheaded the “Lunch Bunch” (some students call her the “Lunch Bunch Teacher”) and has been very active in pushing literacy events. She tutors a set group of students, three from each class, and said she loves working one-on-one or in small groups with these students.

One of the successes that Amy reports is that even older students who were initially reluctant about being tutored are now comfortable. She sees that the students' confidence is growing. As an example, she told of a very shy first-grader who was reluctant to walk down the hall by himself. Amy worked with him and found he had a special interest in using flashcards. Over time he has gained so much confidence that he stands in front of his whole classroom presenting the flashcards. Another boy in fifth grade was considered very unmotivated by his teachers. Amy found a game that this student loves to play. She integrated book reading into their time together. Now teachers are noticing improvement in the boy's motivation to learn. They attribute it to the one-on-one attention he is receiving.

Marlene noted that Danelle and Amy have been an integral part of the Reading Corps. She said that Amy and Danelle are seen as part of the staff, lending a sense of stability to the program that volunteers can't, since they might come and go fairly easily. The members offer consistency and dedication, working side by side with the staff. Amy said she is thanked each day by staff for her work at the school.

Tutors

Volunteers from the community are heralded as another great strength toward the program's success. "We couldn't be doing the program without volunteers," said Marlene and Amy. Before the Reading Corps was in place, Harney had 8-10 volunteers. Last year it had 63 tutors working with Reading Corps students and this year 59 volunteers are involved so far, many of them returning tutors from last year. These tutors include parents, Foster Grandparents, RSVP volunteers, high school students, and Clark College students.

One of the Foster Grandparents, Bernice, spends an hour a day tutoring children in the WRC, in addition to her mentoring duties as a Foster Grandparent. "I enjoy it!" she said with a big

smile. Another returning volunteer is a parent who started tutoring with the Reading Corps last year. He is now volunteering at the school in a whole host of capacities.

Many important people from the community serve as tutors, including the city manager, other city officials, and the president of the Vancouver Education Association. Marlene pointed out that these tutors are excellent role models and even mentors for the students.

Even community members who didn't start out to tutor have become involved with the program. For example, a church group who wanted to do a service project approached the school about having a "wish list" for teachers. They then provided these materials, like fake fur and beads for the art teacher and white lab coats for the fifth grade science classes. The woman who coordinated this is now volunteering as a tutor.

The bonds achieved between volunteers and students speak to their importance. "When a volunteer isn't able to be at the school, the kids ask where they are," Marlene said. She pointed out that this school has a highly transient population and many of the targeted children have family problems, so having a connection with their tutors has been particularly beneficial to these students.

Amy said that the students like the time they spend with their tutors, and aren't reluctant to be pulled out of class. "The kids love all the tutors," she said. "They see their time with the tutors as special. And the one-on-one really helps." She also mentioned how the tutors can see the children's personalities emerge as they gain confidence.

The volunteers have also made friends with each other, and informal training takes place this way as the tutors exchange ideas. Since it can be intimidating for a volunteer to walk into a classroom alone, Marlene pairs new volunteers with experienced ones during their first visit. That way, new tutors get a chance to observe before they have to tutor themselves. Marlene said that many volunteers come early to chat with each other and they often leave together to have lunch.

"Having someone coordinate and train the volunteers is a huge part of the success," said Marty, the reading specialist. Training for the tutors includes an orientation, a mid-year refresher training (for those who begin at the start of the year), and an end-of-year volunteer appreciation tea. As the primary trainer, Marlene meets with each new tutor for about one hour, providing a description, tour, and instructions on use of the Danielian alphabet, comprehension, spelling, etc. The AmeriCorps members observe each new tutor's first session with a child.

Marlene has also spearheaded the orientation for new students and families. She takes the students on a tour of the building and introduces them to their teacher and classmates. Recently, a shy new girl in third grade was being introduced. Two boys (unlikely to do this in the past) came up and introduced themselves to the girl.

Other Community Involvement

In addition to recruiting volunteer tutors, Marlene works to create community relationships in many other ways. When the district bond didn't pass this year it forced the school to reach out to the community and to seek grants for the lost money. "It's a tribute to Marlene that she is always finding ways for the community to support the school," said Vicki. Examples were given such as a bingo night fund-raiser and raffles at teacher meetings.

They've also had books donated from the RSVP, and they established a family night for WRC parents in October. The reading specialists did workshops on helping children read at home. About 7 or 8 families came to this, which, as Marlene said, wasn't a huge response but at least it was a start. Another time, a librarian from the Vancouver regional library came and talked with the parents about how to read with children. This event had about 20 people.

The school also started a parenting class, a four-week session taught in the evenings, and nine families registered. Taught by a psychologist who donated the time, this class provided parents with an opportunity to learn tips on parenting and how to handle issues such as sibling rivalry and behavior problems. This was open to the whole school, not just WRC parents, but the AmeriCorps members provided the childcare, including reading activities.

In addition, Amy, Danelle, and Marlene were busy planning a literacy event for April 19 that would include an instructor from Clark College to talk about parenting. Sponsored by AT&T and held at Fort Vancouver High School, the event will provide children and families free books. They'll also be treated to pizza and a puppet show.

Successes

Marlene, Amy, Marty, and Vicki identified several aspects of their program that they felt were successful:

- **Having a volunteer coordinator**

One of the reading specialists pointed out that the biggest impact this year has been having someone to coordinate the volunteers. Before this, the reading specialists were trying to organize it all, as well as do their own jobs. Because of the community involvement coordinator position that's been established, Harney Elementary seems very capable of continuing the Reading Corps program in the future. As Marlene said, "It's all in place now. Anyone could run it after this."

- **Staff support**

In addition to having an organized system, the staff and volunteers see the value of the Reading Corps. As one of them said, "We can't just let this die—it's too successful, it's too

important.” When the principal surveyed all the teachers about whether they wanted the WRC program back next year, 100% responded with yes.

- **Dedicated volunteers**

Marlene and Amy both said that the Reading Corps tutors at Harney were very committed to working with their assigned students. Many of the children come from dysfunctional families and carry many emotional problems, so the tutor often plays a mentoring role as well. “The Reading Corps gives kids confidence that they can be successful in the classroom because of their success with the volunteers,” Marlene said.

- **Increase in reading scores**

Almost all of the second-graders in the WRC have reached grade level, the teachers reported. When asked to predict how students would fare on the WASL this spring, they were not confident that scores would reflect the changes they are observing, however, because as one of the reading specialists put it, “Mobility is a great problem when it comes to showing gains in the WASL.”

When asked about what she’d like to see in the future, Marlene said that it would be nice for the Reading Corps to have its own room. Currently, the program is housed in the staff room, so sometimes it’s hard to find a quiet spot. She’d also like to have more scheduled time for volunteers and teachers to communicate. Many of the teachers don’t interact with the volunteers and the volunteers would like to have an opportunity to talk more with the teachers.

Lacey Elementary

Background

Posters with the Reading Corps logo hang near the front doors, stating, "We are proud to be a Washington Reading Corps School." Located just outside of Olympia, Lacey Elementary has about 450 students, with approximately 85% of these students beginning and ending the school year at the school. About 42% percent of the students qualify for free and reduced meals. This year about 80 students have received Reading Corps services. The school has had approximately 40 community volunteers, and also utilizes peer and cross-age tutors.

During our visit at the school, we met with the principal, national service members, teachers, community volunteers, and peer and cross-age tutors. A theme that came up continually during the visit was the smoothness of this second year of the program compared to the first. While last year's VISTA member who served alone at the school was credited with giving the program a platform to stand on, this year's two members were given great praise for the new levels of the WRC program that they've brought to the school.

Role of National Service

Lacey's principal, Stan Koep, claimed that the success of the WRC at Lacey probably depended most on having national service. Last year Kellie, the VISTA member, helped them figure out the program, he said. Their half-time reading specialist was having health problems, so the school had to rely heavily on Kellie. He said he appreciates the reliability of the members, since he "can't be in all places at once."

The teachers, too, echoed their appreciation for Anne Tibbets and Starr Erb, the national service members. Mrs. Miles, a fourth grade teacher, said that the members serve as role models for the students. "I can't imagine being able to have this program without them. These kids need so much more than just help with reading."

A fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Ullman, said that last year the Reading Corps took most of the teachers by surprise. Kellie "appeared" one day and suddenly the program began to go into action. She started by working to get the computer lab together, since the school had recently purchased the Accelerated Reader material to be used in conjunction with the new computer lab. This year Starr and Anne have continued these efforts to make the Reading Corps run smoothly. Mrs. Ullman said they were especially good to work with the teachers about scheduling tutor sessions. "It's hard to schedule kids for tutoring," she said, "but the national service members are flexible around the teachers' schedules, which helps greatly." She also said that she was able to communicate with Anne and Starr about the students' needs and progress, which she can't really do with non-AmeriCorps tutors.

Starr initially learned about the Reading Corps at the Washington Educator Career Fair in Tacoma, in April 1999. Though she was looking for a job as a teacher, she considered the

option of serving in a school as an AmeriCorps member in the Reading Corps. As a full-time tutor in the school, she has received additional training from that she had in college. Starr said she's enjoyed her year and is considering staying for a second term. She is very devoted to the success of the students.

Anne had been in Minneapolis, where she saw an ad for VISTA. After she decided to become a VISTA volunteer, she found out about the Washington Reading Corps, and relocated to Olympia. She admitted feeling unsure about the transition at first. She was initially more interested in the VISTA program than the Reading Corps itself. However, her commitment to the Reading Corps has grown tremendously, and she is likewise even more committed to national service. Anne is heartened by the way the WRC has built social connections and support for individuals who have come to tutor, for the students, and for organizations and agencies such as the State Patrol which she actively (and successfully) sought as a source of tutors. She is now working on laying the groundwork for next year at Lacey. One goal will be to recruit more high school students. At the time of our interview, Anne was planning to return to Minneapolis where she had applied to two literacy programs as a VISTA Leader.

Anne and Starr have worked together on training volunteers, developing supplemental WRC programs like Lunch Buddies, and organizing events such as Celebrity Readers, Traveling Readers Theater, a family literacy night, and a volunteer appreciation luncheon. Anne also took the lead in a quilting project that began on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Community members did the sewing, and then the quilt was rotated to each of the four WRC schools in North Thurston County to be finished by students.

Notes and material that Anne and Starr have designed especially for the tutors—to thank them or provide additional tutoring resources—are accessible to tutors on bulletin boards and tables in the computer room that serves as their office.

Community Tutors

Prior to the WRC, the school had some volunteers but there was no structure for them. The national service members have provided this structure and made good use of community volunteers. Two of these volunteers, Starla and Tracy, talked with the evaluation team about their experiences.

Starla is a personal care worker for a woman in a wheelchair who tutors at Lacey. After accompanying her client to the school a few times, Starla decided to become a tutor, too. She tutors from 9:00-10:30 two days a week, working with three different students in grades 1-3. She said she's seen one child go up in reading by a couple levels. Another child described as "a handful" likes to talk, and Starla discovered that he learns from being able to talk to her. She smiles when she talks about the students and seems happy that she is making a difference for them.

Tracy learned about the WRC after her son, a kindergartner at Lacey, brought home a flyer. She said it “clicked” that this was something she could do, since she wanted to give back to the school. She has bonded with the students she tutors, and has watched their confidence levels rise. Tracy described the Reading Corps as “a wonderful thing for kids.” She said, “I think it’s great. It’s geared to fit the level and expectation of the child and the schedule of the teacher. It’s coordinated well.” She said she has grown in empathy for kids who are learning, especially ESL students. “I started learning about kids on a personal level,” she said. “Some like to test you at first, to see how reliable you are—they don’t get the attention that we assume they get at home.” Tracy said the teachers constantly thank her. “They see the difference and appreciate it,” she says. “Kids are reading better in the classroom.” Her son acts proud to have his mom at the school and he has made friends with Starr and Anne.

Mrs. Reslock and Mrs. Olson, first and second grade teachers, said that their kids love to go for tutoring and they praised the flexibility of the tutors. “This program is wonderful. Parents say it makes their kids’ day—they come home talking about their tutor.” They also pointed out that when the kids are getting tutored, it allows the teachers more time to work with the other children in the classroom so that no one is left behind. In fact, they wouldn’t mind seeing the sessions lengthened from 30 to 45 minutes.

Mrs. Ullman, who teaches fifth grade, said she used to have to “nab” volunteers to help in her class. Now she has many committed tutors, including a volunteer who works at Lacey full time. A child in her class from Vietnam made great strides in oral reading and is now working on comprehension. He has a regular tutor from the middle school and one from the high school.

Mrs. Miles, a fourth grade teacher, said that without national service members and the volunteers, she wouldn’t know what to do with some of her students. Fourth graders who struggled with reading were “thrown to the wolves” in the past, she said, but the WRC is a flexible program since it’s not tied to federal laws. “Kids are turned out of Learning Support after third grade, so the WRC picks up the kids who still need help.”

The teachers also said that the tutors play a mentoring role with the students. “It’s time spent with adults—in addition to reading—that makes a difference. The kids *sparkle!*” one teacher said. The principal added, “Just yesterday, a parent stopped me and said, ‘By the way, my son just loves to read now! He comes home jabbering about R.D. (his tutor).’ ”

With so many volunteers in the school, the principal said he feared at first that issues would arise, but very few had come up. He was surprised at how smooth it had been, and he gave credit to Anne and Starr for their screening of tutors and recognition of potential problems before they occur. He was confident that the orientation they gave to new volunteers covers guidelines from the school and the district.

His one concern was that teachers might become dependent on students leaving the classroom because of the smooth coordination Starr and Anne have provided. He doesn't feel a quality reading program can be completely dependent on volunteers.

As he summed up his comments, the principal noted that he is "big on community." He views Lacey as a center of the community, a place to bring people together. He talked about one retired volunteer who had recently lost his wife. "This volunteer just about lives at the school, bringing in goodies to the staff room, working with the children, filling a need in his own life as well as in the lives of the children." Another volunteer tutors full-time at Lacey as she explores her desire to become a teacher. "The message to the kids," the principal said, "is that these people come to see them. Reading is important!" Lastly, he said that Anne and Starr have been a benefit to building the community aspect of the school.

Cross-Age Tutors

Lacey utilizes two types of cross-age tutors, a group from the middle school and the Lunch Buddies, students in grades 2-6 who volunteer to read with another student who is struggling with reading. Some of the middle school tutors used to go to Lacey. "It's wonderful that they are coming back," said one teacher. The Lunch Buddies group is made up of some of last year's WRC students and some who have "graduated out" of this year's program. About twenty of them are active Lunch Buddies, giving up their recess to tutor. Pairs can be seen reading together in the hallways during mid-day.

Coordinated by Starr, the Lunch Buddy program is set up in line with a national service objective to provide service opportunities for students who are the recipients of service. She said it is instilling responsibility in the students. They had to go through an orientation and sign a contract. They sign in at each session. At the end of the year there will be a party and the young tutors will receive a letter of recommendation that they might use in future volunteer or job opportunities.

During our visit, student Lunch Buddies made comments such as, "Someone helped me last year" and "I feel like a teacher." A few mentioned that sometimes their readers wanted to go to recess or were fidgety and it was hard to keep their attention, but they persistently reminded the readers that it was important to read and finish what they were doing. All the students appeared very proud of being a Lunch Buddy and of the fact that they were able to help someone else learn to read better.

Successes

The teachers and the principal made the following comments about the success of the program:

- They're seeing students who love to read.
- "The program is good; it could serve even more kids with more tutors."
- This year there is better scheduling, more committed volunteers.
- "I have very little stress about this program!"

- They feel that fewer of the students will qualify for Special Ed next year because of the extra help they are getting.
- The program success is reflected in test scores.
- “Keep the volunteers coming to the school!”

The staff also saw areas for improvement. A fifth grade teacher said that for next year she'd like to refine the selection of students for the WRC. This year the criteria was based on scores from the WASL, STAR test scores, teacher referral, and participation in the WRC last year.

“Teachers could have given even more students to the WRC for tutoring,” she said. She also wishes that parents would show more interest, and get more involved in their children’s learning. It’s hard even getting information to parents of her students, she said.

A fourth grade teacher said that she is sure that scores will still be low on the WASL. “I just know these kids,” she said. “They will have higher scores than they would have had without tutoring, but the WASL is challenging even for the better kids. We will have significant growth on level tests, though.”

COMMUNITY AND PRIVATE SECTOR CONTRIBUTIONS

In addition to the tutoring assistance they provide to the Washington Reading Corps, AmeriCorps/VISTA members have played an instrumental role in generating cash, in-kind donations, and other resources for the WRC from the community as well as private sector. Since the inception of the WRC, the Governor's Office has devoted significant time to hosting community meetings with companies, foundations, civic groups, and citizens, inviting them to assist struggling readers.

Based on the data submitted monthly by AmeriCorps/VISTA members across the state, in the 1999-2000 year, national service members generated 945 donations to the Reading Corps, totaling \$608,046. This is, if anything, an underestimate, since many small donations (especially of food) sometimes go undocumented.

The types of contributions vary, but they fall into the following categories:

- **Books**
Public resources cannot be used to give a gift, so Reading Corps funds could not provide struggling readers with their own books. Since many of these students may not have books at home, this is a critical need. To address this, businesses, community groups, and individuals made donations of books, totaling \$365,140, so that Reading Corps students could have access to books. The Reading Corps partnered with Books for Kids, a non-profit children's literacy program, in order to distribute thousands of new books to struggling readers around the state. In the 1999-2000 school year nearly \$40,000 worth of children's books were distributed to students as a result of donations to Books for Kids that were directed to the Reading Corps.
- **Food for Events**
Targeted Reading Corps students are often involved in after-school reading programs, summer programs, and literacy events. Food is an important element at these programs, particularly the after-school ones, so that the children are not hungry while they are learning. Community and private sector organizations made food donations worth \$11,385.
- **Student Incentives and Volunteer Recognition**
To reward WRC students, tutors often give them some sort of gift or incentive. These may include pencils, stickers, t-shirts, or certificates to local fast food restaurants. In addition, schools often provide their community tutors with small gifts of appreciation, such as coupons for coffee. Local businesses statewide have shown significant support in this area, making donations worth \$56,489.

- **Supplies and Miscellaneous Support**

Private sector and community donations have also provided school and office supplies to be used in after-school programs, as well as other supplies for special events such as family literacy nights or community service days. In this area there were donations worth \$36,671. (This figure includes \$21,900 donated by both Boeing and Airbus to buy 73 computers for Neely-O'Brien Elementary in Kent.)

- **Cash**

Numerous organizations and individuals also made cash contributions for the individual school programs to purchase literacy materials, food, or incentives as needed. These donations came to a total of \$38,311. In addition, Capital One made a contribution of \$100,000 to underwrite a statewide conference that brought in nationally known speakers and allowed national service, educational, and business partners of the WRC to gather for celebration and learning.

A close look at the organizations that made these contributions suggests that this support for the Washington Reading Corps has come almost entirely from the local level. There are, however, several notable exceptions—Bank of America donated \$25,000 for the program statewide, First Book contributed \$300,000 worth of books that were distributed to all Reading Corps schools, and Capital One made a contribution of \$100,000 to underwrite the conference mentioned above. Aside from these major donors, other contributions to schools in 1999-2000 came from businesses, organizations, and individuals in the local community.

Even more, the majority of these donations (more than two-thirds) came from independent or locally-owned establishments. Slightly more than a third of all the contributions were from local branches of national chains such as McDonald's, Wal-Mart, and Safeway, or from large corporations such as Boeing. The rest, however, came from small businesses, individual donors, or community groups like the Kiwanis, Rotary Club, or parent teacher organizations.

Predictably, the more rural an area is, the more likely it is to have more small business donations. Neah Bay Elementary, on the Olympic peninsula, is a good example of this. The WRC program there had a \$30 dollar donation from Wal-Mart, but received the rest of their contributions from local groups and businesses, such as the Makah Cultural and Research Center, the Makah Tribal Council, Beebe's Café, and Washburn's General Store. Likewise, Reading Corps programs in Chelan and Douglas counties in north central Washington (home to most of the state's orchards) received many of their donations in the form of apples from local fruit companies.

Schools in larger areas also received many contributions from locally-owned businesses or community groups. For example, King County Aquatic Center and the Federal Way Pool provided swimming passes for WRC students at Sunnycrest Elementary, just south of Seattle. Echo Lake Elementary in Seattle received coupons from a local pizza and pasta restaurant, as

well as contributions from a small independent grocery store. Park Orchard Elementary in Kent had donations from a local bakery, bookstore, and craft store. Schools in the Tri-Cities had haircut coupons donated from six different salons, as well as golfing passes and video coupons, all from small local firms. In Yakima, Martin Luther King Elementary received a bookshelf from a local home furnishing store for its reading room.

These are just a few examples of how national service members are tapping in to community organizations and businesses, both small and large, to augment the Reading Corps programs at their schools. As mentioned, most of these contributions involve incentives for WRC students (fairly standard items such as stickers or gift certificates) or food for after-school reading programs. However, some donations come from surprising corners of the private sector, further illustrating how vastly different enterprises can still become involved in literacy efforts at their local schools. Here are a few examples:

- The Swinomish Casino donated 144 decks of cards to West View Elementary in Burlington.
- The Olympia Beekeeper's Organization gave honey sticks to Pleasant Glade Elementary in Olympia.
- The US Army recruiting office in Aberdeen provided prizes for children at Robert Gray Elementary.
- Lefeber Bulb Farm contributed 150 cut tulips for volunteers at Allen Elementary in Bow, a small town in Skagit County.
- The Tulalip Tribes donated \$500 for the Reading Corps program at Quil Ceda Elementary.
- JK Comics gave 300 comic books to Taholah Elementary on the Quinault Indian Reservation.
- Jiffy Lube and Q-Lube provided oil change certificates to Tulalip Elementary in Marysville.
- The post office in Puyallup donated backpacks and books (worth more than \$600) to WRC students at Firgrove.
- Centralia Mining provided \$100 worth of books to Toledo Elementary.
- The Mariners gave 50 t-shirts to Shining Mountain Elementary in Spanaway.
- Mission Ridge Ski Resort donated 2 ski lift tickets for Lewis and Clark Elementary in Wenatchee.
- Spokane Chrysler-Plymouth donated \$1,500 worth of books to Pratt Elementary.

In Warden, a town of 2,350 in Grant County, community contributions to the Reading Corps took on an interesting twist because of an extraordinary collaboration with the National Civilian Community Corps, an environmental stream of AmeriCorps that sends members out on short-term assignments. Thirteen members from the San Diego NCCC campus spent five weeks in Warden, working on environmental needs around the area. Additionally, these members spent 90 minutes each morning tutoring Reading Corps students at Warden Elementary. In order to have NCCC members, the community had to arrange and fund their housing, as well as provide their breakfast and lunch. A nearby campground offered a discount at their facility and the

Kiwanis club provided funds toward the rest of the cost. Local civic groups, churches, and teachers provided food for the NCCC members.

As these examples of community and private sector contributions show, the Washington Reading Corps has received support from a wide variety of groups statewide. In addition to the thousands of volunteers from the community who tutor struggling readers, other community members have become involved in the effort by providing help to the Reading Corps program in other ways. The following two charts summarize the percent of the total amount of documented contributions by type (i.e., how much was donated in each category) and the percent of total number of contributions by type (the number of documented contributions in each area).

Figure 1: Percent of Total Amount of Documented Contributions (\$608,046) by Type

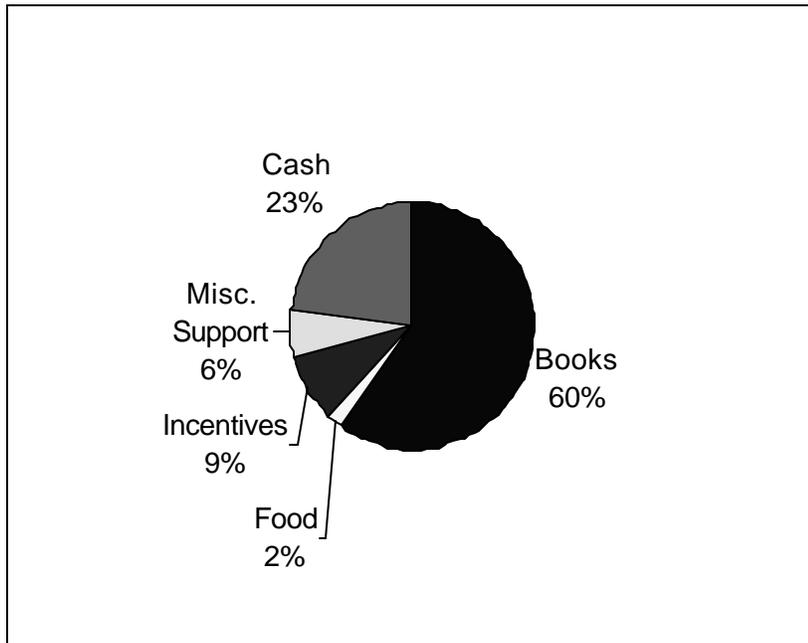
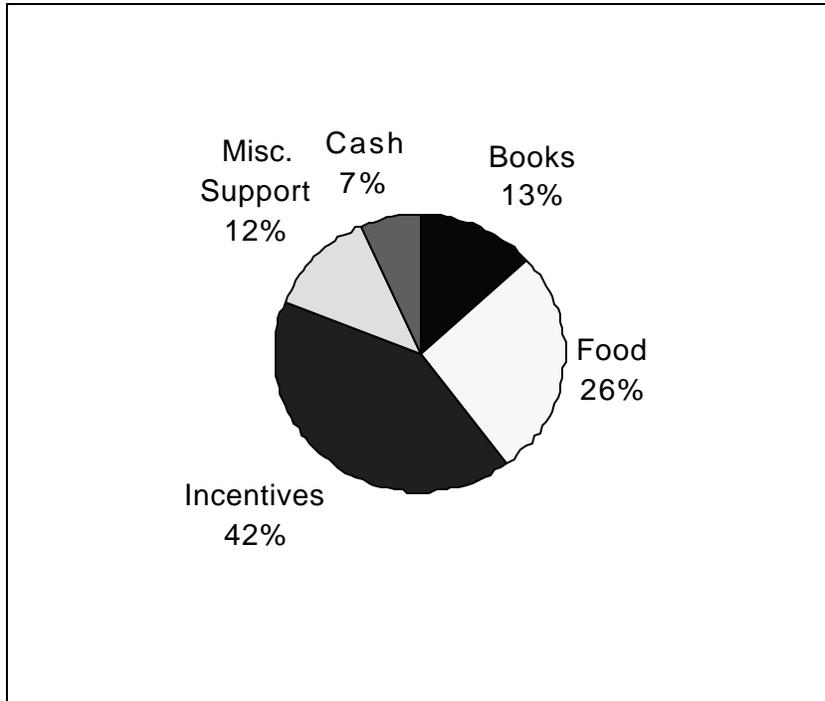


Figure 2: Percent of Total Numbers of Documented Contributions (945) by Type



PROFILES

Students, parents, local citizens, AmeriCorps members, VISTA volunteers—these are the people who shape and are shaped by the Washington Reading Corps on an individual level. For them, this project is less about numbers or other quantifiable areas and more about the growth they see and experience personally. The following profiles of national service members, elementary students, and volunteer tutors involved with the Reading Corps give us a chance to hear some of their stories.

National Service Members

This section of the report presents profiles of eight national service members involved in the Washington Reading Corps. These profiles were created based on our interviews with selected members and are intended to provide a closer look at national service members and their personal experience relating to the WRC: their joys, challenges, compassion, and their individual dreams for themselves as well as for the children they worked with.

The profiles offer a glimpse into the variety and richness that national service participants throughout the state bring to the Reading Corps. The profiles also show the various tasks that these members perform at their schools. In this particular group, there are two VISTAs, two VISTA Leaders, and four AmeriCorps members, each with different roles. Their sites vary from urban centers such as Seattle to extremely rural communities with only a few hundred inhabitants.

The age, professional experience, and ethnicity of this profile group also reflect the range found within national service members serving in the Reading Corps as a whole. For example, one of these members is right out of high school, another right out of college. Three are in their thirties. Two have retired from other careers, such as the Army or IRS. Half of the group has already graduated from or attended some college; the others plan to use their education awards to further their education. As for ethnic background, the profile group also reflects the diversity of the Reading Corps statewide, including Hispanic, African-American, and white members.

In addition, the members profiled here show a deep level of commitment to this project. For example, six of the eight decided to serve a second year with the Reading Corps. And two of these members relocated to Washington from across the country specifically to take an AmeriCorps position with the Reading Corps when it started in 1998.

Kate Giusti

VISTA Leader, Fremont Public Association, Seattle (1999-2000)

VISTA, Pateros Elementary (1998-1999)

I grew up in New Jersey, where my best friend's parents had been VISTAs. In college in New York, I cultivated an interest in community development and organizing by working with a local group of citizens in solidarity with the people of Central America, volunteering abroad independently, and reading books. After graduation, I thought hard about joining the Peace Corps. Ultimately, I had too many ideological misgivings to pursue that option, so I applied to VISTA. I am committed to ending poverty.

As I was near the end of the VISTA application process, I flipped on CNN and Maya Angelou was addressing educators. The theme of her speech was that public education can be a liberating force. It seems obvious to me now but at the time it was earth-shattering. I applied to VISTA programs that had to do with public education in the Northwest, and the Washington Reading Corps coordinators found me.

Last year, as a VISTA "in the field" in a tiny elementary school in north central Washington, I recruited, trained, and scheduled 30 volunteers to work with about 40 K-6 students throughout the school year. I worked with the teachers to create lessons for the tutoring sessions. I got to serve with six other great AmeriCorps volunteers, and we worked together on after-school tutoring programs and on service projects. I also put together other projects to involve families in the school and to illustrate family literacy as one of the school's priorities.

As a VISTA Leader this year, I worked even more on the programmatic level. I worked to understand what was going on at each of our 14 sites in Seattle, so that I could put members together with resources that would help them. I worked closely with our program coordinator as we planned meetings, and I took a special interest in planning meaningful reflection activities. My main responsibility this year has been to ensure that the members are having a positive experience. I have had to balance being completely accessible to the members with facilitative leadership, so that members could reach out to develop their own personal and professional competencies this year while feeling supported in their service.

There are all different kinds of kids and adults involved in the WRC, and by being part of this group, I have had to look at my own prejudices, biases, and expectations. In the classroom, I've been exposed to many different teaching styles and discipline strategies. Overall, I see the WRC's greatest impact coming from all of the community members who are invited into the school to help out and see first-hand what teachers face everyday. I'd like to think that these adults are able to make more informed decisions about where education ranks in our legislative and societal priorities. This is not something that we measure in our reporting.

Some students who are struggling with reading as they are learning English as their second language have benefited from one-on-one time with a tutor. The specific student that springs to mind is the one who was tutored by the manager of an important orchard in town. The student's family worked on the orchard, and they lived there as migrant help. The student and the tutor got to know each other a bit during their weekly session. The student's reading improved, and I think the tutor saw his own community in a new light.

As for future plans, I am going to make some money (!), go to language school in Guatemala to improve my Spanish, and then hopefully enroll in graduate school the following fall for a masters in teaching and elementary certification.

TJ Barcelona

VISTA Leader, Community Youth Services, Olympia (1999-2000)

I joined the Washington Reading Corps as a VISTA Leader in October of 1999, after returning to the US in August of that year. My bride of 35 years and I had just completed our Peace Corps service in the Solomon Islands. Prior to Peace Corps, I worked for the Internal Revenue Service for 15 years. I also served for nine years in the US Navy and the last seven of those years was on board submarines, including conventional snorkel classes and nuclear submarines. Before that, I was in the Naval Drum and Bugle Corps and also served on board an aircraft carrier.

I was born in 1941 and grew up in a Hispanic culture in southeast Colorado. I was a high school dropout and bummed about the western US until I joined the Navy in 1958. I got my GED in the Navy, and eventually earned a BA in Accounting from the U of Puget Sound after the Navy. Plus I learned a considerable amount of tax law via the IRS.

After serving in a third world country, where education is, in reality, very low on the list of national priorities, this experience with the Washington Reading Corps is obviously a great one by contrast. This country, like all others, has its share of problems, but the USA does try to fix its problems. Other countries ask for Peace Corps volunteers for help and right now volunteers numbering about 7000 serve in 144 countries, while in the USA, we have 45,000 AmeriCorps members and in Washington alone there are about 2000. So just looking at this statistically, one gets the sense that our culture values community service.

The WRC falls into one of the “let us solve the problem at its source” kind of projects. Its value and success are obvious even if we help just one student. It is a success and it is cost effective! Any student who receives help, small or large, has had a significant impact from this program, because they will have learned that someone is out there trying to help them individually and that the individual counts for something. I remember when I was young and a slow reader, and the teachers would say, “You don’t need help, you are only going to work in the fields.” I feel that all our members significantly impact WRC because they help students feel worthwhile—not like the only thing they are worthy of is work in the fields.

My program is operated by Community Youth Services in Olympia and I work directly with the program manager, the key area coordinator, and the program coordinator. I share office space with all of them. I function as an ad hoc leader, meaning I have no direct authority, as I am a member first. I lead by example and do facilitate various meetings. I have provided mentoring

and I have coached members on the way to conduct team meetings, but otherwise I allow each to present their assigned program with little interference from me. I have also worked extensively with the Washington Leader Corps this year, serving on the Inter Corps Council and developing this into a sustainable program for southwest Washington.

As for the future, Grace and I have re-enlisted with Peace Corps, and have been recently advised of our re-acceptance. We will likely be sent to either Eastern Europe or Central Asia. Our departure tentatively is slated for January 2001.

Danelle Velkinburg

AmeriCorps Member, Harney Elementary, Vancouver (1999-2000)

Two years ago I was a community volunteer with the Reading Corps here at Harney. Then an AmeriCorps member asked me if I would be interested in applying for the AmeriCorps reading program next year as a tutor.

I was born in Los Alamos, New Mexico and moved to Vancouver when I was two. I believe in supporting our community. I have worked in many different services throughout our community and abroad. One of the services was working for "Think First" as a motivational speaker at local schools. This teaches kids about wearing seat belts and helmets. I was injured in a car accident in 1982 that changed my life, so I am a real advocate for seat belts and helmets. When I was at "Think First," I would speak at assemblies with paraplegics and other head-injured persons. It was amazing to see the empathy and reaction of the students as we spoke and demonstrated our program.

I did this for six years, but now I am taking a different step with the WRC in helping in a different way. I enjoy being a role model to the students, helping them with reading and communicating with each other. The students see me as someone who really cares for them, not only as a reading tutor but someone they can turn to when they are having trouble with one of their friends. I try to help them in peer mediation with each other.

We have 75 targeted students in WRC, K-5. Sometimes we are fortunate to do one-on-one tutoring, which is the best because I have full student attention. If I work in a small group, we read together as a group and then I work with each student one at a time while the others work on reading skills and literature worksheets.

We test students three times a year. At first the testing is very hard for them. But as time goes on, I see the growth. They get very excited when they are able to move up in their reading levels.

The tutoring program with the volunteers is so rewarding. I have seen so many volunteers and children bond. Our students are at-risk children and they love having community support people

and AmeriCorps people there for them. For example, one of our volunteers is a city official who volunteers on his lunchtime. He has been a great role model for one of our WRC students. He has even gone to some of Erik's baseball games! This city official is so excited about the program that many of his co-workers plan to tutor next year.

My AmeriCorps team is about 40 members. We meet every Friday for classes and training to better help our programs and get input from each other. We also do off-site service projects. One of them I helped organize was a service project for "Legacy of Life," a non-profit home that helps pregnant teens get back on their feet. We helped them by doing yard work and housecleaning. We also had donations from Baby Gap and a Mary Kay representative who volunteered her services and products to the girls.

I am looking forward to the new school year at Harney and working with the AmeriCorps team.

Rudy Chacon

AmeriCorps Member, Orondo Elementary (1999-2000)

VISTA Volunteer, Orondo Elementary (1998-1999)

I was born in Texas (El Paso) and lived there up to when I was four years old. My mom immigrated to Venezuela (Caracas) and I grew up and lived there for about ten years. At fourteen years old, I moved to Mexico City and lived there for eight years, then back to the US—Long Beach, California. Now I'm in my 30s and my family is all over the place.

I was always in a school, here and abroad. I have been a traveler all my life. I've done extensive travel in Europe, North America, and South America, and some travel in Africa and Asia, and I am always learning wherever I go, trying to achieve goals. Everybody's perspective is different, so I enjoy fully my conversations in English, Spanish, or French. I've been influenced by my Washington experience—unique, amazing, at this point of my life. I got more skills in education and I've found what I really wanted to do.

This is my second year with the Reading Corps at Orondo. Orondo is a very small place, mostly orchards and the people who work there. Basically, before me, Orondo didn't have AmeriCorps members. So most of the teachers supported us and helped us to organize reading programs. I directly tutored or assisted 156 struggling readers. I also monitored academic progress for ESL students and other targeted struggling readers. For family literacy, we spread awareness of community resources to parents and migrant workers. I translated into Spanish what library resources and other resources were available in Wenatchee, Chelan, and Waterville for the families. I taught kids and parents how to order books on-line.

In two years here I have learned what could have been fifteen somewhere else. The Reading Corps really has had a profound impact on my mental process. I have met wonderful people and friends for life. I'm getting more skills and a wide range of knowledge. Working every day

with kids is all I want to do. It's a constant feedback of the learning process. It's up to me to help others, somehow try to influence positively on children. If you are a role model you have to act like one. I want to build up an "ethic of service" and be an active community member, in one way or another, to help create the future generation.

In general, I think community members in Orondo are now more involved in their kids' education. There's not just a specific story to tell, but a lot of stories, every one with special impacts. I believe we have made somehow an impact on those kids, or at least tried to make happy one kid. It's an amazing experience—you feel the spirit of helping people and that's what makes you feel you're doing the best option.

Now that my term is ending, I'm heading back to Long Beach, more schooling. I want to get a teaching credential and have fun while I learn. Another page in the history of my life is over.

Isabel Falcon

AmeriCorps Member, Wenatchee (1999-2000)

When I started out the year as an AmeriCorps tutor, I was freshly out of high school and didn't exactly know where I was headed—I only knew that I was interested in the educational field and that's why I was there. I met lots of teachers, learned about the school system, and how it works. I had never worked with such a big variety of people but I learned how to work well with them in spite of our differences.

Within a few months I also got to know each child I worked with really well. I learned about their needs and with guidance from the teachers, I was able to help them. But some of these kids needed more attention than what a reading tutor could give them. They not only needed to develop good reading skills, they needed lots of attention, a good role model, sometimes a simple pep talk or a personal cheerleader, but most of all, love. I feel like I tried my best to give them that type of support.

One success story I had this year is about the progress in reading I saw. I noticed improvements in all my kids, but in one class they achieved more than expected. It was a group of second grade kids and the majority started out slow, mostly reading between 15 to 25 words per minute. But there were a couple that didn't even get up to that rate. By the middle of the year there was hardly any improvement, so I thought of a way to change that. At first I made up two groups—one was made up of better readers and the other one of strugglers. This I thought was to get all my attention focused on the strugglers when I had them. But it turned out that my strugglers were falling asleep (along with me), which was the main reason why they were having such a hard time learning to read. And the other group was too awake and talkative. So I divided them up once again, this time into groups partnering one child from each group to make one good reader with one struggler. I also included one "fun day" per month, which included games like monopoly and prizes to get them motivated towards reading. Eventually the results

started to come out, and the rates per minute began to rise, so much so that by the end of the year the teacher let me know that their reading skills had improved by about 65%.

One child in particular impacted me the most. He didn't get to see his parents that much because both started work quite early in the morning. He spent all day at school, and when he got home his baby-sitter was his older brother who was probably 11 or 12 years old. Perhaps that explains why he wasn't well-groomed most of the time. And his lack of attention was reflected in the amazing smile he gave me whenever I patted him on the back or stroked his hair for the good job he had done. It made me realize he needed those more often and it also made me think about what else I could do to help children like him in the future.

Now I have changed my career goal from being an elementary teacher to a social worker. On a personal level, I learned what is important to me and that is reaching out and helping others.

Kimberly J. Smith

AmeriCorps Member, Manson Elementary (1998-2000)

I am serving as a member of the Intermountain AmeriCorps team, which is based out of Chelan. I am serving my second year as an AmeriCorps member at Manson Elementary, a rural school in north central Washington.

I grew up in the town of Sumner, Washington. I attended Sumner schools until I dropped out in my junior year of high school. I was not encouraged to finish school as both of my parents had dropped out of school and they did not view education as being that important. I spent the next 16 years on welfare and in a poor relationship. In 1997, at age 34, I broke free of my relationship and became a single mother with two daughters, ages 6 and 14. I moved to Chelan and felt totally lost. Then I met a woman who was serving in AmeriCorps and she introduced me to volunteer service work. I decided to apply for a position with AmeriCorps to find some direction in my life and I was accepted as a member of the Reading Corps.

My service in AmeriCorps has been very positive for my family. I am trying to teach my daughters to be strong and smart and self-reliant. My daughters see me learning new things, teaching others, preparing to go back to school, and making many new friends along the way. In fact, AmeriCorps has been such a positive experience for my family that now my oldest daughter (who graduated a year early from high school) will serve next year in the Entiat School as an AmeriCorps member.

I have always loved to read and Reading Corps gave me a chance to help children learn to read and to increase their skills in reading. I have always stressed to my children the importance of an education and I feel that reading is the number one skill children need to be successful in their education. I feel so strongly about the importance of reading that I am 100% behind everything that I have done with the Reading Corps program.

As a member of the Reading Corps, I had 23 students to tutor during my first year of service and 10 students to tutor during my second year. My duties included working one-on-one with students and working with small groups of students. I tracked these students' progress through the school year.

When I served as a Reading Corps member last year I worked with third grade students. This year I returned and worked with fourth graders. As I got to work with the same students for two years, I really got to see what an impact Reading Corps had on students. This year I exited students from the program because they reached a fifth grade reading level before the end of the school year.

I feel very good about the changes that I saw in my students, especially because most of my students are ESL. These students seemed to want to improve their reading skills not only for themselves, but for me also. During my first year of AmeriCorps, I was working with a Hispanic girl and one day she said that she wanted to tell me something that she had been doing at home. She told me that she had some folders and that she had put papers inside them and with her cousins and neighbors she was playing Reading Corps. She went on to tell me how she made everyone their own reading chart and they all read out loud to each other. The girl told me that she pretended to be me, Ms. Smith the Reading Corps teacher! I thought that this was great because it meant that the kids were reading outside of school time and that Reading Corps meant something to them. This year the same student was a Reading Corps target student and she was one of the students that I exited from the program because of her great reading growth.

I am glad that I had the opportunity to serve in the Reading Corps program because I feel that I have touched the lives of students and given them skills that they will use for the rest of their lives. Reading is so important and I feel that several of my students found themselves actually enjoying reading instead of looking at reading as something they are forced to do. I am very glad that I was a part of the Reading Corps during its first years and I look forward to seeing the program grow through the years.

My term of service ends July 28, 2000, and I have made many plans for my future. First of all, I am relocating my family to Wenatchee. I am enrolled at Wenatchee Valley College, where I will start classes in the fall. I have chosen to go into social work as I saw a real need for social help in the communities that I served. I feel confident about my choice to return to college and I am looking forward to the new challenges.

Mike Saunders

VISTA, Carter Lake Elementary, McChord Air Force Base (1998-2000)

I'm a native of Buffalo, New York. I attended public schools and graduated from Bennett High School in 1968. I lived briefly in Los Angeles and attended Cal State Long Beach as a fine arts

major prior to entering the US Army in 1976. My service in the military (20 years) has given me the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to effectively perform in changing environments. Another asset I gained from my military service is an ability to work with people of various backgrounds. This has had a positive influence on my service at Carter Lake Elementary by empowering me to focus on and provide for the individual needs and learning styles of all our students enrolled in the Washington Reading Corps.

This was my second year as a VISTA at Carter Lake. My duties included but weren't limited to: recruiting community volunteers to serve as tutors in the school, assisting the Reading Corps coordinator; monitoring and assessing progress of children in the Reading Corps and developing peer/cross-age tutoring and mentoring programs. Our Reading Corps program is based on the SMART program (Student Mentoring and Reading Tutors). The SMART program is a one-on-one tutoring session for grades one through five. The one-on-one contact is intended to instill confidence and build self-esteem with our young students. In addition, the tutor has an opportunity to share his/her real life learning experiences and encourage thinking, develop verbal skills, and problem solve.

Our program is in the second year of operation and ideally it takes about 3-5 years for a program to have a major impact. Early assessments have been made and the response from parents, classroom teachers, and volunteers indicate that the WRC is making progress in student literacy. My service in the WRC has meant that I have had an opportunity to make a difference in a student's education by helping them to achieve their full potential with confidence.

I'm certain that there are numerous stories that can be shared about student successes. This one is about a young Latino girl, M. Vasquez. She is a third grader at our school, had limited English skills. We assigned a WRC volunteer who was bilingual for help with her English reading and writing skills. After one semester of assistance, she is now able to read, write, and speak English fluently enough that she has peer/cross-age tutored other students whose primary language is not English.

My future plans include going to Pierce College and majoring in education. One of my long-range goals is to become a school district superintendent.

Marilyn Craig
VISTA, Ridgeview Elementary, Yakima (1998-2000)

I grew up in Yakima but left at 18 to attend Washington State University. I graduated in elementary education and moved north to Cusick, Washington, where I taught a fifth grade self-contained classroom, 17 students, no pull-outs. I left teaching to raise a family but found I was still teaching—just a little differently. I volunteered in my children's classrooms to keep my eye on what they were learning and how it was being done. I have wanted to be a teacher since I

was ten and my VISTA experience was a good progression to help me earn educational grants, fine-tune my certificate, and learn 21st century teaching methods.

I am 47 and went through a traumatic and life-changing divorce, not by my choice—I believed married was always married. After this, my future plans and scheduled life changes ceased to exist. I was now a full-time mom who just had sold my home, along with my dreams, and I needed my own family for support. I headed back to Yakima where I needed time to heal and carve out new dreams. That’s when I become involved with the Reading Corps.

I served as a VISTA for two years. My first line of service with the Reading Corps was identifying prospective struggling reading students through past reading inventories, teachers’ concerns, or previous program suggestions. Second was testing, using the now-defunct Curriculum Based Management (CBM) program and the Slosson word inventory. Third, we designed a schedule of at least two hours of pull-out time a week that would not interfere with physical education, music, or library. We had seven teachers affected by our program, as we served fourth and fifth grade students. Keeping teachers amicable and allowing them some choices of time was a big juggling game but through perseverance and by passing on my enthusiasm for the necessity of this program to bring up reading levels, we succeeded.

We were lucky to have an entire classroom at our disposal for pull-out sessions. My next and biggest duty was to find and train the tutors. My first tutors were either ones I had worked with as a volunteer or those that teachers were familiar with. Within my first week I had a schedule, a pull-out room, 45 students, an AmeriCorps tutor, and four parents. I trained our tutors in a three-hour group session using materials and information learned through workshops and my own experience. We had a program running and pulled an entire classroom’s struggling readers out at the same time. In the beginning we had to work with some groups of five, but as I gathered volunteers from various sources, we brought our ratio of students to tutor down to groups of three and less.

My tutors were found through PSAs, newspaper articles, and posters. I also targeted businesses, nonprofit organizations, and clubs and was at any community event where a volunteer sign-up table was accepted. Word of mouth by tutors having a good time brought more tutors and helped spread the call for volunteers.

A major responsibility for VISTAs is keeping track of student and volunteer hours; writing work plans; designing tutor training information; informing tutors of schedule changes; and writing reports regarding gains or losses of tutors, test scores, and in-kind donations like books, supplies, or incentives for tutors and students. My favorite portion of this report was reporting our successes, along with interesting stories shared by a tutor, student, AmeriCorps member, teacher, or myself. I was fortunate not to have many challenges with my program. My familiarity with the school staff, the principal’s confidence in my abilities, and belief in the program made the program well received at our site. Also, our team provided a variety of training to give

members insight into various tutoring methods, management skills, resolving conflicts and how to support the staff and gain support.

Some teachers gave us specific materials we can use to work with students and others chose to let us have the children practice reading using chapter books, children's newspapers, or writing activities. Many teachers allowed us freedom to design lesson plans. A huge plus for our program was a thousand-book "in-room" library with multiple copies of books so small groups and tutors each had a copy. Tutors worked with phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, writing skills, pen pal letters, story lines, book reports, and sharing experiences.

The tutors took an active role in our program and developed strong bonds with students. One of my tutors stays the entire day and feels like she really belongs there. One tutor who is a federal researcher says that tutoring is his sanity. Another tutor feels it's her duty to help strugglers because she was blessed with children who are good readers.

Rewarding the tutors was fun. It was easy, because we were so thankful to have them. I always thanked them for their time and shared information about their students' growth. Or we brainstormed about things we could try to help their students. I took tutor surveys on training effectiveness and had them fill out an exit form to show their opinions about the program. We gave them pens, mugs, certificates, and cards from the students and from us. We invited them to teas and to a potluck with parents and children. This program was successful in so many ways.

Another one of my duties was involving the families through home reading. We had a book check-out so students could share them with their families, and we gave children their own books. We also provided bilingual information with hints to build stronger reading families, how to get library cards into the homes, and how to use them.

WRC connected me with literacy at a school, local, state, and national level through courses, workshops, and seminars I did along the way and people I met through the Member Development Institutes, Pre-Service Orientation, and other activities related to literacy. I believe literacy is the key to the door of our future. I want to get that key into the children's hands early so they make positive choices.

I changed teachers' minds about the validity of a tutor-based program for strugglers. I used cross-age tutoring to allow strugglers a feeling of success by giving them students who were struggling even more. This was very positively received. In fact, teachers wanted even more times when our students could work with their students.

It's wonderful being able to be part of a program that lets me watch children find success. I made a "getting to know you" questionnaire to find out what the students liked and didn't like, what they would do with ten dollars or a hundred, what their favorite books, food, or movies were, etc. LaShell's answers were that she hated to read and that with a hundred dollars she would quit school and move to New York. Her first day in our tutoring session was a picture of

a girl stomping into the room, plopping into a chair, leaning her chair back, putting her feet on her desk and folding her arms, saying, “I hate books, I hate reading, and I’m not going to do it.”

I grabbed two copies of *Charlotte’s Web* and sat beside her, turning the pages and holding them out to show the small illustrations, which she could look at if she wanted. As I started reading, her arms uncrossed and she listened. Her feet came down and she coyly picked up the book. I showed her where I was at and told her she could follow along. I asked her if she wanted to read a sentence. She struggled slowly and I encouraged her. She came to a long word and we broke it into parts that she could sound out. She put the word all together and I said, “You really put that brain cell to work, didn’t you?” She laughed, and although she struggled, she didn’t give up. Here she was in a place where she could struggle without being laughed at or feeling embarrassed. We put difficult words in a notebook to review and made games out of it.

The moment that nearly brought me to tears on the spot was a week later when my tough LaShell stopped me in the hallway with a beam of sunshine on her face. She proudly told me, loud enough for many to hear, “I read a story to my mom last night. I read fifteen minutes to her.”

“LaShell, that’s great!” I said as she scurried on to her classroom, smiling.

A couple of months later, LaShell’s teacher said, “I really don’t know what you do with those kids down there, but when they come back they are ready to learn.” All I can think of that we do is drop barriers, care for the child, and make them feel safe to struggle openly, with our praise and encouragement.

Now that my VISTA service is ending, I want to continue working with children, tutoring or having my own classroom. I also want to take classes to increase my knowledge. I want to teach in a rural community, with forests, lakes, rivers, creeks, and wildlife. I know that if there was a position similar to this one, working with eight-, nine-, and ten-year-olds, I would do it again. I know I will use volunteers in my own classroom. I was a little naïve about this before, but it really just multiplies what one can do.

The Reading Corps was a way for me to increase my people skills, learn computer skills, and gain useful knowledge for my future. I learned how much I enjoy working with people who care about the wellbeing of a child. I also learned more about professionalism and how to make students and adults feel confident and comfortable. This experience was also a way for me to work with a diverse group of adults and children joined by the common thread of learning. I learned about common ground and how much each and every one of us has. I enjoyed the struggle of creating an environment for all of us to grow in.

I truly believe in this program and have enjoyed working with everyone involved in this literacy movement. It was an honor to be involved in a cause I am passionate about. Thank you for allowing me to share my story.

Volunteer Reading Tutors

Community volunteers play a major role in the Washington Reading Corps by providing consistency and mentoring in addition to the continuity of tutoring. While schools receiving WRC funds are required to utilize volunteers, many schools had no prior infrastructure for recruiting and retaining a cadre of volunteers large enough to offer tutoring to all the children in need. AmeriCorps members, who serve as full-time tutors, also could not, on their own, provide tutoring to each of the students targeted for assistance. VISTA members, whose primary responsibility is to strengthen the school community, have helped build the ability of schools to welcome volunteers into the schools and classrooms.

These efforts, and the presence of volunteers in the schools, have in many places produced changes in school culture. This is, of course, difficult to bring about in a matter of months, but our observations and data collection suggest that volunteers are helping to create this cultural shift. Within the WRC, teachers and school administrators are seeing volunteers as a powerful means for improving students' academics and self-confidence.

During the 1999-2000 school year, nearly 18,000 tutors worked with Reading Corps students. This number of volunteers equals more than the entire populations of cities like Port Angeles or Moses Lake. About 10,000 of these volunteers were adults; the rest were peer and cross-age tutors from elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools.

The adult volunteers who work as Reading Corps tutors come from many different parts of the community—they may be parents, college students, retirees, businesspeople, or Foster Grandparents. Sometimes collaborations spring up in unexpected places. For example, Gilbert Elementary in Yakima is working with volunteers from a nursing home. As the AmeriCorps member at Gilbert stated, "It has been a pleasure to see the mutual respect develop between the students and the volunteers."

Businesses, too, have become involved with the Reading Corps by letting their employees tutor during work time. One example, the Makah Tribal Council in Neah Bay, allows its employees to volunteer at least one hour per week as reading tutors. Because of this, the VISTA at the elementary school was able to recruit and train seventeen Makah Tribal Council employees.

Dottie Rider, a Reading Corps volunteer at Tillicum Elementary in Tacoma, spent 30 years teaching and working in elementary education. After she retired, the WRC coordinator at Tillicum asked her if she would like to come back to volunteer with struggling students there. She jumped at the chance. "I can't stay out of the classroom," Dottie said. "I love children. I love working with them. I love schools. I love the smell of schools. I even live next to a school."

The first year Dottie volunteered at Tillicum, she was also very involved in talking with other community members and recruiting them for the program. In addition, she visited other schools in the area to see how they were utilizing Reading Corps volunteers and then brought this

information back to Tillicum as they were deciding on some changes within their own Reading Corps program.

This past year, Dottie spent two mornings a week at Tillicum, tutoring struggling readers. She was there from 9-12, working one-on-one with third grade students in 20-minute sessions. The teacher she worked with set up the materials used in the tutoring sessions, but the students still had a choice of what they'd like to share with their tutors that day.

Dottie says that last year she saw significant gains in children. "The teacher makes all the difference," she said, "But the volunteer can be a part of that, too. The real thing I've learned as I've watched tutors and students go through this process is the growth that can happen in students just because they have someone there focusing on them, giving them the one-on-one that kids hunger for." She described a tutoring session in the spring, when she brought a blanket and sat outside on the grass with her students. They read together and looked at the clouds and the sky and read some more. "I can't even begin to tell you what that meant to the students," she said.

Like Dottie, Debra Pridgen is an enthusiastic Reading Corps tutor, volunteering at Greenwood Elementary, located on the Fort Lewis Army base. She began tutoring last year, when her youngest son was in first grade. Since she was already volunteering so much at Greenwood, becoming a WRC tutor was an easy step. Now she goes to the school almost every day to work with Reading Corps students in the second grade. Her time with these students varies: sometimes she has them for a whole hour; other times only 20 minutes. She works mostly one-on-one with the students, although she also works with small groups, too.

"I love what I do," she says. "You don't realize how far behind some of these kids are until you start working with them. Sometimes I sit and wonder if their parents ever read with them. But I'm glad I can be there to help. That's all they need—a little extra time and help. You can see a lot of improvement in them as you work with them. They see you're paying attention to them, especially in a one-on-one situation. It's like you're saying, 'I'm yours and you're mine for this hour,' and the kids really respond to that."

Debra spends so much time at Greenwood that many of the students think she works there. She'll see kids on the street or in the commissary and they'll tell their parents, "There's Mrs. Pridgen from my school." Last year she won an award from the school for putting in over 500 volunteer hours. In addition, she was named "Volunteer of the Post" at Fort Lewis in April. Her family, too, has become involved. Her husband volunteers at the school when he's off, especially for special events like book fairs, reading events, and Dr. Seuss Day. In addition, Debra's college-aged daughter also volunteers there occasionally. Her husband will soon be transferred to Italy, and already Debra is wondering how she can get involved with more tutoring after they move. "I just love working with the kids," she says. "And there's never enough volunteers."

Ruthann Ishihara also volunteers at Greenwood, and she attributes the strong volunteer presence in the school to a dedicated volunteer coordinator. Since her husband is in the military and moves frequently, her children have been in five different schools. “Out of all those schools, this is the best when it comes to community involvement. They do a great job with volunteers,” she says.

She had already been volunteering at the school when the volunteer coordinator asked if she’d like to tutor with the Reading Corps. Ruthann was interested in this because she loves to read herself. In addition, her oldest daughter had reading problems when she was young, and Ruthann had read a lot in this area in order to help her daughter. She learned that different students had different ways of learning and she wanted to be able to apply that knowledge to the students she tutored.

Right now, she spends Tuesdays and Thursdays working with Reading Corps students in the third and fourth grade. In addition, two other days a week she works with reading students who aren’t WRC targets. She listens while the students read to her from their Accelerated Reading books. She also plays reading games with both WRC and non-WRC students.

Ruthann says that she has seen the students develop more confidence in their reading ability. “Before the one-on-one sessions, they were often intimidated because they didn’t feel like they measured up to their peers.” She adds that volunteering has impacted her as well. “When the kids see me, they’re happy and that makes me feel good. Besides, some of them teach me. I’ve learned from their patience and determination.”

Students have also become a dedicated source of volunteers. Nearly 8000 served last year as peer or cross-age tutors with Reading Corps students across the state. Of the 213 Reading Corps schools, 146 (almost 70%) have used peer or cross-age tutors or both. The VISTA and AmeriCorps members seem to have played a key role in organizing the peer/cross-age tutoring effort in the schools. For example, all but 29 of the 175 schools with national service members utilized peer or cross-age tutors last year.

In Pateros, a rural town in north central Washington, the VISTA member set up a successful after-school tutoring program for WRC students. AmeriCorps members ran the program, supervising peer and cross-age tutors from the combined elementary and junior-senior high school. One fifth grade girl served as a reading tutor three times a week, even though this commitment meant staying after school and taking a late bus home, a ride up the Methow Valley of nearly an hour.

Another Pateros student who volunteered to help gained a great deal from working with the Reading Corps, according to his mother. She said that her son, who suffers from Attention Deficit Disorder, helped a younger student with reading over the year. Tutoring gave him a chance to think about someone else, she said. Her son was also able to recognize ADD in the younger student. The two boys found music as a common interest that they shared to keep the

tutoring sessions stimulating. This parent had a great deal of praise for the AmeriCorps members in Pateros who had set up and run the after-school program. "They are models to our kids," she said. "My own daughter's reading level has been raised. Also, because of them, I was a volunteer for the carnival."

Several Reading Corps sites have tapped into an important resource by using tutors from nearby high schools. At Monte Cristo Elementary in Granite Falls, the number of high school students wanting to assist the AmeriCorps members with tutoring is so great that there is even a waiting list. At Arthur H. Smith Elementary in Grandview, 12 varsity basketball players from the high school were recruited and trained by the VISTA.

Mt. View Elementary in Burien, outside of Seattle, has implemented a promising model of cross-age tutoring between high school and elementary students. The Integrated Tutoring Project in the Highline School District is a service learning project that involves 70 students from Evergreen High School. Four days a week, the high school students provide tutoring and mentoring to Reading Corps students in the first grade. At the same time, the tutors are all enrolled in a Home/Family Life class at the high school, where they receive training on tutoring school-aged students. Mt. View's reading specialist provides oversight and training to the tutors on-site one day per week.

Fifteen-year-old Christmore Garcia, one of the students from Evergreen, is enthusiastic about the first graders she tutors. "I love working with people, young and old. My help made a big effect in my students' reading, writing, and also social skills. They have greatly improved on their tests. At first they told me they didn't want to read but when I gave them my 100% attention, they would give me the same. One of my children was really shy but now is coming out and being more open." Other high school tutors echo this. Jessica Eaton, 17, reports that an important bond has formed between the tutors and the "youngsters." Francelia Salgado, 15, says she's definitely seen an increase in the students' reading and test scores.

In addition, the tutors report that they have grown from the experience as well. Dat Mai, another tutor, plans to become a teacher, and feels that this is good preparation. Jessica says, "Being a tutor helped me talk one-on-one with students and also talk in large groups." Christmore adds, "It has really made me a leader. I have improved in my social, communication, and public speaking skills. This program is great and will definitely benefit and support my future dreams and ambitions."

Washington Reading Corps Students

During the 1998-99 year of the Washington Reading Corps, over 22,000 students were tutored one-on-one or in small groups. In 1999-00, the number rose to nearly 24,000. If all 24,000 of these students were to gather together, they'd form a community roughly the same size as Mount Vernon or Wenatchee.

The personal attention these students have received has had an impact on raising reading levels and test scores. Behind each statistic, however, is an individual student, a person with a story of growth. Here are some of these stories, as recorded by the volunteers who worked with these students.

David, a student at Ridgeview Elementary in Yakima, was a reluctant reader who read very fast without comprehension. For him, reading was something he did because he had to, not because he enjoyed it. His tutor, a retired widow who volunteered with the Reading Corps, helped David slow down and listen to what he was reading. She found books that would interest him and shared related experiences with him. By the middle of David's second year in the Reading Corps, he was checking out books weekly, wanting more on the same subjects or by the same author. He had been transformed into an enthusiastic reader. As the volunteer coordinator at his school says, "He would come up to me just bubbling all over to tell me about the story he had just read."

When an AmeriCorps tutor at Mary Purcell Elementary in Sedro-Woolly first met Travis in October of 1999, his reading level was zero—meaning that Travis was reading at a level too low for the computer to even register for the reading assessment. He was obviously a very low reader, but the tutor felt that Travis's attitude toward school in general was the main problem. "Travis tried his hardest to not try at all," she says. "My initial tutoring sessions with him were a lesson in patience and perseverance." Yet the harder Travis tried to make the tutor give up on him, the less she was likely to do so. By December, her philosophy regarding Travis was to expose him to so much reading that he had no choice but to learn. Using the school's reading curriculum, she began tutoring him 45 minutes a day and assigned one of the high school tutors to read books with him for an additional 30 minutes every day. Travis progressed slowly at first, but once he realized that his tutors weren't going away, he finally began to read. He noticed quickly that the more he read, the better he got. The better he got, the more praise he received from his teachers and tutors. The more praise he got, the better he started doing in his other subjects. For the first time, he tried on the role of "star student" and realized he loved it. He has become so self-motivated that now he reads at home and during several recesses. His reading fluency has increased from 10 words per minute to 36 words per minute.

An AmeriCorps member working in Palisades Elementary had a similar experience with one of the students she tutored. Palisades is one of the smallest, most rural schools that the Reading Corps serves. The town itself consists of little more than a post office and the tiny elementary school. Houses are scattered throughout the orchards where most of the students' families work. Nick, a fifth-grader, was one of the more challenging students that this tutor was faced with. He didn't like to read and he let everyone know about it. At the beginning of the year he wouldn't read at all. Gradually, though, this began to change, and by the end of the year, he got a reading award for the number of books read that year. This change had happened so gradually, though, that, as the tutor said, "He was as surprised as everyone else that he had gotten an award."

A tutor in Wenatchee began working with a second grade girl in October who was reading at a 1.3 level. As the tutor says, “It wasn’t that she had a disability, but she came from a home where not one person cared.” This girl came in faithfully every day for her tutoring session and even attended the after-school reading program. Within three months of constant skill building with the same tutor, she began to move up in her reading level. By January, she was reading at a 2.0 level. From here, her reading skills really began to blossom. At the end of the school year, she was reading at a 3.5 level. She even received an award for her academic achievement. The tutor attributes this growth to the security that the student felt by having a consistent person in her life and a consistent environment where she felt safe. Two weeks before school was out, however, this girl’s family suddenly moved. “I can only hope that she will have continued encouragement from others that she will encounter,” her tutor says.

The VISTA volunteer at Chief Leschi Elementary in Pierce County recounted the success between a volunteer and a hard-to-reach student. “One volunteer was very frustrated that one of her kindergarten students seemed not to be learning anything she was trying to teach him. I assured her that, with time, constant effort, patience, and creative tutoring, one day it would ‘click.’ This week it clicked! Her student could not identify one letter of the alphabet for four months and then in a matter of two weeks, he has been able to identify one letter ... two letters ... and yesterday ... thirteen letters.”

At Blue Ridge Elementary in Walla Walla, located in the rural southeast corner of the state, an AmeriCorps member has worked with the same child for two years now. This child has problems with his eyesight and speech and has had numerous surgeries. When his AmeriCorps tutor began working with him last year, he was distrustful of adults and reluctant to participate. However, this year the AmeriCorps member has finally been able to reach him, and what’s more, he trusts her. Because of this relationship, he now knows his sight words and isn’t just guessing at them. His speech is also improving and he is getting along better with other children and adults. “The most important thing for me,” says the AmeriCorps member who tutored him, “is that this child has been able to have a positive relationship with adults because of the Reading Corps. These are the kinds of things that don’t show up on a test but will help the children in their lives just as much as reading.”

PRE AND POST ASSESSMENT OF WRC STUDENTS

While the stories we heard from national services members and our observations at the sites visited clearly indicated that the Reading Corps was having positive impacts on students in many ways, we did not know the overall impact of the WRC on all students served through this program. To collect data to address this question is certainly beyond the budget allowed for in the current study. Fortunately, we found that the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) was collecting assessment data on the WRC students as part of a larger scale evaluation of the WRC, performed by staff members of the Evaluation Program at NWREL.

The Slosson Oral Reading Test-Revised (SORT-R) and the Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) Test were used as tools to assess the WRC students' reading ability at the beginning, middle, and end of the 1999-2000 year.

The Slosson is designed to measure the "level of oral word recognition, word calling oral reading level." It does not test comprehension. The test consists of 200 words organized into ten 20-word lists, arranged from easiest to most difficult. Students read the words on the list aloud and receive credit if they pronounce the word correctly. They begin with the list from which they can read all 20 words correctly, and proceed up to the list on which they can not read any of the words. Their raw score is the number of total words read correctly up to that point.

The CBM consists of two levels of a cloze test: CBM-A for first through third graders (a third grade reading level), and CBM-B for fourth through sixth graders (a fourth grade reading level). In both cases, students read a 400-word selection all on one topic. The first sentence is complete. After the first sentence, about every seventh word is placed in parentheses, along with two alternate word choices, so that the student has to circle the correct word in order for the passage to make sense. The reported scores are the number of correct responses in 2.5 minutes. The students read different texts, at the same reading level, for the mid-year and post-tests.

Tables 1 and 2 show that the WRC student reading ability improved dramatically as indicated in testing scores of the Slosson and CBM. For example, at the beginning of the 1999-2000 year, the average Slosson score of fifth grade WRC students was 103.8 at a grade equivalent of 3.9 (reading below grade level). By the end of the year, the same group of students scored an average of 137.1 at a grade equivalent of 5.7 (reading above the grade level). The pattern applies to students of first through sixth grades.

Student scores on the CBM show a similar pattern of growth in the students' reading ability. For example, third grade students scored an average of 5.5 (or 10 percent of the total score) at

the beginning of the year. By the end of the year, they scored 13.2 (or 26 percent of the total score).

Table 1
Summary of Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) Test* By Grade Level

	PRE TEST		MID-YEAR TEST			POST TEST		
	Raw Score Average (SD)	Percentage of Total Score	Raw Score Average (SD)	Percentage of Total Score	Pre-Mid Gains for Raw Score/ Percentage of Total Score (N)	Raw Score Average (SD)	Percentage of Total Score	Pre-Post Gains** for Raw Score/ Percentage of Total Score (N)
First Grade	1.1 (3.3)	2%	2.2 (3.5)	4%	2% (3377)	4.2 (4.3)	8%	6% (2968)
Second Grade	2.1 (3.0)	4%	6.2 (4.9)	12%	8% (3538)	8.7 (5.4)	17%	13% (3049)
Third Grade	5.5 (5.1)	10%	11.5 (6.5)	23%	13% (3102)	13.2 (6.1)	26%	16% (2726)
Fourth Grade	9.0 (5.4)	16%	10.9 (6.7)	18%	2% (2555)	18.4 (7.0)	40%	24% (2222)
Fifth Grade	12.5 (6.8)	22%	14.5 (8.5)	25%	3% (2175)	22.2 (8.0)	48%	26% (1955)
Sixth Grade	15.8 (7.6)	28%	17.0 (8.9)	29%	1% (955)	25.1 (8.9)	55%	28% (872)

* Maximum raw scores on the CBM-A (Grades 1-3): Pre=57; Mid=51; and Post =50. CBM-B (Grades 4-6): Pre=56; Mid=59; and Post = 46.

** Because the total points possible on each version of the test are not the same, gains cannot be calculated by adding or subtracting raw scores.

Table 2
Summary of Slosson Scores* by Grade Level

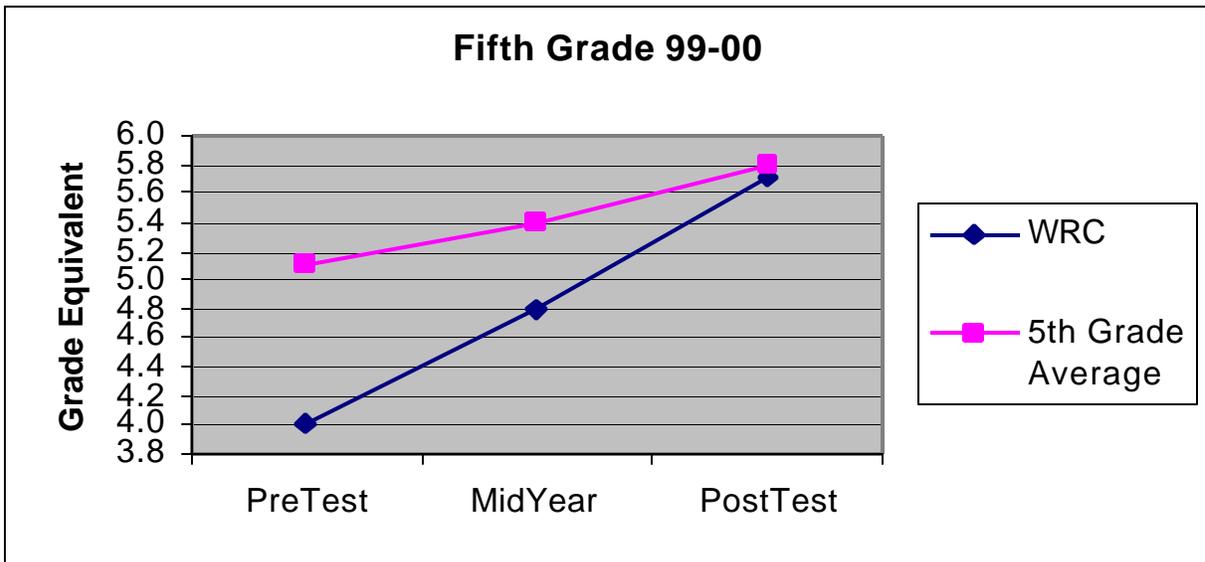
	PRE TEST		MID-YEAR TEST			POST TEST		
	Raw Score Average (SD)	Grade Equivalent *	Raw Score Average (SD)	Grade Equivalent	Pre-Mid Grade Equivalent Gain (N)	Raw Score Average (SD)	Grade Equivalent	Pre-Post ** Grade Equivalent Gain (N)
First Grade	4.9 (11.7)	0.2	16.3 (19.6)	0.5	0.3 (3274)	40.9 (29.3)	1.5	1.3 (2868)
Second Grade	34.5 (25.0)	1.3	52.8 (30.7)	2.0	0.7 (3405)	73.1 (31.6)	2.7	1.4 (3027)
Third Grade	63.9 (30.3)	2.4	80.8 (35.8)	3.0	0.6 (2960)	99.0 (34.9)	3.7	1.3 (2560)
Fourth Grade	86.6 (32.2)	3.3	101.6 (38.9)	3.8	0.5 (2463)	119.4 (34.8)	4.7	1.4 (2242)
Fifth Grade	104.5 (36.3)	3.9	118.0 (42.0)	4.6	0.7 (2092)	137.1 (35.0)	5.7	1.8 (1861)
Sixth Grade	118.3 (40.6)	4.6	125.3 (50.2)	4.9	0.5 (867)	148.4 (34.9)	6.5	1.9 (790)

* Maximum raw score on the Slosson (Grades 1-6) is 200.

** Because the number of students with pre and post scores is not necessarily the same number as those with pre and mid test scores, the pre/mid gain can not necessarily be calculated by subtracting the pre test average from the mid-year test average.

The following figure compares WRC student scores on the Slosson at the beginning, middle, and end of the year with the national norm on the Slosson. The results of this comparison suggest that the gap between the WRC students and the national norm was significantly narrowed by the end of year. This figure represents just the fifth grade, but similar gains were recorded for all other grades involved in the WRC, first through sixth.

Figure 3: Comparison of WRC Students' Slosson Scores with the National Norm



THE WRC KEY AREA COODINATORS, COMPONENTS OF THE WRC, AND CHALLENGES

The AmeriCorps key area coordinators are an integral part of AmeriCorps/VISTA members' involvement in the Washington Reading Corps Program. Each national service member involved with the Washington Reading Corps falls under the supervision of key area coordinators who provide support and training for the members. To find out the primary roles of the key area coordinators, the major components of the WRC, the training of volunteers and national service members, and the challenges of the WRC, members of the NWREL evaluation team conducted a survey and a focus group discussion with the key area coordinators on February 8, 2000.

Key Area Coordinator Site Information

Sixteen key area coordinators from all over the state responded to the survey. Together, their sites cover 25 counties in Washington, ranging from urban areas such as Seattle, Spokane, and Vancouver, to more rural ones like Walla Walla and Clallam County. Almost all coordinators work with more than one WRC school. Some coordinators work with up to 18 schools, through most have between 9-11 schools.

Coordinators also work with various numbers of VISTA and AmeriCorps members at these sites. Each key area coordinator supervises at least one VISTA, but the most common number is 5, with one program having as many as 12. In addition, coordinators supervise between 8-24 AmeriCorps members. The members directly tutor anywhere from 60-2250 in each AmeriCorps program, with the median being 1000 students per coordinator.

Major Components of the WRC

The following is a list of major components of the WRC. It also details the roles of site supervisors (usually a staff member at the school who supervises AmeriCorps/VISTA members there), key area coordinators, VISTAs, AmeriCorps members, teachers, and a variety of others in each of the components.

- **Identifying students to be tutored**—Teachers or reading specialists primarily take the lead here, though the site supervisor also plays a strong role. Two coordinators recorded that a VISTA also takes the lead on this.
- **Training VISTA and AmeriCorps members**—Overwhelmingly, the key area coordinator is the primary trainer of members, though the site supervisors at the schools also play a role. At some sites, AmeriCorps or VISTA members help with this training as well.

- **Recruiting and training community volunteers**—All respondents marked that the VISTA members take the lead in recruiting volunteers. Site supervisors also participate, though less frequently, as do AmeriCorps members. If there are volunteer coordinators at the schools, they help as well. The VISTAs take the lead in training these volunteers, though site sponsors and teachers are also strongly involved. And in one case, the principal does the training.
- **Training peer and/or cross-age tutors**—The teachers and VISTAs mostly take the lead on this, with some help from AmeriCorps members.
- **Selecting reading materials for tutors**—The teachers themselves take the strongest role here, with the site supervisor close behind. About half of the sites reported that the AmeriCorps and VISTA members also do this.
- **Coordinating tutoring with classroom instruction**—Again, the teachers take the lead, as well as the site supervisors. To a lesser extent, the VISTA and AmeriCorps members also contribute.
- **Conducting student assessments**—Site supervisors and teachers are mostly responsible for this, with some help from AmeriCorps members and less from VISTA. (As one coordinator pointed out, when national service members are involved, they do so with the assistance of a certificated teacher.)
- **Supervising tutors**—The VISTA members usually take the lead here, though the teachers and site supervisors also take part on a fairly frequent basis, as do the AmeriCorps members. In one case, the volunteer coordinator and reading specialist do the supervising.
- **Coordinating reading events**—The VISTA and AmeriCorps members often do this, as well as some site supervisors. Some principals are involved, too.
- **Contacting community organizations**—VISTA members have the primary lead, though key area coordinators and, to a lesser extent, AmeriCorps members, are also involved. In one case, the principal does this.
- **Administering program finances and reporting**—The site supervisor and the key area coordinators are the ones to take the lead here, though sometimes the principals or grantwriters are involved as well.

Training

The following list outlines topics related to the Washington Reading Corps and describes who received this training and who provided it.

- **Fundamentals of tutoring young children in literacy and reading development**—Almost all VISTA and AmeriCorps members (93.8%) received training in this area, as well as 62.5% of coordinators. This was most often provided by an ESD, a national service program (such as Washington Service Corps), or the school site.
- **How child development and literacy development influence children to become readers and writers**—75% of respondents said their AmeriCorps and VISTA members had learned about this. Half of the key area coordinators had as well. This training mostly came from national service or from an “other” category, usually the school or school district, but sometimes the coordinator.
- **Talking with children**—The majority of the VISTA (50%) and AmeriCorps (56%) members were reported having training in this area, which was provided mostly by “other” sources, either the school, school district, or key area coordinator.
- **Reading aloud**—Most VISTA and AmeriCorps received training in this area (75% and 81%, respectively), as did about one-third of the key area coordinators. Training came from national service or “other.”
- **Writing with children**—50% of the VISTAs and 56% of the AmeriCorps members had training here, which was mostly given from an “other” source.
- **Reading together**—About three-fourths of all members had received training in this area (VISTA, 75% and AmeriCorps, 81.3%). One-third of the key area coordinators also had. This training usually came from an “other” source, most particularly the school or school district.
- **Helping children with reading strategies**—Nearly all VISTA (81.3%) and AmeriCorps (87.5%) members were instructed with this, as were about half of the coordinators. The training mostly came from national service and “other” sources.
- **Focus on meaning**—Two-thirds of the national service members and one-third of the coordinators received this training. Again, this was performed most by an “other” category, most typically a school or school district.

- **Improving writing skills**—Half of the AmeriCorps members and a little less than half of the VISTAs received this. Few of the coordinators did, only 18%. The training came mostly from an “other” source.
- **How to support children’s reading and promote family literacy**—The majority of members received training in this area (87.5% for VISTA, 75% for AmeriCorps), as did 56% of the key area coordinators. National service and “other” were the primary providers.
- **Management of volunteers**—100% of VISTAs had received this training. Slightly more than half of the AmeriCorps members and coordinators also had (56.3%). In most cases, national service had provided this training.

AmeriCorps and VISTA Involvement

The results of the key area coordinator survey suggest that AmeriCorps and VISTA members generally play a leading role in the following areas:

- **Recruiting volunteers**—Respondents said that their national service members were extremely active in this area, showing a 100% involvement rate. Members either take the lead here (62.5%) or are very involved (37.5%).
- **Providing partners/businesses materials or incentive for the program**—This is another area where VISTA and AmeriCorps members are 100% engaged, with 43.8% taking the lead, 31.3% being very involved, and 18.8% involved.
- **Conducting community service projects such as book drives**—Another area of full member involvement, with 31.3% taking the lead, 43.8% very involved, and 25% involved.
- **Developing a plan for sustaining community involvement in the program**—77.5% of members are working with sustainability in some way, with 25% taking the lead, 31.3% very involved, and 31.3% involved.
- **Organizing and promoting family literacy events**—Members show 100% involvement in this area, with 37.5% taking the lead, 31.3% very involved, and 31.5% involved.
- **Recruiting parents as tutors**—This was another area where members are fully engaged. 43.8% are taking the lead, 43.8% are very involved, and 12.5% are involved, for a 100% involvement rate.
- **Developing or preparing reading materials for students to read at home**—Nearly three-fourths of members are involved here, with 12.5% taking the lead, 43.8% very involved, and 18.8% involved.

- **Inviting parents to observe tutoring sessions**—Though no members are reported to have taken the lead in this area, 43.8% are engaged in some way here, with 18.8% very involved and 25% involved.
- **Publishing a newsletter to highlight efforts of WRC**—56.2% of members participate, with 18.8% taking the lead, 18.8% very involved, and 18.8% involved.
- **Disseminating newsletter to parents and community**—12.5% of members take the lead here, with an additional 18.8% very involved and 18.8% involved.
- **Generating additional resources such as book donations**—Nearly all members (93%) participate in this area, with 43.8% taking the lead, 25% very involved, and 25% involved.
- **Managing volunteers**—Another area where members are actively participating. 50% take the lead, 31.3% are very involved, and 18.8% are involved.

Challenges

In our focus group discussion with them, key area coordinators identified the following challenges in implementing the WRC:

Site supervisors

The group agreed that most site supervisors are classroom teachers and they are not always able to provide time and resources to help with training of new tutors. Some of these site supervisors often know very little about the program because they have taken on the additional responsibilities of the Reading Corps without having extra time to perform them. There was concern that some site supervisors, including principals, took the job but aren't doing the extra work that supervisors need to do. They just add it to their already-busy jobs. For example, at one school the site sponsor gets paid from eight different grants and spends very little time with her AmeriCorps members.

Site management issues

When asked who key area coordinators meet with first at a site, there were several different answers. Generally it was agreed that this depended on whether or not the situation was with a staff member or an AmeriCorps member. One coordinator said that one of her site supervisors offers a lot of resistance and is very protective of the teachers, which makes it hard for her to get to the schools and communicate openly. This site supervisor often prevents the key area coordinator from meeting directly with teachers. As a consequence, these teachers lack understanding of the program. In contrast, teachers who read the material from the key area coordinators have a better understanding of the national service role in the Reading Corps.

When key area coordinators go to schools, they usually spend their time handling management issues. They at times encourage schools to review their grants to clarify the responsibilities that

are outlined. They also ensure that members are being supported and that communication channels are open. One coordinator said that she feels like the members "get caught in the middle," because the schools decide who's going to get tutored and how many, even if this is a very difficult task. The members, who are devoted to the success of the program, will try to meet the expectations, even when they may be unrealistic. Another key area coordinator said that her school visits can also be a way of praising the schools and letting them know they're on target. Also, these visits can be a way to share ideas with other schools.

Setting up a program

Everyone agreed that the 99-00 year is going better than the first year. One key area coordinator said that the difference is that he has built relationships—when he approaches school staff now, they don't feel like he's coming to attack them. Another coordinator said her first visits were met with hesitation or apprehension, but this year the schools realize that there's rapport. She added that the schools who are new this year are getting a huge jumpstart compared with last year's schools, because they understand the program better. Another coordinator said that second year schools aren't as threatened by the program and they want to be more a part of the process, like deciding what AmeriCorps members will be at their schools. In addition, schools are less worried about meeting their "numbers" this year, which puts their members more at ease. [Note: "numbers" refers to requirements in the first year of the WRC for 80 hours of tutoring per student].

VISTA vs. AmeriCorps

All of the key area coordinators agreed that schools often didn't see the distinction between AmeriCorps and VISTA members. Even when schools do understand, they are tempted to use VISTA members as tutors instead of allowing them to perform in their role of volunteer recruitment, training, and bringing in community support. Schools see their immediate need, tutoring, and don't understand that VISTAs can bring in other tutors. They want that immediate need of tutoring to be met. It's a slow process to realize that VISTA members play a different role. It's a growth process, one key area coordinator said.

The schools who have a plan and an understanding of the Reading Corps, especially on the part of the principals, make sense out of the distinction between VISTA and AmeriCorps. Difficulties exist when the site supervisors don't have the support of the principals. This then brought up the idea that in some cases it's hard for teachers to be site supervisors, because sometimes this is the first time they've ever been in charge of someone besides children.

Hyacinth Burt of OSPI said they need to hear this message about the AmeriCorps/VISTA distinction ten times before they "get it." John Miller of the Corporation for National Service State Office said it has to be a consistent message because of all the turnover at schools and programs. He said it's sometimes necessary to explain the policies more than once—that this is a program mandated by Congress, that VISTA does one thing and AmeriCorps does another.

One key area coordinator said that she requires that all VISTAs keep a notebook of their contacts. That way when teachers say, “Why aren’t the VISTAs doing something?” there’s something to show for what they do. Also, this notebook provides a transitional tool for the next year’s VISTA member.

Program understanding

Many of the key area coordinators felt that this was an area with many misunderstandings, though things had improved during the second year of the Reading Corps. The group felt that grant writers often didn’t realize the part that national service members would play. If schools did not receive the number of AmeriCorps members they requested, they became less cooperative with the key area coordinator. Some schools felt that they were no longer bound to the commitment they had made to serve a certain number of students if they did not have the number of AmeriCorps members they’d requested. One key area coordinator said that some site supervisors tend to disregard guidelines of the program, without any sense of accountability. Another suggested that schools who are bad partners should be “cut loose.” A third said that schools are realizing they need to contribute to the process, that they need to work with AmeriCorps—they can’t just check a box and get a member and have everything taken care of.

Informing teachers

The group agreed that teachers and school administrators need to know about the Service Corps requirements and what the process is. Susan Harris from the Washington Service Corps said there are no guidelines or expectations around how many volunteers are needed per student. Some schools ask for a huge amount of volunteers to serve 120 students when another school might ask for only 20 to serve the same number. She stressed that real-world thinking needed to be put into place here, not just numbers thrown out.

The time schedule for working with and informing teachers is difficult. They’re gone all summer and don’t want to come to meetings to learn about the roles and rules of AmeriCorps. She would like teachers to think now about roles for next year. The group agreed that mandatory meetings for teachers don’t work. They have to do site visits to get the word out.

Grants

Some grants are written at the district level and then “farmed out” to schools, with no buy-in or understanding from the schools. In some cases, schools (as part of these district grants) are reluctant to participate. These schools simply want the grant and fail to understand what they are committing to when they receive national service members. Key area coordinators suggested that the grant needs to be like a mini-contract with a signature so that schools view it as a contract. It was noted that sometimes the memos of understanding are signed by the principal who hasn’t actually read the document. The site sponsors and principals have to have ownership for this to work, a final point that was stressed.

CONCLUSIONS

In the 1999 Regional (WA, OR, MT, ID, and AK) Education Needs Assessment conducted by NWREL, it was reported:

The population is aging, and this has troubling ramifications for public education. First, because a decreasing proportion of households has school-age children, schools are losing direct, child-centered connections with a larger percentage of the population. More than three out of five respondents to NWREL's public survey did not have school-age children in the household. This loss of child-centered constituency means that schools have an increasingly difficult job garnering public support for levies and generating public involvement in schools.

The Washington Reading Corps, with national service members providing much of the backbone of this effort, not only directly served students with reading problems but also generated enormous community support for schools. In the process, community members, including those who do not have children in school, have become more aware of the needs of the schools and are more likely to render their support for public education in a long run.

Listed below are the major findings based on our evaluation and some data collected for the OSPI evaluation of the WRC:

- The WRC has made a significant impact on the students served, evidenced by changed attitudes toward reading, other school-related behaviors, and, most importantly, improved reading test scores. These improvements have occurred in over 200 WRC schools that previously had the lowest reading test scores in the state.
- AmeriCorps and VISTA members have played an instrumental role in keeping the WRC running at many school sites. There is great improvement in the program compared with the first year of operation.
- National service members have played a key role in reaching parents and other community members for their support of the WRC. Due to the efforts of the national service members in 1999-2000, 994 community and private organizations contributed more than a half million dollars to support the WRC across the state.
- National service members involved in the WRC are diverse in their professional and cultural backgrounds, but they share the same compassion for helping young children.

- Participation in the WRC also benefited the national service members in their personal and professional growth. Many of them are likely to pursue their career in the area of education and to continue to serve in their communities in the future.

CONSIDERATIONS

The list below, rather than giving specific recommendations, is an offering of our reflective thoughts for the program implementation in the future. We believe the following questions or ideas have direct implications for all participants in the WRC, and we want the staff at the Washington Commission to consider these points in their future collaboration with OSPI for the improvement of the WRC.

Systemic Thinking. Is the WRC a short-term program to deal with student reading problems or is it a long-term collaboration among OSPI, schools, national service organizations, and local community agencies in educating our young people? If it is a long-term commitment, how can schools operate with this as an integral component? How can we enhance teacher roles in the systemic changes without having them feel intruded on by “lay persons” in public education?

Communication. There are many layers of communication involved in running the WRC. Just to name a few, there are communications between OSPI and the Washington State Commission, between the Commission and the Washington Service Corps, between the key area coordinators and schools, between national service members and teachers, and between site supervisors and the national service members. The challenge to the current WRC is how to streamline the communication process and present a clear and consistent message to individual sites.

AmeriCorps vs. VISTA. The Corporation for National Service has made a distinction between the roles—and sometimes the training—of AmeriCorps and VISTA members. Because AmeriCorps members can perform direct service, they serve primarily as tutors with the Reading Corps. The VISTA role, however, does not include direct service. Instead, VISTAs are to work with the community to bring volunteers into the schools as WRC tutors. Such a distinction is sometimes confusing to school sites in face of their priorities (i.e., high demand for individual tutors in most cases). How can we eliminate the burden of this confusion at individual school sites while still acknowledging the differences between the two?

Site Supervisors. Site supervisors are supposed to play a very important role in ensuring the quality of the WRC at school sites and to help school staff understand what the WRC is about. Site supervisors should be a major support that national service members can depend on at their school sites. Based on our interviews with key area coordinators, however, it seems that many site supervisors are not as effective as they could be. One major reason is that they don’t have time. How we can get serious commitment from site supervisors is a question to be considered in continuing the WRC.