

City Year DC: One Year, Lasting Impact BY HEATHER SCHOELL

Giving back is a goal that some people never make the time to meet, so it is extra special when young America makes it happen. For City Year corps members, it is a full-time reality, a commitment to giving 10 months of their lives to the disadvantaged youth of the city. The new City Year DC program is Whole School Whole Child, and it sets the scene for lasting impact on the children served.

Who They Are

“Increasing student achievement is a team effort that involves every adult in each school building. Programs like City Year’s Whole School Whole Child provide our hardworking educators with the extra daily support they need to succeed,” said DCPS Chancellor Michelle Rhee. “From afterschool programs to one-on-one tutoring, the City Year corps is an integral piece of our comprehensive approach to ensuring every student has an opportunity to receive a quality education.” City Year (CY) is an AmeriCorps partner, founded in 1988 with the express purpose of revitalizing communities through the active participation of youth in schools, spreading good citizenry through tutoring and mentoring, creating upstanding adults who have learned to lead. City Year DC was launched in 2000 and has already made its mark having served over 42,000 children in 550,000 hours of service. This year’s Whole School Whole Child program has 50 corps members on hand to stamp out illiteracy in the District – young adults, ages 17 to 24, who have made a decision to give a year of their life to public service. After the application process and a successful background investigation, they begin a month-long training session in late summer. For the first two weeks, they learn CY culture – how to be respectful, responsible citizens – and explore issues facing today’s society. The next two weeks are spent on teambuilding and tools to help them in the schools, such as tutoring and mentoring, and crafting lesson plans. Then work begins.

City Year DC at Gibbs

City Year DC conducted an eight-week course on substance abuse at Amidon Elementary in Southwest Washington from 2000 to 2007, but have since redirected efforts to Whole School Whole Child, which is far more intensive, sustained and involved. The corps teams, made up of groups of 10 individuals, head to their assigned schools by Metro, and they work with kids from 9:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. Then they regroup to discuss the day’s events and to work on the next day’s schedule until 5:30

or 6 p.m. Brown-Young-Gibbs at 500 19th St. NE is one of five lucky DC schools to have CY’s focus for the 2008-2009 school year. Gibb’s team leader is Emmanuel Ekekwe, a DC native in his second year of CY service. “City Year is really, really great,” he said. “It is fun for the kids. We’re the intermediary between teachers and kids. We break up into subgroups, which gives teachers the opportunity for focus on something else, like working with a student who needs extra help.” Corps members follow class curriculum, but have their own Starfish Program for after school. In this program, they teach peace, tolerance and civic-mindedness. “It’s like a mini City Year for little kids,” said Ekekwe. “The concept comes from a story about a little girl who was walking on the beach where a starfish had washed up onto the shore,” he explained. “She said she would throw it back into the ocean, and the other kids laughed that she couldn’t save all the starfish, and she said, ‘I can save this one.’” “It means more adults for children to connect to, and teachers have more support in the classroom than they would have,” said Collin Hill, Gibb’s assistant principal, of City Year’s welcomed participation. “They have been helpful with lunch and recess, planning and facilitating activities...and have been a big part of the after school program.” On Nov. 15, City Year held a clean-up at the school, and painted colorful murals on their white walls.

City Year Benefits

Outside of Whole School Whole Child, another focus is heightening AIDS awareness, preventing the ravage of AIDS on the young generation of DC. Corps members work interactively with seventh- to 12th-graders in middle and high schools throughout the city, in a partnership with Metro Teen AIDS (www.metroteenaid.org), to educate youth and put an end to the epidemic. Additionally, corps members benefit – not only by learning interpersonal and leadership skills, and gaining working knowledge of elementary education. After two years of service, they graduate with nearly \$10,000 in education credit. Finally, we all benefit from a better educated, civic-minded generation. To learn more about City Year, go to www.cityyear.org.

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TOP: City Year logo.

MIDDLE: CY corps members complete a mural at Gibbs during an all day service project at the school.

BOTTOM: CY corps member Ty DeShields paints an inspirational quote about the amazing teachers at Gibbs.