

Media Release

4/9/2010 – AmeriCorps National Service Volunteers Support ARCA

<http://www.ARCASupportingDoors.org>

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National Volunteers Support ARCA's Focus on Fitness

Healthy Living Grows through Philanthropy

Albuquerque, NM –Individuals with developmental disabilities face numerous health challenges and tend to have a shorter life span than the general public. In 2005, ARCA implemented a health and wellness program designed to reverse these health disparities by providing lesson plans and guided exercise sessions teaching flexibility, endurance, balance and strength. The positive results, measurable from the onset, ratcheted up when two AmeriCorps VISTAs joined ARCA to serve the program.

AmeriCorps VISTA, or Volunteers in Service to America, is a national service program founded in 1965 to help people living on poverty level incomes. VISTA provides full-time members to community-based organizations to create and expand programs working to bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty.

Katie Davis and Kenya Williams applied for a two year term with AmeriCorps and in August, 2009, were engaged by ARCA under American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding. Since August, they have worked with almost 70 staff in 41 of ARCA's community living homes providing teaching strategies, modified exercise routines and developing new community connections.

Katie Davis came to ARCA from Texas, with a BA in Religion from Baylor University, a Masters in Divinity from Truett Seminary and two years experience working in the field of developmental disabilities. Katie said, "I felt like AmeriCorps service would give me a better understanding of the complexities of social problems and how they affect real people. Unhealthy lifestyle is not isolated to people with developmental disabilities. It's a nationwide problem and will take all of us to solve it." After her VISTA service year Katie intends to seek local certification as a chaplain and remain connected to ARCA.

Kenya Williams is a graduate from Cornell University with a BA in Sociology. "My VISTA service year has helped me reevaluate my perspective on minority groups affected by poverty," said Kenya. "People with developmental disabilities have many barriers to full participation in society and their complex health challenges are affected by limited access to health education." After her VISTA term, Kenya intends to study public interest law in Washington, DC.

In addition to mentoring ARCA staff, Katie and Kenya developed intranet health resources, convened an advisory group to identify and resolve issues related to program implementation, assisted with training, disseminated wellness literature to families and completed a Spanish Language version of the curriculum lesson plans.

To participate in AmeriCorps VISTA an organization should submit a program concept paper for review by the Corporation for National and Community Service to the state office in Santa Fe, New Mexico. For more information visit www.americorps.gov.

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ARCA is a nonprofit organization founded in 1957 by a group of Albuquerque families who had children with developmental disabilities. The mission of ARCA has remained consistent for 53 years: opening doors for people with developmental disabilities to be valued members of our community. For more information, please call 505-332-6803 or visit our web site at www.ARCAOpeningDoors.org.