

Vitamin L News

Fall 2010

Thanks to Special Funding Support, Vitamin L's Outreach Crosses Economic Barriers

For the past five years, Vitamin L has received special support from the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust for the specific purpose of providing partial scholarships to schools that have very limited funds for assemblies and special programming. This awesome partial scholarship support is continuing this school year, allowing us to reach out to thousands more students in central New York schools, regardless of economic status. Our gratitude for this opportunity is tremendous. To date, the trust has supported _____ concerts and enabled us to reach students and staff who otherwise would not have had the opportunity of having a Vitamin L concert. We share here some feedback from some educators and children who have benefited from the generosity of the J.B.S. Trust to show how meaningful this support has been. We send out a heartfelt thanks to our friends at the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust!



“Over 70% of our school is considered to be below the poverty level. You probably already know what a toll that takes on a child’s daily life. Most children come to school worried about various problems, like where their next meal will come from, or who is going to take care of them (or a younger sibling) when the parents are working (if they work!). Many students commented that for the hour that Vitamin L was singing, their worries ‘went away’ and they were able to ‘just be a kid.’ If it wasn’t for your scholarship, we would not have been able to get Vitamin L here at our school. I sincerely appreciate your memorial trust and what you have done to make sure live music and positive experiences can be a part of EVERY child’s life. Thank you so much.” – Jennifer Ostrander, music teacher, Charles F. Johnson Elementary School

*“When I listened to you sing I felt so happy.”
– Lilly*

“My favorite song is Walk a Mile because it’s like a theme song to sing when you are sad or stressed out.” Sincerely, Anthony

“Your performance was an incredible experience for our students. They love your songs, and I am certain that many will linger in their hearts and minds. Learning the songs ahead of time, enjoying the performance, and continuing to sing your songs in our morning program will ensure that they will have the messages of tolerance, endurance, thankfulness, kindness, and so many others with them for a lifetime.

“Our students have memorized your lyrics and sing even as they are walking down the halls. It was an honor to teach them such wonderful lessons with selfless messages! For example, one of our classes has a student that everyone dislikes. Their unkindness was heartbreaking. In coordination with the teacher, we utilized ‘I Want to Get to Know You’ in a few creative ways that really helped the atmosphere in the classroom. They seemed to understand that everyone was worth getting to know. I’ve seen exceptionally positive results in their interaction!

*“I praise your ability to create an entire experience so kids just are not told to care about others; they see the joy on the performers’ faces while experiencing true community as they all sing along together. Thank you; it’s inspiring!”
– Ashley Samuel, music teacher, Ben Franklin Elementary*



Two Vitamin L Alumni Choose Service Work Through AmeriCorps VISTA

Diversity and Impact

Since September 2009, I have been living in Prescott, Arizona, serving with AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) for a one-year term. I work with First Things First, an Arizona state agency that supports children (ages birth to five years) and their families. Recognizing that learning and development begin at birth, the mission of First Things First is to ensure every child enters school healthy and ready to succeed.

The scope of my work with First Things First has been eclectic and broad, including, among other things, supporting the projects of several community coalitions, such as the child care coalition, parenting education coalition, and breastfeeding coalition; creating and implementing a countywide Diaper Drive to assist local families struggling with financial hardship; serving on a grant review committee; conducting research to assess local needs; and building a collaborative network for family service providers.

This work is unlike anything I've ever done, and, like all experiences, it has its highs and lows. It has certainly afforded me the opportunity to strengthen a few essential virtues: the patience needed to navigate government agency bureaucracy, the grace required to coordinate volunteers, and the endurance necessary for a nine-hour work day in a fluorescent cubicle ("oh, the wonder, the wonder, when I let nothing pull me under!").

After my Ithaca upbringing, living in a predominantly conservative state has had its challenges. An illustrative example of this occurred at a local elementary school. The school was painting a mural on its outer wall depicting several children, and the central figure was a young Hispanic boy. Within days of the mural's completion, I was stunned to hear that several members of the town, including a city council member, had requested that the child's skin be lightened to "better represent the town." The superintendent actually complied with this request. Fortunately, several community members organized a protest to prevent the lightening of the child's skin, and were able to convince the superintendent to reconsider his decision. But the experience reminded me of the need to recognize ideological diversity. Though I may not agree with certain strongly held principles, I endeavor to sustain respect for the people who hold them, even when their ideologies baffle me.

This year has also been a lesson in what it means to have an impact. VISTA is a branch of AmeriCorps intended to build program capacity and foster sustainability in organizations; VISTA members cannot provide direct service. Therefore, though I work to support health and education in young kids, I have not worked direct



ly with any children this year—a stark contrast to my previous work and volunteer experiences! In Vitamin L, it is so easy to see our direct and immediate influence: in the smiling, attentive faces during the show, in the children's enthusiastic singing and dancing along, in the bright-eyed crowd elatedly requesting our autographs after the performance. In my service with First Things First, though I may never see the direct result of my work, I trust that my intention to support children and to interact as I do with people every day will create ripples of significant impact. Like the lesson within "Mighty Power," which remains my favorite Vitamin L song, attention to our simple actions can have a widespread influence. Every detail, every choice, and every moment can lead to the better world we want to see.

Claire Louge is

More feedback from specially funded concerts...

"Our students were the most alive and participatory as I have ever seen them during a presentation/assembly. Students felt the words, heard the words, and moved to the words."
— Andrea Hankey, social worker, Ben Franklin Elementary

"During the concert it made me feel happy inside of me and on the outside of me. All of the songs are stuck in my head." Sincerely, Holly

"Thank you for teaching us those songs because I love those songs from in my heart." - Gina

"An energetic and powerful performance! Our school district has been operating under a contingency budget Our school district has been operating under a contingency budget for the 2009-2010 school year, making field trips and assemblies nearly impossible. Funding a major portion of today's performance allowed our students to hear the messages we teach all year in our school presented in a new way—positive messages of friendship, cooperation, responsibility, compassion, perseverance, acceptance, respect, citizenship, courtesy, and courage. Our students are singing 'Walk a Mile' in their classes and even in the cafeteria! What a message for them to remember! Thank you to the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust for making this possible!"
— Jo-Anne Knapp, principal, Caryl E. Adams Primary School

THE GRATITUDE REPORT

In the last six months The Vitamin L Project received donations from numerous individuals and groups, including grants of \$15,000.00 from the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust.

A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR SUPPORTERS AND VOLUNTEERS!

Adding a Little Love to Our Own Little Space



While Vitamin L offers its listeners an array of positive and inspiring messages, the messages delivered in the songs "With These Hands" and "Mighty Power" have always been particularly inspiring for me. These songs promulgate a core value that I strongly identify with: that every person, regardless of background or circumstance, has the power to change the world for the better. Over the course of my life, I've always striven to "add a little love to [my] own little space" through my participation in activities, events, and organizations that attempt to effect positive change in the world. This past year, I've had the opportunity to work toward improving the lives of youth and families in Tompkins County through my participation in the AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program.

AmeriCorps VISTA is a federal community service program whose mission is to fight poverty by building the capacity of nonprofit and government organizations that focus on underserved populations. With a desire to give back to a community that has provided me with so much, I applied to be placed at the Ithaca Youth Bureau for my year of AmeriCorps service. Fortunately, I was granted the opportunity and an exciting, interesting, and fulfilling year ensued.

My tasks at the Youth Bureau concentrated on building capacity for two programs, the first of which was Youth Council. Youth Council is a program dedicated to giving youth a formal voice in community decisions, developing youth leaders and improving conditions for local teens. While I performed a variety of functions for Youth Council including designing a website, writing grants and organizing fundraisers, my favorite task involved working with Youth Council's teen members to design and implement a leadership training series that was relevant, free, and accessible to local youth.

The second part of my year of service concentrated on building capacity for Computer All-Stars, a program whose focus is teaching computer repair and refurbishment skills to youth. My primary responsi-

bility for this program was to develop an electronics reuse center that would work to improve our environment by keeping hazardous electronic waste out of the landfill and increase equity by distributing low-cost technology to individuals and organizations in need. While originally this seemed a daunting task, I am pleased to announce that this project recently came into fruition, and can now be visited as the "eCenter" at the Triphammer Mall. While Vitamin L is frequently heralded for the incredible work it does spreading messages of empathy, tolerance, and love to thousands of schoolchildren each year, Vitamin L's extended, less direct impact on our society is often overlooked. Every year, Vitamin L sends chorus member alumni out into the world who truly believe in the words they sang all those years and who are moved "to do beautiful things with their hands." By inspiring a body of compassionate and socially conscious alumni, Vitamin L has undoubtedly unleashed a "mighty power" for good into this world, and I am proud to be part of that group.

Brian Stilwell is



Vitamin L Chorus with some alumni guest singers at the 2010 Ithaca Festival

In 2009, Vitamin L:

- * Performed 46 concerts*
- * Reached 11,150 youth & 3,000 adults in concerts*
- * Gave leadership and performing opportunities to our 80 chorus members.*

**Please support our unique outreach, service, and leadership work by making a tax-deductible donation on-line at www.vitaminL.org, or to: The Vitamin L Project
105 King St. • Ithaca, NY 14850 •
Thank You!**



**Join us for our Apple Harvest Festival concert on Sat. Oct. 2
11:45 a.m., Bernie Milton Pavilion, Ithaca Commons*

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**for concert schedule
and more info:
www.vitaminL.org**

The Vitamin L Project is a Project of The Center for Transformative Action in Ithaca, New York

