



# VERMONT

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

ECO AmeriCorps



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## ECO AmeriCorps Celebrates AmeriCorps Week!

AmeriCorps Week, March 11th—17th, is a celebration of all things AmeriCorps – from the programs and organizations that make this national service initiative possible in thousands of locations across the country, to the members who have committed to **"Get Things Done"** since the program's inception in 1994. Below from left to right you will see **Billy Ernest** chopping wood at Fowler's R&R Ranch Corps in Whiting, VT. **Corey Aydlett**, at the Lake Champlain Basin Program's Resource Room at the ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain and **Brodie Haenke**, collecting water samples in Franklin County even in the dead of winter with plenty of snow on the ground! We commend all of our AmeriCorps members and the rest of the members serving through out Vermont and the Country!



# First Half of Service Term Accomplishments



**# Miles of River Treated/  
Improved: 1.33**



**# Acres of Land Treated/ Improved: 37**



**# Vermonters Educated: 1,713**

**# Volunteers Supported: 141**



## ECO AmeriCorps Treats MLK Day as a Day ON and not a Day Off!



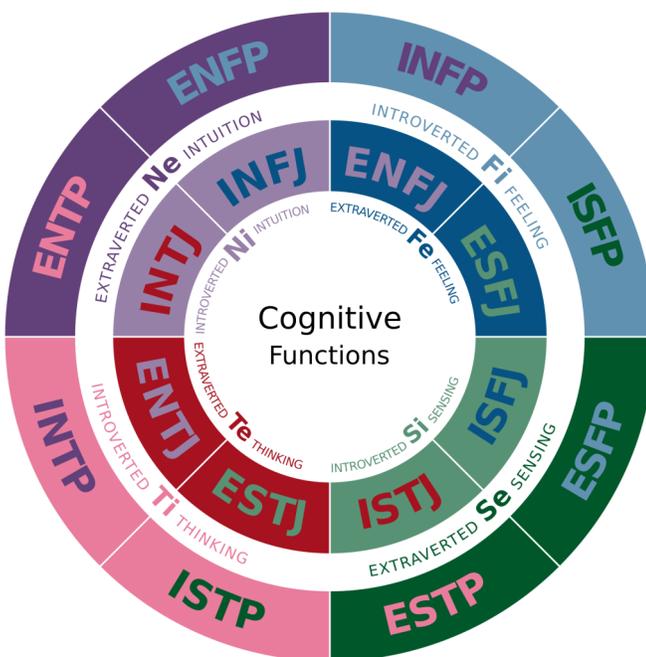
Martin Luther King Jr. Day was declared a day of national service in 1994. This year on January 15th, our members partnered with the Central Vermont Humane Society and gave the facility a much needed face lift. During our lunch break we played a (slightly competitive) game of MLK trivia where our members were tested on their MLK knowledge. We couldn't have been more proud to take part in this day of national service in little 'ole Vermont!





## What is your Myers Brigg's Personality Type?

In January our members learned about their Myers Brigg's Personality Types and how their personalities bring forth different strengths. DEC Lakes & Ponds Program Manager & certified strengths trainer Perry Thomas also provided a look each member's top 5 strengths. Knowing their strengths and personality types will only help our members succeed in their service and professional lives.



## Our training in February at the Essex Waste Water Recovery Facility was Not A Waste of Time!

**In February of 2018** our members took a trip to the Essex Water Resource Recovery Facility where they learned how waste water is processed. The facility is capable of treating 3.3 million gallons of water a day. The pollution that is removed from the water is processed as biosolids at the facilities anaerobic digester, solids can then be used for fertilizer on nearby Vermont farms. Our members then ventured down the road to South Burlington where they took a tour of the Champlain Water District, which provides clean drinking water to many towns in the Champlain Valley. The Champlain Water District is well known for having some of the best drinking water in the state of Vermont, they have even won awards for it! Our members enjoyed a fun tour of the facility and learned more about how Champlain Water District extracts and treats water from Lake Champlain to provide clean drink water for communities. A fun and educational day was had by all.



## Regional Gatherings Bring Members Together for Unique Days of Service



**Fowler's**  
R&R RANCH CORP.

**March 9th, 2018** was a day our central- and southern-serving members will remember fondly. The group spent a day serving with Fowler's R&R Ranch Corps in Whiting. This organization provides assistance to returning military personnel in their transition to civilian life by providing a low-stress working and living environment with mentoring in technical skill building—specifically related to agriculture. We built a railing for an accessible ramp, mucked out stalls, split wood, learned how to use power tools and enjoyed meaningful conversation with organization founder Bruce Fowler. The 8 hours spent on the farm were hard and sometimes a little chilly, but the conversations with Bruce and the delicious lunch he made were totally worth the cold fingers.





# Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity®



**On Friday, March 16th**, our northern-serving members spent half of the day serving with the Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Williston. Members were busy sorting and pricing home goods, building walls, painting shelves and helping customers get their items to their cars. Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity has built 75 homes for deserving families in 9 towns within Chittenden County. Habitat for Humanity Restore has been around for nearly 6 years and is more than just a home for donating and recycling gently used furniture and home goods. It is also the store that helps build homes. Money raised at the store goes directly to helping build Habitat homes in Chittenden County. Not only did we get to help out an organization that needs it but we also got to go into the day knowing we would be helping to keep thousands of items out of the landfill!

## An Udder-ly Great Day Learning About Agriculture

**On Friday, March 30th**, we spent the day at Vermont Technical College (VTC) in Randolph where staff from the VT Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets facilitated presentations on the history of Agriculture in the state of Vermont, and how the agency’s new Water Quality Division is working hard to help improve Vermont’s waterways. Members learned about Required Agricultural Practices along with Best Management Practices. Our members were then split into three teams representing Farmers, Private Land Owners and The State of Vermont to debate the solution to the water quality issues at Lake Carmi. The Farmers won! In the afternoon we toured VTC’s anaerobic digester, which takes organic waste, and turns it into electricity that is sold to the grid and solid material is used for animal bedding on their dairy farm. Members then hopped down to the farm on campus to learn about dairy production. Fun fact, if a Holstein is more than 50% black it can be sold as Angus! It was a long and educational day for the ECO AmeriCorps team but everyone enjoyed learning about the connections between agriculture and water quality.



## Stories From the Field—Cara Stapleford

On January 20, 2018 the Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District (CVSWMD), in partnership with Onion River Exchange (ORE), hosted its first Repair Café. Serving as the Community Zero Waste Assistant, I worked closely with my supervisor to plan and implement the event.

Repair Cafés originated in the Netherlands as a way to reduce stuff sent to the landfill, share skills, and bring members of the community together. The concept has been quick to catch on as people become increasingly aware of local, national, and global waste issues. Repairing is a simple solution, yet most people may don't consider it.

Leading up to the Repair Café, I was responsible for creating outreach materials, recruiting “fixperts”, and finding sponsors to supply food and materials for the event. I was able to use my creative energy for a number of projects including creating social media posts and flyers, setting up a Repair Café display at the Aldrich Public Library in Barre, and designing a Repair Café webpage for the CVSWMD website. Close to 100 people attended throughout the four-hour event, coming from 16 different Vermont towns. There were 13 “fixperts” offering repair services in a variety of fields, including; electronics repair, electrical repair, mechanical repair, wood working, sewing, gluing, and sharpening. A wide range of household items were brought to the event including; clothing, electronic devices such as VHS players, CD players, radios,

headphones, walkie talkies, iPods, speakers, computers, and a video camera, and many household items including kitchen appliances, lamps, vacuum cleaners, knives, and toys to name a few. Not all

of them could be repaired, but mostly because a particular part or tool was needed. In this case, participants were given instructions about what parts were needed and follow up steps to complete the repair at home. In total, the Repair Café diverted close to 300 pounds of household items from the landfill! But what if more Repair Cafés took place and more people participated? How much could we divert from the landfill then? Let's not forget that in addition to these benefits, the satisfying feeling of walking away with your beloved item rather than tossing it in the trash. Now there's something we can all feel good about.



## The Exponential Benefits of Partnering with ECO AmeriCorps

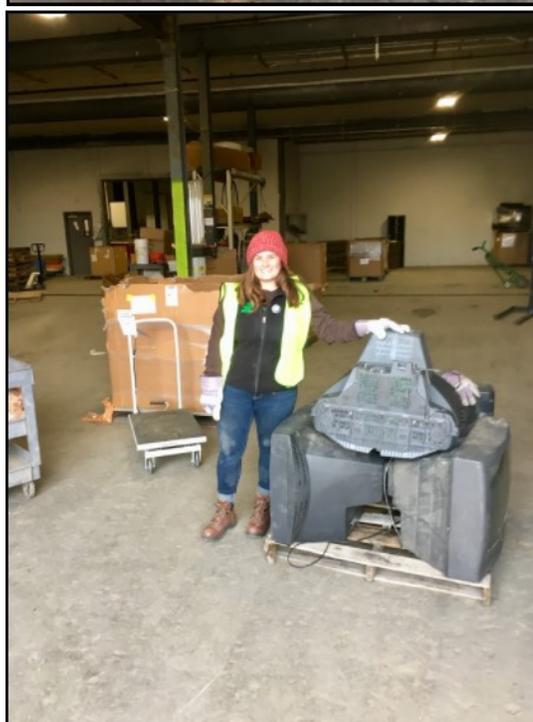
– Cassandra Hemenway, Outreach Manager, Central Vermont Solid Waste

We at the Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District didn't know until we'd completed our first year, about the endless onion layers of benefits from our partnership with ECO AmeriCorps. We are a host site for our second ECO AmeriCorps member, and find ourselves once again awed and appreciative of the level of commitment, capability and professionalism of our service member, Cara Stapleford. But, we are equally awed by the level of support both we and she receive from the ECO AmeriCorps program.

We don't just get a volunteer: we get someone who has been oriented and trained before ever showing up at our office, someone committed to community, collaboration and professionalism, full of enthusiasm and backed up by many levels of training and support. As Cara's supervisor, I, too, receive support and training. Cara, has exponentially increased awareness and outreach of waste reduction issues for us, by successfully planning and implementing a series of Repair Cafés. She has partnered with other organizations, allowing our events to benefit from a wide range of knowledge and skill level, far beyond what we could provide if we were running these events ourselves.

Not only have we seen real engagement from the community, pulling in fixer volunteers, a church group committed to helping the café run successfully, a partner organization and regular interaction with the general public, but we've seen individuals truly inspired by the Repair Cafés. The value of our partnership with ECO AmeriCorps is not only that we are able to provide events that otherwise would not have happened, but that the caliber of the events is leading to interest in our community, and the possibility that they will continue into the future, even if we cannot hold them ourselves.

When the application deadline came around again, we stopped to consider our own time commitment for supervising and training another temporary ECO member. The answer is a no brainer: yes, it takes real managerial time at a host site, but the returns are endless; the benefits of the outreach completed with an extra person who is committed to community service and passionate about environmental issues far outweighs our own investment. We chose to complete that third application.



## Heather Helps the Missisquoi River Basin Association Get Things Done!

– Lindsey Wight, Coordinator – Missisquoi River Basin Association



The Missisquoi River Basin Association (MRBA), like many watershed organizations, relies heavily on passion: the passion of its founders, board members, volunteers, and part-time staff. With large needs, hopes, and dreams, but limited funding, the MRBA has benefitted immensely from the ECO AmeriCorps program. We have hosted a member each year that this program has existed, and each member that we have been matched with has far exceeded our expectations. This year, we are delighted to be hosting Heather Murphy – a Vermont native who has been invested in water quality improvement actions since high school. Heather has brought her passion to the MRBA, along with her extensive list of skills and innovative ideas that are increasing our presence in the hearts and minds of our watershed residents. Heather has thrown herself into the Missisquoi River (not literally – although we do have some canoe trips planned for this summer, so that should probably be followed by a “yet!”): she created a beautiful new website for us, has made strong connections with schools and landowners, has successfully written grants to carry out some of her new outreach ideas (ask for a copy of our Watershed Tour brochure, or pick one up at one of the watershed’s town offices!), and has

enthusiastically conducted any site visits and field work we have asked of her. We are looking forward to a busy and successful summer, in large part thanks to Heather’s efforts. The ECO program overall is a pleasure to be a part of – through the program, and primarily through our members and the friendships that are forged by the program, we have enjoyed getting to know other organizations in our region and state that share our passions, and are working to achieve similar goals. The caliber of the members that ECO AmeriCorps attracts speaks highly of both the individuals who take on this type of work and of the program, and the MRBA is honored to be a part of it.



## What is it like living with other ECO Members?

I have been fortunate enough to spend this AmeriCorps term living with other ECO members. Myself, Corey, Elena and Jordyn make up the fun and wacky ECO AmeriCorps house. Living with other members comes with benefits like carpooling to trainings, being on similar schedules and budgets and all having a love for service and the environment. I am looking forward to the warm months to come and the adventures this group of four will get into! — **Daniel Denora**



Living with three other ECO AmeriCorps Members has been a great experience. It's nice to live with people who are like-minded and share similar values, because for me, I did not get that experience in college. We share ideas, stories, and our experiences being in AmeriCorps which has helped us build a strong sense of community and support for one another. I highly recommend to anyone to live with other ECO AmeriCorps members because it not only helps with carpooling to events, but also helps create meaningful relationships.—**Corey Aydlett**

Having members as roommates has greatly enhanced my experience because I live with friends who share an interest in protecting the environment and water quality, and also experience the AmeriCorps lifestyle (schedule wise, financially, etc). Through our living situation we have hosted events like Friendsgiving, an ugly sweater party and have created a space for other AmeriCorps members to come and hang out! — **Jordyn Geller**



## Reflection of the Cold Weather Shelter—Eric Thorpe

When I was 7 years old I encountered the first homeless person I'd ever seen in my life. My family and I were on a daytrip to Boston, walking down the freedom trail and doing some sightseeing. While we were walking by a graveyard an elderly man approached me and asked for some spare change. I instinctively un-Velcroed my wallet and started rummaging around, but not before my step father abruptly declined the man. As he ushered us away down the street, I stole one last glance back at the old man standing, shoulders slumped, against a backdrop of headstones. A feeling was created for me in that moment that I've never understood.

"Why did that guy ask us for money?"

"He's homeless, he doesn't have money and needs some."

"But why is he homeless? What happened to him?"

"I don't know, but some people make bad choices and things happen to them, and they have nowhere else to go."

And finally a question formed on my lips that I've never gotten a good answer for:

"Why do we all let this happen? Why do we let them live on the street?"

For the 291 homeless citizens of Chittenden County, (*Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness and the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance*) a night with sub-zero temperatures could be a death sentence. With a late December forecast of -20-degree nights, the Vermont Agency of Human Services decided to open emergency cold weather shelters in Burlington and Rutland. I volunteered for two overnight shifts in Burlington, accompanied by my friend and fellow ECO member, Hannah Yates.



By the time I arrived for my overnight shift everyone had already been fed and were too cold and tired to do anything but sleep. As I stayed up, kept awake by my thoughts and a steady stream of caffeine, I caught a few stragglers coming in from the cold, and my mind was lost to wonder. For every great tale in our culture there must be millions of untold; and a thousand stories rode the coattails of each person coming in through that door. Entire biographies I'd be lucky to catch a fraction of before they're lost to history. I'll never forget Reuben, clad in a pair of shorts on New Year's Eve, telling us tales of drifting all over America. Or Jan, who ran the shelter, and had been awake for 30 hours to see that things went smoothly.

I think we forget that we're walking past a person who had hopes and dreams, who used to have birthday parties, and hobbies, who went to school and grew up somewhere. I think we tell ourselves they're all drug addicts facing the repercussions of their own actions, because we can't imagine what their life is like for even a moment. I think we're all just products of a strange and seemingly broken society, conditioned to dehumanize the disenfranchised. Or maybe the problem lies with us; collectively perpetuating a world that allows so many to fall through the cracks and never batting an eye.

## Member Spotlights



Daniel Denora has spent the first half of his AmeriCorps term assisting the Lake Champlain Committee in a variety of different projects. One of the larger projects he is involved with is LCC's Pharmaceutical Disposal Outreach project. He spent a lot of time on the phone with pharmacies and law enforcement agencies around the Lake Champlain Basin asking them questions about their medication disposal programs. All of the data he collected will be used to inform the Lake Champlain Committee where to best focus its outreach efforts. Daniel has started collaboration with the Vermont Department of Health's Drug Disposal Stakeholders working group on this project to coordinate a consistent message on the outreach material they will be disseminating in the future. Daniel has also planned April Stools Day clean up events. These cleanups are focused around dog wastes in public parks and trails in an effort to protect water quality during the spring snowmelt. The events also raises awareness about the pollution problems caused by not cleaning up after your pet in the winter.

Corey Aydlett is serving with the Lake Champlain Basin Program. Recently, he has been in collaboration with Lake Champlain Sea Grant ECO AmeriCorps member Hannah Yates. Corey and Hannah are laying the groundwork for a High School Watershed Stewardship program that will launch at the beginning of 2019. The program aims to improve environmental literacy and watershed stewardship among young people in the Lake Champlain Basin, as well as provide valuable insight into careers related to environmental stewardship.



Corey has been finalizing environmental programs for Camp Abnaki and Camp Hochelaga that incorporates resources and tools from the LCBP Resource Room at ECHO. Some of the activities include topics on invasive species, wetlands, and watersheds and some of the enviro-kits include learning about the fish in Lake Champlain and how to collect data on the lake.

## Member Spotlights

Jordyn Geller is serving with the Clean Water Initiatives Program at the Department of Environmental Conservation, and is loving every minute. She is busy juggling two communication projects, all while developing a program to verify best management practices (BMPs) set to launch in late spring. Jordyn is part of the DEC's Lake Carmi Coordination Team, a group established to enhance communication of Carmi restoration efforts. One project is to create a comprehensive implementation plan that pulls together information on DEC's and partners' efforts to meet the phosphorus pollution targets established by the Lake Carmi Total Daily Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and required by the federal Clean Water Act. Jordyn has also been busy gathering and generating reports of Ecosystem Restoration funded projects for two towns in Vermont in Preparation for a site visit by EPA Region 1 Administrator Alex Dunn on Earth Day. To stay on track with the BMP Verification project, Jordyn has been meeting with different programs in DEC to produce verification check lists for projects occurring along rivers and lakeshores. Jordyn can't deny that she is excited for the snow to melt because that means she can start going out in the field and inspecting BMPs.



Elena Mederas is serving with the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) as the Planning and Assessment Assistant and has been quite busy this winter. Each January, VLT works with its primary conservation easement funder, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, to sign up farms for funding through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program at the Natural Resources Conservation Service. In coordinating VLT's effort this year, Elena compiled all of the necessary paperwork for each farm and created dozens of maps depicting conservation plans, soil types, hydrology, and other features. Along with this, she has continued to offer GIS and project support for VLT's conservation efforts. She will be out in the field this spring flagging riparian buffers throughout the state and coordinating a riparian tree planting project on a farm project in the Mad River Valley.