

A Month by Month for Joan

Joan Page

VISTA at Kessler elementary in Longview, WA

Hi, my name is Joan Page, and I was a VISTA during the 2004-05 school year. I started my service later than most, I didn't begin working until last November. Looking back over my first few weeks last year when I began, I am thankful there wasn't a lot of pressure put on me to know what everyone else already knew. I suggest you read everything you can to help you gain an understanding of your site, your role, responsibilities, what programs are offered, sustainability binders, and files.

I also suggest that you and your team work out working agreements – things that everyone agrees to from the start. Every team goes through phases, and storming is one that everyone experiences during the year. Here is my year thus far-

December: I began actively recruiting volunteers. I also did my first volunteer appreciation, a needlepoint mitten with "Thanks for your helping hand" written on the felt back. I also helped in the plans for a literacy event we had planned in January. I experienced my first off-site volunteer working experiences. Because school is closed for Winter Break, you need to find other non-profit organization to work for, and have a supervisor to sign your off-site time sheet. These must be approved two weeks prior to the actual date that you would be working. During winter break I worked at our local library, the Salvation Army's Christmas Store, and the Lower Columbia Community Action Council.

January: I continued recruiting volunteers (my site had a goal of 25 volunteers). In November there were only 6, in December I recruited 8 more. I recruited 6 more this month. Our volunteers attended a training session prior to working with our students. As soon as they completed the training I was able to schedule the days and time the tutor would be working with a given student, and find a place for them to tutor. We began teaching the CE program to our group of 5th grade students who attended the after school program that was ran by the 21st Century grant. Kelso and Longview worked jointly together with this group of students.

February: I still focused on recruiting volunteers. I made it my goal to reach the school's goal for 25 adult volunteers. I also did my second volunteer appreciation - I made a needlepoint heart magnet with a note attached that said, "From our hearts to yours, thanks for all you do for Kessler students." I also had Hershey's kisses available as treats.



March: I wrote an article to be placed in the school's PTO newsletter informing parents of WRC and some game ideas they could try at home to help their child with reading practice. I spoke to a local women's group and told them about WRC and recruited 3 more volunteers. I also did my 3rd Volunteer appreciation - I purchased plastic eggs, filled them with M & M's, printed a note that said "You're "eggs"tra special, thanks for all you do."

April: Another busy month. This was volunteer appreciation month and we recognized our volunteers with an Appreciation Breakfast. We had posters and pictures of our tutors and students in the halls for all to see. I attended SERVES for the first time in Ocean Shores, WA. I learned a lot of new things I hope to use in the future, no matter where I work or what type of work I maybe doing. WRC did a lot of service projects this month. We went to Klickitat to walk a trail and pick up garbage, at Wishram we helped to spread back dust and pull weeds in the Butterfly Garden, and in Longview we went to Wake Robin and helped to clear trails, trim bushes and trees, pulled weeds, and finished placing stones on a hilly trail path. This was also testing month at my site. We worked on other projects during this time because we weren't able to pull students out for tutoring during the weeks scheduled for testing. I worked on plans for our June literacy event, sustainability ideas, paper work, whatever needed to be done.

May: We completed our CE program with the 5th graders by doing a food drive. My site held a carnival to help raise money to purchase playground equipment. At the end of this month I learned WRC would not be there next year, my site hadn't applied for the grant for the forthcoming year.

June: The end is in sight. Everyone is so busy and there is still so much going on. We put on our final literacy event this month. We didn't have a great turn out because there were a lot of activities going on in the community on the same day. Our volunteer recognition and Sound Partner tutoring program graduation was planned. Our students made thank you cards for their tutors (secretly, of course). We gave thank you balloons and Kudos on the final day of school at the award assembly. More service projects this month - Habitat for Humanity, Act for Action, Ropes Course and so much more. Have a schedule for summer service approved and planned out. Saying good-bye to students and volunteers. I sent personal notes to each and every volunteer. I had spoken personally with each one before school was out to let them know WRC wouldn't be there next year, but I hoped they would continue without us.

July: Summer service - Longview Library's summer reading program, Lower Columbia Community Action Center - working on Wednesday at the kid's craft station during the Farmer's Market, helping at a booth during the Fair with the Cowlitz County Drug Coalition. Graduation for WRC USA members.

I am looking forward to August, September, October, and my last month in my term of service, November. I have signed on for a second year as a VI STA at Beacon Hill Elementary in Kelso!

