



#MadeInAmeriCorps in Tennessee: 2020 AmeriCorps Week Profiles

Each March, the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) (CNCS) leads AmeriCorps Week, a celebration of all things AmeriCorps – from the programs and organizations that, to the members who have pledged to “Get Things Done” since the program’s inception in 1994. As part of AmeriCorps Week 2020 (March 8-14), Volunteer Tennessee focused on how AmeriCorps has transformed lives and communities by highlighting service stories from just a few of those serving in Tennessee that were #MadeInAmeriCorps.

- **Meet Jay Schafer – AmeriCorps Member with [Appalachian Regional Coalition on Homelessness \(ARCH\)](#)**

What was your motivation for serving in AmeriCorps?

I would be homeless and have nothing without my community and the community services. They have helped me and I am now an AmeriCorps member to serve my country.



What activities have you engaged in this year and how have you connected to the local community?

I serve as an intake specialist and process intakes for those experiencing homelessness. Through this position, I have helped people find shelter from the cold, while also gaining new skills using the HMIS (Homeless Management Information System) and becoming more familiar with Microsoft Word.

I also served the community by participating in the MLK Day of Service in January.

What are your plans for Life After AmeriCorps?

After my service I would like to attend college and become an Astrophysics major.

- **Meet Reid Tinker – AmeriCorps Member with [BRIDGES USA](#)**

“I chose to serve AmeriCorps, specifically with BRIDGES, to learn and grow in an organization focused on social justice. I want to take the lessons I’ve learned on intersectionality and inclusivity and apply it in my future career as well as my life. I couldn’t ask for a more amazing opportunity. It is such an honor to be serving here!”

Reid serves in Memphis and you can [learn more about him here](#).



- **Meet Valancia Zimmerman – AmeriCorps Member with [Emerald Youth Foundation](#)**

"My favorite part of serving here is the relationships I get to build with the kids."

Valancia has served as an Emerald Youth Foundation AmeriCorps member at Lonsdale in Knoxville for 2 years. She loves being able to invest and encourage kids the same way others have done for her.

Watch the WBIR Channel 10 highlight on Valancia to learn more about her: <https://emeraldyouth.link/ad7>



- **Meet Gordon Harless – AmeriCorps Member with [CAC AmeriCorps](#)**

"I love AmeriCorps. I love the people in it, the people it serves, the people leading it, the people doing it, the AmeriPets, the AmeriGear, the AmeriSpirit, I love the whole darn thing. Specifically, I love CAC AmeriCorps. I love it because my experience serving here has fundamentally redefined the trajectory of my life, even at a point where I had previously thought I was doomed to mediocrity."

Gordon Harless serves in Knoxville as the CAC AmeriCorps VISTA Leader and you can learn more about his AmeriCorps experience [in this blog post](#).

- **Meet Francesca Heflin – AmeriCorps Member with [Relay New Teacher Pathway](#)**

Please tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to the Relay Residency.

My name is Francesca Heflin and I am a Nashville native. I graduated from John Overton High School then matriculated to Grambling State University in Grambling, Louisiana, where I obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Paralegal Studies. Since a young age, I have volunteered or worked with children in some capacity, from babysitting to working in childcare. Although my undergraduate degree is in Paralegal Studies, I knew that my passion was working with kids, so I continued my education and obtained a Master's Degree in Education with a concentration in Curriculum and Assessment from Strayer University.





This eventually led to a job with Nashville Classical Charter School in Nashville. Upon accepting the offer, I was introduced to the Relay Residency Program where I would get hands-on experience and knowledge to continue to grow into a successful teacher. I began the program in Summer of 2018 and plan to continue into the second year where I will obtain an additional Master's Degree in Education and graduate in 2021. My professors are very hands-on in making sure that I am comfortable and able to attack the many daily tasks as a teacher. I am very glad that I chose the Relay Residency Program to continue to shape me in becoming the best teacher that I can be for my students.

What inspires you to serve your community through teaching?

The thing that inspires me to serve in my community through teaching are the children. The joy in their faces when they are learning and experiences new things, lets me know that their young minds are ready to grow.

How has the Relay Residency AmeriCorps Program helped you to become a more impactful teacher?

The Relay Residency AmeriCorps Program has helped me become a more impactful teacher in many ways. From the professors to the cohort of fellow teachers, everyone strives to be the best educator they can be for their students. The program has equipped me with the knowledge I will need in order to be a successful teacher for many years to come.

How has the Relay Residency AmeriCorps Program helped you prepare for life after graduation? What are your future plans?

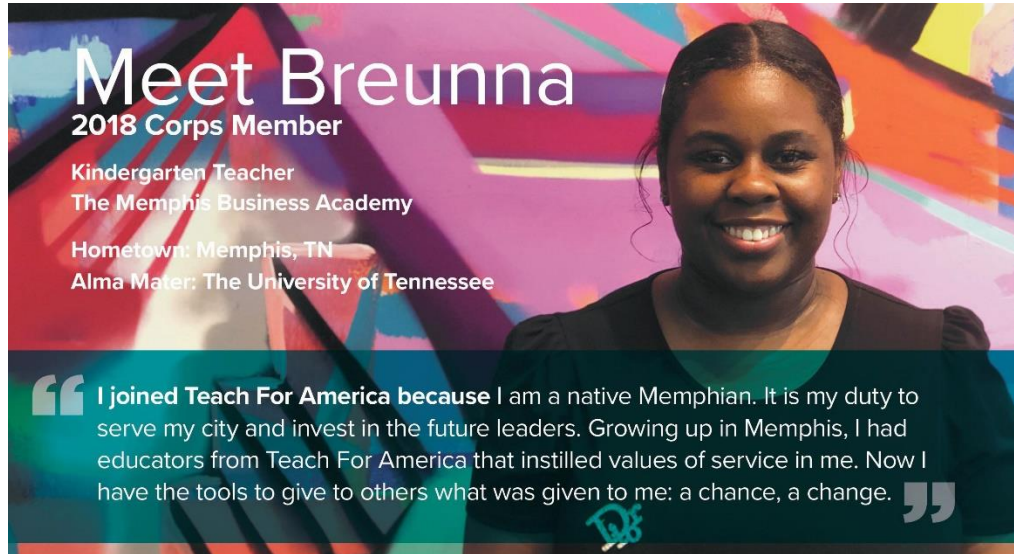
The program has helped me prepare for life after graduation by making sure I succeed in life before graduation. From assisting and encouraging me with becoming fully certified to providing me the real time feedback on ways to implement different teaching strategies within the classroom. My future plans are to continue teaching at the elementary level and eventually transitioning into leadership and administration roles where I will be able to mentor young professionals, like myself, in the classroom.

Can you share a specific moment or anecdote from the classroom that exemplifies how your service makes a difference?

Being a kindergarten teacher, I know that I have a very important job in laying and creating the foundation for my students to succeed as they continue to grow. I recall one student who came into kindergarten being very scared and not wanting to be at school. Being able to see him every day, I would remind him that he is here to learn, grow his brain, and make friends. I would let them know that he is important and that I loved seeing his smiling face each day. Fast forward six months later, he comes into school every morning with the brightest smile ready to learn and he often tells me that school is his favorite place to be. This speaks volumes about the community and our school culture. I am very happy to be able to teach and learn in such an environment.



- **Meet Breunna – AmeriCorps Member with [Teach for America-Memphis](#)**



IF YOU VISITED BREUNNA'S CLASSROOM, YOU WOULD SEE...

- ... **student work** from a recent unit on beginning sight words, letter recognition, and naming the roles of the author and illustrator!
- ... **students singing** songs about the days of the week, months of the year, and good manners.
- ... **19 kindergartners** enjoying learning in their Dr. Seuss inspired classroom.

WHAT MAKES YOU EXCITED ABOUT THE SCHOOL YEAR?

"My new kindergarten students were very excited to see their beautiful new classroom. I was proud to see that the space I created for them is not only an aid in learning, but also a safe space. The goal is to have all of them become confident readers, writers, and speakers. We recite the 'Goal Song' daily! It prepares them for the day and ensures they can tackle any obstacle ahead of them. I'm excited to see them grow throughout the school year!"

HOW DO YOU DEFINE STUDENT LEADERSHIP?

"Student leadership is taking charge! My kindergarten students have turns being 'The Boss of the Day.' He or she will lead the class in each activity, have a turn at leading the 'Goal Song,' and tell us how being a boss went. It is powerful to hear students reflect on what it was like to lead the class. As I continue to support student leadership, I reach out to guests in different careers that can come to my school and talk with my students, giving them examples of leadership in our city."

WHAT CAN WE FIND YOU DOING IN YOUR FREE TIME?

"During my free time, I read, meditate, and hang out with other educators - there is such an amazing community of teachers in TFA and across Memphis! I dedicate a lot of time to self-care by having a spa day, listening to podcasts, and going to concerts. It is so important, especially as an educator, to find a work-life balance."

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[Volunteer Tennessee](#) is a 25 member bipartisan board appointed by the Governor to encourage volunteerism and community service. Volunteer Tennessee pursues its mission through administration of AmeriCorps grants, training and collaborations and coalitions with public and private organizations interested in volunteerism and service. Connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

AmeriCorps is a program of the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) (CNCS), a federal agency that engages more than 5 million Americans in service through its AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Volunteer Generation Fund programs, and leads volunteer and civic engagement programs for the nation.