



## Lake Effect Leaders Host Site Projects and Descriptions 2019-2020

### **Focus Area: Economic Opportunity**

#### **Priority Area: Employment/Workforce Development**

##### **1. Greater Erie Action Committee (GECAC)/Erie Together, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** Erie Together is a countywide, cross-sector collective impact movement launched in 2009 by GECAC and its partners to prevent and reduce poverty, elevate prosperity, and make the Erie region a community of opportunity where everyone can learn, work, and thrive. Erie Together works to achieve economic stability for everyone in Erie County by facilitating cross-sector alignment and collaboration to help more kids become successful adults, more people secure jobs, and more families become self-sufficient. The goals of the VISTA project will be to (1) identify and help secure funding/new sources of revenue through grants and local community investment to continue/sustain Erie Together's mission (2) help deploy an effective community engagement strategy to grow the Erie Together movement, and (3) support specific Erie Together initiatives to prepare students for life after high school and connect out of school youth aged 16-24 to jobs.

##### **2. Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN), Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** The 2.5 square miles included in the SSJNN service areas are some of the most disadvantaged in the City, historically suffering from neighborhood decay, lack of community organization, low educational attainment, high poverty rates and high crime or the perception of high crime. Through grass-roots partnership with local residents, businesses and the broad community, SSJNN creates and implements programs that address wide-ranging and otherwise unanswered needs of residents of these neighborhoods. Hallmark to SSJNN's holistic approach, residents and a large network of volunteers work together to provide social services, revitalize neglected environments, and promote community and economic development opportunities. Building upon the successful model of our existing Urban Farm Project (Our Urban Farm Project pairs teens with individual mentors or 'coaches,' working seasonally in our community gardens, urban farm, and selling produce at our weekly farmers market), our Employment VISTA will help us to build and standardize the additional materials we need for additional recruitment, performance measures and outcomes, as well as providing project

management and support to the SSJNN staff directing this program. Number of economically disadvantaged individuals receiving job training and other skill development services will increase as a result of this project.

## **Priority Area: Housing**

### **1. Bayfront East Side Taskforce (BEST), Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** The goal of this new VISTA project will be to build the capacity of the Bayfront East Side Taskforce's outreach to residents by developing, piloting, and implementing a BEST Outreach Project. Within this expanded outreach project, BEST will identify demographic information about residents, survey their needs/desires for the neighborhood, promote programs and activities available through BEST and other agencies, and build neighborhood leadership capacity. By working to gather information and provide opportunities impoverished residents, BEST anticipates improving the living conditions and quality of life of neighborhood residents. The anticipated results of this outreach project will be improved housing conditions, increased social services brought into the neighborhood by BEST, and improved satisfaction of residents.

### **2. City of Erie, Erie PA (2)**

**Goal:** The goal for this position and this initiative is to build capacity within the City to engage residents where they live, help establish community priorities, and then work with community leaders to execute on those priorities. VISTA assistance is needed to create a system by which this engagement, planning, and implementation is occurring inside City Hall. The position addresses the issue of poverty by helping the city effectively focus resources for home improvements, home ownership, community and public asset buildings, and blight mitigation through a grassroots planning effort. To be effective, this effort takes high levels of collaboration with the agencies and nonprofits working in these neighborhoods, which the VISTA will support.

### **3. Crawford County Coalition on Housing Needs & Crawford County Mental Health Awareness Program, Meadville PA (2)**

**Goal:** This project will support two vital local housing organizations by continuing to develop and formalize fundraising, volunteering, outreach, and advocacy programs initiated by the 2018-2019 VISTA. By ensuring these programs are documented and formalized through procedures, schedules, and similar methods, the second year VISTA will also ensure that they are continued in the future to support these agencies in their important missions

### **4. Common Roots, Meadville PA (2)**

**Goal:** The Common Roots VISTA project was designed to build the organization's administrative and programmatic capacities as they move towards the overall goal of a multi-site affordable housing cooperative. First, the project will strengthen organizational operations by establishing internal and external communication systems and developing relationships with potential funders and community partners. As a membership-based organization, long-term success will hinge heavily on sustained, effective communication with members, as well as donors and other organizations. Second, the VISTA project will enable us to develop the

knowledge and relationships we need to carry out our work in ways that are at once viable given existing barriers and opportunities and responsive to the needs and aspirations of low-income Meadville residents.

#### **5. Community Shelter Services (CSS), Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** Community Shelter Services preserves the dignity and supports the development of individuals who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, by providing temporary and permanent options for shelter, as well as supportive services, referrals, and advocacy and community education. The goals of this VISTA Project will be to build the support services of CSS agency that have been outlined in the recent Strategic Plan. These goals include short and long term program enhancements that further care for and engage current and future clients, as well as outreach to recent former clients to assess their progress to self sufficiency. The goals include the staff training and implementation of the Sanctuary Model (Trauma Informed Care) philosophy and service mode for agencies; the creation and stewardship of a Resident Council so that clients can voice their concerns and work together to improve their living environment; the creation and implementation of a Logic Model study to understand current strengths and needs related to outcome/impact measurement and evaluation; to assist staff with initiatives already underway and to build capacity for improved outcomes and reporting; to improve the HMIS (Homeless Management Information System) reporting system and usage; and conduct outreach to former clients as an assessment of our services they received as well as reconnecting them to services so that they do not return to a homeless situation.

#### **6. Our West Bayfront (OWB), Erie PA (2)**

**Goal:** The Our West Bayfront VISTA will increase the number of low-income West Bayfront residents who live in safe, healthy and affordable housing and neighborhoods by leveraging a network of community organizations to create opportunities for affordable housing, disseminating information about resources that improve housing quality and affordability, mobilizing volunteers, and organizing events that promote stronger attachments to the neighborhood.

#### **7. ServErie, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** ServErie restores communities by connecting people in need to resources. The community ServErie addresses is located in the core of Erie's East Bayfront from East 6th to 12th Street and Holland Street to Wayne Street. The East Bayfront is full of culture and history with a support network of long-standing service organizations and neighborhood groups. However, there are high levels of blight, vacancy, and disrepair causing business and housing stock to decline. The VISTA will aid ServErie in its mission by building capacity in the many facets that the organization operates. Service activities will include volunteer and program coordination, neighborhood engagement and planning, assisting with grant tracking for housing projects, and more.

#### **8. Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN), Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** The SSJNN Housing VISTA will increase the number of economically disadvantaged individuals transitioned into safe, healthy, affordable housing through (1) recruitment of property owners and administration of renovation and repair grants (2) project management for blight acquisition and remediation, and (3) recruitment, outreach and assistance in oversight of educational aspects of home ownership program.

### **9. St. Martin Center (SMC), Erie PA (3)**

**Goal:** St. Martin Center, Inc. serves Erie County with concentrated efforts on several specific, highly distressed, neighborhoods including Trinity Park and East Bayfront neighborhoods. The VISTA assignment project goal is to better equip St. Martin Center, Inc. to reduce poverty for Erie County residents by improving the organization's ability to track client and program data; thereby improving program delivery, communicating program outcomes, and assisting clients in bettering their lives.

## **Focus Area: Healthy Futures**

### **Priority Area: Access to Health Care**

#### **1. Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Services (CCCAS), Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** The 2019 VISTA volunteer will help CCCAS to establish a solid quality improvement program in which the organization is able to identify and serve the members of its communities throughout the thirteen county area of the Erie Diocese. The VISTA will develop a system in which CCCAS can (1) identify which clients CCCAS are connecting with; (2) areas in which CCCAS is not effectively getting its message out to low-income or needy families; (3) measure how effective services are for the clients being served; and (5) determine ways CCCAS can improve their overall performance and effectiveness.

#### **2. Gannon University Wellness Department, Erie PA (2)**

**Goal:** The STRONG after school program will provide preventative health services and health literacy programming for adolescent females and their families living in areas of concentrated poverty. The VISTA will work to break down the correlation between poverty and obesity by providing a sustainable health program that decreases the incidences of obesity and its comorbidities. The VISTA will work alongside Strong Vincent Middle School, the Erie County Department of Health, and the United Way of Erie County to meet the health needs of both the adolescent females and their families. Within three years of VISTA resources, the Strong program will serve not only the adolescent girls on a regular basis, but will also introduce exercise and nutrition programming for parents. Furthermore, within three years the VISTA will provide capacity building services to at least five organizations and serve at least 200 unique individuals.

### **Priority Area: Opioid Prevention/Recovery**

### **1. Gannon University (GU), Erie PA (2)**

**Goal:** An AmeriCorps VISTA member in the Office of Service-Learning, will marshal resources that connect Gannon University students and faculty with opportunities to address the opioid crisis in Erie County through research, treatment, prevention, messaging and policy improvements; measuring the impact through reported numbers of overdoses, deaths, admissions into treatment programs, and improved treatment or prevention protocols.

### **2. Women's Services/Crawford County Drug and Alcohol Executive Commission (CCDAEC), Meadville PA (3)**

**Goal:** The number of deaths and lives negatively impacted by drug use/overdose in Crawford County is alarmingly high. Women's Services, an organization that works with victims of domestic and sexual violence, has experienced an increase in client drug abuse and overdose. The recent Community Voices survey administered by the United Way of Western Crawford County identified Drugs and Alcohol as the top pressing /least addressed issue. VISTA resources will be utilized to understand the demographics of drug abuse/overdose in Crawford County and expand prevention and intervention strategies to curb the escalation of life threatening drug abuse in Western Crawford County.

## **Priority Area: Alleviating hunger & increasing access to nutritious food**

### **1. Erie City School District, Erie PA (2)**

**Goal:** The Erie School District's Farm to School project and preK-12 Horticulture Pathway will provide students, families, and the community with high quality project-based learning about fresh food, nutrition, and urban gardening skills to address food insecurity and limited food access, to be measured by amount of increased food literacy among students, increased consumption of fresh produce, resources developed to support the program, and number of volunteers recruited and trained to partner with the program.

### **2. Erie County Department of Health (ECDH), Erie PA (3)**

**Goal:** The Food Policy Advisory Council (COUNCIL), guided by the VISTA, will develop nutrition education materials and disseminate them at community events, schools, educational seminars, and through community partners. The COUNCIL will use the data from the survey to direct immediate and future efforts and saturate the areas of greater need. Plans regarding the growth of the COUNCIL itself are and will be a continuous activity for the VISTA. In addition to the aforementioned plans, the VISTA will assist the Council with developing a guide to help mitigate and/or alleviate the barriers to urban agriculture and selling produce from smaller local farms. The VISTA will also work closely with produce farmers in the area to help organize and supply new vendors to local farmers market. An inventory of both farmers markets and produce farms in and around Erie County will be compiled to help small local farms generate income and to help low-income individuals gain access to affordable, healthy foods. These initiatives will help

to eliminate food deserts, form a more cohesive community, and facilitate communication across different cultures from farmers, to professors, to refugees, to entrepreneurs.

### **3. Meadville Area Recreation Authority, Meadville PA (2)**

**Goal:** The VISTA assignment project goal is to provide residents with long-term affordable access to fresh produce by learning about and practicing cooking and gardening. The population the MARC garden serves is mixed-income, with about 25% qualifying for government assistance. Research has shown that, in addition to providing low-income participants with affordable food, the mixed-income garden addresses poverty by facilitating interactions with higher-income gardeners; this improves low-income residents' social capital by building their network and access to information. Participants range in age from infants to nonagenarians. VISTA activities will continue to build the capacity of our garden to serve additional low-income residents by continuing to develop and expand the MARC garden's year-round programming and our outreach to additional groups and organizations to recruit participants. The specific results of these efforts will be an additional 30 volunteers recruited and managed to help run the garden programming, with a minimum of 90 hours of volunteer service provided in the 2019-2020 year. The plan for our Healthy Futures capacity-building is to result in 20 new low-income beneficiaries regularly receiving fresh produce and participating in programming. In addition, the VISTA will work with the MARA board and other community organizations to secure funding for a garden coordinator position so that the garden can effectively address poverty in future years. We expect the VISTA will leverage at least \$15,000 toward a coordinator position, through grants, organization contributions, and fundraisers.

### **4. Penn State Behrend (PSB), Erie PA (3)**

**Goal:** The Penn State Behrend VISTA project will continue to address the specific poverty related topic of food insecurity by connecting resources to those in need. This will be accomplished by mobilizing existing resources that will support capacity building and sustainability of local and campus-based programs and utilizing PSB's strengths in research, outreach, and student engagement for meeting targeted needs of individuals, community organizations and members of our campus community.

## **Focus Area: Education**

### **Priority Area: College access for low-income students**

#### **1. Allegheny College Civic Engagement Office, Meadville PA (1)**

**Goal:** One of the goals of the Civic Engagement office at Allegheny is to "match issues of communities beyond campus to the resources of the student, faculty, and administrators of the college." For the 2019-2020 service year, an AmeriCorps VISTA will use their knowledge and the network of the Meadville community on and off campus to create a College Preparation Teen Coaching program. In this program, college students will mentor teenagers across the

Crawford County area who are potential first generation college students that are economically disadvantaged. Coaches will assist teenagers in navigating the college selection and enrollment process. This includes scholarships, programs in college that students could apply for, gap year programs that would provide educational opportunities and stipends, an understanding of loans vs. grants, and more. Through this effort, economically disadvantaged and potential first generation college students will attain college access through support of a college student that they can identify with. The program will ultimately assist in the breaking of generational poverty in the Meadville area and will be the first of its kind for Crawford County.

**Priority Area: K-12 Success in student education and behavioral outcomes**

**1. Edinboro University, Edinboro PA (3)**

**Goal:** Edinboro University purposes to infuse McKinley Elementary School with an array of services and supports to increase the academic performance of students as demonstrated in increased standardized testing and qualitative feedback from educators and families. Year 3 of the project will focus on sustainability of Project Year 1 and Project Year 2 VISTA members. The long term goal will for the project to also become a hub for community change and support.

**2. Environmental Erie, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** The overall goal of the Environment Erie VISTA project is to create a green and healthy school's framework that aligns with and supports the objectives of the US Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools that can then be efficiently replicated at schools throughout Erie County so that students and staff have healthy, high performing spaces in which to engage in meaningful education and preparation for a 21st century economy and society. At this time, it is proposed that some of the cost savings that schools experience as a result of reduced environmental impact and costs related to waste, water, energy, reduced staff turnover and improved student performance would be used to fund one to four staff positions so that the entire region can experience the long-term benefits associated with a healthier workforce ready population that has access the family sustaining employment.

**3. Family Services of Northwestern Pennsylvania (FSNWPA), Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** According to the census data, in 2016, four in 10 children live below the federal poverty line in the city of Erie. The city's childhood poverty rate of 40.6 percent is nearly double the national average. Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS), the number one mentoring program in the United States, is provided in Erie County by Family Services of NW PA. It is a positive program that focuses on meeting the basic developmental needs of youth, ages 6 – 13, who are primarily from single parent households. The goal of the VISTA project is to build capacity to strengthen the overall Big Brother Big Sisters program through curriculum development, volunteer recruitment/retention and fundraising. By reaching this goal. the program can expand the community school program increasing the number of low income children served.

**4. House of Mercy, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** The House of Mercy will partner with Diehl Elementary School for this VISTA project to better serve students living in an area of concentrated poverty, many of whom are New

Americans or live in public housing. The first year of the project will create a new program to improve literacy and PSSA scores of third grade students, as well as a summer reading program to keep students engaged throughout the year and prevent summer slide. It will require working closely with Diehl officials and the Community School Director to complement current efforts. The long-term goal of this project is to create better educational outcomes for students, encouraging them to seek higher education and higher paying jobs that will help end generational poverty.

#### **5. Mercyhurst University, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** A VISTA member will be instrumental in helping to launch and build the capacity of a service leadership program that simultaneously meets the university and afterschool programming community partner needs in a mutually beneficial way. Year one of this VISTA project will enhance a university service-learning requirement program by working towards the recruitment (by the end of Spring 2020 semester) of a academic year 2020 pilot cohort of eight (8) university student liaisons to be recruited and matched with eight (8) current K-12 afterschool programming center partners where service-learning placements already occur. The 2019-20 VISTA project will entail collecting and analyzing each of the eight sites' volunteer programs with an emphasis on: quality site-specific volunteer training for semester-based university volunteers, assessing the levels of evidence-based programming for K-12 children/youth, willingness to collaborate on data measuring academic/individual success, and providing a needs assessment report to the Community Engagement office that will help to shape the student leader liaison positions according to site-specific needs all being coordinated with best practices for after-school programming.

#### **6. United Way of Erie County (UWEC), Erie PA (2)**

**Goal:** The communities the UWEC serves through this project include a portion of the City of Erie, as well as the Girard and Iroquois School Districts. According to the 2017 American Community Survey, 43.5 percent of children under the age of 18 are below the poverty rate in the City of Erie and 24.9 percent in the County of Erie. However, because community schools are selected, in part, based on the economic needs of the students and their families, some of our local schools have an economically disadvantaged rate as high as 90 percent. This VISTA project will build capacity at the existing and future community schools throughout Erie County by supporting the alignment of community resources with the specific needs of students, their families and their neighborhoods to ensure students are academically successful and families are self-sufficient.

### **Priority Area: School Readiness for Economically Disadvantaged Children**

#### **1. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Mentoring Program, Meadville PA (1)**



**Goal:** Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Mentoring Program, in partnership with Allegheny College and Crawford Central School District, has been in operation at the Meadville Area Middle School since 2010. The mission is to assist in the retention of low income students by providing a holistic approach for empowering them to be successful and to teach the principles of Dr. King with the focus on academics and respect for all persons. The MLK Mentoring Program plans to serve 15 seventh grade and 15 eighth grade low income students in the Meadville Area Middle School in the next fiscal year. The goal of the VISTA assignment is to establish a coalition to address student needs through the MLK Mentoring Program, address ways to work with the school district, and ultimately, sustain the program. The VISTA will create a repertory of resources for the mentoring program and serve on the Meadville Fair Committee. The outcome will be the identification of ways and means to sustain the program.

### **Priority Area: Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM)**

#### **1. Bayfront Maritime Center, Erie PA (2)**

**Goal:** The goal for the VISTA project at the Bayfront Maritime Center is to help ensure that students, especially underserved populations, are presented with a unique secondary education experience leading to career and continuing education after graduation, measured by the success of students graduating and progressing to post-secondary education, training, or employment. The Maritime Program VISTA will build the capacity of the organization by developing effective outreach materials and processes, assist in the development of appropriate outcome measurements and a database system for use in securing funds through appeal campaigns, fundraising and grant applications, and assist in networking with local and national maritime career focused post-secondary schools, apprenticeship programs and employers to assist students with future planning.