

# ComCorps News



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## Serving Southeastern Ohio Since 1999

Nancy Schell

ComCorps is a grant-funded National and Community Service AmeriCorps program administered through the Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine's Community Health Programs (OU-COM CHP). Twenty members serve for one year, earning a small living stipend and receiving an education award at the end of the service year. ComCorps members serve in OU-COM's CHP office and at other partner sites including all five school systems in Athens County plus many agencies.

Athens County lacks many support systems needed to insure adequate health services for families and many families lack health insurance. Our mission is to assist in providing children and their families with health education, health screenings, and access to health care.

This issue is a compilation of member insights into their programs and lessons learned. I would like to thank all of our dedicated members, site supervisors, and community partners for helping ComCorps provide vital community service to aid children and families in Southeastern Ohio.

## Our Mission

The national mission of AmeriCorps is Getting Things Done. We asked each member of ComCorps to tell us about his or her duties.

**Hilary Hancock:** My mission at Beacon School (MRDD) is to implement nutrition information through cooking classes and presentations within the classrooms. I assist the school cook in creating healthy snack ideas that are distributed to the classrooms each afternoon. I also assist the school nurse with various lice, vision, and health screenings. I think that my program is unique because I work with individual classrooms and help the students work through various recipes that they can use at home. I generate these recipes using clipart that allows students to work through the recipe more easily.

**Meg Ervin:** Our mission at Hocking Valley Community Residential Center is to rehabilitate and safely send juvenile males who have committed felony offenses back into the community as better, productive citizens.



*Cara Smith with PAWS CLUB*

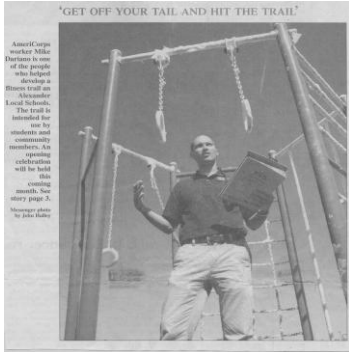
**Cara Smith:** The mission at Trimble Elementary and Middle school is to enhance academic achievement through wellness and safety. My duty is to be there for the kids- to help them feel better and to screen them for lice, vision, and hearing. I lead an after school club for middle schoolers called PAWS. In this club, we work on physical activities, wellness, and self esteem.

**Lori Sayre:** My mission at Coolville Elementary is to learn, improve behavior, and have fun. I inform the staff and students of health and safety issues. I work with the school social worker and mental health professionals to improve the wellbeing of students. I am in charge of general first aid duties and concentrate on children with special health needs.

**Louise Koons:** I work at the Athens City County Health Department in Health Education. We work with different community agencies like schools, faith communities, worksites, and hospitals to provide health education and disseminate health information to change behaviors and policy. Together with the health educators, I help manage several programs like Athens County Walks, Faith Community Health Ministries, the Great Trail Pursuit, and Dining with Diabetes. I also help the school health teams come up with policies on health for their schools and stay in the loop with health policies all over the board.

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**Mike Dariano:** My mission at Alexander Schools is to help the kids. I coordinate vision and lice screenings, prepare fluoride swish for elementary students each week, offer reading tutoring to first, second, and third grade students to build their literacy skills, serve as a mentor, model, and example for junior high boys, and coach the eighth grade basketball team.



*Mike Dariano appeared on the front page of The Athens Messenger twice.*

**Kathleen Gierhart:** NAMI Athens is one of 1,000 local, state, and national affiliates of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Organized locally twenty years ago, NAMI Athens is a self-help organization that offers support, education, and advocacy to people who understand how it feels to love someone who has a severe mental illness or mental disorders. NAMI provides classes and support groups that help families cope with the effects of mental illness and advocacy in such areas as employment, housing, insurance coverage, and health services.

Because stigma against people with severe mental disorders is still a big obstacle for those seeking recovery and productivity in employment and housing, my duties with NAMI Athens are focused on community relations in special event planning, public information, educational outreach, and clerical responsibilities in the NAMI Athens office, as needed.

**Greta Black:** My main job at the office of Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine (OU-COM) is to keep things running smoothly behind the scenes of everyone else's projects. I get the word out and recruit help for school screenings and projects, and I also make sure that members have access to the tools and information they need for their events. Another big role I have is making sure that everyone reports back to the AmeriCorps office on a monthly basis with logs of their activities and data about their presentations and programs. I help to review the incoming logs and data sheets and organize the information into a format that will be useful for monthly and quarterly reports about our ComCorps program as a whole. These reports greatly determine how much funding we receive in grants from the government. My third major task is to work the registration desk for the Community Health Programs' CHIP (Childhood Immunization Program) clinic. This clinic offers free vaccinations, with few exceptions, to children 18 and under. Adults can receive immunizations also, but they are charged for the cost. Every month I help to stuff envelopes that will be sent out to the clients of the clinic reminding them of when their child is due for their next set of shots. These letters, along with the help of the school districts, work to make sure that every child is receiving their immunizations.

**Tara Gilts:** The mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Athens County Inc. is to make a difference in the lives of area youth through professionally supported relationships with mentors and volunteers. I am the school-based program coordinator. I work in four area school districts: Vinton County, Alexander, Trimble and Federal Hocking.

For all four programs, I recruit, interview, and screen mentors. I speak with teachers and staff members at the school and request written referrals for potential Littles. After all Littles have been interviewed and parent paperwork is returned, the Bigs are matched with Littles based on a number of factors including gender, interests, personal preferences, and experience with children. I plan and lead the weekly match meetings and leadership/training meetings for the Bigs. I also help with fundraising for the agency, assist with monthly activities, and serve as a Big to a 15-year-old girl.

**Mary Ann Rosser:** My work site is Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine (OU-COM). I've helped with the Childhood Immunization Program Clinic. I've helped register and inform patients getting the flu shot at the Health Department. As a nurse, I've helped with the Healthy Adult Program by doing blood pressures, glucose testing, and cholesterol testing. I run a self-directed health ministries program which involves members of the community. This program allows me to bridge health resources with already existing faith organizations. Faith Community Health Ministries is an inter-faith collaborative effort which encourages individuals to take personal interest and responsibility in order to be part of the solution for those who have difficulty accessing healthcare. I've had a lot of meetings with ministers and community people in order to help them understand the need and that the faith community has the resources-- their buildings and potential volunteers from their congregation.



*Vision Screenings and Federal Hocking Back to School Pool Party*

**Jacob Jakuszeit:** The mission of the Athens City-County Health Department is to protect and promote the health and wellness of all Athens County residents through public health, nursing, environmental health, health education, and vital statistics programs and activities. The mission of the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) is to improve the health and safety of communities across the country by organizing and utilizing public health, medical, and other volunteers. I am serving as the AmeriCorps member for Public Health Preparedness, which includes serving as clerk for the county's Medical Reserve Corps unit, recruiting and training MRC members, and planning and implementing programs or projects that will improve the health knowledge and preparedness of Athens County residents.

**Heidi Mowrey:** I am partnered with Athens City Schools which encompasses five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, all of which rounds out to about 3,000 kids. My mission is to provide adequate care and attention to all children through health screenings and health presentations. I assist the school nurse in daily routines. I help with all head lice cases along with running school wide health screenings for head lice twice a year. I also do all vision screenings. I check all kindergarten immunization records to make sure that we are in compliance with the state law and I help run programs sponsored by our Health and Wellness Team in each school. I also provide health presentations on a variety of topics to different grade levels and run a tobacco-free program for fourth graders. Every day is different and has its challenges but that's what I love most about my job.



*Trimble Elementary*

**Kim Clark:** My work site is Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine (OU-COM). My duties include scheduling appointments, sending out paperwork to patients, and helping with data entry for our Susan G. Komen grant. I assist at a Breast and Cervical Clinic by handing the health care provider tools for pap smears and hemocult screening tests. I also prepare and clean examination rooms. Sometimes, I assist with patient intake for the Healthy Adult Program, flu clinics, and Childhood Immunization Programs. I have also helped present information about Breast and Cervical Cancer to high school students, vocational school students, and sorority members. From designing flyers to handing out brochures at health fairs, I have an opportunity to contribute to a worthwhile program which provides free medical care to those with low income and without insurance.



*Community Health Programs Van*

**Nan Shafer:** My overall mission at Nelsonville York Schools is to educate students about health. My aim is also to be in classrooms and do fun educational things. As a member of the wellness committee, I work on lessons about healthy eating by example geared towards growing and eating fruit. My duties most days are putting on bandaids and handing out ice packs for injuries, planning the routine screenings that are needed for students, and keeping the health records updated. Also lice continues to be a problem that needs to be addressed. I interact with teachers and families about health issues and medications. We have one nurse for three buildings so I am alone most of the times I am at the clinic. As a nurse, I feel comfortable and competent when I am there and feel that I am making a difference.

**Amanda Porter:** Good Works exists to develop relationships and community with people struggling with poverty in Appalachia, Ohio. Mainly, I oversee three programs. Training for Life is a computer class I teach at the Timothy House (the GW homeless shelter) twice a week for two hours at a time. In that class, we work on computer skills to help individuals be better equipped to get a job, make resumes, and work on whatever skills the person thinks he or she may need to improve. The Senior Care program is to form connections with widowed senior citizens in the area and visit them to develop friendships and to gain trust. Once the trust is established, I set up a volunteer with that senior in order for both parties to grow and develop in a new friendship. The third (and largest) program is Kids' Club, which is for kids who attend Friday Night Life (the weekly free supper put on by Good Works and weekly sponsors). Several OU students and community members volunteer for that program, and we get to have fun! We play games with the kids before dinner, sit and eat with them and their families during the meal, and afterwards have intentional lessons and activities in separate older and younger groups.

**Elizabeth Tompkins:** Our mission at WIC (Woman, Infant, Child) is to provide nutrition education, breastfeeding education and support-supplemental, highly nutritious foods such as milk, eggs, cheese, juice, cereal, beans, Farmers Market coupons in the summer, peanut butter and iron-fortified infant formula, referral to prenatal and pediatric health care and other maternal and child health and human service programs (ex. Head Start, Medicaid and Food Stamps). My duties vary- write and record health commercials for local radio stations, offer prenatal breastfeeding education to families during their OBGYN visits at River Rose, observe our local IBCLC (International Board Certified Lactation Consultant), work with families offering breastfeeding support and education to newborns after delivery while at the hospital, help develop and implement Storytime in the WIC waiting room. Once a week I teach a nutrition education class at Head Start to forty children. At the WIC office, I answer phone calls, offer breastfeeding education and support, occasionally wear a 24 hour pager for breastfeeding support, and contact local agencies with ideas for education.

**Jen Hoyt:** Amesville Elementary serves preschool through fifth grade. Our mission is: "The Federal Hocking Local School Community working together to Believe, Achieve, and Succeed". My responsibilities are primarily to the clinic, assessing the immediacy of children's complaints and offering available treatment or contacting family members as needed. In addition, I am also responsible for organizing school lice checks and vision screenings. I make sure all of the students' records and immunization requirements are up-to-date. I provide a fluoride swish to the students every Tuesday to help prevent dental problems. I help teach students that are involved with Kids on Campus about nutrition. I prepare and give educational presentations to classrooms about healthy living topics. I also help our conflict management coordinator and school social worker teach second-step classes to students about conflict management.

**Neil Duffy:** I hold two part-time positions at Trimble Local Elementary School. The Osteopathic Heritage Foundation grant sponsors the position that has me implementing the wellness plan developed by the School Health Advisory Committee, specifically the new fitness room. The other position is funded by Bridgebuilders, a community based group working to reduce the risk of underage access and use of alcohol and other drugs by building and increasing youth and community assets. I work accordingly with the school social worker on special projects and with whatever else needs done to improve the overall health of students such as teaching Lifeskills classes to K-4<sup>th</sup> grade and tutoring at-risk children. I enjoy heading up the Pool Partners program, where we match people up with developmentally disabled children from Nelsonville-York and swim with them once a week. I go into high schools in Athens, Perry, and Vinton counties and teach about testicular cancer as well.

**Erika Smith:** ATCO's mission is to ensure the availability of quality programs and services that support adults with developmental disabilities so that they may achieve increased capabilities to live, work, and participate in community life. My duties as the AmeriCorps volunteer at ATCO include planning and implementing nutrition classes/ programs for the ATCO enrollees and also providing cooking classes to promote healthy cooking and lifestyle choices for clients.

## Lessons Learned

**Kathleen Gierhart:** AmeriCorps has taught me to slow down and believe the best can happen if we continue to educate and support all people in need. What breaks my heart: Sick children who cannot afford to get health care. We must provide help, hope, and healing to all we serve.



*AmeriCorps members Walk the Walk for National Alliance*

**Jen Hoyt:** I really enjoy interacting with the students. I love walking down the hall and hear students say, "Hi Miss Jen", or tell their parents, "She came to our class today"; it makes me feel like I am making a difference in a student's life.

**Amanda Porter:** I have learned that encouraging people to feel dignified is so huge. Even at the homeless shelter, dignity is essential. None of our programs are demeaning or "here, let me HELP you"...rather, they are "let us work together to remedy the situation." Dignity is when someone in poverty volunteers alongside the Good Works staff and other community volunteers to earn points to purchase a car from the Transformation Station; it is not simply giving someone a car because he or she needs it.

**Greta Black:** The best lesson I've received from AmeriCorps so far is the continual reminder to not be judgmental of other people. It is easy to become frustrated at times with the people we are helping. It's disheartening to see people not making use of the tools and programs that either we offer ourselves or that we provide access to, like when families finally come to the clinic for shots because the kids have missed a week or more of school. It's upsetting because the whole process seems very simple, but at the same time you can see that they simply lack the time, energy, and resources they need to get to a point where they can truly devote themselves to the complete needs of their children. They do care; it's just that their situation makes it really difficult to manage things.

**Heidi Mowrey:** What breaks my heart is seeing some children that people have already given up on. The kids that have "those parents," live in "that trailer park," and do "so bad" in classes. We have to remember that they are kids, just kids, and as hard as it is to do, we have to remember that we are the ones that should be encouraging and supporting these kids. We're the role-models.

**Louise Koons:** I have learned just how important health education is. I entered this job looking for experience working with community agencies and non-profit organizations. I never considered myself a model of health, but now being saturated with health messages promoting policies or informing people about our programs, I realize how important a preventative outlook on life is.



**Cara Smith:** I have learned to look beyond the surface and see if there is more to a story. I am inspired by the resiliency that a lot of these kids show in the face of hardship.

**Mike Dariano:** I've learned that school is even more dynamic than I thought it was and there exists a climate of needs that the staff serves with unending effort.

**Kim Clark:** I've learned that the people who need the help the most are the ones least likely to have the support and resources. Effective communication and access to free education and health services are essential.

**Tara Gilts:** I have learned unbiased and inclusive compassion.



