

I am a Civic Corps Member, and I Will Get Things Done

Posted At : November 24, 2010 1:04 PM | Posted By : Food Bank Staff

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As the Food Bank For New York City's two New York City Civic Corps members, Mallory Shan and I wear a couple of different hats. While on the one hand we're akin to full-time staff at the Food Bank, we also have duties for the NYC Civic Corps, which itself is part of the greater AmeriCorps organization. AmeriCorps is a federal service program, created under President Bill Clinton in 1993, that engages citizens from all over the U.S. in long-term projects, including anything from after-school programs to special-needs advocacy to environmental clean-up. As two recent college grads serious about making a difference in our country, Mallory and I couldn't have found a better fit than working at the Food Bank with the AmeriCorps program.

A few weeks ago we attended the 2010 New York State AmeriCorps Kickoff – an event acknowledging and celebrating the work of the nearly 1,200 AmeriCorps members in the state. The kickoff represented a fantastic opportunity to learn, network, and reaffirm our commitment to serving those in need – in our case, the hungry citizens of New York City. After an early morning bus to the state's capital in Albany, we decamped to the sight of more than a thousand bright and enthusiastic corps members. We began the day with a rousing round of PT (physical training, to the uninitiated), and soon were treated to a packed program of inspiring speeches, addresses and testimonials. John Gomperts, current head of the program, led a swearing in and recitation of the AmeriCorps pledge, committing us to “to make our people safer, smarter and healthier.” Certainly the highlight of the day was the address given by La Verna J. Fountain, President and founder of the Defiant Hope Consulting and Training Company. Highlighting her struggles out of poverty, her battle with multiple sclerosis and instances of prejudice in her own life, La Verna challenged AmeriCorps members to “say yes, where others would say no,” and to keep fighting for positive change even as naysayers will “stab you in the front.”



Swearing in by Mayor Michael Bloomberg

On the bus ride back, Mallory and I had ample opportunity to reflect on the mandate put before us. We will certainly face challenges as we work on projects for the Food Bank, from tax assistance to the CookShop nutrition education program to improving the Community Kitchen and Food Pantry of West Harlem. And though things may get tough, we'll be certain to keep this pledge in mind: “I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done.”

