

Volunteer Center of Battle Creek inspires lifelong service

By Brandon Seng, ConnectMichigan Alliance



“We believe that if we get youth involved in community service at a young age, they will continue to serve throughout their lives,” explained Cherise Buchanan, an AmeriCorps*VISTA serving in Calhoun County. Lifelong service is something that she hopes to inspire in youth through a program called The Avail Project.

The Avail Project of the Volunteer Center of Battle Creek is a 15 week

long service-learning program that pairs college mentors with middle school and high school youth. With the primary objective of inspiring change through service, groups meet weekly to discuss and implement service projects in their community.

“The program is unique because each group of students choose service projects to target very different community issues,” said Buchanan. “Students have chosen projects ranging anywhere from canned food drives to literacy awareness.”

The 15-week program starts with team building exercises, where mentees get to know each other and become familiar with their mentors. Together, they then start to research and identify the needs they see in their community, and develop ideas for projects to address those needs.

From start to finish, each service project is run by students, and several lessons are picked up along the way. Through the process of researching, planning and actualizing these service programs, The Avail Project is proving to each individual student that they are needed, and can make a difference in their community.

As with many mentoring programs, the mentors benefit as much or even more than those they are working with. “As the mentors begin to see each child for who they are, and witness that individual’s capabilities, we begin to see a change in the mentors,” said Buchanan. “Mentees also make progress, as they learn how to work together and become more respectful.”

The combination of mentoring and service-learning creates a powerful program that not only educates youth about their community, but also provides inspiration for continued education. For more about the this program, and other efforts of the Volunteer Center of Battle Creek, visit <http://www.volcenterbc.org/>.