

# Newsletter - Summer 2007



The Chicago Health Corps, an AmeriCorps program in its twelfth year, provides meaningful opportunities for participants to assist their communities in reaching those who face barriers to needed health and social services.

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### Our Host Sites

**Children's Memorial Hospital**  
*Uptown Teen Health Center*  
*Uptown Pediatrics Center*  
**Erie Family Health Center**  
*Henson Elementary School*  
*Ryerson Elementary School*  
**Illinois Coalition for School Health Centers**  
**Josephinum Community Academy**  
**Logan Square Neighborhood Association**  
**Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago**  
**Uplift School Health Center**



### 2006/07 CHC Members

Araceli Carrillo	Maya C. Madlock
Barbara Colon	Jill E. Pessis
Megan O. Erskine	Trey Sanders
Nicole B. Felkel	Shreya D. Shah
Marisa Galarza	Gitanjali
Cirenia Garcia	Sivasubramaniam
Wynetta Harris	Elizabeth E.
Sara Khan	Springston

### 2006/2007 VISTA Member

Christina Luongo



## Marisela Mirelez, Program Manager

My first memory of the CHC is walking in for the first day of Pre-Service Training on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

Though sad and angry from the events of the previous day, I had deeper feelings of determination and a stronger passion to serve others. I was astonished to meet my fellow Corps Members, a group of over 30 people who had sought out this incredible program. These people had researched, applied and interviewed for the opportunity to provide much needed services to Chicago communities. I was amazed and excited to find so many others who believed in the same things I did!

I had no idea what I was getting myself into! I had never heard of AmeriCorps. I was 18 and needed a job. I am what we call a “community recruit” where a community-based organization recruits from within their own area instead of having someone placed from the outside. I was based at the Centro Comunitario Juan Diego neighborhood implementing and facilitating the Open Airways for Schools (OAS) program in nearby elementary schools.

After my year of service, I finished massage school, received my license in massage therapy, worked steadily, began my college education at a city community college (with the help of my education award!), and yet found my life lacking something. Service. I was deeply saddened to hear that the CHC (like so many other AmeriCorps programs) had lost it’s funding in 2003. So when I learned that the CHC was back up and running again in 2004, I jumped at the opportunity to serve again. I spent the 2004/05 service year planning In-Services, coordinating other group events and watching the CHC build itself back up

to what it once was – an enlightening and riveting program designed to serve those in need, educate providers, and promote the health professions. Although that first year back was not easy, my admiration for the program kept me going. When the Program Manager decided to return to school to complete her post-doctorate degree, I was asked to take her place. I was honored, but I must admit I was also hesitant and fearful that I would not be good enough for this incredible program.

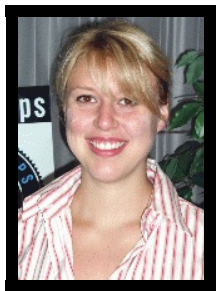
I drew from my past experiences, let go of my fears, and dove head first into the job, and it was the best decision I have ever made. I have learned so much from so many people over the last two years. I am grateful to the CHC staff, site supervisors and Members who helped me learn more about myself and how best to work with people and the community. As I transition out of this position and return to the classroom, I want to thank you for your support, wisdom, and for being some of the teachers I have ever had.

Trey Sanders, a current CHC Member, will be assuming the position of Program Manager. I wish him well and good luck in the coming service year! Thank You, from a young girl from the South Side, for this wonderful opportunity to have served you - I wish you all well in all your endeavors!



## Jill Pessis and Megan Erskine Illinois Coalition for School Health Centers

Jill is short while Megan is tall. Yet, they work together at the same site in a stunning display of bridging differences to reach a common goal. Jill and Megan worked at the Illinois Coalition for School Health Centers



(ICSHC) and together got a lot done for school health centers, the city of Chicago, the state of Illinois, America, and the world. (OK, the data is still being examined on their impact on America and the world...) Jill does not like sleep, while Megan has been known to nap on the Blue Line. Jill majored in Community Health and will use her education award to obtain a Masters in Public Health. Megan majored in poetry and spent a hedonistic year in France that required a grueling two-hour work day.

Past lives aside, the two were able to come together and accomplish a great many things for the ICSHC, an organization that seeks to improve the health of children and adolescents by fostering development and expansion of school health centers through leadership, technical training and advocacy. School health centers bring comprehensive and affordable health services to schools where students spend a great deal of time.

Megan and Jill contributed greatly to the ICSHC’s success. Both were involved in coordinating a campaign for the Governor’s office that culminated with students delivering 1,500 post cards from 30 schools to Governor Rod Blagojevich’s Chicago office. Both contributed to planning and managing the largest youth advocacy day in Springfield. More than 200 youth attended the event, making it the largest and most successful Advocacy Day to date. Finally, they worked to coordinate the statewide School Health Center Conference that hosted the highest number of attendees and rendered the most positive evaluations the ICSHC has ever received from a conference. All of these events played an important role in passing essential state legislation for increased funding for 20 new school health centers.

Jill worked deftly between two locations for the ICSHC. When she was not in the office, Jill spent her time at the Crane School Health Center where she provided clinical support, nutrition education, and developed relationships with the adolescents who came to the clinic seeking health advice and services. Megan was able to spend time at the Orr Adolescent Health Center, and with their energetic and committed staff, along with opportunities provided by ICSHC, was able to contribute to the formation of a new student health club.

As the 2006/07 CHC Term comes to an end, Jill and Megan must part ways and embark upon their own journeys. Jill accepted a position at the American Red Cross of Greater Chicago where she will fulfill her life’s ambition of fostering emergency preparedness and disaster relief by working as a member of the National Response and Preparedness Team. Megan plans to continue to work at the Illinois Coalition for School Health Centers as full-time staff so that she may continue to sing the praises of school health centers.

### Jill & Megan Fun Facts:

- Jill doesn’t require sleep!
- Megan requires 6-9 shots of espresso daily!
- Megan’s favorite animal is the Goat!
- Jill loves eggs and cheese on a whole wheat bagel!
- Jill is the youngest of four!



## Maya Madlock Josephinum Academy

Maya applied to the CHC with the intention of gaining

experience in public health before embarking on graduate or nursing school. She was not expecting to learn how to teach as well. Maya, a Memphis, TN native, served at Josephinum Academy, a parochial, all-girls school that awards scholarships to young women in underserved communities.

Maya describes herself as flexible and able to go with the flow, which she says makes her an ideal “pseudo” school nurse - she must constantly be prepared for the unexpected. Others would describe Maya as self-assured and independent, qualities that make her a good role model for the young women who attend Josephinum. Those students face a myriad of challenges in accessing health care and health information, and Maya is someone they respect and admire. She is too young to be far removed from the adolescent experience, yet too old to be in their cohort group. Therefore, Josephinum students perceive Maya as someone they can trust and learn from. Maya imparted knowledge especially important for young women from underserved backgrounds, including nutrition, reproductive health, addiction and drug abuse.

“I love the students and their energy. Sometimes they drive me crazy, and I want to go ‘mama’ on them. Sometimes it backfires and they go off on me and they get written up and sent down to the office. At the same time, I see so much potential in them that I hope that I inspire them a bit to

see it through”

Along with being available in the health office and teaching a health class, Maya also helped plan and coordinate the “Taste of the Jo,” an event that brings Josephinum alum, current students and their families, and the rest of the community together for a night of good food and entertainment.

Maya does not plan on being a teacher, but she will continue to pursue a public health career. Her experience at Josephinum helped her identify the future steps to take in her career, while leaving a lasting impact on the young women she served.

### Maya Fun Facts:

- Maya would want to meet Abraham Lincoln because she thinks he is kind of cute.
- Her favorite article of clothing is socks.
- She has the best speaking voice in the room.



## Nicole Riggs and Barbara Colon: A World Apart?

At first glance Idaho and Puerto Rico have little in common - but if you look closer, you’ll find a connection between these two distant lands through Members **Nicole Riggs** and **Barbara Colon**. Both hail from these far away places, and both spent their 2006/07 Term of Service with the Erie Family Health Center.



**Nicole Riggs** grew up in Utah and moved to Idaho for her junior year of high school. Upon graduation she majored in psychology at Salem College in North Carolina.

Later, when her husband was accepted at a Chicago Medical School, Nicole followed and decided to pursue community service with the Chicago Health Corps.

Shouts of "Hey Ms. Nicole!" and hugs are her greetings as she walks down the hallways of Ryerson Elementary School. When she isn't being bombarded by embraces from the children, she works at the school's health center where she coordinates and implements health education lessons. Nicole says, "This year has been amazing. I have been able to teach hundreds of students at Ryerson Elementary as well as other communities and schools ... creating new and interesting lessons, games, bulletin boards, and newsletters."

Despite putting in extra nights and weekend hours, Nicole values her AmeriCorps experience. Her dedication and passion for education has inspired her to consider teaching as a future profession.

### Fun Facts about Nicole:

- Was valedictorian of Skyview High School in Idaho
- Does not like warm drinks because she associates them with being sick



A native of Puerto Rico, **Barbara Colon** is almost “quarto-lingual” as she studied French and spent time in Brazil learning Portuguese during a photography study trip. Barbara is also

the proud mother of two boys and is strongly devoted to her family, heritage, and community. In fact, she has been committed to her community since she was in school at Kelvyn High School in Chicago where she was an active member in several student clubs. After graduation she wanted to continue to be engaged in her community and enrolled in the Chicago Health Corps. As a health educator, Barbara teaches the “Salsa Sabor y Salud” program instructing children and their parents about nutrition and physical activity. Children take the class during school, while parents attend after-hours.

Although Barbara is not entirely sure what she wants to do in the future, she has considered becoming a Radiologist. Whatever she ends up doing, she wants to continue to be of service to people. The Chicago community is lucky to have Barbara who is passionately devoted to making the world a better place. (If only she could get some sleep in between being a great mom and saving the world . . .)

### Fun Facts about Barbara:

- Plays the trumpet
- Would like to visit Africa
- Overuses the word "thingy"

May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007 marked the CHC's first ever volunteer-a-thon, a continuous 24-hour span

of time devoted to increasing awareness of health disparities in Chicago by recruiting people to volunteer at sites that serve communities in need. The CHC accomplished this event in conjunction with National AmeriCorps Week. Our AmeriCorps colleagues in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Jacksonville worked with the CHC in putting on simultaneous events, hence the title "24x4 Volunteer-a-Thon." We decided to do our event for a non-stop 24-hour period. Volunteer services throughout the day included gardening and landscaping, a Lake Michigan beach clean-up, cooking and serving meals at a local soup kitchen, and making hygiene kits for a homeless shelter.



The arduous, but energy-filled day began at Josephinum Academy with registration and goodies for the eager volunteers. The first group headed to the beach clean-up at Lake Michigan with the MCOR Foundation while a second batch of heroes went to the Greater Chicago Food Depository. Another group of volunteers left for various Logan Square Neighborhood Association sites where they planted flowers and "mulched their hearts out." Another beautification project took place at Vital Bridges, a home for abused women that fosters a sense of family and community through group art activities. The volunteers got their day's workout in



the sun by prepping the yard for future gardening projects and preparing the shed for a future mural that will soon be completed with the help of other community members.

As the sun set, our loyal volunteers just kept going and going and going. The next site was REST, a local soup kitchen. This site did not live up to its name, and volunteers were kept busy serving meals to people in need. As the night continued on, the party continued with a little help from Jill Pessis' friends. A band called "Wasted Jack" was gracious enough to bring their much needed energy to our fading group of volunteers.

Hygiene became the name of the game late into the night in more ways than one. By that point it had been close to 15 hours into the event, and Team CHC, along with our loyal 24-hour volunteers, assembled hygiene kits that included amenities like toothbrushes, toothpaste, deodorant for the Cathedral Shelter of Chicago.

The event was an unqualified success - one which we will all look back on with great pride!



## Trey Sanders Uplift School Health Center

Trey Sanders, connoisseur and healthcare enthusiast, chose to do his second year of AmeriCorps in Chicago for a lot of reasons. Trey had several good friends who made the move to Chicago and along with being closer to them, he wanted to gain experience for a future career in medicine by participating in the CHC. Trey interviewed in person for his site. He remembered, "When I met with my future site leaders, they promised me a year I would never forget, with a sort of a menacing laugh. I was intrigued."

Trey's rich background in service, acting, teaching, public speaking, and even a year of medical school made him an ideal candidate for the Uplift School Health Center. Situated in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood, the health center is sponsored by Children's Memorial Hospital

(Illinois' premiere pediatric hospital) and situated in a site housing a diverse population of students from an underserved neighborhood.

The Uplift School Health Center provided Trey with the experience he will need to not only complete medical school but provided insight as to how his role as a physician could impact health in community settings. Among other successes, Trey played a vital role in starting a new parent nutrition class. Ten parents came to the class on a regular basis, the highest amount of parent attendees than any other parent program the school has offered to date. Those participants are now serving as a pilot group for a parent health club to be started next year. This landmark program dedicated to bridging the gap between health, education, and parental involvement is a tremendous achievement, as lack of parental engagement tops the list of challenges that the school district is working to improve.

During his time at Uplift, Trey has participated in an immunization drive, health education classes, clinical support, and community outreach - all while leading the planning and coordination of the Chicago Health Corps 24x4 Volunteer-A-Thon in May. Through it all Trey gained a more complete vision of what kind of doctor he wants to be: "I do plan to continue in healthcare as a physician, and I hope this experience will really help my patient interaction skills. I have noticed that there are many barriers to adequate healthcare even after the patient can visit a doctor. I hope to remember that when I'm wearing the white coat."

### Fun Facts about Trey:

- Had a brief stint as a runway model at the age of five.
- From Louisville, KY, Trey's parents surgically removed his southern accent.

