

East Carolina University

Project HEART An AmeriCorps Partnership



Tomorrow starts here.





Project HEART member Qwashanda Staton takes turns reading with a student at Pactolus Elementary School.



Project HEART (High Expectation for At-Risk Teens) is a tutoring program that helps students in eastern North Carolina reach their full potential. The program began in 2000–2001 with forty-eight tutors providing services to 480 middle-grades students in four counties. The program has continued to grow and evolve to serve the educational needs of the region, increasing not only its membership but also its service area. From 2000–2006, Project HEART recruited more than 500 tutors to serve approximately 6,000 students in elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and after-school programs. Currently, the project recruits its tutors from East Carolina University, area community colleges, and area high schools.

“Serving Others... in Many Meaningful Ways”

Project HEART tutors spend time each week with students at a school, a Boys & Girls Club, or a faith-based or community-based after-school program. They work with students who score below the state standard in several academic subject areas, and mentor them to improve inside and outside the classroom.

ECU’s Project HEART is a partnership between ECU, AmeriCorps, the North Carolina Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, and community colleges, schools, Boys & Girls Clubs, faith-based organizations, and other community groups in eastern North Carolina. Located in the College of Education at East Carolina, the project aims to help students succeed academically by reducing classroom failure, retention rates, and dropout rates.



Project HEART in action: Qwashanda Staton, a senior at East Carolina, tutors students at Pactolus Elementary School in phonics and reading. She has watched as students who once were intimidated in the classroom gain confidence as they improve academically and reach proficiency in subjects in which they previously struggled. One of the students Staton has been tutoring on a weekly basis can now open a book

and read aloud without falter. Staton says the children are also helping her learn more about perseverance and success. “AmeriCorps has opened my eyes to what the world is and what it could be,” she says. At North Pitt High School, Project HEART member Jermaine Johnson, a science education major (above), tutors Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) students in science. Johnson says the AVID program motivates high school students to learn about opportunities beyond graduation. “It helps them excel in school,” he says, “and they get to see where they’ll be if they excel academically.”

service

Alan Jeffries, Justin Jenkins, and Andrea Starkie stock groceries and supplies in the pantry of the Food Education and Distribution Center at South Greenville Church of Christ.



“Developing Confidence in an Individual’s Own Capacities to Make a Difference”

Last year, performance data collected on the students served by Project HEART indicated the following educational outcomes:

- 89 percent of the elementary and middle-grades students passed their end-of-grade test in reading and were promoted to the next grade.
- 90 percent of the ninth-grade students in the AVID program improved their academic performance for the year.
- 50 percent of the low-performing ninth-grade students improved their academic performance each semester.

When Project HEART members see the fruits of their labor as the students they tutor gain academic proficiency, they begin to recognize their abilities to meet other needs within their communities. They develop the ability to assess community needs and solve any problem they encounter. Many Project HEART members have stepped beyond their role in the classroom to propose ideas that will meet these other local community needs.

Project HEART in action: ECU student Andrea Starkie was concerned that elderly residents in Greenville were not getting adequate nutrition because of numerous obstacles. She approached South Greenville Church of Christ’s minister, Rudy Burdett, and the two founded the Food Education and Distribution Center. The organization

delivers food to elderly citizens in need and provides a walk-in pantry once a week where eligible low-income residents pick up groceries. Starkie also works to ensure that those served by the program receive education on how to be self-sufficient and productive. A volunteer at heart, Starkie says her involvement in Project HEART opened her eyes to even more opportunities to changing the lives of those around her. “I just have such a love for helping people,” she says.



empowerment

Project HEART members Mallory Harrison and Heather Suggs help students collect coins for Sam D. Bundy Elementary School's hurricane relief fund-raising program.



“Developing Informed, Educated Student Leaders Who Exhibit Character and Respect for Others”

ECU Project HEART assists other AmeriCorps members like Starkie in becoming leaders in their communities. Through a yearlong process of training, participants of Project HEART develop skills in problem solving, team building, goal setting, time management, and decision making. Project HEART members incorporate these new skills into service activities at their schools or at other community agency sites.

Many Project HEART members set out to improve the academic success of younger students in the region, but they end up achieving much more. They learn more about themselves and their talents and potential. They strengthen their understanding of social issues facing the students with whom they work. They expand their connections to their community. They develop a strong sense of civic engagement. That devotion sometimes even spreads to a more global community.

Project HEART in action: Project HEART members at Sam D. Bundy Elementary in Farmville organized an effort to raise money for the Katrina Disaster Relief Fund. The staff and students at Sam D. Bundy raised more than \$2,500 by dropping change in designated jars at the school. The school sent the money to a small hurricane-affected school district in Sabine Pass, Texas, and was recognized by Texas Congressman Ted Poe on the House floor in Washington, DC. The Project HEART members not only tutor at the school, but also work to help their students understand leadership and volunteerism by organizing a variety of service projects including canned food drives,

winter clothing drives, and fund raising. “We try to get young people to want to volunteer,” says Project HEART member Heather Suggs, “and they love having people come out to help them (academically). They look at us as role models.”



Project HEART

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Leadership



On the cover: Project HEART member Mallory Harrison tutors a student at Sam D. Bundy Elementary in Farmville. Members help students master phonics using the Great Leaps and Comprehension Strategies reading curricula.



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