



AmeriCorps Members Make A Difference

(NAPSA)—A growing number of people are breaking away from the working world and taking some time to serve their country in AmeriCorps.

One example is Zachary Sifuentes, a Harvard graduate who took a personal journey after graduation, joining the national service program that tutors children, runs after-school programs, mentors troubled youth, improves the environment and recruits community volunteers.

Since 1994, AmeriCorps has sent more than 200,000 Americans to inner cities and rural areas to tackle the country's most troubling social problems. For some people, joining means having the chance to see a part of the country they've never been to before. Sifuentes, a California native who grew up in Idaho, did just that.

"The really great thing is that you can apply to go anywhere," he says. "Most people stay in their area, but the possibility of naming a place and going there—I loved that. I looked in all the far places—Alaska, Hawaii, New York City—then found Puerto Rico."

While searching through programs on the Internet, Sifuentes found Centro AYANI, a local organization that provides therapy and other services to children with disabilities in a rural area of Puerto Rico.

"Their biggest problem was that they didn't have someone who speaks, writes and understands English, and all the grants are in English," he said.

At the time, the organization needed funding to build an educational and therapeutic center. Sifuentes raised nearly half the cost of the project with the first grant he wrote. He also designed a web page for the organization and obtained donations of computers



After graduating from college, Zachary Sifuentes took a year off to serve his country.

that will be used for the children the center serves, and also for adults in the surrounding community to learn to use computers during evening classes.

Sifuentes was particularly interested in doing community service because of all the opportunities he had, including going to Harvard. As graduation approached, he knew he wanted to do a year of community service because he wanted to give back to others for all the benefits he had received.

In addition to a living allowance and health insurance, AmeriCorps members receive a \$4,725 education award after completing a year of service. The award can be used to pay off student loans or cover tuition at college or graduate school.

Now enrolled in a graduate program at the University of Michigan, Sifuentes is considering a career in either teaching or in the nonprofit sector.

He's also seen in another place: on television. He appears in AmeriCorps' recently launched public service campaign, "Your World. Your Chance to Make It Better." The ads encourage viewers to learn more about AmeriCorps. Visit www.americorps.org to find out about thousands of opportunities to serve, or call (800) 942-2677.