

Executive Summary

1. Provide a brief narrative of your proposed AmeriCorps*VISTA project, including population to be served, issue areas, history of your organization's activities in these issue areas, and the type of service activities you expect the AmeriCorps*VISTA members to accomplish.

Centerforce has over 30 years of experience as a non-profit agency that provides services, education and advocacy for prisoners and their families at various county jails, state prisons, and federal correctional facilities throughout Northern and Central California.

Leaders in Future Environments (LIFE) is a specific Centerforce program that provides mentors for San Francisco Bay Area youth between 11-18 years of age who have an immediate family member in jail or prison. The program serves youth in Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo, Contra Costa, and Marin Counties. LIFE is a prevention-based program that seeks to break the intergenerational cycle of crime and incarceration by providing on-going support and positive role modeling.

The issues faced by children of prisoners frequently begin long before their parents go to jail or prison. Most experience feelings of isolation and alienation well beyond what other youth experience. Many mentor programs serve at-risk youth, but the LIFE Program is one of a handful in the San Francisco Bay Area that has been specifically designed to meet the needs of children of prisoners.

The LIFE Program is seeking an AmeriCorps*VISTA member to conduct the following activities:

- ✍ Donation solicitations and/or fundraising to support program capacity increases and enhance current services provided to both the mentors and mentees.
- ✍ Youth participant and adult mentor recruitment
- ✍ Community outreach and education about the project and our target population.
- ✍ Program and administrative support to the Children and Families Department at Centerforce – the department that houses the LIFE Program.
- ✍ Research to maintain information and community referrals network for participants and their families
- ✍ Educational material development (for youth).
- ✍ Support planning and facilitation of program events.
- ✍ Assist project evaluation efforts and conduct quarterly confidential surveys.

Needs and Activities

1. State in measurable and quantifiable terms the specific poverty-related need(s) identified by the community (ies) that the AmeriCorps*VISTA project will address, including the number of low-income people directly affected by the problem(s).

There are approximately 195,000 children in California who currently have a parent in state prison.¹ Additionally, the State of California Research Bureau estimated in 2000 that there were 856,000 children in California who have a parent currently involved in the California adult criminal justice system (prison, jail, parole and probation).² These youth often come from families that were not intact even before parental incarceration. For these young people, their parent's incarceration is not the beginning of their problems but is instead the final explosive event that disrupts the family for a significant period of time, if not permanently. Traditional youth organizations often have difficulty reaching and serving these youth, leaving them at higher risk for poor academic achievement, substance abuse and delinquency.

¹ Simmons, Charlene; Children of Incarcerated Parents; California Research Bureau, Vol. 7 No 2. March 2000.

² *Ibid*

Strengthening Communities

1. How, if at all, will you collaborate with other national service programs (AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, RSVP, and NCC) in order to support the proposed project?

The LIFE Project does not currently work with any of the above mentioned national service programs. However, the program does work closely with local communities and community-based organizations that help to support the program. The program currently uses the Mentoring Center, a technical assistance and training provider for Bay Area mentoring programs.

VISTA Assignment Description

1. List the recommended skills and qualifications that an AmeriCorps*VISTA member should have to successfully complete the project plan.

Recommended skills and qualifications

- ✍ Excellent communication skills
- ✍ Excellent writing skills and experience with grant writing desirable
- ✍ Able to work with the media and /or some experience in marketing concepts
- ✍ Highly organized and self-sufficient
- ✍ Experience with volunteer work, especially with youth/teens and ability to work with high-risk youth groups.
- ✍ Able to work with a diverse group of volunteers and staff.
- ✍ Ability to work weekends
- ✍ Willing to travel to various monthly event sites throughout the Bay Area
- ✍ Able to pass California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) clearance process and volunteer clearance process (will require Driver's license number social security number and date of birth). Volunteers who have crimes against children will automatically be disqualified from program participation.

Project Management

1. Describe plans for daily supervision of AmeriCorps*VISTA members. Specify if supervision will be a full-time or part-time responsibility.

VISTA members will receive extensive supervision from both the Program Manager and the Project Coordinator. VISTA members will work as a team with the Project Coordinator to complete daily tasks. The Project Coordinator will be available to provide support, guidance, and answer questions on a daily basis. The Program Manager will meet with the VISTA members at least two times each month, with more frequent supervision meetings in the beginning of the project. The Program Manager will provide support to the Project Coordinator and VISTA members as needed. VISTA members will also participate in agency-wide monthly meetings, Children and Family department meetings, as well as staff trainings.

2. Are 51 percent or more of the persons on your board of directors' members of the low-income community? If not, please describe how your agency has developed, or will develop, an advisory council for the AmeriCorps*VISTA project that consists of members or representatives of the low-income community served by the proposed project.

Currently, the Centerforce Board of Directors does not have 51 percent or more members who are of low-income communities. Centerforce plans to develop an advisory council to work with the LIFE Project. This council will include representation from youth program participants, mentors, and caregivers with at least 51 percent being members of the low-income communities. The advisory council will be formed by June 2007 and will meet two

times per year to assist with program expansion through providing proposals and feedback about program structure and content.

Organizational Capacity

1. What in-kind resources will you provide to ensure the success of the proposed project?

Centerforce will provide in-kind resources to ensure the success of the proposed project such as, computer, phone, internet, email access, office supplies and office space.

2. Describe current activities your organization and other organizations are undertaking to address the problems identified in your need statement. Describe how the proposed project will complement this work.

The LIFE program provides youth participants with one-on-one mentoring, monthly group activities and annual retreats that focus on the special needs and unique challenges faced by adolescents who have immediate family members in prison. Centerforce partners with multiple community organizations in order to provide essential services to the youth in our LIFE program. The addition of VISTA members will complement the program by assisting in the program's gathering of information, funding and fundraising, community outreach and increasing program capacity. The addition of VISTA members will significantly increase the amount of services we can provide by supporting the expansion of the LIFE program to include a second cohort of participants.

3. Describe the accessibility of services provided to members of the community with disabilities. Is your organization able to accommodate AmeriCorps*VISTA members with disabilities?

Centerforce values the importance of providing accessible services for disabled community members and staff and will provide reasonable accommodations to meet the needs of qualified VISTA members who have disabilities. VISTA members will work primarily from the Centerforce main location, which has both upstairs and downstairs offices but does not have an elevator. Due to the upstairs offices not being wheelchair accessible, the downstairs offices can be used in cases where a VISTA member is unable to use stairs. LIFE Project events are held in various community locations which may or may not be wheelchair accessible. Centerforce operates from multiple locations, some of which are owned by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Some of these CDCR facilities are not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.