



NEWS RELEASE
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CONTACT: [Gretchen Wright](#)
202/371-1999

Berkeley Heights, New Jersey Volunteer Working to Strengthen Afterschool Programs in Westfield

Lisa West Joins Eight Other Afterschool Alliance VISTA Volunteers Nationally to Support Afterschool Sustainability and Expand Nutritional Resources

Afterschool programs help working families, keep kids safe and inspire learning. In communities like Westfield, they are considered vital resources. But the economic downturn has put a squeeze on programs, causing many to scale back their offerings or even close their doors. Lisa West, an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, is working with the Afterschool Alliance to change that.

Along with eight other VISTA volunteers selected from across the country, West is working to increase local participation in free afterschool and summer meals programs. Her work includes identifying local resources and needs and collaborating with local and national leaders to strengthen afterschool programs in Westfield. She is working closely with the New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition. She began her service in August of this year, and will complete her service in August 2012. Other Afterschool Alliance VISTA volunteers are working to develop local afterschool sustainability plans.

“Today, children and parents depend on high quality afterschool programs to provide engaging hands-on learning opportunities, nutritious and healthy snacks and meals, and opportunities to explore the sciences, arts, physical fitness and more. But many of these same programs are in dire financial straits. That’s why the Afterschool Alliance is delighted to have the support of Lisa West in Westfield. We are looking forward to the contributions she will make in helping keep the doors open at afterschool programs, so that more children and families can benefit from all they have to offer,” said Jodi Grant, Executive Director of the Afterschool Alliance.

West is helping to expand participation in the Afterschool Meal and Summer Food Service Programs by increasing the number of afterschool and summer learning programs offering these meals, as well as increasing the number of students participating in the programs. As a VISTA volunteer, she is working with several different communities in New Jersey, to identify critical gaps in service and developing plans to increase awareness of the Afterschool Meal and Summer Food Service Programs among afterschool and summer enrichment partners. She is also working with school districts, state level officials, and community advocates to remove barriers to the programs and engage community partners.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 included a provision to expand the Afterschool Meal program to all states. The Summer Food Service Program is one of the least utilized food assistance programs.

The need for afterschool is great. Research conducted by the Afterschool Alliance has shown that only 14 percent of New Jersey's K-12 students are in afterschool programs, while 28 percent care for themselves after the school day ends. Nationally more than 15 million children are unsupervised after the school day ends.

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.