



Their Most Significant Contributions and Accomplishments According to the VISTAs of the Central Valley Digital Network



Angela Garcia: ABLE Industries, Visalia, CA



My most significant contribution and accomplishment made to the community while being a VISTA was enriching the lives of members of the community by opening the lab at ABLE to the general public. When the lab became open to the community, different segments of the

population of Tulare County became the users. People that in everyday life I would not necessarily associate with became my friends, the people I saw everyday.

What makes the contribution significant is enriching lives with computer technology skills – whether it is a non-English speaking person learning how to type and speak in broken English, or a disabled or limited person gaining confidence in themselves because of the welcome (“to everybody”) setting of the lab.

This gave the community members a sense of confidence and leadership. When they obtain this in themselves, they in turn pass it on to others. In a sense, closing the digital divide little by little. This is why opening a public computer lab is the most significant item that I have achieved while being an AmeriCorps*VISTA.

Sandra Franco: Housing Authority of Merced County, Merced CA

Being able to give back to my community, the Spanish-speaking, was my most significant contribution this year. To help them better themselves and knowing I did something made me feel good.



I also accomplished being a part of the Tech Listing Project, where I didn't even want to call people for information and now, we have this list that's on the Internet which is great because I was a part of it!

I also accomplished writing a proposal to get \$1,000 where we are going to have a Spanish computer station which I am glad to know a lot more people are going to get connected! I also have learned so much with confidence and a push from Linda telling me, “I could do it!”

My most significant accomplishment was keeping my attitude “up” and taking it day by day as it goes by with the downsides of life, work stress, family issues and everything that comes along unexpectedly. I have learned to deal with a lot of new things, but this whole experience as a VISTA has made me a lot stronger. I have met a lot of good people who I have helped and also my VISTA co-workers who I have shared one year of service with. I hope to keep in touch with them all!

Larry Harig: Family Resource Council/Local Childcare Planning Council, Merced CA



I assembled all the equipment that had “assembly required” on the boxes. A database is in place to keep track of all the books and videos are now available to check out at the CCRC. A web page has been created and re-designed to tell childcare providers about our services. A second database

is in the works to provide information about the childcare providers to parents, the community and other childcare providers. This year's Resource Directory was edited and printed by me. I created a software program to place it on our computers and eventually as an interactive part of the Internet on the FRC web page. Both of these accomplishments will be used to provide information about Merced County. It will tell about what services are available and how to access them.

I enhanced my skills working with the MCOE technical support team by networking the computers and printers during our office move. I was given the opportunity to take some classes in HTML (to write web pages), Access (to create several larger databases by linking several tables together and creating reports using a field or two from each table), FrontPage (to help with editing of web pages written by other people). And, I went to a 3-day workshop on grant writing and have since helped write several grants (including one to start a new technology-based program for MCOE which if funded, has a provision for me to direct the program).

Several times while looking for a job in the past, I learned, “it's not what you know that counts the most, it's who you know.” Going to all the Local Childcare Planning Council and Family Resource Council meetings, I made many contacts for the future (and a few friends, too). Personally, I am in one full-time position as opposed to 4-6 part-time jobs that I had since I graduated from

California State University, Stanislaus. I did not start/do new projects that I didn't know anything about, but, through trial & error, I'm able to get most things done that I start.

Bridget Beck: Stanislaus County Free Library, Modesto



I think the significance of numbers speaks for itself. In 12 months, I taught computer classes in 13 cities in Stanislaus County as one individual initially.

Next I recruited and trained over 40 volunteers from the community to teach computer classes in almost all thirteen cities and retain 20 of these initial volunteers. Beyond that, some of these courses were created and conducted in Spanish, which is not my native language.

The accomplishment of getting people in a community, where I recently moved, involved by the hundreds as teachers and students, is significant for me. These concrete and tangible numbers show that more people have become digitally literate because of my work. They also show how many individuals have become part of my life in this one-year's time.

I feel that I have accomplished the value of sustainability. Just as I strived to create a sustainable project, I created sustainability within myself...to keep going, to keep at this project. I sustained my role as a VISTA in the face of the temptation to abandon the work, in the reality of my own self-doubt and in frustration of working in an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people. It is a great accomplishment to have sustained and persisted at this project.

Robert Gonzales: Stanislaus County Department of Employment & Training, Modesto CA



With so much help from my new friend, Matt Ketchum, I have been able to advance the Department of Employment and Training's long-term goals of providing the general public computer literacy programs, into one year. It has made a significant change with the

Stanislaus communities that we in the Valley are continuing to grow in so many ways. There will be challenges all the way, but teamwork, determination, and

belief in yourself as well as in others overcome many obstacles.

My most significant accomplishment would have to be the fact that I learned how to teach others. If someone was to have asked me would I like to teach computers to other people about five years ago, I probably would have laughed at them and said, "Yeah, right."

But I have realized something about teaching. If you don't have your heart in it, then no matter what kind of formal education that a person may possess, he or she will not excel at relating the subject to their students. They must believe in the subject, their students and themselves.

Frances Sandoval, Housing Authority of Stanislaus County, Modesto CA



My most significant accomplishment to the community is teaching Spanish-speaking women how to use a computer. The main concern for Spanish-speaking adults seems to be security on the Internet for their children. They are aware that their children are learning

computer skills and gaining access to computers at school or other areas. The Spanish-speaking adults want to purchase computers to help their children excel in school, but they (the parents) don't know how to use them or navigate the Internet. A family bought a computer a month before I started at the Housing Authority computer lab. They had no idea how to set it up, connect the Internet or how to use the computer. They returned it and bought linoleum to re-do the kitchen floor instead. Two families went out to buy a computer after one hour of lessons they received from me. This really amazed me and was a deciding factor for me to stay and finish my term.

My most significant accomplishment is to leave behind a binder as a resource tool for the Computer Lab. It consists of all the lessons and resource material I have gathered or created. I have learned that a lot of the drop in students seemed to be somewhat intimidated with all the "techie" jargon. So I decided to write uncomplicated lessons in words they can understand.

My computer skills have increased and I have worked in creating a computer and resource center accessible to the public. It is now a resource center for children ages 5-17 and for adults ages 18 to 100 or more.

This was not an easy task and this is how I did it:

1) Perseverance – hard work, determination and pain

- 2) "Keeping the End in Mind," a phrase Linda Lopez repeated over and over through the year. At my turning point, when I would have to decide to persevere, I realized that the end was not there yet.
- 3) Nothing else matters, "Just get the job done."

**Matt Ketchum: Stanislaus County
Department of Employment & Training,
Modesto CA**



My most significant contribution was creating Internet, computer and MSWord workshops at DET with my partner, Robert Gonzales. Most of the clients at the DET are looking for job skills. The workshops we created helps them with

technology skills that they need now to compete for better jobs.

I have seen students go through computer Part 1 and 2, then Internet 1 and 2, and finally take the MSWord Part 1 and Part 2. Going from not using the mouse to searching for jobs on the Internet, writing their resume in MSWord and then sending it out as an attachment in e-mail. These are powerful skills they are learning, and I am happy to help in the process to help others use the computer as a tool and make it benefit them with finding a better life.

In this microwave society, tech skills are being more demanded and if you do not have them, you may be left behind. So, I am happy to help not leave others behind.

My most significant accomplishment is not something that I did but something that I have gained this year and they are my friends, Ginny and Dick Burk.

They are not just my host family giving me a place to live and eat, but also my best friends here in California. They spoil me so much with their unselfish acts and kindness. Dick makes me laugh even if have had a long and hard day, he seems to know what to say to make it better. Ginny has taken me to so many places in California and showed me the great sights of the state that I never would have seen this year without her. Being from another state and not knowing anyone out here, they have made it feel like home for me and that unselfishness to let me in their house allows me to be a VISTA volunteer with the Central Valley Digital Network.

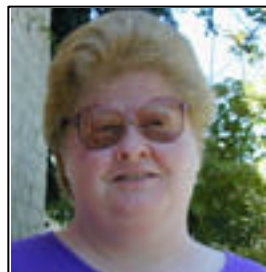
So, everything I have been able to do to help others with technology skills is due to the kindness of my host family, giving me a place to stay to carry on these awesome duties.

They have also reached out to help me figure out what I am going to do after VISTA and have given me a huge relief from always worrying where I am going to live after my volunteer service is over.

Thank you Ginny and Dick for being there for me.

**Martha Medina: Sutter Library, Yuba City
CA/FREED, Marysville CA**

My most significant contribution is providing one-on-one classes to people who are uncomfortable in a class setting, and embarrassed to ask questions in front of a group of people.



I have provided a safe, comfortable learning situation for people who would fall through the cracks of a formal education.

People with different learning styles and abilities are being helped to learn technology and grow enough in their confidence to benefit from the more formal group learning experience.

I feel my most significant accomplishment this year has been learning perseverance. I continued the year when I was moved from my first site to the second. The second site was even more unpleasant than the first, and I wanted to quit. But, I was moved again.

The situation was a lot better, but now I had to learn how to teach, and to learn how to make up lesson plans. I had to sit down with people and know what I was talking about (or at least act like I did). It was hard work for a shy person like me, and at times, I wanted to quit. At times I wanted to, but I didn't. And now, I am glad I hung in there.

Look at all the invaluable experience I have now. Look at all the new computer knowledge I have gained. Look at all the great people I have met and enjoyed. Look at all the inner-strength I have now that I didn't have before. I am stronger, smarter and more confident. Yes, it was worth it.

Joel Pimentel, Sutter Library, Yuba City CA

My contribution to the community was in being helpful in something that they need to learn so they can help their children to do homework or even to use the computer. And it was exciting how they asked questions during class because that is what you are waiting for. Also, to let people know that we are here to help. They can know that there is someone there if they need the help on something.



Nancy Bright, Yuba Library, Marysville CA

My most significant contribution to the community is the benefit that the site has enjoyed from my service as a VISTA is a much more computer savvy patron base than before I began offering the classes. Upwards of 200 patrons have taken the beginning computer classes. Our Library has just completed the process of getting the Library automated. The classes have greatly increased the patrons' comfort level with using the computers and it has helped in the transition to automation. The number of patrons who used the computers has increased due to the Library's classes.



The community has benefited in that there are upwards of 200 more people who have taken the class and are more comfortable with using a computer and many are continuing to increase their knowledge of computers.

In addition, through the training that I have received from both the VISTA and IDEAL programs, I have become more involved, concerned and informed community member. This will bring continuing benefits to my community in the future as I stay involved.

I have always been involved in trying to improve the quality of life for the small sphere of influence that my life has come in contact with. My most significant accomplishment in my term of service as a CVDN VISTA has to be the fact that I have been "forced" (with the abundant support of the GVC staff) to reach outside of that small sphere and to learn to network and to "grow" that sphere of influence. I have always had the desire to be more involved with my community and my experience this year has absolutely given me that opportunity.

It is difficult to put into words, but to try, I would have to say that by nature I am a tortoise – methodical, slow and plodding. (I was) completely happy to live within my shell of protection and to pull inside whenever uncomfortable situations arise.

I think of my mother who for the 14 years since my father passed away, has been content to stay at home to do her own thing, and does not belong to any group or club.

I am thankful for the opportunities that I have experienced this year to grow and to learn. I think my greatest challenge for they year ahead will be to reinforce the networking and reaching out process so that I do not regress back to my old nature.

*These are the stories of the 2000-01
AmeriCorps*VISTA Members of the Central
Valley Digital Network at the Great Valley
Center.*

*The Great Valley Center
911 13th Street
Modesto, CA 95354
www.greatvalley.org*