

Pima College Adult Education Family Literacy AmeriCorps Program. Tucson, AZ.
Gerie Espinoza, Coordinator

Mission Statement

Pima College Adult Education builds partnerships with the community to provide adult learners with opportunities to acquire foundational skills and knowledge to enrich themselves, their families, their workplaces, and their community.

History

Pima College Adult Education (PCAE) has been providing services to adults for more than thirty years. In 1992 and in 2000, PCAE received the U.S. Secretary of Education's Award as one of the country's top ten *Outstanding Adult Education and Literacy Programs*. In spring of 1993, the Metropolitan Education Commission of Tucson and Pima County gave its *Crystal Apple Award* to PCAE for *truly outstanding and singularly innovative achievements in education excellence*.

Summary of the Pima College Adult Education Family Literacy AmeriCorps Program

The hallmark of the Pima College Adult Education Family Literacy Program is the Family Literacy AmeriCorps project, which began in 1994 through a grant from the National Center for Family Literacy. Since 1997, the project has been state funded with 85% funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the remaining funding from Even Start and Pima County. As a testament to their success, while the Corporation for National and Community Service was downsizing programs across the country, the Pima College Family Literacy AmeriCorps program doubled in size and scope.

Most (73%) of the AmeriCorps volunteers are graduates of the family literacy program at Pima College, thus bringing their experience and understanding of family literacy to their volunteer placement. The program has expanded to include collaborative work with libraries, schools, Head Start, food banks, shelter homes, businesses, and civic organizations.

The director, family literacy staff, and collaborating partners attribute the strong retention of AmeriCorps volunteers to their unconditional support of the members. They provide a yearlong training plan that is organized into three phases: Orientation, Ongoing, and Life after AmeriCorps.

Services Performed

- In addition to tutoring 222 children and 743 adults during this program year, AmeriCorps members facilitated 30 educational events, including four eight-week summer learning programs for families.
- Members volunteer in a career-linked non-profit organization, matching their skills with the needs of the site.
- Through newsletters and public meetings, members share their powerful stories of success with the community at large. They have completed 16 presentations and publications this year.
- Members recruited 46 non-AmeriCorps members to volunteer in the community, with a strong focus on activities in public schools and adult learning centers. An example

of one project is a community garden inside a school. The AmeriCorps members held focus groups with third- through fifth-graders to decide on a project. After the children decided on a community garden, they took a neighborhood walk to ask community members for their input and to gain their support. The project brought in community members who contributed their skills, time and money. The children learned how to select desert-hardy plants, as well as how to plant them and care for them.

Concluding Statement

AmeriCorps director Gerie Espinoza explains that it takes unconditional support from the family literacy staff, as well as realistic expectations for the AmeriCorps members, to administer the successful program. However, the members bring resources to the family literacy program that would not be obtained otherwise. Through regular counseling sessions, meetings with other volunteers, encouragement, and troubleshooting, successful placements are assured. This builds the *esprit de corps* – the common spirit existing in the members of a group and inspiring enthusiasm, devotion, and strong regard for the honor of the group. The AmeriCorps members believe in their program and work to serve the program for the good of the community, the families, and all AmeriCorps members.