

YouthBuild Gulfport, Mississippi: An Update



AmeriCorps Members Kevin Kelly and Vu Le share a moment with MCVS board members Withers, Skelton, and Blessey. This room was gutted and restored by the YouthBuild Isles AmeriCorps team members and YouthBuild AmeriCorps Gulfport team members.

After rebuilding over 100 homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina through the YouthBuild AmeriCorps Katrina Rebuilding Project, YouthBuild USA helped to establish a permanent YouthBuild AmeriCorps program in Gulfport, Mississippi. This program serves the Gulf Coast community and engages Gulf Coast youth in the reconstruction of their community as well as their own lives. The YouthBuild AmeriCorps Gulfport program was first funded by the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Services (MCVS), which has a mission to engage and sup-

port Mississippians of all ages and backgrounds in service to their own communities. More recently, the U.S. Department of Labor selected YouthBuild Gulfport for funding in a national competition.

The YouthBuild AmeriCorps Gulfport program provides 35 low-income, out-of-school, out-of-work young people the opportunity to earn their GEDs, gain construction experience, receive living allowances while learning, and at the same time provide service to their community through volunteering. They also earn Segal AmeriCorps



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Education Awards to help pay the costs of their postsecondary education.

In June 2008, leaders of MCVS came to Gulfport to visit the service site of the YouthBuild AmeriCorps Katrina Rebuilding Program. A home damaged by Hurricane Katrina had been gutted and restored by a team of YouthBuild Isles AmeriCorps members from Trenton, New Jersey, and YouthBuild AmeriCorps Gulfport team members. Marsha Meeks Kelly, MCVS executive director, visited the site with board members William T. Withers, Marcie Skelton, Deborah Johnson Schumaker, Dr. Joseph Haynes, Roktabija Abdul-Azeez, and Katherine Blessey; and staff members Margaret Graham, deputy director; Janet Hillebrand, AmeriCorps VISTA; and Jennifer Delmas, disaster training coordinator.

The board members and staff heard the story of the elderly homeowner who has resided in a FEMA trailer since the hurricane in 2005. They also talked with Lauretta Richards, 1st Missionary Baptist Disaster Office case manager who works with many elderly members of the community. She informed them about the great need for programs like YouthBuild to continue. ♦