



NEWS RELEASE  
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## **Hadlyme, Connecticut Volunteer Working to Strengthen Afterschool Programs in Farmington, Maine**

### ***Meagan Erhart Completes Service Along With 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 Farmington, Maine, 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. Meagan Erhart, an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, worked with the Afterschool Alliance to change that.

Along with eight other VISTA volunteers selected from across the country, Erhart worked to increase local participation in free afterschool and summer meals programs. Her work included identifying local resources and needs and collaborating with local and national leaders to strengthen afterschool programs in Farmington. She worked closely with the Maine Afterschool Network. She began her service in November of last year, and completes her service this month. 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 had the support of Meagan Erhart in Farmington, Maine. We are grateful for the contributions she made 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.

Erhart helped with to expanding 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 worked with several different communities in Maine, 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 also worked 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 15 percent of Maine's K-12 students are in afterschool programs, while 33 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](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org).*