

## LISC's AmeriCorps: Building Stronger Neighborhoods

**M**ai Lor Xiong grew up in a Hmong family that spoke no English. As a teenager living on the East Side of St. Paul, one of her roles was to translate at events and meetings to help her family understand English-speakers.

Recognizing the importance of that role, someone from the East Side Neighborhood Development Company (ESNDC) offered her a part-time job working with Hmong families who needed help filling out applications in English and participating in community meetings. When her job responsibilities grew, ESNDC encouraged her to apply to become a 2010-2011 Twin Cities LISC's AmeriCorps Member.

"When I found out that I was chosen I was so excited that I would be able to assist more families," says Mai Lor. "Being at ESNDC as a LISC AmeriCorps member has changed the way I feel about my neighbors, my community, and myself. This year I will serve to make a difference in my neighborhood. I will create my own story."



*Mai Lor Xiong*

### The importance of human capital

Two years ago, Twin Cities LISC began placing AmeriCorps participants like Mai Lor in local community development organizations to help create stronger neighborhoods across the metro area, especially in areas where LISC focuses its work. AmeriCorps is a federal program that gives people an opportunity to apply their skills to meet critical needs in communities across the country.

AmeriCorps is one of LISC's strategies to build *human* capital, which can be as important as physical and economic capital to neighborhood transformation. This year in the Twin Cities, 11 2010-2011 LISC AmeriCorps participants from widely varying backgrounds rehabilitated foreclosed and abandoned homes, provided foreclosure counseling and homebuyer training, did outreach and education programming, and organized residents and organizations to work more collaboratively to improve their neighborhoods.

It's a win-win proposition—host organizations make good use of participants' expertise for a year, and participants get a taste of community development work. It's putting people to work in a tough economy and filling important roles and activities that would otherwise go undone at organizations with constrained budgets—it's a job creator. LISC AmeriCorps members are paid an annual stipend of

\$18,000 and upon successful completion of a minimum of 1,700 hours of service, they earn an education award of \$5,350. We're now recruiting 14 new 2011-2012 AmeriCorps participants.

## Tornado relief in North Minneapolis

A great illustration of their value is how three AmeriCorps participants contributed their time and skills to help last May's tornado victims on the North Side of Minneapolis. The event and its aftermath united North Side organizations and residents in aid of those affected by the damage. Matthew McGlory, who serves as a community outreach specialist at Northway Community Trust, helped cut felled trees and clear debris.



*Matthew McGlory*

David Morris, a real estate specialist at Urban Homeworks, a North Minneapolis CDC, helped manage crew assignments when more than 5,000 volunteers from across the community came to Urban Homeworks to respond to the need. David and many others literally moved tons of debris in a matter of days. Donna Evans, whose AmeriCorps position is with St. Paul's Aurora St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation, did door-to-door checks on shut-ins, prepared food and daily need bags, and sorted donations and distributed them to affected North Side residents.

"My AmeriCorps experience provides an opportunity to serve people in the community in many ways, says Donna, "and it broadens my vision of who we can be in the world of service to others. I am an AmeriCorps servant and it fills my spirit with joy."

Other 2010-2011 LISC AmeriCorps participants include:

- James Bacigalupo, homeownership advisor at PRG (region-wide)
- Ann Beuch, community organizer for the Blake Road Corridor Collaborative (Hosted by Intercongregation Communities Association) (Hopkins)
- Amanda Dionne, community development assistant at the Native American Community Development Institute (South Minneapolis)
- Laura Hodges, home ownership support coordinator at the Minnesota Home Ownership Center (region-wide)
- Ian Plitnick, project assistant at the Greater Frogtown Community Development Corporation (Central Corridor)
- Margaret Scott, homeownership and foreclosure prevention counselor at the Neighborhood Development Alliance (St. Paul)
- Arielle Strachan, Community Engagement Specialist at Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center (South Minneapolis)

**Twin Cities LISC's total investment in local AmeriCorps participants to date: \$170,000**