

Career building, social change at core of Public Allies

By Ashley Gilliam

As people across Arizona search for employment, they may be overlooking the opportunity of a lifetime to invest in their own futures.

Public Allies is one of the most highly regarded programs for those interested in the nonprofit sector seeking to gain knowledge and on-the-job training. Participants in Public Allies are diverse in culture, education and professional background, but all share the drive to become new leaders who strengthen communities, nonprofits and civic participation.

Public Allies is an AmeriCorps program of the ASU Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation. This unique program identifies young, talented adults from diverse backgrounds and prepares them for careers working for community and social change.

Allies, the term used for those accepted to the Public Allies program, serve 40 hours each week in 10-month paid apprenticeships at local nonprofits, and participate in a rigorous and rewarding leadership development program with a diverse group of peers who also are working within their home community.

Allies are at a variety of life stages and don't always consider themselves "leaders" in the traditional sense. Many are like Rachel Finch, a 23-year-old Ally at Aid to Adoption of Special Kids (AASK), who never thought of herself as a leader, but through this experience realized that she had all the skills necessary to take charge and make a difference. Another reason she was drawn to Public Allies was for the opportunity to experience a field before she invested in a degree.

"I'm getting all this experience in 10 months that I couldn't get in a classroom environment," Finch says.

Public Allies is for those who are truly dedicated, says Finch, who works at a spa when she is not at her apprenticeship. Despite her hectic schedule, she says that it is definitely worth it.

"My favorite thing about Public Allies is the networking," she says. "I get to hear from all the other Allies about how it is to work at their organization. I've also learned very important tools such as time and money management, organization, making positive connections with others, and a lot about what is happening in the community."

Those who are accepted into the program

"Public Allies trains the next generation of philanthropists, and we need this service now more than ever."

– Steve Yamamori,

executive director of Fighter Country Partnership

receive priceless experience in a nonprofit organization as well as leadership development programming, with other added benefits to aid them in this time of personal and professional growth. During the 10-month period, there is a stipend of \$13,500 – and, at the time of graduation from the program, a taxable educational credit of \$4,725 is awarded to each Ally.

AmeriCorps health insurance also is issued to Allies during their apprenticeship. Child care assistance is available if an Ally is eligible, as well as interest-free loan deferment for qualified student loans.

Ally Jenn Sinkey, a 28-year-old single mom, is also at AASK. She is working on her social and community service degree, and has another full-time job on top of her apprenticeship. The most important things that she says she has learned in this process have been how to be a better leader, and that she loves being with people and serving them in any way possible. She believes that people should consider Public Allies to have the opportunity to serve in a tangible way.

"Public Allies sets up the opportunities for you, and to participate is such a blessing," Sinkey says.

The nonprofit organizations that partner with Public Allies reap numerous benefits from the partnership as well. The organizations get the opportunity to add to their staff a dedicated young person who is energetic and enthusiastic about the nonprofit sector. The organization gets to create a wish list of projects they have hoped to initiate, but without the help of the Ally may not have the manpower to accomplish. Additionally, the cost of this great employee is much lower than that of any other full-time employee.

Steve Yamamori, executive director and chief

executive officer of Fighter Country Partnership, which supports and advocates for more than 6,000 airmen stationed at Luke Air Force Base in Glendale, Ariz., is in the first year of being a partner organization with Public Allies.

"I feel Public Allies trains the next generation of philanthropists," Yamamori says. "And we need this service now more than ever."

Public Allies began 17 years ago in Washington, D.C., and grew the next year to Chicago thanks to the founding executive director, first lady Michelle Obama. It now is in 15 communities and is entering its fourth year in Phoenix. Last year, 63 percent of the 20 graduates in Phoenix received job placement at their apprenticeships. With a national unemployment rate of 8.1 percent in February, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, this program is giving hope to the future for those passionate about community and social change.

"The success of Public Allies in the three short years it has been here in Phoenix is tremendous," says Michelle Lyons-Mayer, program director of Public Allies Arizona. "It's an extremely rewarding experience to give these talented young adults the opportunity to learn about the nonprofit sector, outside and in, while also obtaining valuable leadership skills."

The application deadline for the upcoming program year is May 29. Applicants must be between the ages of 18-30, be a U.S. citizen, and be available for a 40- to 50-hour week internship. For more information, or to fill out an application, visit the Web site <http://publicallies.asu.edu>.

Gilliam, with the ASU Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation, can be reached at ashley.gilliam@asu.edu.