

2021: Dubuque National Service Recognition Award Nomination Form

Category nominated for: National Service Impact Award

Name of nominee/member: Tessie Strohm

National Service Program and/or host organizations: City of Dubuque AmeriCorps Program: Creating Opportunities

Nominator Name: Sarah Petersen, Multicultural Family Center Assistant Director/Site Supervisor

Please tell us a little about the background and personal circumstances relating to the individual or organization being nominated for the award:

Tessie Strohm is a single mother of two, a Dubuque community member and a student working toward her Bachelor's Degree. Tessie has faced personal challenges throughout her life including homelessness and living out of her car. She has consistently risen to the occasion and overcome several barriers.

Please tell us about the service effort relating to the Nominee. Please include what have they done and how long have they volunteered, how frequently, how many hours, etc:

Tessie has served with AmeriCorps at the MFC during the summer of 2019, summer of 2020 and full-time September 2020 through August 2021 equating to 2,300 hours. She has started her 4th term, full-time September 2021 through August 2022 which will be an additional 1,700 hours.

During the summers of 2019 & 2020, Tessie served in STEP-Summer Teen Empowerment Program. STEP is a service-learning based program focusing on developing life skills, with an emphasis on community building, workforce readiness and social and emotional learning. She worked directly with 40 teenagers summer 2019 and 20 teenagers (in-person) summer 2020 during Covid-19.

In STEP she built relationships with the teens in a supervisor role, assisted in teaching teens the responsibilities of having a job and respecting their supervisors. She also led activities based on social justice, nutrition and health, environmental education and community service. Tessie built strong relationships with many of the teens during this time. In particular, one teen trusted Tessie with sharing their personal challenges around their gender identity. Through Tessie's care and guidance, the teen felt confident and safe to come out as non-binary at the graduation of the program. They thanked Tessie for her support and advice throughout the summer.

During the 2020/2021 school-school year, Tessie served as a Teen Engagement Coordinator. She was essential in planning and executing virtual learning and eventually in-person programming for the weekly Teen Night and TAB-Teen Advisory Board program. Tessie also assisted MFC teens canvassing neighborhoods with the Teen Resiliency Corps in partnership with Sustainable Dubuque. She has played a vital role in recruiting teens and is often in contact with the parents of the teens encouraging engagement in MFC programs and events. During this time frame Tessie served 85 teens.

The summer of 2021 she worked primarily with the Teen Night program which ran four nights per week and served 70 teens throughout the summer. Because Tessie served two summers with STEP, she was also an asset to the new STEP Manager, assisting with planning and offering advice.

How has the Nominee made a significant contribution to a population, organization, or community during their term of service:

During her service, Tessie has worked specifically with teenagers. The teens we serve are typically at risk, marginalized and under resourced. The demographics are on average: 70% teens of color and 84% qualify for free and reduce meals. The majority of the teens either walk or take the bus to attend our programs and come from single-family households.

She is very accepting of the teens and who they are. Tessie brings ideas to the table and is willing to help out whenever needed. She will take on extra tasks if it means the teens will have a greater benefit.

Tessie understands the impact her service has on the lives of the teens. As a caring adult, she understands the responsibility in how she presents herself, her behavior and how she treats others. She knows the teens are impressionable and her actions matter.

Tessie recently ran into two teenagers who participated in STEP this summer. They both had just obtained jobs at a place in the mall and were excited to see Tessie and tell their story. In turn, Tessie was excited to tell the staff at the MFC. She became teary eyed sharing the story and realizing the impact she has had.

How has the Nominee demonstrated leadership abilities in their Service and/or among their peers?*

Tessie often takes initiative during the program with regards managing the group and executing plans. At times, when a group is struggling, Tessie is quick to jump in to assist with solving their disagreements or uncertainties.

It is very apparent that Tessie enjoys getting to know new AmeriCorps members during the summer. Because of her past experience, the new members will often go to Tessie for advice and she is very willing to lead and assist where ever needed.

How has the Nominee demonstrated a spirit of cooperation among groups of people and organizations?*

Tessie shows up every day with a smile on her face ready to take on the day. She has a very positive attitude and likes to lift others up.

Tessie makes a difference by casting a positive light over all of the staff. She brings joy and is always looking at the glass as half full. The teens have noticed this as well as the staff. She gives them a sense of hope and empowerment.

How has the Nominee displayed exemplary work ethic and commitment to duties?*

Tessie has a very strong work ethic and often goes above and beyond her duties and our expectations. She is committed to her service outside of her schedule within the community. She has worked for the school district in the past and often uses her connections to assist with MFC programming.