



SIUE students provide academic support and mentorship to area children through America Reads program

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EDWARDSVILLE - From future educators, accountants and social workers, to those still undecided about their future profession, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville students involved in the Project Advance - America Reads program are gaining invaluable professional skills and developing as engaged, thoughtful citizens.

Project Advance - America Reads is an AmeriCorps program run through the Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House. SIUE has been a program partner since 1997,

coordinating tutoring opportunities for its students at locations spread throughout Madison and St. Clair Counties.

The federal grant provides approximately \$23,000 in annual funding to support some 55 SIUE students, who upon completing 300 service hours, earn an AmeriCorps education stipend.

“Just by showing up to help at a school for a few days a week, I’m making such a difference in the lives of local children,” said Tashawna Nash, a senior studying accounting, and three-year America Reads program participant. “I get to see their confidence grow as they begin to understand math better and transition from needing help to being more independent.”

The Peoria native tutors third and fourth grade students in South Roxana. Fellow SIUE students are making a similar impact at the approximately 14 other sites SIUE partners with to provide tutoring. Preschool through middle school students in communities such as Collinsville, Edwardsville, Glen Carbon, East St. Louis, Bethalto, Alton, Granite City and O’Fallon are also benefiting from the program.

SIUE program coordinator, computer science instructor and University alumnus Erin Harris emphasizes that the America Reads program is a win for all involved.

“Some of our community partners couldn’t offer this kind of service, if not for SIUE students,” Harris said. “They rely on the students’ help to keep some programs going. SIUE is putting federal work study money back into the community through this program. And, students are getting paid for their hours and receiving the education stipend. America Reads is truly a win-win.”

“This partnership with SIUE has enhanced our services by providing the additional hands needed to help children with their homework or sit and read a book with them,” said Fairmont City Library Center Manager Katie Heaton. “Many passionate students have come through the America Reads program. They’ve spent countless hours with children at our library forming personal relationships, reading, assisting in homework, listening to family issues and playing educational games.”

America Reads is sophomore Donnie Bland’s first job. The Belleville native couldn’t think of a better organization to join to make such a positive impact on multiple communities.

“I love working with kids,” Bland said. “I work at two sites in Collinsville to support a diverse age group, and help with mostly math and reading. This program has provided me with the opportunity make money during college, and refine certain values, such as patience, respect and open-mindedness.”

Personal growth and strengthened confidence are common benefits of the program, enjoyed by both the tutors and the students.

“These children can be coming home from school to an empty house,” Heaton explained. “But, coming to the library to see friendly faces and spend quality time with an SIUE student can change their lives. I have seen growth on both sides of the group, especially with tutors majoring in education or social issues.”

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River’s rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of nearly 14,000.