

## The Business Of Empowering Youth

By *Katie Henry*

Concord, NH - June 6, 2009 - Youth Venture, a really cool social entrepreneurship program, recently entered our radar when we were asked to serve on a judging panel. Always flattered when asked our opinion, we agreed to serve.

In our brief panel stint, which lasted an hour, we managed to learn a lot about the nonprofit group, including the fact that the New England headquarters are right here in Concord! Not Boston, but Concord, Cowhampshire. (Thanks, New Hampshire Historical Society, for the Cowhampshire T-shirts. We are now trying to work in the reference whenever possible.)

If you're not impressed yet, you should know that Youth Venture is an international organization with offices in 17 different countries. Is the coolness factor sinking in yet? Okay, good.

After the panel ended, we promised to contact the group in the summer. We made good on that promise last week when we visited its office in the Concord Center. That's the office building off of North Main Street, best known for its hilly terrain in the parking lot. We made the staff fill out a questionnaire (see right) and chatted about the program.

Youth Venture, we were told, is part of an organization called Ashoka. Ashoka helps adults get their social entrepreneurship ideas off the ground and keeps those entrepreneurs connected with one another. Youth Venture was founded in 1996 to do exactly that, but with young people ages 12 to 20. "Venturers," young adult teams with a community-benefitting plan in place, can contact Youth Venture to apply for seed funding of up to \$1,000 for their project. Teams also receive support from Youth Venture as they promote and raise money for their work.

Teams must submit an action plan and present their project to a panel put together by the Youth Venture staff (that would be the panel the Insiders made an appearance on). Venturers only receive seed money if approved by the panel. To get approved, the team has to demonstrate that its venture benefits the community, is youth-created and youth-led, is a new organization or a major new program of an existing organization, is ongoing and sustainable and has clear, attainable goals and a realistic budget. Talk about having to do your homework!

One thing the staff mentioned was the level of professionalism the Venturers have - you almost forget how old they are. Once a team is approved, it gets the seed money and continue to work with the Youth Venture program. Staff help with fundraising and media exposure and keep them posted on competitions for extra funding. The team also completes a three-month and 12-month evaluation. Plus, teams are connected to the global network of teens trying to change the world (or at least their community). It's not just about the money - it's about a youth movement to help solve some of the world's problems.

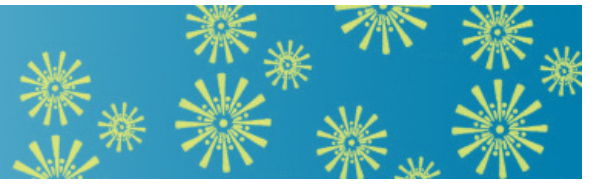
In spite of Youth Venture's convenient location, it only recently approved a Concord High team, the first from the area. We've got the story on that venture, Wakati Ujao (see related articles).

Youth Venture, including the office here in Concord, is staffed by AmeriCorp Vista volunteers. Vista is a national service program designed specifically to fight poverty. Volunteers look for job opportunities posted on the Vista site, or can post their resume to be contacted by a site coordinator. If hired, they receive a stipend, health insurance and at the end of their service, money to put toward school expenses or a post-service stipend.

The staff at the Concord Youth Venture come from all over the country, so we were excited to get their thoughts on the city. Keep reading for their views on Concord!

For more information on Youth Venture, visit [genv.net](http://genv.net). For information on AmeriCorps Vista, visit [americorps.gov](http://americorps.gov).

Are you between the ages of 13-18? Visit [at15.com](http://at15.com) to vote for the organization you think should get 1 million dollars donated by Best Buy. Complete activities, get awarded points, and help earn additional funding for Youth Venture. Got to [at15.com](http://at15.com) for details.



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### **Jessica Shoemaker - 22, Knoxville, Tenn.**

**Favorite Ice cream flavor:** *Ben and Jerry's Chunky Monkey. (Yum!)*

**What do you do for Youth Venture?** *Program association – outreach and programming.*

**How did you get involved with the program?** *I was looking into AmeriCorps positions and learned about Youth Venture on their website. Once I read about Youth Venture New England, I knew I wanted to be included!*

**What's the best thing about working for Youth Venture?** *The Venturers! I really love working with young people as they develop and implement plans to help the community. It is amazing to see what they come up with and wonderful to have the opportunity to help them.*

**What's it like living in the Concord area? Were you aware before you signed on how long winter lasts around here?** *I severely misjudged how long and cold the winter would be! I had never seen more than a few inches of snow before I came to Concord, so it came as a bit of a shock. But I had a lot of fun learning to ski and skate!*

**What's one thing you think Concord really needs?** *More places to eat! Really, I love to eat.*

**What do you miss from home?** *Southern things like SEC Football, southern accents, sweet tea and short winters! And my family, of course.*



### **Bret Carr - 24, Peoria, Ill.**

**Favorite Ice cream flavor:** *Chocolate chip cookie dough.*

**What do you do for Youth Venture?** *Program associate virtual team, French outreach (mentor to French teams) and help with Youth Venture New England (events, Dream It Do It Challenge).*

**How did you get involved with the program?** *Put in an application on Americorps.gov and I was contacted by the New England manager, Lidia Pedro.*

**What's the best thing about working for Youth Venture?** *Working with amazing, inspiring youth and being amazed everyday by their intelligence and motivation.*

**What's it like living in the Concord area? Were you aware before you signed on how long winter lasts around here?** *Well, it's not bad so far. I haven't been here through the winter yet, and I'm a little intimidated. Snow's always fun but I'm not sure how I'll deal with a couple feet of it. But yes, I was aware before I signed on.*

**What's one thing you think Concord really needs?** *An outdoor amphitheater for outside dancing, movies performances, etc.*

**What do you miss from home?** *The comfort of know where everything's at!*



### **Elizabeth Bandy - 22, Minneapolis, Minn.**

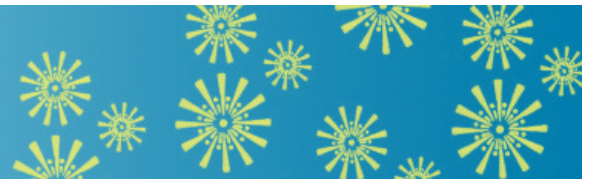
**Favorite Ice cream flavor:** *Chocolate chip with chunks of cookie dough, smothered over a warm brownie.*

**What do you do for Youth Venture?** *Marketing and media.*

**How did you get involved with the program?** *I found out about Youth Venture on idealist.org, which routed me to AmeriCorps.gov. I interviewed over the phone and fell in love with the program.*

**What's the best thing about working for Youth Venture?** *I love seeing the impact Youth Venture has on kids – watching them go from under appreciated and having very few outlets to express themselves in, to powerful, passionate change makers that are ready to accept challenges. It's inspiring.*





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**What's it like living in the Concord area? Were you aware before you signed on how long winter lasts around here?**

*Concord has grown on me. We joke about it being a cookie-cutter city but I really think it's a safe, clean place. The winters here are a breeze, though! It gets below 20 degrees in Minneapolis and it's too cold to snow! The land and the seasons are some of my favorite things about Concord.*

**What's one thing you think Concord really needs?** *I would love to have more live music! If we had some sort of outdoor pavilion where the community could dance and just hang out. I really think youth need more options.*

**What do you miss from home?** *The public transportation in Minneapolis was fantastic! New Hampshire is very "green," but it would be great if we had a more developed transportation system so we didn't have to drive.*

### **Suria Lloyd - 23, Rochester, N.Y.**



**Favorite ice cream flavor:** *Ben and Jerry's Phish Food.*

**What do you do for Youth Venture?** *Program development associate – connecting Youth Venture and its parent organization Ashoka. Vista Leader – Vista orientation and training.*

**How did you get involved with the program?** *I was looking for AmeriCorps Vista positions after I graduated from college and had applied to a bunch of positions.*

**What's the best thing about working for Youth Venture?** *The great team of people I work with! I've gotten to do a lot of different things over two years – development, outreach and working with great Venture teams.*

**What's it like living in the Concord area? Were you aware before you signed on how long winter lasts around here?** *Not quite! We have winter in Rochester, N.Y., but I think it's colder here even though it's the same amount of snow. What I really like about Concord are Red River Theatres, skating on the pond during winter and skiing at Pats Peak 20 minutes away.*

**What's one thing you think Concord really needs?** *A coffee shop besides the in Borders that is open after 9 p.m.*

**What do you miss from home?** *On-street overnight parking on all streets.*

### **John Dillman - 24, Portland, Maine**

**Favorite ice cream flavor:** *Cookies 'n cream.*

**What do you do for Youth Venture?** *I support our network of Venture teams. I am basically a consultant – I work with them to help them achieve their goals, troubleshoot problems that arise and connect them to opportunities (grants, events in their area, etc.).*

**How did you get involved with the program?** *I learned of the program when I was living in Kathmandu, Nepal. My volunteer work really inspired me to join an organization that works with youth. It is really up to younger generations to find solutions to the world's big problems.*

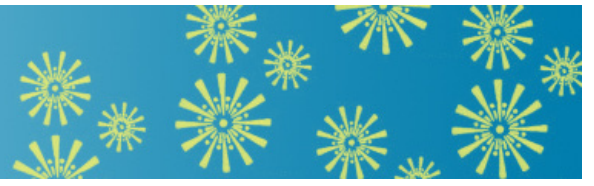
**What's the best thing about working for Youth Venture?** *Working with the kids! Seeing them take on and solve problems that I didn't even know existed when I was in middle/high school*

**What's it like living in the Concord area? Were you aware before you signed on how long winter lasts around here?** *It is nice! Being from Maine, I knew what I was getting into. I love the outdoors and spend a lot of time riding my mountain bike at Bear Brook and skiing in the Whites!*

**What's one thing you think Concord really needs?** *A summer music festival and bike lanes. Concord is small and could be a lot more bike friendly. Also, a monster sledding hill for the winter.*

**What do you miss from home?** *I miss being near the ocean. I also miss my mom's cooking.*





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### Jessica O'Neal - 24, Columbia, Md.



**Favorite ice cream flavor:** *Mint chocolate chip*

**What do you do for Youth Venture?** *Media and marketing. I promote Youth Venture New England and venturers to the New England region.*

**How did you get involved with the program?** *AmeriCorps Vista program.*

**What's the best thing about working for Youth Venture?** *Meeting incredibly smart and driven kids. They come up with some fantastic, creative solutions to some serious issues facing our world. It's incredibly inspiring to work with them. I feel like I'm part of the solution. The staff is amazing, too!*

**What's it like living in the Concord area?** *Were you aware before you signed on how long winter lasts around here? It's great! I love the small town feel. Being able to walk everywhere (and feel safe) is a huge perk! I was warned how long the winters were before moving here, but needed to experience it for myself to really understand! It's not so bad.*

**What's one thing you think Concord really needs?** *More live music!*

**What do you miss from home?** *My friends and family.*

### Rob Alexander - 30, Aiken, S.C.

**Favorite ice cream flavor:** *Ben and Jerry's Americone Dream.*

**What do you do for Youth Venture?** *I am sort of special projects. At the moment I am working on a video project for our Staples partnership and a new landing page for our website. I also deal with technical issues in the office.*

**How did you get involved with the program?** *I started January '07 as an AmeriCorps Vista, but have since been hired as a consultant. I have worked with youth and nonprofits for a long time, so Youth Venture was a good fit.*

**What's the best thing about working for Youth Venture?** *Helping inspire the youth and see the amazing changes they are able to create.*

**What's it like living in the Concord area?** *Were you aware before you signed on how long winter lasts around here? Concord is a lot like my hometown in South Carolina, which is pretty laid back. I like that it's a relaxed community that still has places you can go for a good time. I'm a huge fan of the winters, even though they took a bit to get used to. Now I spend as much time at Pat's Peak as possible.*

**What's one thing you think Concord really needs?** *Better public transit/bike lanes.*

**What do you miss from home?** *Sweet tea.*

