



Thought Leadership Corner

By Laurel Gower, Former Project RISE AmeriCorps Member

[About the Author](#)

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Reflections on a Year of Service

When I was about to graduate college in the spring of 2014, all of my friends seemed to have everything figured out. They had jobs lined up, new apartments in new cities, and they were ready to start their new lives after college. I, on the other hand, had no idea where I'd be living, what I'd be doing, or even where to start. I was planning to apply to medical school immediately after graduation, but that would leave a full year open before I could start school. I knew I wanted to do something different—something outside of my comfort zone, not related to medicine, but still fulfilling and fun.

I stumbled across AmeriCorps while I was looking for volunteer opportunities in the Atlanta area. There were a couple different Atlanta AmeriCorps sites, but the one at **New American Pathways** (at the time RRISA and RFS) caught my eye. The AmeriCorps member description suited me well—I liked the idea of being in the office for part of the day and spending time in an afterschool program for the afternoon. I had never worked with refugees before, and I was excited to get to know this unique population of immigrants.

Throughout my time at New AP, I learned much more about the refugee resettlement process than I had ever known. I got to know clients from around the world, listened as they spoke about life before their move, and encouraged as they made plans for their new lives in the United States. My co-members, as well as all of the New AP staff, were some of the most unique and wonderful people that I've ever worked with. Together, we made many trips to the DMV, helped clients apply for jobs, put on workshops, made afterschool lesson plans, and figured out how to best serve the refugee community.

Now, I'm about to start my fourth and final year of medical school in Charleston, South Carolina. I look back fondly on my time at New American Pathways, and I talk about it often with patients, friends, and colleagues. This experience outside of the medical field has served me

well in treating and empathizing with patients of vulnerable populations, especially immigrants. I'm grateful that I found AmeriCorps and New American Pathways four years ago, and I know I'll use the skills that I learned there for many years.

Laurel Gower graduated from Vanderbilt University in 2014 with a Bachelor's degree in Biology. She served as an Project RISE Employment Services AmeriCorps member at New American Pathways during the 2014-2015 term. She is now a fourth-year medical student at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, SC, and plans to pursue a career in pediatrics.



Are you interested in serving the community through [AmeriCorps](#)? Now in our 10th program year, New AP is officially opening up recruitment for 2018-19 AmeriCorps Project RISE (Refugee and Immigrant Success through Education) program members! We encourage all who meet the requirements to apply, Learn more and apply [here](#).