

# Taking the LEAP



[www.csufresno.edu/leap](http://www.csufresno.edu/leap)

Share your stories! Post your pictures! Let your Project LEAP partners know what your organization has been up to. Please send photos and news to:

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## Project LEAP partners:

### University HOPE

(559) 224-9051  
hope.atinet.org

### SMILE Center

(559) 224-9058  
smilecenter\_fresno@yahoo.com

### Fresno READS

(559) 278-7079  
(559) 278-7634 (Fax)

### Jumpstart Fresno

(559) 278-8846  
(559) 278-7634 (Fax)

### Friendly Visitor Service

(559) 225-3565  
(559) 225-5351 (Fax)

### ReadFresno

(559) 443-READ (7323)  
contact@readfresno.com  
www.readfresno.org

### Focus Forward

(559) 495-3737  
www.focusforward.org

*“Providing students at California State University, Fresno with meaningful opportunities to address issues of poverty through leadership education and civic engagement.”*

## University HOPE Ready to Begin Work on Tenth Home.

This past year University HOPE has made a lot of progress. Saturday, May 12, was the house warming celebration for Dennis and Marlene Hancock, the recipients of the 9<sup>th</sup> house built by HOPE. It was attended by Clovis Mayor Bob Whalen, Chris Lopez of



**Dennis & Marlene Hancock, outside their new home.**

Granville homes, and Dr. Paul Oliaro, Dean of Student Affairs for Fresno State. University HOPE would like to thank Martin Campanella and Darin Deniz, our student coordinators, for a job well done. HOPE was also named the 2007 Organization of the Year by the Community Housing Council of Fresno at its 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Champions for Home Ownership Awards dinner.

We are looking forward to beginning our 10<sup>th</sup> house this Fall! The project will begin with a wall raising in September. Along with coordinating the efforts for the house, we are also planning on putting together various events to give construction of our tenth house a special emphasis as this will be a milestone for University HOPE.

## Focus Forward Joins Us at Project LEAP

I am very pleased to announce the addition of Focus Forward as one of our Project LEAP partner organizations. Focus Forward is a non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the quality of care for unserved and underserved children and youth in the Fresno County juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Without proper support many incarcerated children and youth from low-income families will reenter the justice system as adults and continue the cycle of poverty.

Project LEAP will support two new VISTA Positions through Focus Forward, A Direct Services Coordinator and Community Relations and Development Coordinator. The Direct Services Coordinator will be responsible for Coordinating the outreach and recruitment of community

volunteers, student interns and service-learning volunteers for Focus Forward. The Direct Services Coordinator will also coordinate the training of staff and service-learning volunteers. The Community Relations and Development Coordinator will be responsible for increasing community awareness about Focus Forward and the importance of extended resources for incarcerated youth who are returning home to high poverty and high crime neighborhoods.

These are two very important positions that will no doubt be rewarding, eye opening, and invaluable to the Focus Forward program as it begins to build and expand it's services to children and youth in need. You can learn more about Focus Forward by visiting [www.focusforward.org](http://www.focusforward.org)

**Article provided by Ray Sever.**

## AmeriCorps\*VISTA



*Our AmeriCorps\*VISTA members play an important role in all the Project LEAP programs. Over the past few months, three new faces have joined us at Project LEAP. At the SMILE Center, Laura Rodriguez will serve as the Program Coordinator. Rukku Singla will be working out of Fresno State as the Fresno READS coordinator. Steven Schwartz has joined us as the Project LEAP Resource Development coordinator. We welcome all three and they were kind enough to share a word about themselves.*

### **Laura Rodriguez, Program Coordinator for SMILE Center**

My name is Laura Rodriguez and I am serving as the new Program Coordinator VISTA for the S.M.I.L.E. Center. I grew up in McFarland, California, a small farm town few people know about, with a population of about 8,000.

I moved to Fresno, California to attend California State University, Fresno because I heard great things about their Liberal Studies Program and because it has always been a dream for me to become a teacher. That dream became a reality in the Fall of 2006 when I received my Bachelors of Arts in four years.



After having my degree, I decided to take a year off and find a way to serve my community because community has always been a passion of mine; and not shortly after I chose to sign up for AmeriCorps VISTA as the Program Coordinator where I will manage and coordinate the activities of the SMILE Center after-school programs that provide tutoring and mentoring resources for at-risk and disadvantage children. By serving my community, I hope to help better the lives of the many families that went through the SMILE Center.

**For more information about the SMILE Center, you can contact Laura at (559) 224-9058.**

### **Rukku Singla, Program Coordinator for Fresno READS**

I was born and raised in Ohio, and attended The Ohio State University, where I just graduated this past June with degrees in Classics (Latin and Greek) and South Asian/Asian American Studies. I have two older



sisters, and we are desperately trying to get our whole family to shift away from the cold winters of Ohio, to the sunny times in California.

I decided to do a year with VISTA because, although I have long-term goals to go to law school and practice for the public interest, I didn't want to go straight to law school from undergrad. Being interested in nonprofit management and literacy (I'm a big fan of reading) led me to Fresno READS, and even though I didn't originally have any plans to be in Fresno, it only took one conversation with Chris Fiorentino to get me super interested.

I'm excited to take this year to gain a lot of new skills (hopefully including some Spanish!) and work with some great people. Yay VISTA!

**For more information about Fresno READS, you can contact Rukku at (559) 278-7007.**

### **Steven Schwartz, Project LEAP Resource Development Coordinator**

My name is Steven Schwartz. I am a VISTA who will be serving as the Resource Development coordinator for Project LEAP. I am 23 years old from Elmwood Park, IL, a close knit town boarding Chicago. I graduated from Southern Illinois University Carbondale in 2006 with a BS in Economics and I have been in Fresno since December 2006 as a VISTA. I started my VISTA journey after working as a bill collector after college. I disliked my job and was looking for something more meaningful as well as a way to move out to California. So I came to Fresno.



My plans for working with Project LEAP include securing funding through grant writing and fundraising events in order for more VISTA positions to be made available in the near future. I would like to be able to provide new opportunities for the organization by bringing in funding and creating new connections with the community. I am happy to be a part of the team here at Project LEAP and look forward to making a difference here.

**For more information about Project LEAP, you can contact Steve at (559) 224-9052.**