AmeriCorps NCCC is a federal program that lets 18 to 24 year olds spend 10 months giving back, traveling the country and making a difference.

Dalton Lasnier, a 19 year old with an infectious smile and dark, curly hair, was one of those dream high school students every school counselor loves to work with. As student body president, a volunteer for Relay for Life events and a mentor for local youth, Lasnier was an ideal student who would have had an ideal college application. Instead, he chose an option presented by his high school counselor and sent his application to the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) program.

AmeriCorps NCCC is a federal program for 18 to 24 year olds that brings passionate, service-focused young adults together to spend 10 months giving back, traveling the country and making a difference. While serving, members also earn a living allowance and an education award of at least $5,645.

Lasnier is one of thousands of young people who have decided to put college on hold to serve in AmeriCorps NCCC. Each AmeriCorps NCCC team is as diverse as the communities it serves. Young men and women from every background, race and orientation join together as they gain valuable leadership, team-building and organizational skills while serving communities in need—skills that make them more attractive candidates for a range of employers.

Employers are looking for individuals who are mature, responsible and experienced. They prefer individuals who can work respectfully in diverse teams to achieve a common goal. AmeriCorps NCCC graduates people with these exact skills and characteristics.

AmeriCorps NCCC members do everything from building homes with Habitat for Humanity to refurbishing trails and facilities in remote and beautiful state and national parks or restoring communities after major natural disasters. In fact, AmeriCorps NCCC teams...
are ready for rapid disaster deployment anywhere in the country. Although members are not first responders like police, fire and rescue specialists, they have been integral in the long-term rebuilding of communities, such as Joplin, Mo., and the Gulf Coast after hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Irene. Trained in CPR, first aid, long-term disaster recovery and firefighting, teams have responded to local and national disasters since the program was established in 1994. Since 2000, members have served more than 5.1 million hours on 1,900 disaster services projects across the nation.

AmeriCorps NCCC members were instrumental in building 300 new housing units for residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina, said Jim Pate, executive director of the New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity.

“This would not have been possible without our AmeriCorps friends,” he said. “Of all the things the federal government sent after Katrina, the best ones came in gray t-shirts with the AmeriCorps logo on the chest.”

Although many members choose to join AmeriCorps NCCC to help when disaster strikes, others join to earn their GED, college- or graduate-level credits, to improve their college applications or earn money for college. Currently serving AmeriCorps NCCC members will earn a Segal AmeriCorps Education award of at least $5,645, or the equivalent of the Pell Grant, for each year they serve. Members can use this award to help pay for college, graduate school or pay back qualified student loans. Every member learns and grows each day, by living and working with fellow team members in challenging and humbling service experiences. These teams become like families, celebrating the joys and successes of each completed project before traveling to a new state and starting a new adventure.

Members like U.S. Air Force Major Rebecca Lange chose AmeriCorps NCCC to start new adventures, help communities in need and earn money for college. “My parents told me I was on my own to pay for college, not because they couldn’t afford it but because I’d appreciate it more if I earned it,” Lange said.

Lange chose to use her education award to go to the University of

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Colorado. She later became a cadet in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) in the U.S. Air Force. She is now the deputy legislative assistant at the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Lange credits the AmeriCorps NCCC program for leading her on the path to a successful military career.

Lasnier, on the other hand, decided to join a brand new unit of AmeriCorps NCCC called FEMA Corps. In 2012, AmeriCorps NCCC partnered with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to create this 1,000-member force of well-trained, well-equipped service members. FEMA Corps teams are devoted solely to FEMA disaster preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery efforts, which strengthen the nation’s ability to respond to and recover from disasters.

Just two short months into his service term, Lasnier and his team deployed to the ravaged neighborhoods of New York City after Hurricane Sandy. For five months, Lasnier and his educationally and geographically diverse team went door-to-door across Queens, N.Y., passing out essential supplies and information to families who had lost everything and spending weeks discovering who needed emergency food options and how they would get it. As of July 2014, 128 FEMA Corps teams have provided more than 521,500 hours of Hurricane Sandy assistance.

AmeriCorps members serving in FEMA Corps have been an asset to communities across the country, said FEMA director Craig Fugate. “We’re proud to partner closely with AmeriCorps at FEMA and recognize the tremendous value the program brings not only to delivering services but also to helping those in need during times of disaster,” he said.

The AmeriCorps NCCC experience has led both Lasnier and Lange to dedicate their lives to service. Lange continues to serve in the military, while remaining active in her chapter of AmeriCorps Alums. And Lasnier traveled to Costa Rica for two months to work on an organic farm. He will soon begin a second year of service as an AmeriCorps member working with the American Red Cross.

When asked what advice he had for new members of AmeriCorps NCCC and FEMA Corps, Lasnier said, “It is a rare and beautiful thing that you are choosing to be a part of. Don’t forget that.”

For more information about AmeriCorps NCCC and FEMA Corps, visit www.nationalservice.gov/nccc. To order recruitment publications free of charge, please visit: http://pubs.nationalservice.gov. If you would like to request an AmeriCorps NCCC or FEMA Corps team to present at your school or would like to speak to an AmeriCorps NCCC recruiter, contact Katrina Mathis, kmathis@cns.gov.

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