



**SERVE**  
LOUISIANA

2023 REPORT



SERVE LOUISIANA is an AmeriCorps program that partners emerging leaders with non-profit and community-based organizations for a paid year, helping local organizations improve lives and build stronger communities.

Each year Serve Louisiana recruits a diverse corps of members that work to build the capacity of their organizations by expanding services, improving programs, and vitalizing communities. The goal is to improve lives through social justice initiatives, mental and physical health programs, education, youth development and environmental preservation. Serve Louisiana provides AmeriCorps Members with strong leadership development training, networking opportunities and personal and professional coaching.

Historical and present conditions demand bold actions. Healthy societies cannot grow from the unhealthy roots of historic and systemic racism, class oppression, gender discrimination, and other forms of domination. This report tells stories of how Serve Louisiana is supporting roots-level solutions by helping local organizations divest from these systems and invest in equity.

**Taken together, these stories illustrate how Serve Louisiana is here to build a continually healthier, more sustainable and more equitable Louisiana for each new generation of children and families.**

*Supported by a grant from the Volunteer Louisiana Commission in the Office of Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser*

## 2023 AT-A-GLANCE

**19** Partner Host Sites

**60** Corps Members

**160** Community Partnerships

**1,550** Volunteers Organized

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Scan the QR code to see the unabbreviated report online!

## CRCL's innovative recycled oyster reefs protect sacred indigenous land from erosion

The Pointe Au-Chien Indian Tribe, indigenous to south Louisiana's coast, watches year by year as more of their land and sacred sites are lost to the sea. The Tribe recently partnered with The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (CRCL) to build reefs out of recycled oyster shells to protect their sacred land. Current and former Serve Louisiana Members helped build the partnership and the Oyster Shell Recycling Program that turns discarded oyster shells into land protection.

"They came to us. This project has been determined by that community," said Darrah Bach, CRCL's Oyster Shell Recycling Program Manager and Serve Louisiana alum. CRCL hired tribal members as "Captains" to convey the oyster shells and volunteers to the site and monitor the reef construction.

"Oyster reefs have been shown to grow so quickly that they can outpace sea level rise," Bach said. The reefs provide habitat for other critical species as well, which benefits the overall ecosystem.

**So far, the program has recycled 13 million pounds of oyster shells and protected 8,000 feet of coastal land since 2014.** This success allowed CRCL to convince state lawmakers to provide tax incentives for restaurants recycling oyster shells.

Pointe Au-Chien Indian Tribe Elder Theresa Dardar takes care to remind people why it's important to listen to indigenous coastal communities: "We're the bumper, but if you don't protect us, you're next."



"It's very important work because our history was being lost. It's our connection to the land and to our people."

– Theresa Dardar  
Elder, Pointe Au-Chien Indian Tribe



"We continue to advocate for large-scale state restoration... What we hope to see is that our volunteers are so inspired by this work that they will continue supporting policy that benefits coastal restoration."

– Darrah Bach, Serve Louisiana Alum



Read the full story online!

# March for Moms bridges grassroots maternal health with national advocacy & resources

The United States has one of the highest maternal mortality rates of any industrial nation. The rate is almost twice as high in Louisiana and across the U.S. South. And even worse for Black moms and birthing people who live here.

March for Moms started in 2017 as a bridge between grassroots maternal health organizations and national advocacy groups.

“We needed help with community engagement,” said Laneceya Russ, March for Mom’s Executive Director, who applied to Serve Louisiana in 2021 for a Corps Member to help March for Moms strengthen its Louisiana partnerships and engage more moms and birthing people.

**Corps Member, Mya Prean, has helped March for Moms build partnerships, develop a community engagement plan, and assemble resource directories for birthing people.**

March for Moms, supported by Serve Louisiana, is raising awareness of the maternal health crisis, as well as some of the solutions that save lives. They are also uplifting grassroots maternal health organizations and amplifying the voices of moms and birthing people to work for better outcomes.

Russ explained, “The only way this is going to change is if we come together.”



Read the full story online!

“These disparities exist... In order for our communities to truly understand what is happening, we have to raise our voices a little bit louder.”

— Laneceya Russ, March for Moms



“We needed help with community engagement. Serve Louisiana was a way our organization could invest in someone in Louisiana doing social justice work and benefit from it as well.”

— Laneceya Russ, March for Moms



# Holistic client services program at Orleans Public Defenders reduces jail time

The Client Services Division has helped Orleans Public Defenders develop a more holistic, client-centered, and community-oriented approach to public defense. Serve Louisiana Corps Members have played a pivotal role in developing the systems to support it.

OPD Client Services Division Deputy Supervisor, Max Lurye, who is also a former Serve Louisiana Corps Member, explained that without timely interventions from OPD, the accused are often left in jail for three or four weeks, sometimes longer, before appearing before a judge. All this time in jail keeps defendants from working to meet their needs, such as getting an education, finding employment, securing housing, and getting treatment.

Serve Louisiana Corps Members act as “client advocates,” building relationships with clients to support them in their broader life, while at the same time building internal systems to support a client-centered approach.

“[They ask], ‘What is your story? What are your needs? How can we meet one of those acute needs?’” explained Lindsey Hortenstein, OPD Communications Director and Deputy CAO.

**These systems have reduced the average time incarcerated by 14 days**, allowing clients to remain in and contribute to their communities, while saving taxpayers \$1 million.



Read the full story online!



“Because of the partnership with Serve Louisiana, we now have a bond advocacy team; we have a mental health unit; we have peer, youth, and parent advocates. Ten years ago this seemed not doable - an unrealistic goal.”

— Lindsey Hortenstein,  
Communications Director and Deputy CAO,  
Orleans Public Defenders





Featured Partner Organization

## Louisiana Environmental Action Network amplifies people-powered wins against pollution

“Previously, a majority of this media was only available to people in the area... Now, LEAN has an archive of articles that is organized and searchable... Hopefully, this media will be able to guide future leaders.”

— Jessica Deveraux  
Serve Louisiana Corps Member

Since 1986, the Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN) has helped educate communities on environmental pollutants and hazards and how they impact health outcomes of Louisianans. Now they are partnering with Serve Louisiana to share hundreds of stories of environmental justice victories.

“The organization has been creating and maintaining an archive of videos, photographs, and newspaper articles for decades,” said Jessica Deveraux, a Serve Louisiana Corps Member. “There is a fantastic wealth of information, stories, and history.”

Deveraux’s archival project aims to amplify stories of average folk organizing, often over decades, to persevere against seemingly insurmountable odds. **The project will update LEAN’s website with a publicly available archive of the past and present environmental justice movement in Louisiana.**

Making the stories publicly accessible may also help people feel capable of working for solutions. “Most people don’t realize that it’s possible,” said Communications Director Michael Orr.

LEAN also plans to build a curriculum using these stories to teach young people how to solve environmental problems. Ultimately, LEAN hopes to train a new generation of environmental justice advocates.



Read the full story online!

### 1980's

door to door neighborhood organizing, collective actions, civic engagement, founding Law Clinic

*Alsen, Rollins, Devil's Swamp  
Geismar, BASF  
Marine Shale  
Willow Springs  
Mossville  
Homer*

### 1990's

bridge building, worker safety, pioneering EJ litigation

*Shintech, Convent  
Oakville  
Grand Bois  
Norco  
Reveilletown, Georgia Gulf  
Placid, Sunshine  
Morrisonville*

### 2000's

Air enforcement(CAA), disaster response, political progress

*Exxon, Baton Rouge  
Katrina  
Dow, Myrtle Grove  
Louisiana Land (landfill)  
LMRK  
Produced waters*

### 2010's

formalizing empowerment tools, cross-sector partnerships

*BP Oil Spill  
Tubal-Cain, Baton Rouge  
2016 Flood  
Thermaldyne, Plaquemine  
Adsorbent, St Gabriel  
Mo-Dad, Northshore  
Ronaldson Field, Alsen  
BP Oil Spill / UTMB  
Guidebook / LSU*

### NOW

democratizing and scaling-up empowerment and EJ education to latest technology

*Providing EJ education to k-12  
Tulane Service Learning  
Community Air Network (Aclima)  
Community Power Hubs  
Save Our Water*

“Successful democracy requires constant maintenance. Without participation, nothing happens.”

— Michael Orr  
Communications Director, LEAN

Featured Partner Organization

# Saul's Light improves outcomes for babies and parents, family by family

Kimberly Novod started a support group for families with children in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), and families grieving the death of a child. **Currently, Saul's Light is working with more than 100 families using a case management approach, learning each family's needs and connecting them to community resources.**

"These families have access to information, resources, and support they would not otherwise have if not for Saul's Light and our partnership with Serve Louisiana," said Novod.

In 2022, Saul's Light applied to Serve Louisiana for two additional Corps Members to add new programs. Novod's sights are set on the next level of impact.

"Addressing social determinants to health: poverty, racism, and access is a problem for all of us, not just the groups missing out on that access," she said. After all, "When you create access for one group, all groups will benefit."



"We're trying to even the playing field for the families and for the babies. They are literally the future of our city. We have to invest in their wellness early."

— Kimberly Novod, Saul's Light



"I would highly recommend organizations that want to grow cautiously to partner with Serve Louisiana – it's been the best thing for Saul's Light."

— Kimberly Novod, Saul's Light



Read the full story online!

## Corps Member Stories

### Meet Dimitri

Dimitri Celis worked as a restaurant manager for eight years. When COVID hit the industry hard, Celis applied to serve with Recirculating Farms, an organization doing innovative food access work in New Orleans.

Through leading community outreach and capacity building, Celis learned about nonprofits and the importance of working collaboratively with other groups.

The first year also helped Celis clarify his career goals. So, he set his sights on getting a Master's Degree in Environmental Law. With the help and support of Serve Louisiana staff and his site supervisor, Celis completed his master's degree and a second service term. For his dedicated service, Celis was honored with Volunteer Louisiana's "Champion of Service Award" for 2023.

At the end of his second term, Celis was also offered a job at Recirculating Farms. In the future, he wants to explore public service, so as to better advocate for grassroots organizations like his.



*"AmeriCorps has been a good way to network within the whole industry... When we work together, we are actually able to get a lot done... I've been open to a lot more opportunities than I would have without this experience."*

— Dimitri Celis

### Meet Kaitlyn

When Kaitlyn Collins graduated from college, she jumped on an opportunity to apply for a Serve Louisiana position at the Boys and Girls Club. "I didn't expect my service year to be as life changing as it has been," she said.

Throughout her service, Collins identified the needs of Club families and compiled resources to help them stay engaged in their children's lives, provide care and support, deepen their relationships, and create more opportunities for young people to talk.

Once she completed her service year, she applied to continue at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Acadiana as a full-time Recruitment and Engagement Manager. She now manages staff and volunteer engagement work of all clubs across 6 parishes. Part of Collins' role now is to support new AmeriCorps Members. She says she wouldn't be where she is without her service experience, especially the support from Serve Louisiana staff.

"I believe everyone has something that is needed in their communities," she said.



Read the full stories online!



*"Service is a great opportunity to learn and be the boots on the ground... Be intentional about your service experience, be open to learning new things, and maximize your service year."*

— Kaitlyn Collins

*"We are crucially exposing young people to what's going on in Louisiana and what they can do about it... It's also about building community..."*

### Meet Brett

*"Because of a program like this, we have a more informed, aware, better prepared population in Louisiana than we would have had in the past."*

— Brett Pickett

Brett Pickett finished his master's degree in May 2022, but every job he looked at and applied for, even entry-level jobs, required a few years of work experience. For this reason, Pickett applied for a Serve Louisiana position at CRCL running their Student Coastal Leaders program.

The program hosts bi-monthly educational meetings on environmental topics such as environmental justice, public policy, and coastal erosion and facilitates young people to participate in hands-on volunteer opportunities.

Pickett's success leading the program led to CRCL inviting him to speak at the national Restore America's Estuaries Conference. Pickett and his fellow Corps Members also conducted research projects in advance of CRCL's State of the Coast conference.

Ultimately, CRCL figured out a way to hire him after his term, allowing him to continue his work.







# AmeriCorps

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