



## **Public Allies brings grads into society as young leaders**

Indianapolis Star

Aug. 2, 2010

By STEPHANIE WANG

Larry Morris has a vision: a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing a homelike setting for youths, kind of like his grandmother's house on Kenwood Avenue in Indianapolis.

It would use an approach called asset-based community development, which looks to enhance a neighborhood's existing values instead of focusing on what it lacks.

Morris now has the foundation to make his dream a reality, thanks to training he received this year through Public Allies Indianapolis, a branch of the national AmeriCorps program. The organization supports young leaders who seek to develop communities through nonprofits.

The first class of Allies, a group of 23, will graduate today. Morris said he will use his experience with Public Allies to create temporary housing for "kids in transition" and help them find jobs or counseling through other community resources.

"I want to help organizations better serve youths and focus on skills and assets that teenagers have," he said.

That's one of the core values of Public Allies, which stresses community participation.

"We saw the need for young adults in Indianapolis to get engaged in their community," said Marc McAleavey, site director for Public Allies Indianapolis. "Without the help of diverse young adults, our neighborhoods aren't as inclusive as they could be and don't have the power they could have."

The program recruits young adults interested in the nonprofit sector to work with partner organizations for 10 months. The Allies receive some leadership training while also gaining hands-on experience -- a key factor for many young job-hunters.

"It's hard to get that initial opportunity," said graduate Jamison Hutchins, 27, Indianapolis. He studied history and political science in school, and he graduated without a sense of direction.

"I knew what I enjoyed doing," he said, "and I just needed to find some kind of way to do what I enjoyed and also pay the bills."

Public Allies Indianapolis set him up with Health by Design, where Hutchins channeled his love of cycling through the company's relationships to explore forms of sustainable transportation.

Now, he's working with Freewheelin' Community Bikes, a nonprofit organization that forms a cycling community for Indianapolis' urban youths.

One of Public Allies' goals is to foster local talent such as Hutchins and Morris and encourage them to invest in the city.

"It's really easy for a young adult in Indianapolis to get excited about going to another city," McAleavey said, "because they haven't had the opportunity to really fall in love with Indianapolis."

By connecting them with a network of resources here, McAleavey said, Public Allies tries to give them reasons to stay.

The Allies' influence on the city can be measured in numbers, he said. This year, through its work sites, the program has recruited almost 3,000 volunteers to donate 3,000 hours to their communities.

The local Allies program is run through the Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center. It receives half its money from AmeriCorps, which is federally funded, and matches the other half through its partner organizations to pay the Allies' \$15,000 stipends.

Next year's finalists have already been selected and will attend a matching fair this week to coordinate each one with a partner organization.