

AmeriCorps Alumni of the Year

DeShanda Williams

Originally served with Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services at Pathfinders and currently working as the Director of the Runaway and Homeless Services at Pathfinders Milwaukee -- Milwaukee, WI

Since first becoming involved with service with homeless, runaway, and at-risk youth at the Walkers Point Youth Shelter as a teen, Deshanda Williams has continued to provide vital service to these youth first as an AmeriCorps member and then through several leadership positions at Pathfinders Milwaukee.

DeShanda first came to Pathfinders while completing an internship while pursuing her degree in social work and then served as an AmeriCorps member from 2011-2012 in their Drop-In Center.

The Drop-In Center serves as the home base for their street outreach program, helping youth access the clothing bank and receive multiple forms of assistance. She has worked tirelessly to showcase the voices of those youth who are often left unheard.

Returning to get her Master's degree in Community Counseling after seeing that the youth needed a therapist of color who would have common experiences and who they could identify with.

She regularly holds listening sessions with youth at the Drop-in Center, making sure the work done by Pathfinders stems from their needs and provides trauma informed care that helps them in some of their most difficult situations. Through her guidance, Pathfinders was able to expand their therapy program and group wellness groups to provide youth with the support they need and assist them in their transition to adulthood.

She has worked to change the face of their direct services by encouraging young professionals and interns to see the benefit of AmeriCorps service, helping foster their development to continue to make a difference in the community and for homeless, runaway, and at-risk youth.

Through her consistent focus on answering the needs of youth in Milwaukee and developing innovative programming, DeShanda Williams is an outstanding example of how AmeriCorps service can enrich a professional career and a community as a whole.