



Petra Mandic- Spirit of Service, Outstanding YouthBuild AmeriCorps Full Time Member of the Year

Honestly, I (Laura Hirshfield – English teacher) could not imagine someone better embodying a spirit of service than Petra. I have been teaching for ten years and I have had ten years’ worth of teaching assistants (all paid teaching assistants, by the way), and I have never worked with someone more dedicated to young people than Petra. Petra was frequently the first person in the parking lot at the beginning of the day, often so that students could come in early for extra help if staying after school was impossible. Additionally, I strive to offer students authentic experiences related to what we are learning in the classroom, and that frequently means field trips. Field trips often fall outside of school hours, unfortunately, but Petra was not only willing, but thrilled to be a part of these after-hours learning experiences. Her dedication to the students is just so clear and obvious, and I can’t imagine someone better embodying a “spirit of service.”

Her care, her passion, her dedication, her compassion, and her selflessness have all helped support our members in making the kinds of change that they are striving to make in their lives. Finally, I know that this experience has been invaluable to Petra herself. She cried when she learned that she could not complete her student teaching at this YouthBuild site next year, and she is looking into ways she can continue her teaching at a different YouthBuild. In volunteering this year, Petra found her calling.

Additionally, the young woman I met in September is not the same as the teacher I am working with now; Petra has grown in spades, in so many ways, because of her selfless service. She has gained knowledge about the cycle of poverty and what hard work must be done to break it, grown in her capacity for compassion for human beings who have gone through things we could not imagine, and gained confidence in herself as an educator and agent of change in the world. CCEO, its members, and I are all so grateful to AmeriCorps for bringing Petra to us, and I could not recommend her more highly for this recognition.

-Nominated by Laura Hirshfield and Alexander Gil