



# ALPINE ACHIEVERS INITIATIVE

## Celebrating 10 YEARS STRONG!

Connecting, inspiring, and nurturing youth  
and families with one act of service at a time.



EMPOWERING YOUTH • INSPIRING EDUCATORS  
TRANSFORMING LIVES





**Alpine Achievers Initiative (AAI) inspires, connects,  
and nurtures youth, families, and communities  
in rural Colorado.**

## MISSION



## VISION

**Our vision is to offer relationship-based and clearly defined organizational structure and services that support accessible, transformative experiences for all involved with AAI. We aim to be responsive to partner and community needs through a culture of service quality, expertise, and inclusivity.**



# Full Circle: From AmeriCorps Member to Nonprofit Leader



**Megan Strauss**

AAI Executive Director  
and Founder

I've come a long way since my first AmeriCorps term in 2008 and never imagined that 17 years later I'd be leading an AmeriCorps program and nonprofit. The journey has been incredible—what began with long days, tears, and 60-hour work weeks has evolved into my dream job. Every day brings new challenges and opportunities to learn, grow, and expand our impact in the community. I'm constantly inspired by the people I work alongside—our AmeriCorps members, staff, and partners—who embody the spirit of service in everything they do.

One of my favorite parts of this work has been the versatility of our mission. It's allowed us to adapt to changing community needs while staying rooted in the belief that connection and opportunity can change lives. And at the heart of it all are the relationships—between members and students, between teammates, and across our entire AAI family. Even though we've grown, it still feels close-knit and deeply personal. I hope to continue in this role for as long as I can contribute meaningfully, and I am so grateful that this is where my life's path has led.



Original logo



2024 logo

# HOW IT STARTED



Alpine Achievers Initiative (AAI) began in 2012 with one teacher in Saguache, Colorado, who refused to watch her students fall through the cracks. As a math teacher in the Mountain Valley School District, she saw kids struggling not because they lacked ability, but because they lacked access—after-school support, enrichment opportunities, and the kind of consistent encouragement that helps young people thrive. So she started small: staying after class, offering extra help, and inviting a few other teachers and community members to do the same.

What began as a handful of people giving their time quickly grew into something much larger. With early county grants, those late afternoons turned into coordinated in-school and after-school programs focused on connection, growth, and providing prosocial activities for youth. When AAI received its first AmeriCorps grant in 2015, the idea took off—reaching more schools and more communities. By 2016, AAI had officially become a nonprofit and has continued to evolve ever since.

Today, AAI operates in eight rural Colorado counties, with more than 250 AmeriCorps members having served in schools and communities—contributing over 400,000 hours of service over the past decade. Our homeschool program now engages over 120 students yearly in hands-on learning experiences, while our outdoor education programs foster confidence, resilience, and a deep sense of belonging.

Over the years, our work has stretched far beyond academics. AAI has helped coordinate food access efforts during COVID, opened a new childcare center, invested over \$75,000 in supplies for schools and community partners, and created professional learning opportunities focused on equity and access. **Through it all, our mission remains the same: to inspire, connect, and nurture youth, families, and communities in rural Colorado.**



# FROM CLASSROOMS TO THE OUTDOORS: ENRICHING YOUTH EXPERIENCES



To further meet the evolving needs of rural communities, AAI expanded its programming beyond schools. The Valley to Valley (V2V) Homeschool Program, developed in partnership with the Mountain Valley School District, provides homeschool students with weekly programs and engaging field trips offering social, extracurricular, and enriching learning experiences throughout the school year.

Building on this success, AAI launched a 10-month program for youth ages 12-15 called Alpine Adventurers. Focused on outdoor exploration, conservation projects, cultural experiences, and mentorship, Alpine Adventurers gives participants a safe and supportive space to build friendships, develop confidence, and connect with caring adults—all while fostering a lifelong love of learning and nature.



**7**  
Counties  
Served

**391**  
Youth  
Served

**600+**  
Outdoor  
Opportunities

**6200+**  
Instruction  
Hours



# SINCE THE START

**400,000 hours  
served in  
communities**

**\$2.7M+ added to  
the region's  
economy**



**259 youth-serving  
professionals placed  
in local communities**

**21,000+  
youth  
served**



# VOICES OF 80+ ALUMNI

**38% remained in the region to teach after service**

**99% believe their service positively impacted the region**



**74% credit AAI service with guiding their career path**

**51% now work in youth-focused careers**



# FROM SERVICE TO PROFESSION: ALUMNI IN LOCAL EDUCATION ROLES



## **Alumni Spotlight: Gianna Canestri** **Marsh Elementary, Monte Vista (2021-2022)**

After serving with AAI at Marsh Elementary in 2021-2022, Gianna chose to stay in the San Luis Valley, drawn by the school's strong culture and supportive team. What began as an AmeriCorps service year turned into a career and calling.

Now in her third year teaching first grade, Gianna continues the work that inspired her during her service term: building meaningful relationships, fostering an inclusive classroom, and helping students believe in their potential. She credits AmeriCorps — both AAI and her earlier experience with Polk Reads in Florida — for shaping her approach to teaching with empathy, patience, and a focus on social-emotional learning. One memorable experience from her service year still guides her work: supporting a student with challenging behaviors and watching him grow through trust and consistency. “He taught me patience, and he showed me that I truly can make a difference,” she shared.

Her advice for future AmeriCorps members considering staying in their service community: “When you know, you know... sometimes opportunities lead you exactly where you were meant to be.”



# From Saguache to FEMA: A Year That Shaped a Career



**Molly Serpi (2015–2016)**  
Current Role: Management &  
Program Analyst, FEMA

Molly’s year with AAI in Saguache solidified her passion for non-traditional education and community connection—a focus that has guided her career ever since. Working closely with partner schools and community programs, she discovered the value of creative approaches to engage students and foster meaningful relationships.

Some of her favorite memories include winter camping, baking geology cookies with high schoolers, and driving students home in the old red suburban—moments that built trust, laughter, and lasting connections. Molly emphasizes that simply “showing up” consistently had the biggest impact on students, reinforcing the importance of reliability and presence in education.

Reflecting on her service, Molly highlights AAI’s dual impact: providing tangible support, such as expanding teaching staff and after-school programs, and inspiring courage, creativity, and connection within rural communities. She credits her service experience with shaping her understanding of community as a space of trust, shared growth, and welcome—a perspective she carries into every professional and personal interaction.



# From Mural to Meaning: Erica Lynch's Journey with AAI



**Erica Lynch (2022–2023)**  
Current Role: School-Based  
Therapist

During her time with Alpine Achievers Initiative, Erica Lynch learned the most meaningful impact isn't always easy to measure—it's often found in the relationships built and the moments of connection shared. Through time spent exploring nature, fostering creativity, and engaging youth in hands-on learning, Erica witnessed the powerful influence of curiosity, consistency, and compassion in helping young people grow.

One of the highlights of her service was collaborating with a local artist to complete a mural project for the Boys and Girls Club. Designed and painted by students, the mural became a lasting symbol of teamwork, creativity, and community pride—a tangible reflection of what can happen when young people are given space to express themselves.

Erica encourages new members to “give yourself grace—it takes time to get into a groove.” Though service can be challenging, she believes it's a deeply rewarding experience for those who are passionate about making a difference. Erica's role with AAI allowed her to integrate many of her passions—the outdoors, creative arts, social-emotional learning, and education. Today, she continues to carry those values forward in her career as a School-Based Therapist in New York, supporting youth in building emotional resilience and confidence, “my time in AmeriCorps motivated me to continue my career serving youth in mental healthcare,” Erica said.



# Our Funders

At AAI, we understand that creating a meaningful impact in the San Luis and Arkansas Valleys requires a collaborative and community-driven approach. Our community partners and funders play an integral role in shaping the success and sustainability of AAI's initiatives and mission.

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT!

**\$100K+**



Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** ★★ ★



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF THE  
**SAN LUIS VALLEY**



**COLORADO**  
Behavioral Health  
Administration



**THE  
COLORADO  
TRUST**

*A Health Equity Foundation*

**\$50K+**



**\$25K+**



Saguache County  
Government

**\$10K+**



**UP TO  
\$10K**



HHSB Family Fund – Larry Moscow



# AmeriCorps Service Sites

## Saguache County

- Mountain Valley School
- Boys & Girls Clubs of the SLV (Saguache)
- Crestone Charter School
- Crestone Boys & Girls Club (summer)

## Mineral County

- Creede Parks & Rec
- Silver Thread Public Health

## Chaffee County

- Ark Valley Preschool
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Chaffee County
- City of Salida Parks & Rec
- Longfellow Elementary School
- Salida Middle School
- Salida Montessori Charter School
- Crest Academy
- Greater Arkansas River Nature Association
- Guidestone Colorado

## Alamosa County

- Alamosa Elementary School K-2
- Alamosa Elementary School 3-5
- Alamosa High School
- Alamosa Parks & Rec
- Boys & Girls Clubs of the SLV (Alamosa)
- GOAL Academy
- Ortega Middle School

## Rio Grande County

- Marsh Elementary School
- Bill Metz Elementary School
- Monte Vista Middle School
- Monte Vista Kids Connection

## Fremont County

- Canon City High School
- Harrison K-8 School
- McKinley Elementary School
- Washington Elementary School



**AmeriCorps**



**ALPINE** ACHIEVERS  
INITIATIVE



# Regional Partners



MONARCH  
MOUNTAIN



CITY OF  
**SALIDA**  
COLORADO



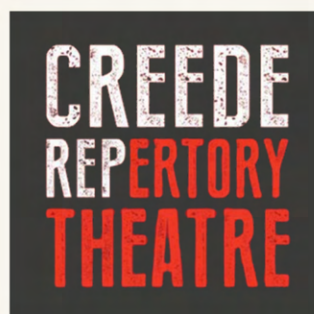
HEART  
of Saguache/KV



LA PUENTE



COLORADO  
Lt. Gov. Dianne Primavera







# ALPINE ACHIEVERS INITIATIVE

LET'S CELEBRATE AAI —  
JOIN THE \$10K CHALLENGE!



EVERY GIFT ADDS  
UP TO A DECADE  
OF IMPACT!

HELP US REACH \$10,000

100 PEOPLE X \$100

200 PEOPLE X \$50

500 PEOPLE X \$20



## Ways to Give

- Colorado Gives
- QR Code
- Colorado Community Shares
- By mail
- Set up reoccurring donations
- Sponsorship
- Grant Opportunities



Scan this QR code  
to donate today!

AlpineAchievers.org