



East Side Works VISTAs Charlotte Hauser, Devon Moody-Graham, Snowbia Barnes, Zorhna Brown, and Stephanie Anthony Miles

# East Side Works! Unique Partnership, Technology Link Students and Employers

BY Tim Fox    PHOTOS BY Kevin Hopkins

**A public relations expert. A health sciences professional. A database builder. An entrepreneur. A professional consultant. A human resources graduate student.**

These are the AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) members behind East Side Works.

East Side Works uses an online tool, Career Cruising Inspire (ccInspire), to build a stronger talent pipeline for East St. Louis.

"It is a movement, not a project," says Stephanie Anthony Miles, Sustainability Pathways Coordinator. "Our goal is to bring students out of poverty by opening their eyes to possibilities and empowering them to make the connections they need to succeed."

East Side Works, officially launched in April 2016, is part of the

East Side Aligned process that ensures community youth are ready for college, work, and life. Powered by AmeriCorps VISTA members, it is housed at the East St. Louis School District and primarily supports career exposure and exploration opportunities for District 189 secondary students.

East Side Works has already recruited 24 regional employers to establish company profiles on ccInspire. Students complete ccInspire inventories to be matched with potential career cluster areas. They then search for regional employers sharing their interests.

Additionally, the East Side Works team has recruited 75 career coaches (all of whom pass a series of background checks) to work with students in the program and 183 work-based learning opportunities for youth.

To date, three companies—SMiles TV, IDEX Photography, and Youth in Biz—have actively engaged students. For example, SMiles TV (Miles' company) helped media class students produce a video about East Side Works that aired on the city's cable network.

But some of the most exciting opportunities now are in finance and healthcare.

"We forged relationships with the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis that allowed us to provide eight students with meaningful job-shadowing opportunities," Miles says.

Meanwhile, Snowbia Barnes, a Pathways Curriculum Coordinator, says existing relationships between the school district, BJC Healthcare, Touchette Regional Hospital, and St. Elizabeth's Hospital, will allow students to explore healthcare through about 90 job-shadowing opportunities.

BJC is even providing two grant-funded paid internships.

"The interns work in orthopedic surgery and cardiovascular health under BJC supervision," Barnes says.

Like her teammates, Barnes has a diverse background that reflects the spirit of East Side Works.

After starting as an engineering student at the University of Missouri-Columbia, she switched to health sciences services in her senior year.

"If cclinspire had been available to me while in school, I could have realized that my strengths were best suited for careers in health science and saved a lot of time and money," she said.

Another team member, Sustainability Pathways Coordinator Devon Moody-Graham, also found out the hard way that her intended career path wasn't for her.

"I wanted to be a doctor," she says. "But when I went into a medical class and saw a cadaver, I said, 'Nope! Don't want to do that anymore!'"

Moody-Graham, one of four East St. Louis natives on the team, instead discovered her "passion for entrepreneurship" and started her own organization, Youth in Biz, to help youth find their way out of poverty through economic development. She holds a bachelor of science degree in consumer and textile marketing from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

"I could have gotten to my goal a lot faster if I'd had access to East Side Works' resources," she says.

Miles, another East St. Louis native, spent 25 years as a media and public relations professional. She worked as Public Affairs Man-

ager for the city under Mayor Carl Officer, Community Relations for the U.S. Department of Commerce, and Director of Public Relations for Harris-Stowe State University before becoming a stay-at-home mom for 15 years.

The newest member of the team, Charlotte Hauser, is a student of computer information systems. She serves as Program Alignment Coordinator.

"I was happy and surprised to learn that AmeriCorps was doing such great work throughout the country, and excited to learn that AmeriCorps was right here in East St. Louis," she says.

"Before [I arrived] as an AmeriCorps VISTA, the team had already made great progress. Using my database management skills, we are compiling data that will help students secure their career goals."

The team stresses, however, that they are just laying the groundwork for East Side Works. Making it sustainable is the real challenge.

That task falls to Barnes and two other Pathways Curriculum Coordinators, Zorina Ann Brown and Anitra Dorsey.

Brown, who holds a bachelor of science degree from Lindenwood University, joined East Side Works after 15 years with the Belleville YMCA of Southwest Illinois and consulting for East Side Aligned.

"We are developing a curriculum for East Side Works to integrate East St. Louis middle and high schools," she says. "The curriculum team is developing lessons on 'soft skills'—

like appropriate dress, leadership, and time management—that employers view as essential."

Dorsey, who holds a bachelor of science degree in paralegal studies with a minor in psychology from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, is pursuing a master's degree in business administration with emphasis in human resources.

"East Side Work's success depends on the students, administrators, and employers working together," Dorsey says.

"Fortunately, we are off to a good start. Everyone understands the importance of nurturing the future workforce by connecting with students early in their careers to develop the next talent pipeline."

*Opportunity for Involvement: If you are interested in serving as a career coach or want to increase your business' visibility to students and educators, contact [www.eastsideworks.org](http://www.eastsideworks.org).*

*Entities representing the career cluster areas of health science, information technology, finance, energy, advanced manufacturing, and transportation/logistics are particularly desired.*



East Side Works students Anjamae Muhammad and Katherine Elizabeth Miles with BJC staff member Monica Sanchez.