

# Southern Miss TRIAD AmeriCorps Members Partner with Special Olympics for Make a Difference Day

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Haley Graham, left, and Maria LeJeune show off the medals they won at the Hub City Special Olympics. (Submitted photo)

Several members of the TRIAD AmeriCorps program at The University of Southern Mississippi served as volunteers for the Hub City Special Olympics held earlier this month at Camp Shelby.

The members chose the Special Olympics as their service event to recognize one of the largest national volunteer service days, the Make a Difference Day. The Make a Difference Day brings together volunteers nationwide to improve the lives of others in the community through various service projects.

Special Olympics, Hub City Region returned to Area 1 in fall 2015 after being absent for more than a decade. The TRIAD AmeriCorps program has been partnering with the Hub City Region since the return of Special Olympics.

“The TRIAD AmeriCorps members have cheerfully volunteered for numerous state and local games, assisting to ensure the events are operating smoothly and creating an enthusiastic atmosphere,” said Allison Hinz, Hub City Region assistant director. “The members have developed lasting relationships with the Special Olympics athletes both on and off the field. The collaboration of the two organizations has created unity in the community, as both organizations promote social inclusion.”

This year’s sporting events included cheerleading, softball (unified and traditional), soccer skills, croquet, and horseshoes. Two TRIAD AmeriCorps alumni, Reagan Ratcliff and Haley Graham, participated in the games. Reagan Ratcliff received a bronze medal in the horseshoe event, and Haley Graham received a silver medal in the croquet event.

“We are so proud of both Reagan and Haley who previously were not interested in sports but decided to get involved this year as part of their healthy living goals,” said Sylvester Crosby, TRIAD AmeriCorps program coordinator. Haley has been chosen as the state representative for the croquet event to be held in Seattle, Washington. She is so excited to represent Mississippi.”

Sylvester Crosby volunteered as the softball coach for the Hub City’s unified softball team. “I love coaching, but most of all I love working with the athletes. I’ve known and worked with many of them through various programs for several years and always look forward to the social

aspect of the Special Olympics events. Of course winning the gold medal was special for the entire team.”

First-year full-time TRIAD AmeriCorps member Aron George said, “This was my first time volunteering for Special Olympics, and I didn’t know what to expect. I saw nothing but positive attitudes and competitiveness from the athletes which really got me excited and into the game even though I didn’t know anything about softball. I enjoyed one-on-one conversations with the athletes, and they taught me that individuals with disabilities are just like me. This was a great experience for me.”

Funded by the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Services (MCVS), the TRIAD AmeriCorps program, housed at the Institute for Disability Studies at Southern Miss, focuses on assisting individuals with disabilities with developing a healthy lifestyle through healthy eating habits and exercising.

For additional information about TRIAD AmeriCrops, contact Sylvester Crosby at 601.266.5441 or [sylvester.crosby@usm.edu](mailto:sylvester.crosby@usm.edu) or visit our website at [www.usm.edu/disability-studies](http://www.usm.edu/disability-studies).