Shirlee Perry is an AmeriCorps member in Nebraska, and serves within the Rural Improvement for Schooling and Employment (RISE) state program, and is being nominated for “Most Compelling Member Experience.” Shirlee is being nominated by Allison McElderry, Program Director for the RISE program, and can be contacted by email at [allison.mcelderry@nebraska.gov](mailto:allison.mcelderry@nebraska.gov).

Leaving her apartment, Shirlee takes one step at a time down the three flights of stairs, careful not to put too much pressure on her bad knees. Today the weather is hot and muggy, most likely reaching temperatures in the high 90’s. Neither the weather nor her knees, deter Shirlee from walking the couple of blocks to the nearest bus stop. The city bus arrives, and carefully Shirlee takes her usual seat, as she makes her way to the Lincoln Probation Office, where she serves as an AmeriCorps member. Shirlee enters the office, always with a smile, and ensures she says “good morning” to any person headed her way. This has been Shirlee’s routine for the last nine months.

Shirlee facilitates a skill-based curriculum, focused on education and employment, to youth who are placed on probation, who struggle in school and lack basic life skills. I have observed Shirlee work with youth who were disengaged from school, and after a few weeks, the same youth are passing his/her classes for the first time that year. Throughout the year data was collected from the AmeriCorps members serving in the RISE program. The data demonstrated whether or not the member and the curriculum had a long lasting impact on the youth, as evidenced by an increase in the youth’s attendance, grades, and/or behaviors and the youth obtaining employment. Shirlee has maintained a 73% success rate of youth passing their classes after completing her group, allowing them to grow closer to receiving their high-school diploma.

Shirlee is also determined to better her community and provide opportunity for the youth she serves. In April 2017, Shirlee received the “Community Engagement Award,” presented to her by ServeNebraska. Shirlee has been very involved with community stakeholders such as, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Nebraska Department of Labor, Food and Safety Inspection of Lincoln, Nebraska, Lincoln Public Libraries, Hy-Vee grocery stores in Lincoln, NE, Education Quest, Community Action, and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program of Lincoln, NE. Shirlee’s vision is to help the community understand that the youth she serves lives amongst them, and without their support these youth are less likely to succeed, negatively impacting their community. Shirlee believes all youth deserve an opportunity to pursue their education and obtain employment, and advocates for them on a daily basis.