

Ellen Carlson *AmeriCorps VISTA Alumni of the Year*

Ellen Carlson has been making a difference in the lives of the citizens of Dane County for the past twenty years. She originally came to Madison to study psychology at the University of Wisconsin with plans to pursue a career in medicine. Upon her graduation she decided to take a break from her studies and joined AmeriCorps VISTA. Ellen served from 1999-2001 with the Schools of Hope Literacy Project, helping address the achievement gap, specifically in the area of literacy. Ellen advanced to be the VISTA Leader during her second year of service, providing support and leadership to a team of VISTAs serving in schools across Madison. During her term of service, she realized that it was not just tutoring that was needed to help bring these children out of poverty, but also the provision of a stable living environment, including food and shelter. After serving two years with VISTA, she realized that her career path was leading her to the non-profit sector, where she has remained ever since.

Following her AmeriCorps VISTA service, Ellen went to work for Middleton Outreach Ministries (MOM) in 2002. She progressed through several roles at MOM, including leadership positions working on volunteer and donor development, communications and strategic planning, operations, and program development. When she became the Executive Director of MOM in 2017, its board president said that Ellen would “continue in the tradition of responsible and visionary leadership. She’ll bring the people of our community together to make sure those most vulnerable are cared for with dignity and hope.” Ellen believes that “MOM is here to be that support and hope for people in our community who are struggling with housing security and hunger. This mission makes even the simplest tasks important and fulfilling.” She has worked to investigate creative ways the organization can make sure that, despite unstable times, people’s basic needs are met. Her vision for MOM is to “determine how we can continue to make local change to the issues of poverty and the inequities in our community,” believing that “we can be a community where those most vulnerable have the basic supports needed. Everyone has the right to a healthier and more stable future.”

Ellen is a passionate and compassionate advocate for those in the community without a voice or a seat at the table. She works tirelessly in her professional and personal life to help others, taking action to address problems in a thoughtful and purposeful way that includes as many people as possible. Ellen is currently a Board Member of the United Way of Dane County, on the governing board of Madison’s First United Methodist Church, and is an active parent volunteer at her sons’ schools. She is also a co-founder of Kids Code Madison, an organization that provides youth with free coding classes.

