

## **AmeriStories Interview: Melissa Ettman**

May 18, 2012

### **Q. Why do people serve?**

"It fills you up in a way in which nothing else can. It's better than a piece of chocolate cake. Service itself is the best piece of chocolate cake. It puts this warm fuzzy feeling in your belly without the calories. It's a feeling... and when you can do it without expecting anything in return, you're doing it right. It's a feeling that is bigger than yourself. It's acknowledging that it's worthwhile to do something bigger than yourself."

### **Q. How has it been for you living on a stipend?**

"The most struggling thing for me has been that I have a college degree and I *still* have difficulty getting and maintaining my food stamps. I misunderstand what they have written on the food stamps forms and I still haven't been able to maneuver in the system - even when I have excellent communication skills. It just highlights how challenging it is for anyone...As far as living on the stipend, I can't say that I've lived it because I have been so fully supported by my family. Not just supported financially, but emotionally as well. They have set me up at a level that can't compare with what people have gone through."

### **Q. If you were going to tell a future AmeriCorps member how to deal with their stipend or food stamps, what would you say?**

"When you use your food stamps and you're going through the grocery lines, there's nothing to be ashamed of. It gives me so much more respect for the people who are surviving on food stamps because people look down on you and there's *no reason* for it."

***More of Melissa's story can be found in our book "AmeriStories" to be published July 13, 2012!***