

## **Gerilyn Lopez**

### **Aspen Idea: Climate Spark Talk Talking Points**

- Boozhoo, My name is Gerilyn Lopez, but my friends call me Geri. I am a member of the White Earth tribe located in Central Minnesota.
- I am proud of the steps my community has taken to address climate change and equip our people with renewable energy sources.
- When I was in my early twenties, my tribe was actively working to advance technologies like solar and wind power. I was interested in construction and was fortunate to play a part in learning how to bring these technologies to my community.
- Unfortunately, as is too often the case, the funding dried up and I found myself searching for new opportunities to continue to learn and improve my skills.
- Around that same time, my mother-in-law told me about an opportunity she came across for young people to assist low-income families in Minnesota to achieve greater financial stability by lowering their energy usage.
- The program, Ampact's Home Energy Initiative, was an AmeriCorps service year program where I could get paid, learn new marketable job skills related to the green economy, and make a positive impact on the families and communities that I would be serving. I jumped at the opportunity.
- During my service year, I served at a Community Action Agency where I was paired with an experienced energy efficiency professional. I learned the on-the-job skills that are needed to assist low-income families in making their home safer and more energy efficient.
- I learned how to test and analyze the building envelope and began to understand the ins and outs of weatherization.
- Just as importantly, I learned how to problem solve and communicate with people across Minnesota — all while providing client education to families in my state.
- During my very first home visit of my service year, I was assisting an older woman with her home energy usage. I remember her telling me she was so impressed to see another woman succeeding in what she had traditionally thought of as a man's profession.
- Until then, I hadn't realized that my service year was doing more than just helping my career — it was serving as an inspiration for other women like me who were interested in a career in the energy sector.
- The skills, training, and experience I received during my service year got my foot in the door in this industry. It equipped me with the skills I needed to secure my current position as a Weatherization Auditor at MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership.
- And today, I am in a career that I know is not only making a difference for the environment, but also for the families that I assist day in and day out.
- I hope my story can be an example for other young women — and for all of you. Weatherization and energy jobs are no longer just for men.
- If we invest in training our next generation, we can empower women and men from all walks of life to join this climate fight and pave new pathways to opportunities for all of us.
- Chi-Miigwech.