Dear Commonwealth Corps Members, Partners, Alumni, and Friends,

As the 2019-2020 program term comes to a close, we are excited to celebrate the incredible accomplishments of our Commonwealth Corps members and host site partners and recognize their efforts to go above and beyond during these challenging last few months. This year’s members have had to navigate their roles during unprecedented times, but they’ve still managed to help expand and enhance their host organizations’ programming both through immediate client and community impact and towards longer-term capacity building projects. While in-person programming had to come to a halt, members and sites have found creative ways to continue to engage community members and address urgent needs that have arisen during the pandemic.

In addition to managing their remote service, members also participated in a series of virtual training sessions on preparing for their next steps and ensuring they’re able to make the most of their last few months of service. MSA also held several sharing sessions and check-ins with both members and supervisors to maintain our sense of community during these isolating times.

While focusing on finishing strong with this year’s program and supporting members’ next steps, MSA is also excited to announce that we’ll be partnering with 16 agencies, half of which are new to the program, to host 40 members for the next term (see full list on page 13). These agencies have demonstrated their commitment to creating meaningful change in their communities through service, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are excited to begin another inspiring and impactful service term.

Thank you and congratulations to all of our 2019-2020 members and partners! We are excited to see what these members do next, including continuing their education, committing to another year of service, and transitioning to staff roles at their host sites.
Founded in 1988, the Chelsea Collaborative’s mission is to empower Latinx immigrants to enhance the social and economic health of our community and our people, and to hold institutional decision makers accountable to everyone they serve. Our name says it all – we are deeply rooted in the Chelsea community and recognize the power of collaboration to create change.

Despite making valuable contributions to their communities, Latinos in Massachusetts experience extreme economic disparity and high unemployment. To address these needs and build on the many assets in the community, Chelsea Se Prepara offers English, computer, job readiness, financial literacy, and citizenship classes to more than 500 people each year.

Our Commonwealth Corps member, Nick Rodriguez, has been serving as a Community Outreach Advocate in the Chelsea Collaborative’s Chelsea Se Prepara (Chelsea Gets Ready) program, an adult workforce development pipeline designed to increase economic advancement and justice. Nick is proud to add to his family’s legacy of service and volunteerism – his aunt was previously a part of the Chelsea Collaborative. “I am glad that I left something behind that will continue to be used by the organization when I am gone, some form of lasting impact of my service,” he reflected.

The demand for this program is high and, in response, it has grown rapidly over the last three years. To increase access to economic mobility and stability, the Chelsea Collaborative is further expanding it to connect with more residents, including in East Boston, Everett, and Revere. Special Projects Manager Sylvia Ramirez says the partnership with the Commonwealth Corps program and Nick’s contributions over the last year have helped them do just that.

- Katherine Mulkern, Development Director
Chelsea Collaborative

“Nick has helped tremendously with his data gathering skills and streamlining the process. I strongly believe we wouldn’t have been able to gather so much data without his support. He also took on helping Chelsea Se Prepara pipeline members and did many one-on-one resume support sessions.”

- Sylvia Ramirez, Special Projects Manager and Member Supervisor
I was still uncertain what kind of career I would be interested in following graduation from college (Boston University) this past year and felt I needed more experience. Luckily my aunt had previously been a part of this organization, the Chelsea Collaborative, in the past and both she and my mom suggested I serve there. I had enjoyed service/volunteer work back in high school (Malden Catholic) and I thought the trainings offered through the Massachusetts Service Alliance would be a good opportunity to grow.

The culture of the Chelsea Collaborative is very well, collaborative. Everyone helps each other out and although each has their role, you can expect to receive support and provide support on a regular basis. As a result, I have been given the privilege of growing in this dynamic environment and gain lots of experience doing many things (especially using my interpersonal skills) including: planning a job fair, conducting 1-on-1 intakes, making cold calls, leading workshops, and even manning the front desk at times.

I am hoping that I am able to leave something behind that can continue to be used by the organization when I am gone. Something that they otherwise wouldn’t be implementing: some form of lasting impact of my service, including useful advice for service members they host in the future.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I feel as though I have expanded my adaptability in the workplace as well as learned a bit about myself that has highlighted my work styles as well as areas of improvement which will help me in my future career.

All of this year’s Commonwealth Corps members made the transition to serving remotely and found ways to stay connected with their communities and clients through phone calls and virtual meetings. Some members’ service shifted dramatically over the last few months to address urgent needs at their organizations and communities, especially around food access.

For example, CC members at the Regional Environmental Council in Worcester (including Max, pictured left) have been helping to package and deliver produce, support farmers markets, and distribute plants. Also, Coalition for a Better Acre CC Member Mitchy (pictured right) and her supervisor help set up a new food pantry and have been delivering food by appointment and leaving it at residents’ doors throughout Lowell.
Girl Scouts builds girls of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place. This is the mission we hold here Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts (GSEMA), and it is reflected through the passion we hold for engaging girls and building them up to be the leaders of tomorrow. The goal for our GSEMA Commonwealth Corps members has been to build our volunteer capacity that supports the youth and leadership development of girls in grades K to 12 in underserved communities through GSEMA’s Community Programs. As the year progressed, there was a need to realign our overall focus and have members support our team with new tactics to engage families in our underserved communities. 

By hosting Commonwealth Corps members, our small team was able to support more troops and facilitators with their weekly meetings, and now we have started to build a portfolio of community partners who could support our girls towards earning their Girl Scout high awards. This was our first year as a host site and it was a learning process to truly understand and see how we can enhance our productivity and services to girls by utilizing our member and in the future volunteers.

Francesca has shown significant interest in direct service with girls and with creating hands on experiences for older girls. Through large and smaller community events she has helped us to engage girls and families and connect them to additional opportunities our council has to offer for all girls. Francesca has also started the ground work for us to be able to connect with local community partners so that we can collaborate and bring more unique hands on experiences for girls.

It has been great to see Francesca build her confidence and enhance her youth development skills during her time at CSEMA, and this fall she will is continuing her community impact as an assistant teacher in another youth serving organization. Being a host site and having the chance to work with MSA has given us a new understanding of how we engage volunteers as a council and where can we utilize volunteers and community partners beyond traditional troops in order to reach more girls.

- Ashley Eadie, Associate Director of Community Programs, Girl Scouts of Eastern MA
FRANCESCA SOTOMAYOR

I choose to serve because I feel strongly about girls empowerment and Girl Scouts of Eastern MA is all about empowering girls. They cover all aspects of empowerment from financial literacy, leadership, healthy relationships, and STEM! Working directly with girls and helping to develop the programs we deliver has taught me so much, and has informed the work I do in the future. One of my biggest accomplishments is helping the Girl Scouts to link the Community Girls to earning their high awards, so all girls have the opportunity to achieve the highest award in Girl Scouts.

I also have been able to develop my own ideas outside of Girl Scouts, by developing a non-profit called Project 70 that focuses on making sustainable fashion accessible. Commonwealth Corps allows time for personal development, and with this time I developed my non-profit. Without the time and resources Commonwealth Corps has given me, I would not be able to work on my own creative projects and work on how I want to serve my community. Commonwealth Corps also has provided valuable training in topics I feel I would not have exposure to otherwise such as disability rights, white supremacy culture in the workplace, and your own mental well-being while serving. The whole experience has helped me to develop not only as someone serving the community, but as a better person overall. I want to bring everything I have learned into all the service I do and the work I do in the future.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I feel I am much more prepared to serve my community.

Member Development

Starting in March, MSA transitioned all CC member training sessions to a virtual setting. Members were still able to participate in a series of sessions focused on finishing strong and preparing for next steps, including leveraging their skills for the future, writing resumes and cover letters, and ensuring a successful end of the term in the wake of the pandemic. To complete the series in May, MSA collaborated with the 826 Boston AmeriCorps program to give members an opportunity to connect across programs to practice for job interviews and learn how to negotiate a salary and other benefits.

MassArt CC member Lewis Morris also led an interactive training, “Simply Stated vs Poetically Stated: Empowering Youth Expression Through Poetry,” during which he guided members through a series of poetry exercises that can be used to help youth express themselves in new ways. Members enjoyed having the time to get creative and experiment with new tools of expression.
Massachusetts College of Art and Design

Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) is a public, independent institution that prepares artists, designers, and educators from diverse backgrounds to shape communities, economies, and cultures for the common good. This year, MassArt has hosted two members, Lewis Morris and Sean Hargrove, each in different departments of the college. The goal of both members has been focused on community engagement and youth development.

sparc! the ArtMobile, an initiative of MassArt’s Center for Art and Community Partnerships (CACP), travels the city to lead innovative and intergenerational art workshops, programs, and special events. sparc! collaborates with schools, libraries, community organizations, and artists to ignite art and design in the neighborhood. Lewis’ service as the CC Teaching Artist in Residence this year has included building relationships with diverse youth and intergenerational groups using writing and poetry as a tool for wellness, healing and self-expression through sparc! programs and events, leading multiple art and design experiences, enhancing relationships with community partners, and collaborating with sparc! staff to lead the sparc! student team.

Artward Bound is a free four-year college access program that prepares 9-12th grade Boston-area students interested in art and design with the artistic, academic, and life skills needed to thrive in college and beyond. As the Artward Bound Community Engagement Associate, Sean has helped facilitate the student leadership program, and visit Boston middle and high schools to present the program to prospective students. He has also supported the efforts to launch the Radical Imagination for Racial Justice regranting project, a collaboration between MassArt (specifically Artward Bound and CACP), and the City of Boston.

It has been beneficial for both of MassArt’s members to have the dual roles of direct service and capacity building. This has added great capacity in CACP as we undergo our five-year strategic planning process, and in Artward Bound as we strengthen our program and adapt to our new online model. In addition, he is a true leader and has great rapport with our sparc! student team and the youth that we work with in community. As an alum of the Artward Bound program, Sean brings a valuable perspective to the admin team. He has cultivated a natural and welcoming facilitation style and is very tuned in to the student experience, qualities that have served the program well as we transition our courses online.

- Bethany Strohm, Program Manager
Artward Bound
SEAN HARGROVE

I was drawn to the Commonwealth Corps after I was approached by the director a program I used to be a part of, Artward Bound. I was instantly attracted to the position as I knew I would be serving with Chandra Ortiz and Bethany Strohm, both of whom were mentors of mine throughout high school when I was student in Artward Bound.

As the Commonwealth Corps Community Engagement Associate Artward Bound, I am currently helping in facilitating the “Street Team,” a collective of eight young and intelligent youth striving to make a difference for inner-city artists and youth of color. I’m also helping to spread the word about the Radically Imagining Racial Justice grant that Chandra has been spearheading this year. This opportunity has been great; seeing these youth go out and spread the word about different social topics to fellow people in their communities has been really rewarding.

Overall, my goals and aspirations lay heavily in my art and that’s where I want to strive and prosper in life, however, there are different skills you need to navigate the world and be successful outside of just talent. This service year at MassArt has taught me time management and professionalism, and helped me to boost my overall confidence in being able to apply myself and think critically about any challenge I encounter.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps I know I can achieve in any career path I choose so long as I dedicate myself to the work with passion every single day.

Alumni Updates

As this year’s Commonwealth Corps members transition to becoming alumni of the program, we’re excited to have a handful of members members staying on at their host sites in a staff role, several members starting/finishing their undergraduate degrees or going on to graduate and medical school, and several members pursuing a second year of service with Massachusetts AmeriCorps programs.

Whether you’re just about to become an alum or you’ve been an alum for several years now, you can help strengthen our communities by spreading the word about the positions that are available for the 2020-2021 service term (more details [here](#)).

We encourage you to share these positions with people you know who might be interested in taking on a year of service, as well as former advisors/guidance counselors who support others who might be interested. We’ve even created a few templates you can modify and use to share the positions on social media (general or for your former host site). Check those out [here](#) and reach out Julianne at jdefilippis@mass-service.org if you need any help or have other ideas for spreading the word. Thank you!
Peer Health Exchange

Peer Health Exchange’s mission is to empower young people with the knowledge, skills, and resources to make healthy decisions. We do this by training college-aged facilitators to deliver relatable, skills-based health curriculum to high school students, prioritizing communities most likely to experience health inequities. In our second year as an MSA host site, PHE Boston hosted three full-time Commonwealth Corps members – Tamara Fils-Aime, Theresa Yeo, and Elisabeth Palacios – with the hopes of continuing our first-year member projects, establishing Out-of-School Time (OST) programming and a Youth Advisory Board. We also launched a new initiative that involved CC members leading all workshops for our partner schools in Malden and Lynn. These schools have intricate schedules that make reaching them with our traditional program a challenge.

Going into the year, we expected our CC members’ service to solve for this and increase the capacity of our college volunteer cohort to serve other schools in the Greater Boston area. While this proved to be true, in some ways, we underestimated just how impactful their service would be. Collectively, Tamara, Theresa, and Elisabeth taught 321 workshops in nearly 50 classrooms, reaching 1,200 young people before schools closed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

“I really appreciate them so much right now...they are able to facilitate the [virtual workshops] and have skills that I do not have [to elicit different kinds of things than I ever could]!”

- Mary Kate Little, OST Partner (Bowdoin Street Health Center)

Our members continue to show up for young people in our communities by developing and delivering virtual sessions with an OST partner, Bowdoin Street Health Center, as well as leading PHE workshops specifically designed to provide mental health support for young people during COVID-19 at partner schools such as East Boston High. Each of our members bring unique gifts to the classroom, whether in-person or virtually. Tamara’s unflinching ability to connect with students, Theresa’s innovative on-the-spot solutions, and Elisabeth’s well-developed lens for understanding trauma all lend to their individual success, but they truly shine when collaborating. They’ve demonstrated a deep and unwavering commitment to each other, young people, and health equity since Day 1 (and even before).

As an organization, the unprecedented amount of teaching our members did combined with their thoughtful insight on everything from classroom management techniques to how our curriculum could better focus on student needs allowed us to learn a great deal from them as well. Impressively, all three members have excelled outside of PHE during their service term: the American Heart Association selected Tamara as a Raheem Baraka Community Fellow. Theresa received multiple medical school acceptances, and Elisabeth balanced the demands of a service year while continuing her studies at Boston University. We are incredibly proud to have played even a small part in the development of this fierce trio, and will know better than to underestimate just how big an impact they will have in the world going forward.

- Bethany Allen, Boston Program Director
Peer Health Exchange
I was drawn to Commonwealth Corps because of their dedication to strengthening local communities. This quote from the famous Asian American activist Grace Lee Boggs summarizes my motivation well: “You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it.” Therefore, I chose to pursue a service year at Peer Health Exchange, which combined my passion for health equity with community engagement.

This year, I, along with my fellow Commonwealth Corps members, have successfully taught over 200 health education workshops in Malden and Lynn. Our work has been unparalleled within the organization, both because of the number of workshops we taught and the relationships we built by being present in the schools week after week. Although the pandemic put an end to our in-person workshops, we have been able to continue teaching virtually. Instead of facilitating the usual curriculum, we are instead discussing topics that are relevant to current events. So far, we have been focused on mental health and discussed different types of coping mechanisms and how to support a friend.

Facilitating workshops has taught me how to be a better educator and communicator. We cover a variety of topics in our workshops, ranging from mental health to sexual health. Some of these topics can be uncomfortable or awkward for the students to discuss. Therefore, I endeavor to make the classroom as supportive as possible, so that students may engage with the information in a safe space.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have become a better health educator.

I chose to serve with the Commonwealth Corps because I wanted to make a positive and lasting impact on my community’s health. Health equity is something I am passionate about, especially mental health de-stigmatization and advocacy. Along with my fellow Commonwealth Corps members, we’ve taught health education to over a thousand students in the Greater Boston area, including the Malden and Lynn school districts, as well as the Bowdoin St. Community Health Center.

Our health education curriculum included mental health, sexual health, and substance use with an emphasis on self-advocacy and harm-reduction. Throughout these teachings, we included discussions about identity and intersectionality, and how these two interact with our health.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I believe achieving health equity is possible.

The most impactful part of my service year has been the discussions with students about health equity as well as normalizing and de-stigmatizing conversations surrounding mental and sexual health. We had an ‘anonymous question box’ where students could submit questions to us anonymously. Because of the confidential nature of this system, students were more comfortable asking vulnerable questions. I am so grateful to have provided validating and accurate information to the students as well as directed them to resources for their mental and sexual health.

As I taught students the importance of equity and advocacy, I also became more cognizant of my own advocacy, allyship, and impact. Building these vital skills with young people in the Greater Boston communities is something I’ll always remember. I am incredibly thankful to the young people I’ve interacted with during my time as a Commonwealth Corps member with Peer Health Exchange.
UTEC, Inc.

UTEC’s mission and promise is to ignite and nurture the ambition of our most disconnected young people to trade violence and poverty for social and economic success. Today we serve Lowell, Lawrence, and Haverhill, MA and are nationally recognized as a model agency serving justice-involved young adults. UTEC provides workforce training through our social enterprises and alternative education through onsite HiSET (GED) preparation classes. Social justice and civic engagement are embedded throughout. In 2017, UTEC opened an onsite early childhood education center and introduced two-generation programming for the young parents who we already serve.

Our three Commonwealth Corps Early Education Specialists, Lexus Velez, Stacey Nwachukwu, and Whitney Cormier, have been an amazing support system to our 2Gen Early Education Center, as well as to the UTEC organization as a whole. Through their service, members have assisted children (ages 0-5) and their young parents (ages 17-25) who are working to increase their educational and other competencies. They’ve also coordinated volunteers to support whole-family engagement and enrichment activities that support social-emotional learning and core competency development for both generations.

Every week, they came up with fun arts and crafts projects for the children, supported every child during the activities, and even displayed the children’s finished work beautifully. They also organized events every month to increase family engagement where parents came to the center during or after work hours and engaged in an activity with their child.

Teachers and family members agree that Lexus is always thinking of ways to support children when challenges arise. Whitney came up with great ideas to support teachers with activities, and Stacey is very nurturing person. Our infants love her, for she gives them lots of love and care.

Lexus, Stacey, and Whitney: MADD Love to you from our UTEC family and thank you for all that you do to support us every day.

- Rula Jaber, Assistant Director of Early Education and Member Supervisor

“I want to give a shout out to the members, not only for supporting our center, but also helping UTEC programing with our young adults. The members were instrumental in planning and supporting outings for young adults in the program and providing individualized support to young adults preparing for their HiSET tests.”

- Rula Jaber, Assistant Director of Early Education and Member Supervisor
**WHITNEY CORMIER**

What made me want to serve with the Commonwealth Corps was that simple fact that so many members who served with AmeriCorps when I was a young adult at UTEC made an impact on my life, so I decided I wanted to give that same feeling for someone else! Nothing makes me more happy following in those footsteps and continuing the legacy of service at UTEC. I can only hope that the youth I have come in contact with during my service year can look at me and my story, see how far I’ve come, and want to do the same for themselves.

One major thing I feel I have a sense of accomplishment with is taking on leadership roles. I have been able to ensure 15 young adults got the chance to experience what it’s like to volunteer with the 2Gen Center! Being able to influence others into giving back gave me such a good feeling and it makes me want to continue to spread that positivity.

One major way this service has impacted me is that now I know that I want to work in a field that allows me to make other people’s lives or jobs easier. I would like to be some kind of a youth worker and that assurance is everything to me, especially since I’ve had the chance to see what kind of mindset I will need and now have a lot of experience working one-on-one with youth of all age groups. To me that is something money can’t buy, so I will forever be grateful for the Commonwealth Corps.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I know the importance of service members and the great impact we make everyday.

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**2020-2021 Host Site Partners**

The Commonwealth Corps is a state-funded service internship program that engages Massachusetts residents of all ages and backgrounds in direct service to strengthen communities, address critical needs, and increase volunteerism. This coming program year, we’re partnering with 16 agencies across the state to host 40 service members. Help us spread the word about serving as a 2020-2021 Commonwealth Corps member, or consider applying yourself at bit.ly/JoinCommCorps!

**Economic Opportunity/Workforce Development Focus Area:**
- Boston Cares/English for New Bostonians (Boston; full-time)
- Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity (Pittsfield; full-time)
- International Institute of New England (Boston; full-time)
- More Than Words (Boston & Waltham; full-time)
- One Family (Statewide; full-time)
- Matahari Women Workers Center (Boston; half-time)

**Education Focus Area:**
- Coalition for a Better Acre (Lowell; full-time)
- Friends of the Rafael Hernandez School Inc. (Boston; full-time)
- Westport River Watershed Alliance (Fall River, Taunton & Westport; full-time)
- WriteBoston (Boston; full-time)

**Health & Nutrition Focus Area:**
- Family Health Center of Worcester (Worcester; full-time)
- Peer Health Exchange (Boston, Lynn & Malden; full-time)
- Open Table (Regional; full-time)
- Regional Environmental Council (Worcester; half-time)

**Youth Development/Youth Violence Prevention Focus Area:**
- Open Sky Community Services (Fitchburg; half-time)
- PAACA - South Coast Youth Courts (Fall River and New Bedford; half-time)
Thank you to all of our 2019-2020 Host Site Partners!

STAY CONNECTED

[Social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn]