Dear Commonwealth Corps Community,

The Commonwealth Corps Program is thrilled to have started another year of service this past August 2021. This year we have partnered with 12 host sites and have recruited 31 Commonwealth Corps members. Over the last few months, our members and host site partners have continued building organizational capacity and mobilizing volunteers throughout MA. So far, members have attended various trainings provided by MSA and their host sites, participated in learning groups, and attended small in-person events for an opportunity to connect.

As the new service year begins, we believe that the mission of Commonwealth Corps, of strengthening communities, addressing critical needs, and increasing volunteerism, must continue to have at its core a commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. This means working together with our community, service members, and host site partners towards addressing and dismantling systems of oppression that disproportionately impact marginalized communities we serve in our state. While our commitment to equity starts with our members and communities who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, we also commit to a broader definition of equity, recognizing that our members and communities often hold an intersection of marginalized identities which are most affected by oppression.

You’re invited to read our updated Commitment to Equity, which also includes our priorities for the 2021-2022 Service Term.

If you have questions, ideas, or feedback, or if you are interested in getting involved with Commonwealth Corps Community Advisory Committee, please email CC Program Manager Stacey Sirois at ssirois@mass-service.org.
Allies for Immigrants

Boston Cares mobilizes and trains volunteers who strengthen communities and improve the lives of people in need. English for New Bostonians creates opportunities for immigrants to learn English and pursue their educational, economic, and civic aspirations. Together, the two organizations partner to run the Allies for Immigrants Program, creating a network of volunteer tutors who share a passion for enhancing English skills for adult learners. Boston Cares and English for New Bostonians (ENB) have two full-time Commonwealth Corps members. Maggie Sestak serves directly with ENB and Jess Gates serves directly with Boston Cares. The members serve collaboratively together to support the Allies program. They support the growth of the Allies program by recruiting, training, and supporting volunteer ESOL tutors, facilitate volunteer engagement and community, including a peer volunteer leadership program to build sustainable capacity at each of our sites. They also maintain an active tutor base of over 100 volunteers serving across 12 programs throughout greater Boston. The Allies for Immigrants program addresses the growing need for ESOL and citizenship tutors in Boston. Currently, waitlists for Boston ESOL programs exceed 3,500 people. Our members have been able to address this need by training and equipping tutors for ESOL classrooms. Tutor assistance through the Allies for Immigrants program helps free up classroom slots to reduce the waitlist numbers by building student confidence and accelerating language acquisition.

**Adult Learning Principles**

- Different from children: goal-oriented and busy
- Varied -- maybe multiple -- languages
- Varied academic backgrounds and beliefs about teaching and learning
- Varied cultures, and varied degrees of awareness of own/US/other cultures
- Have background knowledge to contribute

"As adult ESOL programs begin the new year with a mix of face-to-face, remote and hybrid options, Maggie has connected with each site to learn how volunteer tutors can best assist students in the different modalities. This work lays the foundation for how staff will recruit, train and deploy volunteers for a successful Allies for Immigrants ESOL Corps. Whether helping students learn to use technology to access online learning or providing much-needed practice time, Maggie’s warm personality, attention to detail, and eagerness to connect people will help ensure immigrants’ safe and strong recovery through English classes this year." - Sara Hamilton, Executive Director at English for New Bostonians

"The Commonwealth Corps Program has been a valuable way for us to increase the capacity of Allies for Immigrants and improve the quality of support provided to both our volunteer tutors and community partners. Jess works directly with our volunteer tutors, ensuring they're supported, engaged, and meeting the needs of our partner organizations. With this focused support, we'll be able to bring on a new site this year to support more immigrants." - Claudia Green, Executive Director at English for New Bostonians

We are only able to meet this need because of our members and being a part of the Massachusetts Commonwealth Corps. The Commonwealth Corps has allowed our program to grow and develop into a more sustainable and effective program so that we can continue to train more tutors and serve more sites than ever before. So far this year, our Commonwealth Corps members have already made a great impact on addressing the need in our city. For example, our members this year have trained and equipped so many new tutors that we are now looking into adding new partner sites where we can place new tutors. This increase in capacity allows us to meet further the need for ESOL tutors in the Greater Boston Area. Currently, both Maggie and Jess are training tutors for both the virtual and in-person settings. They are also supporting sites as they either transition back to in-person or continue to navigate the challenges of virtual teaching and learning. Further, Maggie and Jess have begun to train new peer leaders for sites that will allow the Allies. As the year continues, we are excited to see the ways Jess and Maggie continue to contribute to the program, and we are thankful for their service.

- Nicole Plante, Program Manager Allies for Immigrants and CC Alum '20-'21
MAGGIE SESTAK

I discerned for months whether or not a service year was for me. I finally decided “yes,” but that didn’t mean that the discernment process was over. A lot of my hesitation is that I couldn’t seem to find a program that clicked instantaneously. I looked at dozens of service year opportunities, but none of them felt right. Leaving me with the feeling I couldn’t serve those that I would be working with, as well as someone else, may be able to. Then, I came across the opportunity with English for New Bostonians. As cheesy as it sounds, the first time I read the service year description, I knew it was what I wanted to be doing post-graduation. With this role, I am able to utilize my language, interpersonal, outreach/coordination, and organizational communication skills. I feel as though my strengths are highlighted, which allows for both my own growth and the betterment of those that I am serving and working alongside.

In one short month, I have learned about the people, needs, cultures, and neighborhoods of Boston, as well as gotten into the swing of communicating and working with people from all kinds of backgrounds, each with a different story. Through my first month of serving as a Commonwealth Corps Fellow, I have helped in the recruitment, training, and placing of 30+ volunteers who are residents of Boston, across 12 locations. These volunteers then assist in the teaching and facilitating of ESOL and Citizenship classes, helping immigrants learn English and get their citizenship. Even though my role is small, it makes going into the office each day so much more special, knowing I play a part in the process of the bigger picture. This service year has already opened my eyes to the fact that I want to stay in the world of non-profits for my career. Being able to go to work each day and serve people and channel your passions is a gift that I am lucky enough to experience through ENB and MSA on a daily basis.

JESS GATES

I chose to serve because I wanted to interact with my community in a meaningful way. I just graduated college, and I felt very unsure of what I was doing next, but I knew I wanted to do something service-related. This lead me to the Commonwealth Corps. As a service member, I can serve my community, get real career experience, and help with professional development. It was the perfect fit for me after college. I recently organized a Volunteer Tutor Training for the Allies for Immigrants program. I coordinated with 40+ volunteers to set up the training and then to place the volunteers with our partner sites. It is incredibly rewarding to see these volunteers go on to tutor in the Adult ESOL classes that I connected them with. It was really great to see our efforts pay off and know that we are impacting someone’s life. We are currently planning our next training, where we hope to accept even more volunteers who are interested in serving their community, which is pretty exciting. My service has given me so many exciting opportunities so far. I was able to serve at an event on 9/11 where 300 volunteers helped pack over 100,000 for the Greater Boston Food Bank. One of the speakers there was Representative Ayanna Pressley. I have followed her career and am very inspired by her, so it was incredible to get to meet her and hear her speak. That was definitely a once and a lifetime opportunity that I would not have had without Commonwealth Corps.

NAME: MAGGIE
HOMETOWN: NEW ALBANY, OH
CURRENT HOME: BOSTON, MA

‘Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have the opportunity to actively learn about cultures, needs, languages, and humanity outside of myself. I am part of a greater good by being a member of the Commonwealth Corps!’

NAME: JESS
HOMETOWN: ARLINGTON, MA
CURRENT HOME: ARLINGTON, MA

‘Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I get to interact and connect with people from all over the city who I may not have met otherwise.’
Coalition for A Better Acre

Coalition for a Better Acre is located in the beautiful, diverse Acre Neighborhood of Lowell, MA. Founded by local Acre Residents in the 1980s to protect the neighborhood from being razed. The organization has grown into a multi-dimensional community development corporation, providing affordable housing and supportive programming, such as the YES! Learning Center, throughout the Greater Lowell Area. The YES! Center is located on the first floor of CBA’s main offices at 517 Moody Street and provides daily after-school education and care to residents of local CBA-owned properties such as the North Canal Apartments. Members attend the program daily and receive academic support and tutoring services, provided by Commonwealth Corps member, David Rosario, who serves as a Program Instructor. David also serves members a healthy and nutritious snack daily and monitors their peer relations for patterns of risk, bullying, or other types of social dysfunction.

After homework assistance, and snacks, members can choose from a variety of educational programming aligned with the state’s Common Core Standards. Because of this alignment, all YES! Programming mirrors classroom learning, providing a consistent educational base for members. Youth can select to participate in any number of physical fitness, art, literacy, STEM, cultural, or wellness programs based on their own individual interests. Program Instructor Angel Beltran, also a Commonwealth Corps member, oversees outdoor play and fitness in the park neighboring the center and manages day-to-day behavioral concerns during programming. He ensures members adhere to program guidelines and treat each other, staff, and themselves with respect and kindness by CBA’s organizational mission. The center is overseen and managed by Pam Larocque, a veteran youth worker in the city, who trains and develops all Commonwealth Members into the role models our members need. These vital services provide our youth residents with the skills to be successful in school and beyond while providing our parents with a safe, trustworthy space for their children.

“Our Commonwealth members are vital to the success of the program, and we are so happy to be working with David and Angel during the 2021-2022 School Year!”

- Pam Larocque,
Youth Development Program Coordinator

CBA at an outdoors event
DAVID ROSARIO

When I learned about an opportunity at Commonwealth Corps (CC), I volunteered at Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA). My role was to assist them with organizing and delivering boxes of food for Lowell residents. Also, I helped CBA build and maintain their website, researched information for marketing-related writing, and wrote drafts or concepts for CBA member profile pieces and newsletters. Through my experience with CBA, I created a friendship with Mitchy, who was a former CC member. Mitchy told me about CC, its mission, and the wonderful benefits that come with a service role. Her CC experience influenced her to continue volunteering and engaging with our community. Her good spirit inspired me. During the summer, CBA was looking for people to serve for their afterschool program. Mitchy sent me the link to the descriptions and applications for the roles CBA offered. After some consideration and insight from Mitchy, I used my connections at CBA and applied for service through CC.

At the time, I thought that CC offered an opportunity for me to participate in a unique and impactful cause. Gathering a greater appreciation for humanity and our society was one of my personal goals. As I reflected on my life, I realized I needed to acknowledge the worth of contributing to society and focus less on my financial pursuits. Thus far in my service, I have played a small part in offering the youth at CBA’s afterschool program a place where they can socialize, express themselves, and have fun. Our team has also gained the trust and confidence of parents who want to bring their children to a supportive and developing program. Growing up, I never worked or interacted with kids much. My service has given me a better idea of how significant a person’s childhood can be in their development. Even more, teaching the youth how to conduct themselves has given me a sense of how to be a good role model and improvements I must make about my behavior and ways of thinking.

ANGEL BELTRAN

I heard about CBA from a teacher that’s from a high school I previously went to. What drew me to Commonwealth Corps is that I get to work with local kids and learn different things from the different age groups and what it means to be a kid in this generation. I chose to serve because I want to make a positive change in someone’s life or even be an ear for someone. One thing I’ve personally hope to accomplish is that this will make me a better teacher overall. A second thing I hope to accomplish is to gain the trust and respect of the kids. A third thing I’m hoping for is for me to be a better speaker so I can state my opinions more easily. An example of how this service has impacted me in a good way is that from working with the kids for a decent amount of time, I’ve just been a little more used to talking to or in groups of people. Another example is of how this service impacted me is that normally I’m a shy person, and it’s hard for me to talk to someone I don’t know, but this service is slowly helping me come out of my comfort zone. A fine example of how this service is helping me prepare for the future is that getting to know and see all these different kids we serve helps me slowly think of possible lessons plans or fun and exciting activities.
Commonwealth Corps Updates

Member Meet-Ups

During the month of October, Commonwealth Corps members and MSA staff participated in small gatherings with members for an outdoor lunch and an opportunity to connect and get to know each other in person. These events took place in Boston and Worcester. MSA is grateful for the hospitality of one of our Host Site partners, the Regional Environmental Council, for hosting the gathering at their farm. (In the pictures, from left to right, members and MSA staff in Boston and Worcester).

New Partnership!

We are happy to share that as a Commonwealth Corps Member or Alumni, you now have a new educational benefit in a partnership with Regis College in Weston, MA. Regis College offers a tuition discount to CC members and alumni (plus their spouses and children). This benefit can be used for courses on-campus, online, and even on the work-site.

Join the info session on 11/3/21 at 5 pm. Register here.

Stay Connected

Whether you’re a current member, alum, host site partner, or supporter, we invite you to stay connected with the Commonwealth Corps on social media.

If you want to know more about the work that our host sites partners do, connect with them on their social platforms.

We’re always happy to share photos, stories, and updates from members, alumni, and supporters. Please send them to Marlene at mrojas@mass-service.org.