MSA Welcome & Update

Dear Commonwealth Corps Community,

We are excited to celebrate our Commonwealth Corps members for their accomplishments throughout this year. Members have had to face many challenges and navigate their roles in new ways we never thought were possible. In addition to managing their service, members also have participated in a series of virtual training sessions on preparing for their next steps, leading their own trainings, participating in MSA in-person events, and more.

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 and hosting 38 members for the next term. The recruitment process has started, and it is possible to see the available positions here. These agencies have demonstrated their commitment to creating meaningful change in their communities through service, and we are excited to begin another impactful service term.

Thank you, and congratulations to all of our 2021-2022 members and partners! We are excited to see what these members do next, including continuing their education, or committing to another year of service!
Cambridge Women's Center

The Cambridge Women's Center is still here for our community! For the past 50 years CWC has been providing a safe space for all those to whom the term ‘woman’ is a meaningful identifier. Our low threshold approach allows us to open our doors without judgment to marginalized communities in the Cambridge and Greater Boston area. Our center services are 100% powered by our volunteers, interns and fellows. This year we got the opportunity to partner with MSA and host three amazing fellows. Having Marta Lee-Perriard, Khadija Koutani, and Leila Bower at our site has truly allowed us to see the potential of impact when we have the right people on board. Marta is our diplomat! You can hear members calling her name from the other room, just so they can get an opportunity to chat with her. Though Khadija was quiet at first, she has really come out of shell and is a huge contributor to managing our drop-in. She is usually the first face out community sees.

Leila is constantly helping us improve our operational systems and bring back resources to improve our volunteer training. Their contributions to drop-in management to special projects helped us establish administrative processes to improve our efficiencies and serve more people. The added support and capacity have enabled us to expand hours and add days, allowing us to have more reach in our community. Since January 2022 alone, our volunteers have served over 500 hours and have helped with over 820 drop-in visits. Assisting with computers, addressing food insecurity, providing emotional support, and much more. Our fellows help us keep all of this in order. Our partnership with MSA, Stacey, Marlene, and the fellows has been transformative and important. Our team, our members, and our community have greatly benefited from being able to have these three superstars serving with us. Thanks, MSA!

- Stephanie Haynes
Co-Director of Programs and Services.
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
KHADIJA KOUTANI

My experience with domestic abuse was one of the reasons that motivated me to be part of the Commonwealth Corps members and serve the community. In fact, being so grateful for the many support services I received in the past, I was hoping to support those who have been enduring the kind of hardship I experienced, then help them the same way I was helped. In addition, I noticed that being a fellow with the Massachusetts Service Alliance would be a good fit for me as long as I am passionate about helping others and I also was thrilled to start my studies in Human Services alongside serving with my host site. In cooperation with the other fellows on my host site, I could contribute to the preparation of the steps prior to the monthly schedule, including organizing the volunteers’ list and the emails delivered to the volunteers willing to serve at the center. Also, I believe that my organizational skills could help in making the food supplies and our community fridge easy to access for the volunteers and fellows to better serve our members at the center. Taking my classes in human services while I’m serving helped me to share my skills as a compassionate and empathetic listener, especially when I had to offer emotional support to the women at the center. I’m so grateful because I could provide some support and at the same time, I learned a lot from those women to who I relate. I gained new insights through their life stories and that helped me to learn more about myself as well.

Cambridge Women's Center

NAME: KHADIJA
HOMETOWN: QUINCY, MA
CURRENT HOME: QUINCY, MA

‘Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I could gain communication skills and be more confident in discussing different topics. I also had the opportunity to be part of that amazing community and meet awesome people.’
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
ALYSSA ZURAWSKY

I decided to join the Commonwealth Corps after realizing the career track I was on was not what I wanted. As I gained more professional experience, I wanted to help build a healthier, and happier community, which led me applying for the Commonwealth Corps position at the Family Health Center. One of the most exciting projects my fellow members and I are working on for the Homeless Advocacy and Outreach Program is starting a Women’s Support and Empowerment Group. This group is designed to help our female-identifying patients participate in group therapy, learn new skills, build relationships, and become more empowered overall. The group has been in the planning stage for months, but hopefully, by the beginning of June, the group will finally launch! It feels great to be part of something that is extremely important not just to me personally, but to our patients and the organization. It is also a program that can be sustained for years to come. As I approach the end of my service year, I am coming away with new skills and experiences that I would not have had otherwise. The resume, interviewing, and networking trainings have been incredibly helpful as I look for my post-service job. Another incredible training experience was completing an 84-hour training course on Community Health Work. It was offered through the Health Center, and I learned the intricacies of community health work. I learned so much from this training and I now have a certificate that is pertinent to the jobs I am looking for.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I feel more prepared for the professional world and I have a better understanding of the type of work I want to do in my life.'
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

OLIVIA ZINTER

I was drawn to the Commonwealth Corps, because I had a desire to devote my time to a nonprofit community health organization from a unique perspective other than as a staff member. I believe that the opportunity to serve provides the ability to assist the needs of an organization, while observing the structure and logistics of the nonprofit healthcare sector from an outsider’s perspective. During my service, it has been rewarding to see my efforts have an influence on both the success of the organization and patients’ wellbeing. Our most consistent project has been the implementation of health education and hospitality programming events, which has allowed us to exceed our goal of serving 800 patients. Additionally, I am thankful to have had the opportunity to assist in the creation of a Women’s Support Group. I believe that this group will be an essential safe space for unsheltered, female-identifying individuals to share. Ultimately, my service has well prepared me for my future career goals. This service position has allowed me to solidify my desires to commit my career to helping increase healthcare accessibility and limit health disparities for vulnerable populations. Additionally, this experience has supplied me with essential skills, such as computer proficiency and health education planning, as well as extensive confidence within the professional setting. Both my time at my host site and opportunities for professional development allowed me to enter my post-service job search and interview process with confidence and minimal stress. I will be forever grateful for the impact that my Commonwealth Corps experience has had on exceeding both my personal and professional goals.
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
DEISY RODRIGUEZ LEDEZMA

I chose to apply to the Commonwealth Corps because I loved the idea of being able to do a year of service part time while also going to school. I have always been interested in service years, but it wasn't economically feasible for me in the past or would require a lot from me full time - so being able to do a year of service part time at a host site that not only aligns with my course of study but is within walking distance has been great. I would say the most major thing my fellow Commonwealth Corps members and I have accomplished this year is managing a food grant and setting up a food distribution system for our patients. We serve a vulnerable population that faces food insecurity, so being able to set up snack bags, grab bags, and warm meals on site and distributing 10+ meals weekly has been great. The second thing would be creating cultural, health and wellness, and fun programming to make the space more welcoming for patients. My favorite one would have to be valentine's day - but world water day and mother's day have also been great. My year of service has impacted me in various ways, the main one being getting to know and serve vulnerable populations. I would say that I had 'played it safe' in the past and mainly worked with populations that - although also vulnerable - I felt more comfortable with and I was more exposed to. I've been able to learn more about patient care, trauma informed care, hospitality, health education and health literacy, advocacy, and so on. This role has prepared me for the future by allowing me to expand my experiences and learn different work/office cultures as well as gain new skills and knowledge about public health, health equity, and accessibility.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I am looking forward to exploring roles in patient care and continue to serve vulnerable populations in different capacities.

NAME: DEISY
HOMETOWN: WESLACO TX
CURRENT HOME: WORCESTER MA
Safe Homes at Open Sky Community Services

Safe Homes is a program supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) young people, and their allies, between the ages of 14 and 23. Having Commonwealth Corps members as a part of our team has been extremely beneficial to our programming. With the increased support, we have been able to expand our services immensely, better support the youth we serve and present a diversified team. This year, our interns have heavily focused on learning, developing and applying numerous professional development skills. One of these skills includes the development of resumes and cover letters. This development allowed our interns to emphasize to potential hires not only what makes them adequate for a position, but also what makes them stand out from other applicants. Through these practices, there has been a major increase in the confidence and performance of our interns throughout the year as they center on these skills.

‘Having the CC members as a part of our team has been beneficial not only to our program but to the greater community. They have all brought new insight and perspectives to Safe Homes and our program wouldn’t be the same without them.’

–Otto (he/they)

Thanks to our members, Tyler Pender, Sayoni Barari, and Zand Ghaemi, we have expanded our services to allow for two more groups through Safe Homes, Art Expressions, and QTBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Art Expressions, run and developed by Zand, serves as a safe space for our youth to create art, practice self-care, and have a chance to decompress and enjoy creative expressions within a safe environment. QTBIPOC, created by Sayoni, is a space designed to build community, envision, and work toward liberation, primarily emphasizing QTBIPOC coalition. Our Commonwealth Corps members have been tremendously beneficial to Safe Homes. Of course, an increased number of people has allowed us to greatly expand and improve our services, but each member also brings new ideas, perspectives, and experiences to the program that have made it possible for us to better serve and connect with our youth.

–Renn Duffey
Director of Safe Homes at Open Sky
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
ZAND GHAEMI

I chose to serve with Commonwealth Corps because its service internship program focuses on providing a valuable opportunity for personal and professional discovery. This kind of chance to learn about oneself and their potential career paths was an important one for me to try and take advantage of as a graduating college student and I didn’t want to pass it up. I’m so glad that I was afforded this service experience because it did in fact help me to broaden my knowledge of myself and the human services career field. I am proud of the programming/discussion facilitation skills I have acquired through serving at my host site and intend to implement them in future circles I am a part of. This service internship has also made it possible for me to feel even more empowered stepping into leadership roles and I hope to continue accomplishing each new leadership goal that I set for myself moving forward. Serving in the human services field has exposed me to a career path that is fraught with professional burnout due to the emotional intensity and immense personal investment the field requires in order to remain motivated. I learned very quickly during my internship that if I didn’t prioritize my own well-being I wouldn’t be able to show up and serve in the way I wanted to, meaning in an effective and present way. Being forced to confront my own shortcomings when it came to my self-care and self-image made me not only a better service and community member but a better version of myself than I was when I started this service.
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
SAYONI BARARI

The main thing that drew me to Commonwealth Corps was the opportunity to provide others the with the support that I had always wanted when I was a younger trans person. I wanted to serve because I not only wanted to learn about other people but I also wanted to learn more about myself and use my identity to help others. I would say that my biggest accomplishment in this goal has been starting a QTBIPOC youth group. As a QTBIPOC individual, I had never seen or heard of a similar group and I felt that a space needed to be created to help people like me. I hope that the knowledge of this space will help encourage QTBIPOC youth to access the resources they need. While it is difficult to isolate one example from the many examples of me gaining knowledge and insight from my service, I believe that the most impactful moments have been the realization that the incremental work has had a larger impact. I especially notice it when I mention something from an activity I have facilitated and the youth we interact with recognize what I am talking about. I try to make my activities memorable, even if they are memorable for silly reasons. When one of the youth brings up those moments, they also tend to remember the original point of the lesson or activity we engaged in. It makes me feel as though I have actually managed to get through to people and not only help them learn and grow but also laugh.
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
TYLER PENDER

I was drawn to Commonwealth Corp because of their extensive background in working with groups that I love to support. Once I found out Safe Homes was one of the groups, I could potentially serve with I had to join. Being able to serve LGBT+ youths as a member of the LGBT+ community myself has been so fulfilling. I have had the opportunity to head booths for Safe Homes at multiple Pride events and gotten to network with so many different Groups. It has been such a growing experience getting to connect with different youth from diverse backgrounds and learning how to help the community. Getting to hear all the different stories from the youth I serve, my fellow service members, and other members of the LGBT+ community has been so impactful in my own personal life. It has helped me discover who I really am as a person. Coming out as Transgender and starting my own transition has made me happier than I have ever been in my entire life. This has brought so much understanding and clarity to me and helps me serve the youth in the community so much more effectively than I would have expected. Additionally, all the skills I have picked up and learned from my supervisor and team have helped me improve my social, public speaking, and communication skills immensely. I finally feel like I have the confidence to speak and let my voice be heard when I did not before. This internship has been an amazing and life changing experience for me and I could not be more grateful.
PAACA Youth Services

PAACA is a nonprofit agency on the South Coast with a Youth Services division that seeks to prevent delinquency, substance use and violence through positive youth development, education and engagement. PAACA and SCYC have hosted 2 part-time members this year to serve as program developers, facilitators, and recruiters. They have helped expand our educational programs throughout the community by doing presentations in the area schools. Members have developed several in person programs with creative curriculum to serve middle and high school students as well as continue our work in elementary programming.

Jason Remick has been a grounding force on the team. He brings a sense of calm and creativeness with him that allows our team to look at things from a different perspective. He developed 2 new curriculums involving life skills and mentoring from start to finish. He was able to mold topics into hands on activities that were engaging and fun for the youth and adults. Jason has opened creative doors within the Youth Services department with his art! We were able to offer free Creative Paint programs to over 130 youth and adults this year that most of our community have never been able to participate in due to the expense.

“We re-applied for Commonwealth Corps because the experience last year was a wonderful experience for us as well as the youth we work with. Our community of young people need talented and experienced young men to role model positive behaviors and our CC Duo did just that by providing a consistent support and presence in their afterschool programs. Jason and Nate showed up every week with a positive attitude and ready to have fun with the youth in programs. Their enthusiasm was catching, and the youth had fun because of them.”

-Yajaira Romero, Director SCYC Fall River

Nathan Andrade has been a force of energy for the team. He brings excitement for working with the youth and a drive to educate and desire to make the community better. He has created new and engaging activities for established programming as well as developed a new language curriculum that included 3 languages (Spanish, Portuguese and ASL). Nathan made sure that activities were appropriate and exciting to keep the youth interested. His experience working with youth did not go unnoticed as we saw how most young people gravitated to him each week ready and excited for the next new topic he was going to teach them.

With the talents of both Jason and Nathan, we were able to serve over 511 students within afterschool and community programming this school year. As a community-based office, we want to continue to engage and be a place of emerging community leaders. We have always been and will continue to be on the forefront of developing new and innovative programming for the Youth In our city. While we wont be a host site for Commonwealth Corps for the upcoming year, we will hopefully be back in the mix in years to come. We would like to thank our CC Members for all they have done for the youth in our community in 2021-2022.

-Terri Belliveau, New Bedford Youth Court Director
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
NATHAN ANDRADE

What initially drew me to the Commonwealth Corp was hearing about it through a friend, and learning about the potential opportunities that can come from serving. Not just personal advancement but having the ability to actually make a direct impact in my community. While serving I was able to provide guidance to local youth through after school programs that my host site would run. In said programs I was given different roles such as leading, facilitating and curriculum creation allowing me to further advance my skills. An example of one of my accomplishments would be I created an entire curriculum for a language program we were running. Alongside the curriculum I even created supplementary learning materials that were easily accessible and intuitive for the students via Quizlet. While being a program facilitator not only was I there to run programs I even had the chance to mentor some students and help guide them towards any goals they may have. Being from the city in which my host site is located, I’m aware of the negative influence the community has on youth today. But with serving I had the opportunity to help steer these students away from those harmful paths that would lead to nothing positive for them. I left each day with the feeling that I had actually made a difference in my community, even if it’s just one kid at a time. That truly impacted me on a personal level realizing how important and beneficial mentoring/guidance can be for a young person especially in their formative years. All thanks to Commonwealth Corps for allowing me to serve in my community and grow as a person.
I found Commonwealth Corp after a brutal 2020 (as it was for a lot of us) lead to me quitting my job and taking a leap of faith into building a better future for myself. I knew I wanted to do something related to volunteer service and getting connected to community. When I found CC through a career services website, I jumped at the opportunity to get involved. I applied to serve at my host site, PAACA, serving with South Coast Youth Courts, because at the time I was also making the decision to go back to school for psychology and wanted some experience working directly with people in need. Through my service year I have gotten a lot of opportunities to grow and practice skills such as group facilitation. My artistic skills have been tapped many times by my host site to facilitate group painting events with kids and adults. I also got the opportunity to put what I was learning in my psychology classes to practice by designing curriculum for after school mentoring programs that teach life skills and building better relationships through better communication. There are many stories from my experience that will stay with me but the one that stands out in my mind is from the first time I taught a paint night. The painting was a bit more than people where expecting, and as I patiently tried to guide them through the steps people were getting frustrated that things weren’t turning out well. However, in the end when they all put their paintings on display together, everyone was impressed with how good they all turned out and worked together. It was a reminder of how no matter the struggle or frustrations that working in our individual silos can be, when we all come together and see the big picture of what was accomplished, we can recognize the beautiful art we have created.
Thank you to all of our 2021-2022 CC Members!
Thank you to all of our 2021-2022 Host Site Partners!
Important Dates

- Friday, 6/24 in-person event - Celebration of Service.
- Saturday, 6/25 - Members' Last day of service

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.

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.