MSA Welcome & Update

Dear Commonwealth Corps Community,

The Commonwealth Corps Program is happy to share that we have successfully started another year of service. This year we have partnered with 14 host sites and have recruited 28 Commonwealth Corps members. Over the last few months, members have attended various trainings and in-person events provided by MSA for an opportunity to connect.

As the new service year begins, we are excited to see what our members accomplish throughout the year. In order to keep supporting the professional development of our members, we have reached out to our experienced CC Alumni to become a mentor to support current members. Alumni mentors are such a valuable part of the Commonwealth Corps program, and we are so grateful for their willingness to give back to our community by supporting this year’s cohort. The member support they will provide will be important as they serve their communities and transition to the next steps after service.

CC Members at the in person meet up, ICA Museum in Boston
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 1 full-time, Commonwealth Corps member, Helen Hawkins. Helen works collaboratively with both ENB and Boston Cares to support the Allies program. She supports the growth of the Allies program by recruiting, training, and supporting volunteer ESOL tutors, facilitating volunteer engagement and community, including a peer volunteer leadership program to build sustainable capacity at each of our sites. She also maintains an active tutor base of over a 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. We are only able to meet this need because of our committed member 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 member has already made a great impact on addressing the need in our city. Helen has been part of two orientation sessions that equipped 57 tutors who are now ready to serve at our partner sites. Helen will be supporting tutors for both virtual and in-person settings. Helen also is supporting sites as she either makes the transition back to in-person or continues to navigate the challenges of virtual teaching and learning. Further, this year Helen has already onboarded a new Allies for Immigrants site and is planning more projects aimed at tutor engagement. As the year continues, we are excited to see the ways Helen continues to contribute to the program and we are thankful for her service.

"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. Helen 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
HELEN HAWKINS

As I have begun my year of service with English for New Bostonians, I can already tell that this year will be one of learning and growth. When I heard about the opportunity to be a Commonwealth Corps member, I was excited to be able to help the immigrant community in Boston as well as gain personal and professional skills. The main part of my position is to recruit and match volunteers with ESL programs who teach adult English Language Learners. One of the most impactful things of my service so far is to be able to create a partnership between the volunteer and ESL teachers which will positively impact their students. So far my service has given me the opportunity to gain a lot of professional skills. I attended a Business Luncheon where I was able to practice essential skills such as networking and meet people who I would not have an opportunity to meet otherwise. I am also using this year of service as a way to figure out what my future will look like, getting a year of work experience is very helpful to me while exploring my options of graduate school or continuing my professional journey.

Cape Cod Times Needy Fund, Inc.

The Cape Cod Times Needy Fund, Inc. has been helping residents since 1936. Our mission is to provide urgent assistance for basic human needs to individuals and families residing on Cape Cod, Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket who are experiencing temporary financial crises.

This year, for the first time in our 86 years, our organization is fortunate to have the opportunity to host our first service interns through Commonwealth Corps of Massachusetts. Each day, our wonderful engagement coordinators, Aliyah Pires and Mary Stetson learn about nonprofit business development and programming. They are helping the organization grow our client service and fundraising and development, and our outreach and a volunteer base. In turn, our aim is to provide them with professional development opportunities and skills that we hope will serve them each well as they plan their future professional goals.

Mary and Aliyah are each making an undeniable impact on our organization and to the community, but we are also extremely happy to see them each day, and sincerely value having them on our team! Residents of the Cape themselves, they each bring a new energy and fresh perspective to a long-standing community organization, and to the work we do. As part of their service with the Cape Cod Times Needy Fund, Mary and Aliyah are growing our social media presence, planning, and executing our organization’s first fundraising event, creating a current regional resource handbook for our intakes and clients, and aiding us with growing a brand-new Volunteer Fundraising Taskforce. These projects are so important to help us sustain our programs and services into the future so that the community will always have a place to turn when they are in financial crisis. We are truly grateful to have this time with Mary and Aliyah, and we are grateful for their service!

‘Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I am able to gain professional skills and insight about my future career path while helping to support marginalized communities in Boston.’
ALIYAH Pires

I decided to serve because I recently changed my major from Elementary Education to English and management marketing during my senior year of college. I realized I had no experience in this field and wanted to get out of my comfort zone. I know I love working with children but not only that, I enjoy helping children and families that are in need within the community. I wanted to work with a company that would do just that while also allowing me to take on the marketing role and that is how I stumbled upon the Cape Cod Times Needy Fund internship opportunity. I think it will not only give me experience in my new desired field but also allow me to provide service for those in need throughout my community. Although it is just the beginning, I have already created a resource guide for the office where they can easily direct clients to other nonprofits that want to help. I have also started gaining professional skills in marketing and client outreach that I hope to keep developing. For me personally, I am most interested in the marketing and social media side of things, and I have definitely been excited when working on these tasks. I have created posts that will be going out soon as a way to communicate with the community. I have also wrote and published a press release which is very exciting!

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I feel confident in the experience I am getting and believe it will lead me to my dream career.

THrive Communities of Massachusetts

The mission of THRIVE Communities is to empower communities to welcome and support our neighbors transitioning from incarceration. THRIVE is hosting 2 full-time Commonwealth Corps members who serve as Peer Community Outreach and Support Coordinators, helping with community outreach and volunteer recruitment and support people transitioning from incarceration in greater Lowell. Through their service, members will help people returning to the community from incarceration uphold their reentry requirements and access resources, including those needed for employment, and support them in housing searches. In addition, members will increase community awareness of THRIVE and leverage 12 volunteers that will be engaged in community building workshops.
DEMETRES RUSH

How did I get involved in Commonwealth Corps? I wanted to be a facilitator in community outreach, with the priority being returning citizens. The things I have been most impacted by is the inclusiveness. In orientation and other subsequent training sessions the impetus is on informing, communicating, providing insight. The differences we have make us particular, unique. Those differences are intriguing to the point that you see more parallels than things to disagree with. Fast forward a few weeks later, and I attend an LGBTQ+ wedding. Because of the social identifiers portion of the orientation, I was in a space where I was okay. People have different orientations, ideologies, philosophies, etc. I would like to be an individual that has the open-mindedness to hear, observe, and respect all individuals. And to be not afraid to engage in dialogue even if I find myself in the occasional stretch zone. In orientation, we had a session on social identifiers! Very informative. For I was very ignorant to the issue of pronouns and the like. I have to admit I was initially very uncomfortable. The society I am accustomed to is very heteronormative. And it wasn’t a phobia. The cause of my ignorance was basically: aversion. Am I cured of my ignorance? Probably not, but I am okay with engaging in discourse.

MARK SUMMERS

I learned about Commonwealth Corp from a friend who is heavily involved in reentry and the cause of restorative justice. Although I had never explored working in the field as a potential career, I had always wanted to share my experiences in hopes of helping people who might be struggling with different issues. Since joining CC and Thrive I have learned many official practices that are necessary for success in the workforce. As I pride myself on being caring and considerate, I realize that professional protocols must be added to properly serve the community. In my service, I have had the pleasure of meeting people who come from situations very similar to the path I had been on. What excited me most is that I can see myself in them and also know that they, like me, can progress and turn an ugly, unfortunate situation into something positive and rewarding. I had internally given up hope and had been living day by day believing that I was doomed. My world changed completely simply because I understood that there was hope and that people were willing to work with me, accepting me for who I was and who I had been. Being able to share this with people and allow them to connect with me and our similarities is remarkable. I think once a person is able to see potential as opposed to just hearing the story makes it all the more believable. I consider myself more fortunate than many because I was blessed with so much support, yet that wasn’t enough. Seeing a difference and doing the work changed my life, and I am now able to be an example. There may be obstacles along the way, but I now know I can bounce back and stay the course. I have purpose and drive. I know success is well within my grip.
Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity

Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity (CBHFH) brings people together to build homes, communities, and hope by building strength, stability, and self-reliance through shelter. CBHFH is hosting 3 full-time Commonwealth Corps members. Two members serve as Community Outreach Connectors and will connect 800 unique residents to resources that contribute to economic stability, resilience, and improved employability in Berkshire County. One member serves Pittsfield focus neighborhoods, the other expanding into Great Barrington. The Commonwealth Corps Volunteer Service Enterprise (CCVSE) member will implement the Volunteer Service Enterprise Action Plan and increase the number of volunteers managed. Members will recruit and manage 10 resident volunteers in community connection recovery efforts.

MARIA MENACA

Yo decidí servir desde mi propia experiencia personal como inmigrante porque se que es llegar a un lugar donde no tienes un lenguaje, donde desconoces cómo conectar cómo adaptarse a un nuevo sistema … y desde allí empece a servir a ayudar a otros para tener mejores recurso tanto en conocimiento como información que pueda ayudar a tener una mejor calidad de vida para cada uno dentro de la comunidad. Cómo puedo mejorar mi comunidad encontrando mucha más información importante para compartir, buscando nuevo recursos ya que tenemos muchas organizaciones de las cuales desconocemos su servicios y cómo la comunidad puede beneficiarse de estos. También he encontrado información de organizaciones que ofrecen entrenamientos gratuitos que pueden mejorar las condiciones laborales de todos dentro de la comunidad pienso que en la manera que todos trabajemos juntos estaremos mejor. Una gran experiencia que he vivido es salir presentarme, presentar mi trabajo y explicar que hago esto ha aumentado mi confianza y motivado mucho a trabajar más por la comunidad, personalmente soy muy tímida a veces el lenguaje es una gran barrera pero tomo coraje para salir adelante ganado conocimiento y compartiéndolo a otros para que sus objetivos se cumplan de una forma rápida y segura, creo que dar conocimiento, hablar de las experiencias, motivar a otros a salir adelante es uno de los mejores servicios que Podemos dar a otros.

‘Yo puedo ayudar a que mi comunidad tenga más información que de un crecimiento a la Comunidad’
LAURA CABRERA

Me siento muy afortunada de formar parte de CC y central Berkshire habitat, gracias por el soporte que he recibido a lo largo de estos meses con diferentes entrenamientos y orientaciones y conectar con diferentes organizaciones, que tienen el mismo objetivo, servir a nuestra comunidad. He tenido la gran fortuna de pertenecer a un gran equipo como organización y hemos tenido algunos avances el desbloquear mucha información para la comunidad, en especial la comunidad latina que a veces por el idioma se complicaba recibir ayuda o aplicar para servicios. He tenido la fortuna de servir junto a María Menaca, es una mujer que admiro mucho por todo su amor y entrega al ayudar a nuestra comunidad Latina, ha sido una gran inspiración. El ver muchas familias recibiendo la ayuda y la información que necesita para poder lograr sus sueños y objetivos. por otra parte también el tener la oportunidad de ver y ayudar a construir una casa a base de voluntarios para mí es una de las mejores experiencias que he tenido en mi vida, el saber que en un futuro se beneficiarían muchas familias.

Commonwealth Corps Celebration of Service 2021-2022

During this summer, we hosted an in-person Celebration of service for the 2021-2022 members after 2 years of remote events! It was great to meet some of our members for the first time in person along with their supervisors.

We were able to give special recognition to our Alumni Ambassador, Francesca Jeudy! Many thanks for her support and commitment to the Commonwealth Corps mission.
Alumni Summer meet-up

We also hosted a get-together with 2021-2022 CC Members for an extra opportunity to meet in person at our new office. Members from Cambridge Women’s Center and Matahari attended and provided helpful advice to a new member.

If you are interested in hosting an event or training for the 2022-2023 CC Members, please contact Marlene.

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.