The 2020-2021 Commonwealth Corps program service year comes to an end. 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 few months. This year’s members have had to navigate their roles in new ways we never thought were possible. Members and sites have found creative ways to continue engaging community members and addressing urgent needs in the Commonwealth.

In addition to managing their service, members also participated in a series of virtual training sessions on preparing for their next steps. 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 42 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 2020-2021 members and partners! We are excited to see what these members do next, including continuing their education, or committing to another year of service!
Allies for Immigrants: Boston Cares and English for New Bostonians

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. We currently have 2 full-time Commonwealth Corps members, Nicole Plante and Louisa Woodhouse. Members support the Allies program by recruiting, training, and supporting volunteer ESOL tutors, developing systems and tools to facilitate stronger engagement and serving as tutors themselves. Nicole and Louisa have increased capacity for continued growth by building stronger relationships with both partner sites and the Allies volunteer base. Members are also essential in helping Allies tutors gain the skills they need to be the most effective tutors possible. For example, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, members could virtually train 166 new tutors and develop additional training opportunities for in-service tutors in a virtual world.

“Nicole and Louisa have been a really valuable addition to the Allies program. Working together, they’ve helped expand our capacity to provide customized support to host sites and tutors, which was vital when shifting the program to virtual learning during the pandemic.”
- Sara Hamilton, Executive Director at Boston Cares.

English classes through the pandemic have been a place for immigrants to find information, community and, most importantly, a means to continue pursuing their dreams. As Program Outreach Coordinator, Louisa has drawn on tech-savvy Bostonians’ goodwill to assist their neighbors and to meet student and program needs. This year, she helped integrate tutors into several new remote English classes for immigrants most affected by the pandemic. Louisa’s steadfast creativity and commitment have enabled English for New Bostonians to learn, innovate and stay true to our mission.”
- Claudia Green, Executive Director at ENB

Both members have been flexible and innovative in a virtual world. They developed virtual roundtable events to bring together those involved in the Allies program. These virtual events opened up discussions with volunteers and addressed current challenges. Not only did this allow volunteers to share direct feedback to our organizations, but they also provided a common platform for volunteers involved in the program to connect. In a virtual world, these events were essential in keeping folks connected. These roundtables also allowed members to be creative and design a completely new project from start to finish during their terms. Current waitlists for Boston ESOL programs exceed 3,500 people. By building student confidence and accelerating language acquisition, tutor assistance through the Allies for Immigrants program helps to reduce the waitlist numbers overall. In addition, being part of the Commonwealth Corps program has allowed the Allies program to grow and expand to serve more ESOL programs and recruit and train a higher number of tutors than ever before. These tutors are then equipped to best assist students in the 12 ESOL program sites throughout the city. Having Louisa and Nicole has been a wonderful and impactful experience for volunteers, program sites, and staff at English for New Bostonians and Boston Cares, and we thank them for their service with the Allies program.
- Casey Mullane, Senior Manager for Corporate and Community Engagement at Allies for Immigrants - BC/ENB
I have always been interested in policy, economic mobility, and structural social change, but previously had worked primarily in direct-service roles. I felt that the Commonwealth Corps position offered a valuable opportunity to gain experience at the program’s level. Having interned with English for New Bostonians in the past, I was excited to be able to return to an organization I knew well, especially in a year of so many unknowns. This year, the Allies for Immigrants team recruited and trained 165+ volunteers and expanded to include three new sites, which are now receiving volunteer tutors for ESOL and citizenship classes. This growth means we can support an even larger community of adult English learners, immigrant employees, and families, and act as a resource for ESOL tech support.

As I near the end of my time with Commonwealth Corps, I have reflected on the importance of community and collaboration. The Allies program is made possible due to strong partnerships with Boston Cares and ENB, as well as our funders, program directors, teachers, and of course, volunteers.

"Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have been able to create tangible, positive change, and help others achieve their economic, civic and educational goals."

I wanted to complete a service year so that I could gain more experience before attending graduate school. I chose to serve through the Commonwealth Corps at Boston Cares in the Allies for Immigrants Program because I have always been passionate about immigrant and refugee rights and I have a desire to work with these populations in my future career. This year my co-member and I have been able to accomplish many things. We have onboarded three new partner sites which has allowed us to reach even more immigrants across the Greater Boston area. Additionally, we have hosted a new tutor training for -25 volunteers about every two months which has greatly expanded our volunteer base and allowed us to fill all tutor positions at our partner sites. I am also really proud of the way the whole program has been able to shift to virtual and not only continue but expand and thrive.

Just being able to see the impact that the Allies for Immigrants Program has on the lives of immigrants has reaffirmed my passion for working with immigrants.

"Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have been able to learn more about the immigrant community in the Greater Boston area and help support them in their English language acquisition and pursuit of citizenship."

For example, through my service year, I have participated in citizenship preparation classes with immigrants. Through that class, we have seen many people pass their citizenship exams and become US citizens. Additionally, serving with Boston Cares has allowed me to gain experience working for a nonprofit and learn more about volunteerism in the Greater Boston Area. I have enjoyed my time serving at Boston Cares so much that I am continuing to work part-time with them next year, supporting the Allies for Immigrants Program. I am excited to continue to work with this program and to be able to support the incoming Commonwealth Corps Member serving at Boston Cares.
The Westport River Watershed Alliance (WRWA) is a nonprofit environmental education and advocacy group established in 1976 to protect and conserve the natural resources of the Westport River and its 100-square mile watershed located at the entrance to Buzzards Bay in southeastern Massachusetts. WRWA hosts two full-time Commonwealth Corps members as Environmental Educators. Through their service, members teach the Watershed Education Program (WEP) topics to over 2,500 students in PreK-12 in Fall River, Dartmouth, Westport, Fairhaven, and Taunton. Members have developed new virtual classroom lessons, new website content, social media posts, interactive videos, displays, and pamphlets for the River Center through their service. In addition, they have been recruiting high school youth volunteers to assist with creating a pollinator garden outside the River Center. Having Commonwealth Corps members this year has been a huge help in adapting all of our lessons to outdoor or virtual programs. This year’s new requirements through the pandemic have added additional restructuring and adaptations of the Watershed Education Program. Online content was created for everyone to view and the classroom students, and we continue to add more volunteer opportunities for community members.

“Our CC service members did an astounding job of pivoting in response to the restrictions of Covid in regards to our in-classroom teaching. They made weekly videos for the children to be able to continue their science learning, and many of them are now available on our website. They were poised, expressive, and accessible teachers at a remote distance!”

- Shelli Costa, Education Director at WRWA

Chelsea has been a huge asset to WRWA this year, having a background in theater and production has helped create videos and online content for students throughout the pandemic. She has a wonderful presence on the screen and has assisted with organizing and editing video programs. Jenny has so much passion for all of the plants and animals of the natural world. She has brought that passion for sharing with students on in-person programs and through videos created for students. Chelsea and Jenny have both shown great improvements in teaching science lessons to a wide age range of students and a great variety of topics. The difference in their skills from the beginning of the school year until now is quite an accomplishment. They use different methods to keep students engaged and on track while teaching lessons. Being a part of the Commonwealth Corps Program has brought our organizations’ mission to a new part of the community. These new community members are potential WRWA members, volunteers, and the support needed to continue our mission for future generations.

- Shelli Costa
Education Director at WRWA
CHELSEA THIBOUTOT

I was drawn to the Commonwealth Corps because I wanted to be able to give back to my community during an unprecedented time, gain professional skills in public service, and, through my host site, help get kids excited about the importance of protecting our environment. In my capacity as an environmental educator with the Westport River Watershed Alliance, I have been able to educate children of all ages on their local ecosystems and how to become future stewards of their local watershed through educational videos, virtual lessons, and in-person programming. I have also been able to help promote clean water initiatives through the organization of volunteers for community science projects.

"Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have gained invaluable experience and perspectives that I will carry with me into graduate school."

Commonwealth Corps caught my interest as I was looking to advance my career and education. This was the perfect opportunity for me to give back to my community, join a supportive organization during a difficult time, and educate myself on environmental matters. Choosing to serve in the program has been one of the most rewarding experiences. During my service year, teaching the educational programs for grades pre-K through grade 12 was the most impactful thing I was part of that impacted the community. Seeing the students learning about new critters of the watershed or about the environment is a great feeling. The students impress me when we see them and they are naming multiple birds they have seen and what field marks they recognized. It’s fun knowing that I am helping create environmentally conscious minds and planting the seed in young minds of how to love nature.

JENNIFER BURNS

One major accomplishment of my service thus far has been hosting young student volunteers in a week of volunteerism. Through the coordination of the volunteers, we were able to host a beach cleanup, a rain garden cleanup, a biodiversity hike to track local species, and a pollinator garden project. It is endlessly rewarding to help facilitate young people who want to give back to their community. I have also been afforded the opportunity to grow and learn myself throughout my service year. Through professional development training opportunities, I have been able to hear from environmental educators all over the country and the world about global and local initiatives. These experiences have been vitally important on my journey to build the skills, perspectives, and competencies I know I will need to succeed in my service now and professional opportunities to come.

Service has impacted me in multiple ways. Especially from numerous training sessions that MSA, along with WRWA, have provided. Things like abolishing racism, learning how to support and respect the LGBTQ+ community, disability inclusion, and how to incorporate Native American history and teachings into our environmental education. The honest conversations I was able to have with other service members were impactful and cherished. These are things that I will carry and expand throughout my life. My awareness has increased along with the strength to stand up for what’s right and the patience for those who are still learning like myself.

"Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have been able to increase my awareness along with the strength to stand up for what’s right and the patience for those who are still learning like myself."
Open Sky Community Services believes in blending best practices with the power of community, we partner with individuals and families to see beyond and live beyond perceived limitations to pursue fulfilling lives! The Safe Homes program, an LGBTQIA+ youth support network hosted by Open Sky, has recently expanded to a new geographic area. It was the responsibility of the members to help establish the new location, recruit participants through outreach to local schools, and develop fun and interesting programming for the youth we serve. We knew that becoming a host site and involving promising young professionals would be a huge benefit to our programming. Safe Homes North prioritizes youth development and LGBTQIA+ leadership opportunities. This mission allows our members to include their ideas and opinions into the foundation of our programming, and as a host site, we have learned as much from their influence as we hope they’ve learned from us.

Our members were fantastic additions to Safe Homes North! Alicia has brought so much light and joy to our team and all the youth we serve. Her humor and creativity have greatly shaped our sense of community, and the youth have always found it easy to connect with her.

"The Service Members have been a real asset to the Safe Homes North program. They have helped us improve our digital presence during this challenging year by adding important resources to our website on self-care and help for transgender youth. The Service Members have also been instrumental in polishing our social media presence and reaching new youth by sharing content that is interesting and exciting."

- Catherine Twing, Director of Marketing at Open Sky

Diadora is kind and endearing, always considering the needs of her team members and the youth we serve. Her passion for learning and growing has impacted not only her own identity as an ally but has encouraged our youth to ask questions and further their own growth. Taylor is a dedicated and focused individual who brings order and direction to the chaos of program design. He has been an immense help in keeping our team focused, providing valuable resources, and bringing a level-headed and mature viewpoint to our work. Finally, Terra is hardworking and generous, bringing her personal experience to the work we do with our youth. She brings kindness and direction to her leadership, encouraging those she works with to be their most authentic selves. All the members have grown so much, and a perfect example was when they recently had to lead a program night on their own. The youth had a blast, and the members confidently ensured that things went smoothly. We can clearly see the impact the members have had in the culture of the drop-in nights. Our members have established a lasting culture centered on community and fun.

-Renn Duffey
Program Coordinator at Open Sky
MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS

TERRA BUCK

A few of the main reasons I was attracted to Commonwealth Corp was the opportunity to serve in my local community as well as the financial benefits this provided. In addition, I wanted to assist the youth at my current service site because they are part of the population I want to work with in my future career in counseling. In my current role at Safe Homes, I made a zine for local healthcare, housing, and food access resources in the northern county for the youth to be able to access, that at least I believe, is pretty neat. As I’m writing this, I haven’t yet been able to know how my zine will be received. However, I hope that the youth enjoy, remember, and most importantly, find useful, when they are able to read it.

"Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I can assist the youth at my current service site because they are part of the population I want to work with in my future career in counseling."

As an alum of the Safe Homes Worcester program, I was first interested in serving with Open Sky Community Services and learned about the Commonwealth Corps as the service year has progressed. This opportunity arose at the perfect time to complete this service year in the pandemic, where I was able to balance my part-time responsibilities with Safe Homes North with my graduate program and internship. With Safe Homes North, I’ve been able to utilize my strengths in virtual programs to keep our team connected while serving remotely. Through suggesting different organizational platforms and resources for our drop-in activities, I’m proud knowing that my contributions will continue with the program after our service year concludes. I have also led the Peer Staff Program development through my cumulative project, which I’m excited to see reach fruition as more attendees join our drop-in nights.

This has involved drafting the applications through collaboration with my team and building the orientation plan based on the successes of the program’s Commonwealth Corps member onboarding process. Since our drop-in nights began in February, it’s been incredible to see the youth that attend become comfortable in the space. As a facilitator and previous attendee, watching conversations and laughter increase is all you could want for the drop-in environment! I’ve also been able to focus more time on professional skills and am leaving my position with strong materials for my next steps. I’m very excited to carry through what I’ve learned into future professional roles!

"Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I’ve been able to strengthen my interpersonal and professional skills to become a more well-rounded member of my teams in the future."

TAYLOR GLICKMAN

There have been multiple times over the course of my service that I have been able to see the difference we’ve made in the youth’s lives. At the Tuesday night drop-ins, seeing their smiling faces from being able to freely be themselves and being validated is just a great feeling. There’s one youth in particular who began attending the meetings with a mask on as they weren’t comfortable presenting to strangers yet. Now after a few months, this person is super engaging in the drop-ins, doesn’t wear a mask and has opened up to us about their gender experience. Overall, it’s been an amazing experience working with Safe Homes North and the Commonwealth Corps as a whole; I would definitely recommend service to those interested.

AGE: 25
HOMETOWN: STOW, MA
CURRENT HOME: CLINTON MA

AGE: 25
HOMETOWN: GRAFTON, MA
CURRENT HOME: GRAFTON, MA
Important Dates

- Thursday, 6/24 6 PM - 7:30 PM - Celebration of Service. [Guest RSVP here](#).
- Saturday, 6/26 - Last day of service

We now have our own LinkedIn page! [Click here to follow.](#)

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.
Thank you to all of our 2020-2021 Host Site Partners!