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

The new Commonwealth Corps service year started in August 2020. This year we have partnerships with 16 host sites, and have recruited 40 Commonwealth Corps members who all began their service by the end of September. Over the last few months, our Commonwealth Corps members and host site partners have continued to build organizational capacity and mobilize volunteers throughout Massachusetts. So far, members have provided over 5525 hours of service, and recruited 168 volunteers.

Their projects have ranged from creating a network of community residents in order to provide services for the immigrant community to bringing communities together to promote education and advocacy for environmental issues. In addition to members’ own contributions, they’ve also managed 402 community volunteers who have provided an additional 615 hours of service, furthering the impact of their projects.

As always, our thanks go out to our members for their commitment to service and our partners for their support. Please enjoy this issue’s highlights from the past two months.
International Institute of New England

The International Institute of New England is hosting two full-time Commonwealth Corps members in our Education and Career Advancement services who serve as Career Readiness Specialists at our Boston site. The mission of the International Institute of New England is to create opportunities for refugees and immigrants to succeed through resettlement, education, career advancement, and pathways to citizenship. While serving remotely, our members Nico Britt and Yuka Chen support a continuum of self-sufficiency services for refugees, asylees, and immigrants, including coaching and career readiness supports that promote economic security, education, and well-being.

Our Commonwealth Corps members have made sustainable contributions to IINE’s work in just 2.5 short months! Together our current members have created (and continue to create) tutorial videos to assist teachers and support students with remote learning in response to COVID-19. These videos include important information about accessing email, zooming, and more! These videos will help over 70 students access remote English and skills training classes. These videos directly contribute to our programming’s building capacity, as the videos will be accessible anytime, including after their year of service, to increase students’ English skills.

In addition to creating tutorial videos, Nico and Yuka provide individual support during coaching sessions focused on career advancement, English tutoring, and connecting clients to community resources. These coaching sessions add to our clients’ career and educational success due to the high level of customization of client support by Yuka and Nico. As the year continues and the next Skills Training class starts, Nico and Yuka will be collaborating with the Manager of Skills Training, the Lead Instructor, employer partners, and community agencies to help bridge gaps and overcome barriers for ESOL students. This collaboration will unfold to deliver job assistance and career fairs, as well as wellness workshops for students. Though we may see refinements to our workshops due to COVID, these workshops will serve not only to engage existing students but also new students/visitors.

Each of our members brings unique talents to their service. Nico is very organized, is able to stay focused and make students feel welcome. Yuka successfully handles many projects at the same time, with great attention to detail and calmly assists students. Both Nico and Yuka have shown incredible teamwork, collaboration, and flexibility while serving remotely. Nico and Yuka continue to build their professional networking skills and leveraging their CC connections with clients who express an interest in volunteering. Being part of the Commonwealth Corps network not only helps our clients feel more connected to the community and giving back, but it also helps remind staff at IINE the importance of staying present in the work we do and committed to service.

- Mary Blunt, Boston Skills Training Manager
The International Institute of New England and CC alumni

“Yuka and Nico have become valued members of the Education team. They have forged deep connections with clients and are helping them to get on the right path to achieve their education and career goals. We are so lucky to have them serve with us!”

- Hillary Bradburn, IINE Education Manager
NICOLAS BRITT

The reason I chose to serve with the Commonwealth Corps is because I am very passionate about helping underserved communities in the U.S. and the Commonwealth Corps provides me a fantastic opportunity to continue with this passion. As I am serving with IINE, an organization which helps immigrants and refugees, my goal is to provide the best possible service to our clients so that they feel they can succeed and prosper in our country. I want them to feel welcomed and fully supported so they can aspire and realize their dreams. Part of my role at IINE is to advise students who are enrolled in English classes. This is has given me the chance to interact with students 1-on-1, and allowed me to help them directly. I am always amazed by the dedication and work ethic of our clients. I feel I've done a good job guiding them in these advising meetings. This has also helped me further harvest some communication skills.

In my service so far, I have been very touched and inspired by the stories and circumstances clients have shared with me. It makes me motivated everyday to work hard for them. I have already learned and developed many effective ways to help the immigrant community. I have also learned a lot from the people I work and serve with. Their passion, kindness and intellect has inspired me to improve as a professional in the non-profit industry and the workplace. I am very grateful for this opportunity with the Commonwealth Corps and IINE.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have had the opportunity to pursue my passion.

I always want to be in a field to help immigrants and refugees, but I never thought about what position and role to help them. I really enjoyed serving immigrants and refugees when I interned at IINE in the 2019 spring semester, and I kept checking different opportunities on the IINE career website after I graduated from Lesley University. I was thrilled to find the Commonwealth Corps program on the IINE website because this opportunity gives me a space to do service for immigrants and refugees and explore my professional career at the same time. I believe serving at IINE will help me gain more knowledge and insights on the U.S. immigration system. I can develop my professional skills and explore my professional career through the training hosted by MSA. By the end of the service, I will know how exactly I want to serve with immigrants and refugees.

YUKA CHEN

I am looking forward to being a CC member this year! Right now, me and my fellow Commonwealth Corps member at IINE are establishing a series of written documents and videos to teach non-English speakers how to use technology. In the first two weeks at our host site, we noticed our clients are not very familiar with the technology. We found many tutorials online are not English-learner friendly.

This project aims to create a series of tutorials that can help our clients to learn how to use technology and navigate the tools online. We hope our project result can allow our clients to be in our virtual class and appointment easily. Working with IINE’s clients directly reminds me of my past struggles when I learned English as an international student. The memories help me to be more patient and understanding when I assist clients. I remember how much help I had when I first started learning English, and now I want to be the inspiration for our clients to assist them in achieving the goals they've set for themselves.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I am able to serve the population I care about while developing my professional skills and path.

AGE: 22
HOMETOWN: BERNARDSVILLE, NJ
CURRENT HOME: BOSTON

AGE: 24
HOMETOWN: HUALIEN, TAIWAN
CURRENT HOME: BOSTON
Open Table, Inc.

Open Table’s mission is to address hunger in our local community by providing healthy food in a welcoming environment while respecting the dignity of those served. Open Table’s mobile program allows us to partner with well-established community organizations that do not have a food relief operation sufficient to cover all food insecurity in their area. As the COVID-19 pandemic has unfolded and economic conditions have deteriorated the need for new partnerships has become urgent.

Our Commonwealth Corp members, Scarlett Cheung and Terra Buck are working towards formalizing the Mobile Program model such that it can be quickly replicated and expanded to new communities in need. While working together towards this goal, they each have areas of focus.

Scarlett’s focus is to look at how to source and distribute food of the right types and quantities. Other aspects they are working towards are how to collect data to demonstrate impact, estimate costs, identify volunteer roles and training needs.

Since their arrival, they have taken on an active role in supporting our pilot mobile program with the Hudson Housing Authority and leading a new partnership with the Concord Carlisle Public School System to run a drive-thru pantry at the High School. “Scarlett and Terra have been instrumental in helping Open Table quickly respond to mobile pantry opportunities, in just a few weeks they come a long way from just learning about the many faces of food insecurity to taking leadership roles as we roll out new mobile programs…”

- Jill Tsakiris, Program Manager at Open Table

Terra’s focus is to understand the unmet food needs in a community and how they might best be served. Scarlett’s focus is to look at how to source and distribute food of the right types and quantities. Other aspects they are working towards are how to collect data to demonstrate impact, estimate costs, identify volunteer roles and training needs.

Since their arrival, they have taken on an active role in supporting our pilot mobile program with the Hudson Housing Authority and leading a new partnership with the Concord Carlisle Public School System to run a drive-thru pantry at the High School. “Scarlett and Terra have been instrumental in helping Open Table quickly respond to mobile pantry opportunities, in just a few weeks they come a long way from just learning about the many faces of food insecurity to taking leadership roles as we roll out new mobile programs… their internships will certainly have a lasting impact on Open Table but also on the many Massachusetts residents who are finding themselves newly in need.”

- Jill Tsakiris, Program Manager at Open Table
SCARLETT CHEUNG

While pursuing my undergraduate degree, I developed a passion for fighting for food justice and sustainability. I was drawn to my host site’s (Open Table, Inc) mission of serving its community by fighting food insecurity and removing the stigma associated with experiencing hunger. I was also excited about all the new opportunities for me to develop professional skills and meet other Corps members that shared my interest in community engagement. Additionally, it has been comforting to know that I gained a support system made up of fellow Corps members, especially during a time when social distancing has made it more difficult to meet new people.

One major accomplishment I have made since starting my service has been working with my co-member and our supervisors to start a mobile pantry at a local high school. Not only did we start it with very short notice, we also did not know what to expect in terms of demand. At the end of the pantry distribution, we managed to serve over 30 households, and I hope we continue to reach more residents in need.

During one of the first times I led a group of volunteers, I became flustered because the directions I gave them were interpreted differently from what I had intended. Being efficient volunteers, they immediately started their tasks, but I became caught up in helping them because I did not speak up and re-explain my directions. Since then, I have learned to slow down and confirm with volunteers that they understand the instructions, which has taught me how to communicate more clearly and effectively. I hope that my service will continue to increase my comfort level in leading others and becoming a stronger decision-maker.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I am learning to be more confident in my abilities while also learning how to develop them further.
Matahari Women Workers’ Center

Matahari Women Workers’ Center is a Boston-based community organization working to end gender violence and exploitation. Matahari is a leading force in advancing immigrant families’ rights and women workers of color in the Boston area. Matahari’s three Commonwealth Corps members, Organizing Fellows as we call them in Matahari, are conducting multilingual outreach to women workers, coordinating workers’ “know your rights” training Matahari new member orientations, conducting wage theft intakes, among other critical activities. As workers and their families navigate the Covid-19 pandemic, the Organizing Fellows’ service with Matahari is especially important!

Marie Menard is amazing at doing outreach to immigrant women workers and welcoming them as new Matahari members. She conducts many 1-1 meetings with new members who are looking for community and connection during the pandemic. Jessica Colindres is doing critical outreach to nannies and au pairs in the Greater Boston area. Many community workers know to turn to Jessica if they need support connecting with resources or if they want to get involved in the Matahari community. Angella Foster is powerfully leading exciting and emerging work in Matahari, including a project that uplifts the history of domestic worker organizing and an initiative to create recommendations for worker safety and dignity during the pandemic. She also continues to do outreach to nannies and other women workers!

“Having the Organizing Fellows onboard through the Commonwealth Corps, has been a huge opportunity for growth in Matahari, allowing us to expand the impact of our organizing work. Through outreach and 1:1 meetings they are getting new members excited about Matahari and teaching community members about their rights as workers.”

- Hana Sarfan, Development and Emergent Projects Organizer

All three members were already organizing and leading within their communities before their service. Now that they get to dedicate even more time with Matahari through the Commonwealth Corps, they have the opportunity to further build the practices and skills of leadership, including 1-1 meetings with workers, meeting facilitation, know your rights education, etc. Matahari is so excited to be part of Commonwealth Corps, which allows us to deepen our community impact at such a critical moment in history. We know that the lessons we learn collectively and the capacity that the Organizing Fellows help build will support us well into the future in our continued work to reach more immigrant women of color and their families.

- Julia Beebe, Lead Organizer Matahari Women Workers’ Center
JESSICA COLINDRES

I chose to serve at Commonwealth Corps because I think the idea of helping others is important to me and the community. I feel good inside when I am helping others. I want to make a change and make sure that people in our community to have what they need.

I am hoping to accomplish the responsibilities or requirements that the team is giving me and remind others that they are not alone in whatever situation it might be. I want to let people know that there will always be help. I have accomplished showing up for the meetings and participating. I am also hoping to encourage others to also be thinking of ways they can help.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have the opportunity to learn and help others.

As a leader with Matahari where we are fighting to end gender based violence and exploitation, I am always on a quest for knowledge on how to better serve my community. Through the various professional developments offered by Commonwealth Corp I will be able to build relationship and power thus imparting knowledge to a growing organization. The program has afforded me a space in which to grow. I have also learnt from past CC members in the orientation.

My fervent desire is to able to facilitate a training solo. That would be a great accomplishment for me as I lack confidence in that area. I would like to create an agenda and lead that training from beginning to end just like the facilitators at the Commonwealth. Stacey et al and Julia my supervisor and mentor at Matahari.

During the pandemic I had a lot of people coming to me and asking for help. Whether it was food or money. I didn’t have a lot of resources where I could tell people where to find help. Being able to join the Commonwealth Corps I can be the one helping. Although its not easy participating online. I have learned how to use technology more efficiently. I have gained the skill of using technology and helping the community. These skills that I am gaining. I am hoping to teach them to others.

Once we have a bigger group of people helping, we can start building off each others ideas. A lot of people have great ideas and abilities that can be very helpful.

ANIELLA FOSTER

In the first month of training with CC, I have learnt the true meaning of self care, volunteerism, new norms (I am now using in our leaders and neighborhood meetings), building healthy boundaries, knowing what to share, learning what from other organizations in the service and building relationship within. Two of my favorite professional developments are non violent communication (NVC) and effective communication. These have taught me to listen more and to choose the right medium.

I am now enrolled in a history cohort study with the National Domestic Alliance on digging deeper into the history of domestic workers. After the completion of this eight months course I will be fully trained so I can train other members and leaders.
I am so excited to be part of the Commonwealth Program. I heard about the program through Matahari, the host site where I serve. The CC program aligns with the organization’s mission: to support the community of Massachusetts. My objective is to keep assisting the community by providing informations about people’s rights. The fact that Matahari keeps expanding its services, it motivates me to keep improving my professional skills, in order to be succesful during my service year.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have the opportunity to learn and help others in my community.

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.

International Institute of New England  
@iinewengland  
@iine

Open Table, Inc.  
@opentablema  
@opentablema

Matahari Women Workers’ Center  
@mataharijustice  
@mataharijustice

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.
New Staff Member
MARLENE ROJAS

Meet our newest MSA team member, Marlene Rojas. She is originally from Mexico, and joined the MSA team as the Commonwealth Corps Program Assistant in September this year. She most recently served as MA Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy Coalition’s New American Integration Program AmeriCorps member, at Project Citizenship. She also taught ESOL at Mujeres Unidas Avazando in Boston.

Marlene received a Master’s in Sociology and a BA in French in Mexico and was a fellow in the Bilateral Forum on Higher Education, Innovation, and Research at the University of Arizona. She has worked and volunteered in numerous organizations as an interpreter and providing free legal services to immigrant communities around the country. She is fluent in French and Spanish.

Members In Action

Commonwealth Corps members at Westport River Watershed Alliance, Chelsea and Jennifer, are pictured here tending to one of their partner schools’ garden and taking care of the compost worms. These members are serving as Environmental Educators, teaching the Watershed Education Program (WEP) topics to over 2,500 students in grades PreK-12, in Fall River, Dartmouth, Westport, Fairhaven, and Taunton.

Upcoming Events

October CC Member Training - “Disability Inclusion & Advocacy”
October 30th, 9a.m. - 1p.m. via Zoom

November CC Trainings and Events:

3. November 24th, 2020 - Public Speaking Training: Member facilitated training. See member portal for more details.