

# COMMONWEALTH CORPS NEWSLETTER

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## MSA Welcome & Update

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

The Massachusetts Service Alliance (MSA) is excited to share the first edition of our 2019-2020 Commonwealth Corps Newsletter, highlighting our incredible new members and host site partners.

Since their start in mid-August, our 33 members have provided over **9,500 hours** of direct service and capacity building across the Commonwealth, in conjunction with our 15 partner agencies. *See last page for a complete list of agencies.*

This issue shares stories from our Commonwealth Corps (CC) members and partners about their first months of service and the training and development opportunities they've received so far.

We're also excited to share our new brand identity and logo, developed and designed in partnership with Flowetic and Artists for Humanity. *Check out our website for the full brand refresh.*

We love hearing from the larger CC community and invite everyone to share stories, photos, and updates via social media and/or email ([jdefilippis@mass-service.org](mailto:jdefilippis@mass-service.org)).

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# Coalition for a Better Acre



The Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA) is a membership-based community development corporation dedicated to resident empowerment and sustainable community revitalization for current and future residents of Lowell. In our quest to promote healthy, vibrant neighborhoods in Lowell and the Merrimack Valley, we take pride in developing resident leaders, maintaining affordable housing, exploring economic opportunities, and responding to community needs through collective action.

CBA is hosting two Commonwealth Corps members, Jasmine "Mitchy" Alberti and Natalie Rovira, to support the Youth Education Success (Y.E.S.) after-school program. As Commonwealth Corps Youth Development Program Associates, they have assisted in organizing the after-school program by developing and facilitating enrichment activities, providing homework assistance, and organizing career exploration to diverse, low-income students living in CBA properties, the Acre, Lowell, and its surrounding communities. Members have been inspired to be more active in the community by attending local events and educational seminars that CBA organizes and/or partners with other local organizations.

Having CC members has enabled CBA to run an effective after-school program and connect with the



Coalition for a Better Acre Commonwealth Corps Members Mitchy Alberti and Natalie Rovira

*"The program has really found amazing team members...I like these two."*

*- Mother of youth participant*

families served through Y.E.S., to assure each child's educational and developmental needs are met. Our program takes pride in our goal to support each young person academically, expand their knowledge by exposing them to any opportunity that allows a new experience, and most importantly, instill a pride of their culture, community and themselves. CBA realizes that if these youth can become more worldly, they will have a better chance to choose an appropriate career path that can allow them to be inspired and to inspire others.

Mitchy and Natalie have been a wonderful and effective addition to the CBA family. They have both shown an amazing willingness to learn about our agencies culture and have been able to relate to the clients we serve. Natalie has been an asset in translating agency policies and family needs between CBA and our Spanish-speaking families, while Mitchy has a natural ability to research unique activities that not only expand our youths' experiences, but also inspire them to engage in something new. There has already been visible growth displayed by both members.

While both CC members have been challenged to meet strict deadlines that require enhanced organizational skills, they have worked diligently and successfully to meet our program needs. Natalie has created a natural connection with one of our youth who is struggling with pre-algebra and has encouraged him to put in the effort to achieve. Mitchy has connected with a youth who shows interest in helping with the daily tasks of running the program (e.g. handing out snacks, setting up, and cleanup). Mitchy has assigned this youth various tasks while guiding the youth through the step by step process, which enhances her leadership skills. Our youth and their families have warmly received our CC members. They will always be remembered as a major part of restructuring and enhancing the quality of this program.

*- Jennifer Balala, Youth Development Coordinator, Coalition for a Better Acre*

## MITCHY ALBERTI



**AGE: 24**  
**HOMETOWN: LAWRENCE**  
**CURRENT HOME: LOWELL**

I was drawn to the Commonwealth Corps because had just moved to the city of Lowell and I have always enjoyed working with youth and the community as a whole. I wanted to help give back to the youth and do my part to contribute to the community in any way I can, which led me to serving at CBA.

I'm hoping to help start an indoor garden and after-school garden club within the Y.E.S. program to get the youth thinking about urban science. I want to teach them about healthy, easy alternatives to our everyday diet, and show them we have many beautiful things right here in Lowell, so we don't have to go too far to find it.

One of my favorite parts is teaching the youth the importance of nature, plants, and bees, and why we must respect and protect them. I'm excited about starting the indoor garden and having the youth learn responsibility, accountability, and appreciation of life, and understand the work that goes into sustainable living.

Hopefully they will open their eyes and see that everything we are doing will be worth it in the end. I want them to leave Y.E.S. with a skill they could use for years to come and maybe even get them thinking about pursuing careers in natural resource, environment, or agriculture.

My dream in life is get a huge plot of land, grow some crops, adopt animals, farm the land out, and give back by fostering, mentoring, or even adopting children in need. I would teach them how to farm and live sustainable lives, give back to the community, run farmers markets, have it open to the public to volunteer or take lessons, and have events that we can all enjoy.

*Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I am able to help encourage and inspire youth. I believe the earth isn't given to us, we inherit it and pass it down through generations.*

I have always had a passion for volunteering and helping others within my community, in whatever way that I can. When I was presented with the opportunity to serve with the Y.E.S. program at CBA, it felt like the perfect opportunity to try something new and make an impact in the lives of children in my hometown.

On a daily basis, I serve with children to make sure they're receiving the support they need to succeed academically, and partner with local organizations to provide activities that allow them to try new things. There's nothing more fun than encouraging

*Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have the opportunity everyday to make positive impacts in the lives of children in my community.*

the children to try new things, and nothing as gratifying as seeing the look of surprised excitement on their faces when they realize that they like it.

In just a few months of serving, I have developed a greater sense of connection with my community than I've had in all the years I've lived here.

Serving with CBA has opened my eyes to an amazing network of people working to serve our community and its residents. I've had the opportunity to see first-hand how passionate individuals and organizations unite to host events, from basketball tournaments to community dinners, encourage civic engagement, and build a greater sense of community.

At every community event I've attended so far, I've met new people that inspire me to better myself and continue to give back.

## NATALIE ROVIRA



**AGE: 20**  
**HOMETOWN: LOWELL**  
**CURRENT HOME: CHELMSFORD**

# Girls Inc. of the Valley

The mission of Girls Inc. of the Valley is to inspire all girls to be strong, smart, and bold by providing them the opportunity to develop and achieve their full potential. Girls Inc. of the Valley is hosting four full-time Commonwealth Corps members in our Elementary School Partnership Program, who serve as School-Based Program Facilitators.

Our Commonwealth Corps members, Natalia Cruz, Cassandra Vazquez, Idalis Salgado, and Caitlin Mogilka are helping to create this new program through developing curriculum, recruiting volunteer support and program participants, and delivering programming. The barriers facing Hampden County's girls are real and profound, and the need for programming focused on Youth Development/Youth Violence Prevention is vast.

This need hits close to home for our Commonwealth Corps members, as they all hail from the Hampden County communities we serve the most: Holyoke, Springfield, and Chicopee. Idalis has a deep passion for youth development and has creative ideas for lessons plans and ways to engage the girls during groups. She is eager to create a series of lessons on environmentalism and sustainability to pilot with the girls later this year. Cassie loves to dance with the girls (and staff!) and brings an open heart and mind to her



Girls Inc. of the Valley Commonwealth Corps Members Idalis Salgado, Caitlin Mogilka, Cassandra Vazquez and Natalia Cruz

## girls inc.

### of the Valley

*"These four [Commonwealth Corps members] have formed a sweet team. They are supportive of each other and have fostered a welcoming and inclusive environment for our girls."*

*- Becca Neubardt, Director of Elementary School Partnerships*

service. She is self-reflective and eager to learn new facilitation techniques. Caitlin brings a lot of energy and enthusiasm to her service at Girls Inc. of the Valley. She always has a smile on her face and loves to ask the girls questions to get to know them better. Natalia brings a lot of confidence and classroom management skills to her groups. She is a steady and reliable presence who creates a safe space for our groups.

Prior to the arrival of our Commonwealth Corps members, our Elementary School Program served only 52 girls at a time through our after school program center. Through their service, the members have enabled Girls Inc. to engage at least 200 more elementary school aged girls in positive youth development activities and have enhanced our organizational capacity by building a school partnership package.

Before the school year officially kicked off, Girls Inc. of the Valley hosted Family Dinners at local elementary schools to provide an outlet for parents to ask questions about the program, learn more about the Girls Inc. mission, and to share a meal together. After co-hosting several Family Dinners with their supervisor, Natalia, Cassandra, Idalis, and Caitlin hosted their very own Family Dinner at Mary M. Walsh Elementary School in Springfield, MA. The members felt confident discussing the importance of specialized and appropriate "girl only" curriculum with the families in attendance and had the opportunity to meet girls interested in the program.

- Jessica Colson, Communications & Engagement Manager, Girls Inc. of the Valley

## NATALIA CRUZ



**AGE: 20**  
**HOMETOWN: PUERTO RICO**  
**CURRENT HOME: SPRINGFIELD**

I have always had a passion for serving our children and youth because I feel time invested in them is always time well spent. I am currently a senior at Bay Path University studying both child psychology and sociology. I have also wanted to become more involved in my community and take part in child and youth development within it. I knew this was a great first step towards gaining professional experience that directly relates to what I'm studying. For these reasons and more, I chose to serve as part of the Commonwealth Corps.

While at Girls Inc. of the Valley, I have successfully established good relationships with the people I serve alongside and the girls who participate in our programs. I have also had the opportunity to share my organizational skills to make our office the best possible professional environment for our team; it isn't finished yet, but we definitely feel more at home in our space.

In my short time here, there have been so many things that have already happened that are preparing me for my future. One of them was having the very challenging, yet rewarding, opportunity to translate an entire event from English to Spanish; something I had never done before! This really boosted my confidence in public speaking and I truly look forward to doing it again.

Not only have I established a good relationship with the girls I serve with, but also with my supervisor, who has already agreed to serve as a reference for my graduate school applications!

*Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I can inspire girls in my community to be Strong, Smart and Bold, while building personal and professional relationships with amazing people.*

I was drawn to the Commonwealth Corps because after doing some research on the purpose, I really loved it. I had heard of it in the past and knew it could provide me great opportunities for my future. I was also able to connect my past volunteer experiences to this role; I have a great deal of experience working with all types of children from a variety of backgrounds, so I knew I could expand the knowledge I already had even further.

An accomplishment I have made so far is already creating connections with the staff of the program, outside of my co-service members.

*Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I feel much more excited and comfortable with my future.*

I know these will be people I will have in my life for a long time and can always count on. I am also already establishing good relationships with some of the girls in the after-school program. They without a doubt brighten up my days. I cannot wait to build bonds with the girls we're working with in the schools.

I have been impacted in so many ways in just this short span of time. Outside of great relationships with the people I'm surrounded by, I have had amazing training experiences that I feel have helped me begin to narrow my career goals. I've also had my eyes opened in many ways. I feel no matter where I go from here, both the Commonwealth Corps and Girls Inc. of the Valley have prepared me for so much yet to come. I can't wait to grow over the course of this service year.

## CAITLIN MOGILKA



**AGE: 18**  
**HOMETOWN: CHICOPEE**  
**CURRENT HOME: CHICOPEE**

## IDALIS SALGADO



**AGE: 23**  
**HOMETOWN: HOLYOKE**  
**CURRENT HOME: HOLYOKE**

What drew me to the Commonwealth Corps was the opportunity to serve with Girls Inc. of the Valley. I have been apart of numerous programs that Holyoke has to offer. I like to take advantage of my hometown's resources and show others all the resources we have in this community that unites us.

This service has already impacted my life in so many positive ways and I give thanks to Girls Inc. of the Valley for giving me this opportunity. I have been through a lot this year and when I applied to serve with Girls Inc. of the Valley, I wanted something to uplift my spirit and help me find something that I know I can do. I have used this opportunity to help me help my community, and become part of an organization that does so much for the girls who are going through similar things that I have gone through. Now, I can be a role model to the youth and show them the path to success.

This service is everything I wanted when I was graduating college and has helped me be a better me. When I went to serve in the school the first day, we went through everything and at the end of our short 45 minutes together, the girls felt so comfortable with Cassie and me, as facilitators, that one girl started to dance. Then all the girls started to dance and finally we broke out into a dance battle. The lyrics, "Who run the world? Girls," played in the background as we danced and sang, and I felt at that moment that the girls could be themselves around us and we value that in the most healthy, positive way!

*Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I can help girls who are growing up in a similar way as me and help them strive to be Strong, Smart, and Bold.*

This past summer, I worked as a program co-facilitator for Girls Inc. of the Valley for their Eureka! program. I felt so nervous to work with teen girls because I'm still young myself and figuring out what I want to do with my life. My little sister is in the summer program and she loved it so much; it has given her guidance and even helped her with her first job at the age of fifteen. Of course this was the first job that was challenging for me because I had to facilitate girls and help them learn and grow. Well I never knew that these girls loved me! They always wanted to show me their lab work and what they built.

*Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I wake up feeling happy and never sad because of what I'm doing now, and that is facilitating the girls.*

It made me feel good that I was helping the Eureka! girls and I finally loved my job, as a facilitator. I always loved helping people, especially kids, and when the program was over I felt sad and stressed because I had to find another job. One of the supervisors told me about the Commonwealth Corps program and thought that I would be perfect for the role. I felt anxious because I always would put myself down thinking I would never be chosen, but I was wrong. The staff was really nice to me and gave me a chance to be part of this community.

I feel so proud to still be a part of Girls Inc. of the Valley now that I'm serving in the elementary schools and inspiring them to be Smart, Strong, and Bold. I finally know what I want to do for the rest of my life. I love being a part of the Commonwealth Corps too; it has given me so much guidance and confidence to do what I love to do and that is supporting the youth.

## CASSANDRA VAZQUEZ



**AGE: 20**  
**HOMETOWN: FRAMINGHAM**  
**CURRENT HOME: CHICOPEE**

# More Than Words

More Than Words (MTW) is a nonprofit social enterprise that empowers youth who are in the foster care system, court involved, homeless, or out of school to take charge of their lives by taking charge of a business.

We are grateful to have two Commonwealth Corps members – Wafaa and Donna – serving as part of our Career Services team, who are focused on supporting graduates of our program to achieve success in education and employment.

Throughout the course of the year, Wafaa and Donna will help MTW to refine our performance measurement system to better assess job quality, formalize partnerships with key stakeholders in the education and employment landscape, and roll out and refine a newly developed job-readiness curriculum.

Wafaa has been with MTW for two months, and has quickly made her mark on our organization. She's been trained on business operations, performance measurement, and Career Services programming, played a key role in the refinement of our performance measurement processes, and connected with a significant portion of our youth team in Waltham.



More Than Words Youth and Commonwealth Corps Alumna Shaina Kaplan

# MORE THAN WORDS

*“Our Commonwealth Corps Members are instrumental in empowering system-involved young people to move their lives forward through meaningful pathways to education and employment. Their service within our organization has deepened our ability to deliver individualized case management to more than 150 graduates and alumni of More Than Words. We are incredibly grateful for their support!”*

*- Alex Murray, Career Services Manager*

Donna started her service a bit later, but is diving right in. She's spent most of her time shadowing shifts to learn about the programmatic and operational structures that support MTW, and will be focusing on Career Services-specific projects in the coming weeks.

Our Career Services team works incredibly hard, but we wouldn't have the capacity to provide high-quality programming AND ensure that we are continuously improving our effectiveness in supporting MTW graduates without the capacity that our Commonwealth Corps members provide. We're grateful to the Commonwealth Corps for the impact that our members are having in developing the capacity of our Career Services team and ensuring that we provide the most effective support possible to the young people we serve!

*- Greg Brueck-Cassoli, Foundation and Corporate Grants Manager, More Than Words*

## WAFAA ABUZAYDA



**AGE: 25**  
**HOMETOWN: PALESTINE**  
**CURRENT HOME: WALTHAM**

I knew that I wanted to work or volunteer with a nonprofit organization, especially with youth. When a friend told me about Commonwealth Corps, I liked it because the program provides opportunities for skill building, leadership development, and encourages and enhances a lifelong civic vocation for members. I was excited that as a member I would get to both do direct service with youth and help an organization like More Than Words build capacity and enhance their programs.

My main role as the Commonwealth Corps Employment & Partnership Coordinator in Waltham is to help youth to apply for jobs that fit them best. This involves helping youth to create resumes and cover letters, and creating job blasts for youth that include the job title, wage, and requirements, to make it easier for the youth to pick what they want. We also group the jobs into three categories and tailor what we send based on the classification of each young person.

One of the most exciting things I get to do at More Than Words is help out with the youth development shift because it's a chance to connect with youth face-to-face and chat with them during the shift. It's helpful to get to know them and find out what they want to do after More Than Words, in order to help find positions that are the right fit for them.

Also, it's a nice feeling when someone has a problem, and comes to talk to me because they trust me and want my advice on solving the problem. I feel like I have a beautiful relationship with most youth at More Than Words so far.

*Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have gained experience in how to deal with youth.*

I was drawn to the Commonwealth Corps service internship program because of its mission to strengthen communities by addressing critical needs. Having spent most of my undergraduate years focused on the fields of public health and medicine, I was excited to explore the nonprofit world and social enterprise sector through my service at More Than Words. I am also excited to join a community of Massachusetts residents passionate about service

*Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I had the opportunity to attend the 10th Annual MA Jobs and Workforce Summit, which allowed me to network with leaders in job development from across the state.*

and build a network of allies across the Commonwealth.

Over the next year, I hope to expand my knowledge of the barriers system-involved youth face as they transition to adulthood. Already, my service has started to impact my understanding of what it means to be a vulnerable young adult in Boston. No two young people I have interacted with have had the same path to More Than Words, but all are working hard to not let their challenging past prevent them from succeeding in the future.

In helping young people with resume writing, cover letters, and mock interviews as the Commonwealth Corps Employment & Partnership Coordinator in Boston, I have learned a lot about best practices in employment. In the future, I will undoubtedly make use of the skills and knowledge I learn to make myself stand out to employers.

## DONNA APPIAH



**AGE: 22**  
**HOMETOWN: PARK RIDGE, NJ**  
**CURRENT HOME: BOSTON**

# Member Development

MSA provided a variety of training and professional development opportunities throughout the first few months of service, including: a two-day orientation; "Settling Into Your New Environment;" "Intro to Volunteer Management" webinar; "Ableism in Volunteering" with Sandy Ho, Emily Ladau, and an EPIC Service Warrior; and "Remarkable Service Leadership" with Shoshanna Cogan.

During these sessions, members were able to discuss complex topics and bring new knowledge, skills, and perspectives to their current service roles, as well as their future beyond their CC service term.

Members should always check the CC Member Portal regularly for additional details and registration information on upcoming training sessions and events.



# Members in Action

Top left: Westport River Watershed Alliance CC members Jess and James team up with their supervisor, and CC alum Bailey to clean up a school garden.

Top middle: Girls Inc. of the Valley CC members Cassandra, Caitlin, Natalia and Idalis go on a scavenger hunt in Holyoke.

Top right: Peer Health Exchange members Elisabeth, Theresa and Tamara table an outreach event.

Bottom: MassArt CC member Sean visits an art installation, Augment by Nick Cave, with the Artward Bound team.





MASSACHUSETTS  
SERVICE ALLIANCE



# 2019-2020 HOST SITE PARTNERS

The Commonwealth Corps is a state-funded service internship program that engages Massachusetts residents of all ages and backgrounds in direct service to strengthen communities, address critical needs and increase volunteerism. This year we are partnering with the following agencies to host service members:



MASSACHUSETTS SERVICE ALLIANCE  
100 N. WASHINGTON STREET, FL. 3, BOSTON, MA 02114  
LEARN MORE AT [WWW.MASS-SERVICE.ORG](http://WWW.MASS-SERVICE.ORG)

