

Program Spotlight: Boston Education, Skills & Training Corp. (BEST Hospitality Training)



**BEST Hospitality Training Commonwealth Corps
Members Alexis Kubana and Cheryl Holmes**

The mission of BEST Hospitality Training is to provide individuals with the education, skills and training to excel in the hospitality industry and in their personal lives. The two Commonwealth Corps members serving at BEST, Alexis Kubana and Cheryl Holmes, are supporting volunteer and workforce development programming.

Alexis, Commonwealth Corps Volunteer Management Specialist, recruits volunteers to support education, skills training, and career coaching. Cheryl, Commonwealth Corps Career and Resource Referral Specialist, offers workforce development services to clients ineligible for regular programming due to funding restrictions. These services include referrals to skills training, employment services, and job development activities.

Alexis began serving at BEST soon after he first arrived in Massachusetts as a refugee. From the get go, it was clear that he was thinking about his future. He had not quite figured out what he needed to do, but he knew he wanted to make a difference like he had been doing with his fellow refugees back home. Recently, we asked him how he was feeling about finishing his service year, and he said that he is excited about the future. Serving at BEST has given him the chance to understand the value of his experience, settle in the U.S., and draft a plan to reach his future goals, all while giving back to the country that welcomed him a year ago.

Cheryl came to BEST looking to serve and make a difference in her community. During her service year,



she has co-led weekly information sessions to inform anyone walking through our doors of the services available to them. Through this activity alone, she has reached over 260 people from her neighborhood, providing them with information, tools, and referrals to services where they can continue on their path to economic stability.

Overall, our Commonwealth Corps service members have been an invaluable resource for BEST and the people we serve. Our service members have been able to immerse themselves in our mission and neighborhoods, engage our communities, promote our mission, and increase our ability to reach those in need of our services. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "To serve you only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love." We believe our members embody that, and we know their impact will outlast their service year.

*-Aisha Necochea,
Workforce Development Strategist,
BEST Hospitality Training*

"Alexis has made such a difference to our volunteer program and his impact in our community will last well past his service year. He's been an incredible addition to our program and is always willing to be creative to meet his goals and support our clients. Both volunteers and students feel naturally at ease with him. Running our volunteer program with him this year has been a wonderful experience!"

**Huiling Chen,
Program Manager,
BEST Hospitality Training**

Member Spotlight: Alexis Kubana



Name: Alexis Kubana **Age:** 27
Hometown: Kigali-Rwanda
Current city/town: Lynn, MA

Over the last six years, I have been gaining experience working with my fellow refugees in East Africa as a computer trainer and a field coordinator, dealing with communities from different backgrounds.

I promised myself to give back to the United States after

resettling here as a refugee in May 2017. I chose to serve as a Commonwealth Corps member because I'm passionate about making an impact, changing my community, giving back to society, and also because I wanted to network with others and learn how non-profit organizations work in the U.S.

Since I began serving with BEST, seven clients have become U.S. citizens after being tutored by our volunteer tutors.

Throughout their tutoring sessions, I communicated with all parties to ensure they were progressing smoothly, and followed up with them to ensure consistency in their attendance. I also decided to begin sitting in during the first tutoring meeting; this allows the tutor, tutee, and me to foster a strong relationship built on the same understanding of our policies and the tutee's goals. Most importantly, I want to become a citizen one day and this has taught me first-hand what the process is like and what to expect when it's my turn.

I've really benefitted from the MSA Commonwealth Corps member trainings, particularly in the area of leadership. At my host site, I have been able to take the lead on managing our volunteer program. In addition, I've learned in-depth the value of Salesforce not only in tracking data, but also in applying the collective results of that data to my plans for recruiting, matching, and supporting tutors and tutees.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have been able to meet and interact with humanitarians and change-makers within Massachusetts who are contributing towards the same goals, and my passion of working with a nonprofit is now very clear.

Member Spotlight: Cheryl Holmes



Name: Cheryl Holmes **Age:** 61
Hometown: Long Island, NY
Current city/town: Roxbury, MA

I learned about the Commonwealth Corps through BEST Hospitality Training Center. Serving with BEST gave me the chance to fulfill a sincere commitment to giving back to my community through service. While serving as a Career Resources Specialist at BEST Hospitality Training

Center, my thinking has shifted away from treating individuals the way I want to be treated. As a result, I endeavor to respectfully engage individuals in ways they prefer.

Through my service year I have grown and stretched while serving alongside committed employees and volunteers at BEST. We collaborated to increase the number of underserved individuals accessing quality full-time benefit earning entry level positions in Boston union hotels.

I was fortunate to be placed in this position to broaden an already richly diverse accountabilities contract. For

example, I recently received a workforce development request from a union employee, asking if I might know of job seeker training and placement resources available to adults with intellectual disabilities. I began contacting organizations specializing in servicing the demographic in need and scheduling on-site visits. Now I will be able to call the individual's mother to share that we've made progress toward the desired outcome, and should be able to secure, at minimum, a job seeker training assignment for my client in a timely fashion.

Hats off to the staff of Commonwealth Corps. They remained encouraging and authentically committed to doing all needed to assure that I excelled during my service year. Obstacles appear in the most vital of human interactions. Amy Mulvena helped me remain focused on desired outcomes versus presenting obstacles. I'm fortunate to have made her acquaintance. Equally important, I am a member of a fantastic service cohort.

Because of the Commonwealth Corps, I have been able to regroup both personally and professionally. I honed existing and developed valuable new skills, met and served alongside phenomenal people, and made important contacts that have led to my next job.