

REFLECTIONS OF A WOOSERVES INTERN



Why did you decide to work at UWCM?

As a student at the Jesuit institution of Holy Cross, I've been driven by the guiding principle of being a person for and with others who learns through action and reflection. At Holy Cross, I engage in a number of social justice-oriented clubs and service activities, primarily through their Donelan Office of Community-Based Learning.

As a Community-Based Learning Intern, I volunteer in the Worcester community and lead my peers in thinking deeply about their service and how it impacts themselves and the people around them. When I was looking for summer internships, I knew I wanted to be a part of something meaningful that spoke to my Jesuit values and allowed me to engage and connect with others. My boss and mentor in the CBL Office, Isabelle Jenkins, suggested getting involved with United Way of Central Massachusetts, where she once held her own student internship years before.

After exploring and applying for United Way's internship opportunity with WooServes and seeing that it incorporated working with youth, I was immediately excited knowing I could combine my love for working with kids and teens as a camp counselor with my concern for service and social justice.

Meet Catherine

College:

College of the Holy Cross

Class Year:

Senior

Major:

Psychology

Study Abroad:

University of Granada, Spain





What is WooServes?

I only truly began to understand what the WooServes program entailed once my wonderful supervisor Idaliana and I began to put it into action.

The WooServes Summer Youth Leadership Institute is an opportunity for 13-17 year-old students to volunteer at agencies across Worcester county for a period of six weeks. Our goal is to have each student each 15 hours of volunteering over the six weeks and to experience a variety of sites surrounding issues like food insecurity, emergency response, youth education, access to outdoor recreation, and more. Usually this involved morning and/or afternoon projects that Idaliana coordinated at local nonprofits such as students playing carnival games with children at Pernet Family Health Center, cleaning and stocking the Worcester Community Fridges, playing basketball with students at WooCares summer basketball camp, organizing and distributing food at El Buen Samaritano and Yes We Care, reading with children at African Community Education, painting and cleaning apartment complexes at Worcester Housing Authority, clearing trails at Broad Meadow Brook, and harvesting produce at Community Harvest Grafton.

I am happy to report that this summer, we had 32 students graduate who all together volunteered for 852 Hours with a Volunteer Value of \$27,094. We partnered with 11 agencies in Worcester county for a total of 28 projects. And in one morning at Community Harvest in Grafton, we harvested 651 pounds of produce, which was enough to feed 3,300 residents.

How has WooServes, the projects and the students impacted you?

Beyond these numbers are students who utilized their summers to make a long-lasting impact on their community. Throughout the summer, I watched students go from being shy and nervous during our orientation to letting their funny and empathetic personalities show as they volunteered more and more. Students who were complete strangers soon became fast friends as they found ways to make volunteering fun and entertaining, such as painting walls while bonding over Taylor Swift music or turning scanning and shredding papers into a friendly competition. I loved how each day, I was learning alongside students about important areas of social injustice affecting the Worcester community and how we as young people can contribute to supporting our neighbors with simple actions like dropping off extra food at a community fridge. I also really enjoyed how our partner agencies emphasized that service doesn't have to be a boring requirement of labor, but how instead we can incorporate our passions and spend time with friends to make it an opportunity to spread love.

Since I'm only a few years older than most of the students, I enjoyed being a role model and mentor at volunteering sites and answering their questions about college, while also bonding over our shared uncertainty of our futures and interests in helping others. As our program came to a close, I couldn't help but get a little emotional at our graduation ceremony when each student presented their service learning projects on what they learned this summer and their ideas to address issues in their community at one of our partner organizations. As I opened a card signed by all of them at the end of our ceremony, I teared up reading all of their little notes of appreciation and felt so lucky to have been able to get to know them and grow alongside them over the summer. I feel an overwhelming sense of pride and excitement knowing that our WooServes students are young leaders who will set examples for their peers and create positive change in the world by combining their interests, creativity, and compassion. It makes me so happy to know that our students have enjoyed coming to our program so much that they've told me they want to return next summer, are going to tell their friends about the program, and will continue to volunteer at partner agencies during the school year.

My summer with United Way and WooServes has made me even more excited to return to Holy Cross and bring back what I've learned about community organizing, youth volunteering, mentorship, and non-profit organizations to my involvements like Community-Based Learning, Working for Worcester, and Spring Break Immersion Program. I've loved getting to know Worcester by serving its community and can't wait to continue exploring and connecting with the city through volunteering during my senior year.

I cannot thank United Way of Central Massachusetts enough for the opportunity to work with them this summer, especially my kind and thoughtful boss, Idaliana Medina, who put the whole WooServes program together seamlessly, as well as UWCM CEO Tim Garvin, who was so inspiring and welcoming to our WooServes students and me.