



LOCATED IN: Worcester, Massachusetts

WEBSITE: www.greaterworcester.org

Who Is Involved:

- ✓ Community youth from the Greater Worcester area
- ✓ Supported by youth development consultant and staff from the Greater Worcester Community Foundation



History of Youth Engagement:

As a way to support the voice of youth in the community and engage donors, the Greater Worcester Community Foundation adopted the Youth for Community Involvement (YCI) Program in 1999. YCI provides an opportunity for youth from schools across the area to build skills in leadership and philanthropy. The foundation set up a youth endowment to support the program and contracts with a youth development consultant to run the program. In the past, youth have helped fundraise for this endowment.

The 13-week YCI program engages a group of 16 sophomores and juniors from across the Worcester area. They begin with a full day off-site retreat for teambuilding, followed by 3-hour weekly sessions over the course of approximately 3 months. In this program, participants explore community needs, determine the request for proposals, read grant applications, and make those grant decisions. They then present their final

recommendations to the full board. In addition, these dedicated students develop and complete a 4-hour community service project. YCI encourages sophomores who complete the program to return in their junior year to continue this collaboration. Because youth come from a variety of backgrounds, during these sessions, adult mentors and mental health professionals are present to provide support if needed.

This work with YCI has been a signal to donor families that the Greater Worcester Community Foundation is comfortable and competent working with youth, and that they can be a resource for succession planning issues.

Current Youth Engagement Strategies:

- ✓ **Youth for Community Involvement Program** participants choose a focus each year, receive applications and make grants, and complete a service project.



Adult Perspective:

“I love seeing the change in the youth from the minute they walk in the door to just 12 weeks later. They are confident young people with a newfound set of skills, knowledge and self worth.”

—Pamela Kane, Senior Program Officer

“It has been such a joy to see the alumni of the program now involved in the community as adults. I have particularly enjoyed seeing the youth help one another when needed.”

—Ann Lisi, President and CEO

Next Gen Perspective:

“The YCI experience prepared me for many future opportunities not only in philanthropy and business, but in social circumstances as well. For example, my senior class has student run meetings to come to specific conclusions on tasks that must be done before the end of the year. These meetings are always hectic because of my many loud, opinionated peers. Two students were facilitating the meeting, only asking “does everyone agree?” One of the main lessons I took away from facilitating with Amy’s help in YCI was to always ask if anyone disagreed to make sure everyone’s voice was heard. I stepped up in the meeting, and gave the two facilitators the feedback on making sure they received everyone’s opinion before coming to conclusions. The lessons I learned from YCI will stay with me the rest of my professional career.”

— Ellery Gibbs

Other Insights from YCI Youth:

“I was able to appreciate non-profits more for the full impact they have on our community by becoming more involved. I have always known about community needs in Central MA, but have never known the whole importance of non-profits.”

“There are a lot of people out there who are less fortunate than us. We need to be thankful for what we have in life.”

“My leadership skills have actually improved since beginning YCI. I learned that it takes more to be a leader than just running a meeting and stepping up when you are needed. It is a full time commitment.”

“I learned that I can do a lot even if I am an adolescent. I have learned more about myself and about respecting others and their ideas. I learned that my voice is valued and I started voicing my opinion more often not only here but everywhere.”

Advice to Others:

1. Be intentional about the talent you want represented in your group. Create a brand and talk it up!
2. Be watchful that the youth are truly leading the room. Listen, engage, and empower them!
3. Engage the students in other activities of your foundation, like committees and internships.

Resources They Have Available to Share:

- ✓ Youth for Community Involvement Documents and Curriculum

Contact:

Pamela Kane, pkane@greaterworchester.org