

AmeriCorps Week 2022

Alumni Feature: Corps for a Change Alumni Bailey and Kate



One of our favorite moments at Colorado Youth for a Change is when we get to catch up with alumni from our AmeriCorps programs and hear about all the amazing things they have gone on to do. In celebration of #AmeriCorpsWeek 2022, we reconnected with two of our Corps for a Change alumni, Bailey and Kate! Corps for a

Change is our high school program that supports students attending less than 90 percent. Members empower students with one-on-one support and connect them with resources both inside and outside of school.

Bailey and Kate are two great examples of how powerful AmeriCorps service can be in preparing you for your future. Bailey was hired on at her service site, CEC Early College, after her service concluded. She is now the Student Support Coordinator at CEC! Kate is pursuing a Master of Arts in Teaching after working hard to implement restorative practices and mindsets during her service term.

Bailey, served at CEC Early College

Q: What are your current job responsibilities?

I am the Student Support Coordinator at CEC Early College. My responsibilities look different every day, but the bulk of my work is focused on collaborating with families, staff, and students to build equitable educational practices. I currently oversee 50+ students who are off-track to graduate and help build plans with the students to get them back on track. It's important to me that students see themselves as "students" and shake any negative self-identifiers they may have gotten in the past as a "bad student".

Q: What's your favorite part of your job?

When I say that my students make me laugh constantly—I mean it! The work in education can be discouraging, but who wouldn't feel energized and excited to do the work when students are constantly



bringing you laughter, joy, and optimism for the future? It's cliché, but I feel with each class I grow and slowly turn into a better version of myself.

Q: How did serving with AmeriCorps prepare you for what you are doing now?

I would not be in this field of work without AmeriCorps. After graduating, I had no idea what I wanted to do but was drawn to the program by its core values and dedication to service and equity. What followed was a rewarding career path in education and a long list of people I now have in my corner, supporting me and cheering me on. I still reference many training sessions from my year with AmeriCorps and have implemented many practices in my high school.

Q: Where do you see yourself in five years?

I used to be afraid of this question; I knew the type of person I wanted to be but couldn't see myself in any career. Because of my leap of faith in joining AmeriCorps, these last three years in education have given me just that and more. Now I dream of one day holding office and being a voice for dismantling outdated and inequitable systems in our school systems. I want to continue to work in my community and restore bruised relationships between schools and marginalized groups.

Q: What do you wish people knew about AmeriCorps?

Imposter syndrome can be your worst enemy as a member; look to your support system when you are feeling that doubt. AmeriCorps is a great training ground for growing as a person. Allow yourself to step out of your comfort zone and to speak up when there is something that needs to be said knowing that you have a team that is walking right beside you.

Kate, served at Adams City High School

Q: What are you currently up to?

Currently I'm in a Master of Arts teaching program at Towson University. I'm attending full-time; this semester I'm not fully integrated into graduate classes yet, but that starts in May. I'll graduate in May of 2023 with the intention of being a high school English teacher. I also have lofty dreams of creating an Intro to Ethics course to be circulated through public school districts for high schoolers. I want to teach for a long time. Corps for a Change taught me that I might be a great principal, and helped me realize that there is a lot of interesting work that is done at the "top end." So depending on where I land school-wise, I definitely am open to alternative paths through the education system.

Q: When did you know you wanted to be a teacher?

Since I was like six years old. I just never changed my mind. I've done a lot of other work, and did a lot with outdoor education, so for a moment I thought maybe I would do that, but no.

Teaching has remained a really huge passion of mine. I've done a lot of different youth mentoring positions throughout my life.



Q: Can you talk about your work in restorative justice during your Corps for a Change service?

It was twofold. With my cohort of members, I gave a training on the history, ethics, and implementation of restorative practices. I did a lot of that to get our cohort on board with that language and philosophy. At my actual school site, I found it really challenging to restrict myself to just my forty-student caseload in such a huge school. A lot of different students gravitated

towards me and my office was actually in the dean's wing, so I was building relationships with students who were being disciplined. I took on a lot of extra responsibilities in the building by doing mediations between students and helping students figure out how to talk with their teachers about attendance or issues in a way that wasn't combative. I also created resources like PDFs and sent them to the dean and other school officials in the circle of my students. Overall I was trying really hard to get the restorative mindset to be more present at the school. When you're not in a position to make top-down, meaningful change, you can at least do a lot of groundwork that is important.

Q: What effect did serving with AmeriCorps have on you?

It was my first foray into the real work of restorative practices. You can be a student teacher all day, but it's never going to be the same as having the job be yours. For a long time I was just a mentee and always learning from somebody else; it was not as if I was in charge of my own classroom. So with AmeriCorps, I got to learn how to effectively build relationships and instill education within four concrete walls. AmeriCorps gave me major confidence and affirmed that I do have a very specific, unique, and important skillset. I think if I hadn't had practice through Corps for a Change, I don't think I would have ever learned how to positively influence attendance rates with students. The practice that I've had through AmeriCorps will definitely stick with me once I am running my own classroom.

Q: What do you wish people knew about AmeriCorps?

I'm not sure that people really realize just how meaningful even one year of service can be. People underestimate the amount that you get out of that experience. It's really not the case that your year of service flies by and then when it's over you don't think about it anymore. Even if I were to have done something outside of my career path, like environmental service, I think

that there's just really valuable lessons that are taught to you just by doing that kind of service. Those lessons include what it means to be in relation and in service to others, and that can be the backbone of what it means to be a person. I would want more people to step out of that box of "I have to find service that is aligned with what I want to do with my life because it has to fit on my resume." It doesn't. You can get a lot out of service that maybe feels alternative to your lifestyle. It's beyond the narrow scope of, "what am I doing with my life?" It then becomes "what are we all doing with our lives?"

**Interviews were edited for length and clarity.*