

(L-R) Matt Spellman,  
Jaretta Konneh,  
Edwine Paul and  
Justin Roias



## IN GOOD HANDS

### CITY YEAR WORKING WITH PROVIDENCE SCHOOLS

BY ADAM HOGUE / PHOTO BY JEN WALLACE

Idealism, when placed in the hands of the right people, has the power to bring tremendous good. At City Year, young idealists are helping to change the future of Providence for the better.

Edwine Paul, Matt Spellman and Justin Roias joined City Year Providence for different reasons, but after finishing their first year, they each decided to stay for a second year to see their impact grow. They signed on to return as team leaders and not only make a difference in schools but also guide the next recruits.

City Year is an AmeriCorps program that places teams of young adults in urban schools where they work to bridge the gap between what students need and what schools can provide. Corps members work with struggling students full-time throughout the school year, running before- and after-school programs, tutoring in math and English classrooms, mentoring students and modeling positive behavior. As 50 members prepared to serve in the upcoming school year, Justin, Edwine and Matt shared what City Year is doing for Providence and what Providence has done for them.

Justin Roias is a Providence native and attended the same schools he is currently serving. His passion for making positive change in his community is evident. In high school, he spent a year in Warwick before returning to Providence and the discrepancies in schools led him to

wonder why some can offer so much and others so little. He also wondered whether making up the difference can actively change a community, and this question is what led him to City Year after college.

Justin enjoys being an example and showing students what is possible with a Providence Public School education. Like all City Year members, he plays an important role as a near-peer mentor to the students he serves. They will often share things with him they would not necessarily share with a teacher. In the upcoming school year, Justin would like to host Mayor Elorza and show him the impact City Year members are having in Providence.

Edwine came to Providence by way of the University of Connecticut. Sold on her first meeting with a City Year recruiter, she was confident she wanted to serve youth through the organization. She fell in love with the mission and has not been disappointed. She wanted to work with students in a school setting, but not necessarily as a teacher. After her first year with City Year, she felt “she was supposed to be here” and decided to continue.

Edwine’s main role in her first year was supporting students in English and math classrooms. Edwine and her team members also worked to develop students’ social-emotional and leadership skills, getting to know them on a more

personal level. She led an after-school dance program and helped organize a “Hollywood-themed” camp for students. As a team leader for the upcoming year, she wants to help create a culture that exemplifies social justice for all.

After college, Matt Spellman came to City Year wanting to discover his path in the real world rather than spending more years in school. He was interested in “meaningful experience right off the bat.” He appreciates that City Year in Providence is smaller than the teams in Boston and New York. The smaller team fosters a “close-knit community” and played a big part in his return.

Out of school, Matt would often see his students on the weekends in his neighborhood. He likes the feeling of his students seeing him in both roles: in both City Year and just-a-regular-guy mode. Providence is his home, too, and it is important for students to see that. Next year, Matt wants to focus on making already good relationships even better by “seeing the City Year mission and schools’ missions be adequately conveyed to each other.”

Knowing these stories, be sure to thank a City Year AmeriCorps member next time you see one. One idealistic organization led by young people truly has the power to make the kind of positive change needed in Providence. For more information, visit [CityYear.org/RhodeIsland](http://CityYear.org/RhodeIsland).