



City Year Chicago



MEET BIANCA VERMA, CITY YEAR CHICAGO CORPS MEMBER

Each year, City Year Chicago recruits a diverse corps of 17 to 24 year olds who serve in Chicago Public Schools as tutors, mentors and role models. These young leaders embody the City Year tag line of “give a year. change the world.” through their commitment to build the graduation pipeline in some of Chicago’s most challenging neighborhoods.

Read about Bianca Verma, one of 125 corps members serving with City Year Chicago.



My parents (and their parents) emigrated from India before I was born. Both had been educated abroad as physicians, and placed strong emphases on the value of education as a means of financial, social, and personal stability and mobility. Though new to the schooling system in New York (and America), they did everything they could to make all opportunities available to me. Their hospital work kept them incredibly busy, but they prioritized being active in my elementary, middle and high schools, and consistently attended family engagement nights and meeting with teachers to monitor my progress. I graduated towards the top of my high school class, and this past May, graduated with honors from Harvard University, with a degree in Social Anthropology and Health Policy. It was only toward the end of my college career that I appreciated what it took for my parents to help me get to where I was. I had always taken my education, and their sacrifices, for granted. Upon graduation, I needed to give other children a similar opportunity to achieve their dreams.

In only a few months, City Year has already allowed me to understand new depths of myself, like how far I can push myself to give (which is a lot) and how much I still have to learn from those around me (which is a lot more). So far this year, my students have shown a positive growth. 66% of my students increased NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) test scores from fall to winter. The average increase on the exam was 5.7 points and the largest increase was by 11 points! That being said, every student moved from below meeting to meeting grade standards. The two students who did not improve their scores only dropped one point but are very close to meeting those standards, so I know exactly who I need to work with for the remainder of the year.

Of course the numbers only reflect on aspect of the impact I am having with the students at Howe. I want to tell you a little about one student I work with in Ms. Russell’s 6th grade Reading class. He is a funny and sociable boy, but appeared to be a disengaged and disinterested student. Rarely, if ever, did he complete his homework, and he would often space out in class. He just would not apply himself! If asked him about what he was reading he would simply shrug his shoulders and say, “I don’t know;” however, if I pressed him, he would figure out the answer after a few seconds. Even though he rolled his eyes at my insistence, I continued to check in on his class work to ensure that he didn’t talk to his classmates to get himself off track.

Within a few weeks, he would call me over to check how he was doing. I started seeing him take responsibility for his own learning. He was still not completing his homework assignments so I was able to speak with mom and told him about the Morning Homework Help we held at Howe. Soon, I was surprised and excited to see him in the cafeteria one morning! He has come every morning since then, and if not, I found that he finished his homework the previous evening. I am so happy about his academic growth and the motivation he is developing. He now knows that he is capable of doing his work well, as long as he takes the time to do it (or ask for help)! I am confident he will improve in the spring NWEA, and more importantly, I can't wait to see how he continues to find his own intellectual confidence.

Building relationships with underserved youth in a high-risk community makes my life feel meaningful in a new way than ever before. I have learned how to manage my responsibilities to others, how to balance the line between teacher and friend, and how to overcome challenges in working with children that have ultimately made my service stronger. I have heard the struggles my students have had to endure at too young an age, and I am developing ways to communicate with parents and community members who can support my students outside of the classroom. It will be incredibly difficult to leave my students at the end of this year, but I will carry this experience in my heart as fuel for my fire for public service, as I move forward and become a pediatrician and health advocate.

With City Year, I am not only giving my parents' investment in my education a greater purpose, I am gaining valuable skills for a career working with youth and underserved communities. With City Year, I am becoming the person I want to be.

For additional stories about how City Year Chicago corps members are making a difference, please visit the City Year Chicago Blog at cityyearchicago.wordpress.com.



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