



## City Year changes lives

By Beth LaMontagne Hall  
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After a year of fixing up playgrounds, reviewing math problems, sounding out troublesome words with students and planting gardens, 54 of Manchester's City Year corps members graduated from the program Friday evening.

In an interview last week with four of the graduating corps members, all said the one-year community service program changed their lives.

"For me it was a huge change in perspective on my life," said 25-year old Jawad Ashour from Houston, Texas, who is headed to medical school. "I was a really cynical guy before I came here. It's been a 180-degree change since I got here."

"It's totally crazy thinking about my life now," said Vance Umphrey, a 20-year-old corps member from Spearfish, S.D. "Before I was just having fun, being in college and not doing a whole lot. I'm really excited to go back to college knowing I'm going to be more organized. I almost feel I have a one-up on everybody."

Umphrey was struggling to figure out what to do with his life during his first year of college, so he signed up for City Year. He spent the past school year working with students on their reading and math skills at Gossler Park Elementary School. Umphrey said working in the school has shown him the importance of education, and he hopes to continue to do work in communities in need.

"It gives you perspective you could never gain until you do this," said Umphrey.

This is the first year City Year New Hampshire placed corps members in five Manchester elementary schools to work with students at risk of dropping out of high school. The early targeting plan focused on students who have low attendance, poor behavior and struggle in math and English, key indicators of likely high school dropouts. The corps members also served as mentors to the students, joining them at lunch and recess and participating in weekend service projects.

Nicole Bathalon, a 23-year-old corps member from Westfield, Vt., was assigned to Bakersville Elementary School this year. Having grown up in a small town, City Year experience opened her eyes to the social challenges facing American cities and inner-city students.

"The stuff they deal with every day outside of school and what they bring to their schoolwork is incredible," said Bathalon.

She said one of the most satisfying parts of her assignment was seeing her students tackle their academic challenges. Bathalon was charged with improving basic arithmetic skills and would give her students 200 problems a day to complete. The work eventually paid off, she said, when four of her students passed their math test.

"As much grief as they gave me for doing them, it worked and now they know their math facts," Bathalon said.



City Year Corps Member Graduates line up at the start of the Graduation Ceremony at the New Hampshire Institute of Art on June 3rd.

Bathalon enjoyed the City Year experience so much, she is coming back next year as a team leader.

Belinda Alvarado, a 21-year-old from Chicago, said City Year also influenced her career plans. Alvarado had been studying to be a nurse, but after forming a relationship with the Gossler Park occupational therapist, she is now heading into that field.

"Whatever path I take, I want to work with kids," she said.

All four corps members agreed their respect for educators was boosted during their City Year experience.

"We hope we have a great impact on education, but there are a lot of people trying really hard, teachers, parents, paras. There are a lot of people in education who are really dedicated," said Ashour. "If they weren't there, what we do wouldn't matter."