Yale University President’s Public Service Fellowship

Proposal for Fellowship Placement • Summer 2020

- Organization: Common Ground/New Haven Ecology Project
- Full street address of organization: 358 Springside Ave, New Haven, CT 06515
- Website: www.commongroundct.org
- Name and title of the Direct Supervisor: Rebecca Holcombe, Director of Community Programs
- Phone number and e-mail address of Direct Supervisor: 203-389-4333 x 1213, rholcombe@commongroundct.org

- Are placement dates flexible? If so, please describe:
  Somewhat: June 29 – August 7 are required, as these are the dates for staff training and the Summer Camp program. Fellows are welcome and encouraged to start anytime before June 29. Earlier weeks will be spent observing environmental education programs and helping on the farm.

- Proposed work schedule: Monday – Friday, 7:30 AM – 3:15 PM (hours before June 29 are more flexible).

Placement Description

Organization description
Common Ground is a center for learning and leadership, inviting people across ages and identities to connect to their urban environment, build community, grow into their full potential, and contribute to a just and sustainable world.

Common Ground connects farm, forest, and city through our High School, Urban Farm, and Environmental Education Center. Our campus includes production and education gardens, farm animals, and creative playspaces for children. Located at the base of West
Rock Ridge, we have direct access to forests with hiking trails, wildlife, and diverse natural habitats.

We serve the greater New Haven community, and have a deep commitment to making our site, programs, and practices inclusive of and accessible to all people.

Summary of the work that the Fellow would be conducting:
Join us at our farm and nature camp for children ages 4 – 13! Some camps have a special theme (animals, outdoor skills, cooking from the farm). The weeks before June 29 are primarily farm work (planting, weeding, greenhouse care, helping with animal care, etc). Lots of photos at commongroundcamp on Instagram!

Please write a complete description of the specific project you propose and list the duties/outcomes expected of the Fellow.

Common Ground’s summer camp provides a diverse group of children with a fun, safe summer experience, emphasizing building friendships and developing an appreciation for the natural world. Campers experience nature as an exciting place to explore, and discover how people, food, and the environment are interconnected. The campers come together on “common ground” as they discover that we all have the responsibility and opportunity to help protect the Earth. Over the years, the camp has evolved from a small group of campers and staff to an energetic community of over 300 children and staff each week.

Making camp financially accessible to low income families is essential to our mission. We provide over $15,000 in scholarships each summer for campers, and we work hard to get the word out to underserved New Haven neighborhoods and schools.

Campers participate in both structured and unstructured activities on the farm and in the forest. Depending on personal interests and skills, a Fellow might lead farm animal care, take campers on a nature hike, lead a group in cooking a snack from the garden, be creative with recycled or natural materials, lead games that foster friendship and cooperation, explore the stream and catch crawdads, or coach a child on how to hold a chicken! Each day is different, but Fellows will always have some assigned stations or activities and may also offer daily activities for small groups based on their interests and experience. Daily work involves being an integral part of this community, teaching, playing, mentoring, getting dirty, eating strawberries, rounding up chickens, bandaging knees, and making memories. Many Fellows have worked in a support and assistant teacher role, so having significant experience with caring for and teaching children is not
an essential skill – many Fellows have worked in partnership with our experienced team of professional Environmental Educators!

Many campers come back year after year and some eventually return as camp counselors to share what they have learned over many summers at Common Ground. Several parents have reported back to the camp that their child’s college decisions were influenced by their time at Camp, as they looked for colleges with a strong environmental program where they could turn their love of nature and the environment into academic studies and eventually, a career.

Since Summer 2001, over 9,000 campers have spent part of their summer learning about our local environment and about how we all can get involved in caring for it. As this message is spread to families, schools, and communities, then our community and our local environment also benefit. Campers have reported back to us about the changes they have made at home and at school, from starting a compost pile to bringing a paper recycling bin into their classroom. In this way, we know that by exciting and inspiring the campers, we are also effecting change for the better in our environment and in the community.

The children who participate in camp also benefit from the breaking down of barriers erected by race, class, neighborhood lines, and socioeconomic status. Common Ground Camps serve a very diverse group of campers from all over the city and surrounding towns, and when campers come together to complete a challenging hike, build a shelter from leaves and branches, and cook together from the garden, they make friends with children that they may never have met outside of camp. Many of these children keep in touch with their camp friends all year long, thus connecting neighborhoods and families and emphasizing the idea that all things (and people) are interconnected.

Yale Fellows (and our interns who come from colleges all over the country) are important role models for our high school students who work as counselors in the camp. Getting to know fellows and interns who are not too far past high school and who are having a variety of experiences in higher education helps our students think about what path they might be excited to follow after high school. In addition, the participation of a Yale Fellow in camp helps us keep our camp costs lower by providing funding for a staff position. This allows us to dedicate more funds towards our scholarship program, making an amazing summer at Common Ground available to a diverse group of children from across the City of New Haven.
The duties of the Fellow are as described above – participate fully as part of the staff team serving an amazing group of children who are having the summer experience of a lifetime!

**Specific skills/experience required for the position:**

- Ability to work with children in a patient, nurturing manner (staff training provided to help learn skills in this area)
- Interest in helping children engage with the natural world
- Willingness to get dirty and work hard in all weather
- Ability to work on a team of adults and teenagers, including both taking and giving direction
- Work includes being a supervisor and role-model for high school students working as assistant counselors. Some teenage counselors may be close in age to the Fellow, so the ability to work with a group of peers while maintaining appropriate boundaries is essential.
- Ability to be physically active for most of an 8 hour day
- Demonstrated commitment, reliability, punctuality, and responsible behavior at previous jobs

**Additional requirements:** none – we are on the city bus line and are also accessible by bicycle from downtown New Haven.

**Briefly describe the work that Yale PPSF Fellows have done with your agency in the past and present**

Common Ground and the New Haven Ecology Project have been fortunate to host Yale Fellows for over a decade, and our site and our students have greatly benefited from their contributions.

Yale PPSF participants have worked in camp and also put in many hours in the garden and at our Farmer’s Market stand. Fellows have worked with our teenage Youth Crew, helped us design new publicity materials for our market stand, hosted Saturday Open Farm Day, developed environmental and food justice curricula, and worked as tutors for Common Ground High School.

**Lots of photos and videos here:** [http://commongroundct.tumblr.com/](http://commongroundct.tumblr.com/) and at CommonGroundCamp on Instagram!
Summer 2015 PPSF Dan rocks out on the last day of camp!

Campfire cooking
Sprouts Camp goes for a hike

Stream Day is the best!