My Summer with Community Access

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What is Community Access?

- Non-profit in New York City that provides housing, education, and wellness resources to individuals struggling with mental health issues and housing insecurity.
- Dedicated to helping people get back on their feet and take the lead on their own paths to recovery.
- Emphasizes the importance of participants having control of their recovery and making their own decisions.
What does Community Access do?

- **Housing**
  - 20 affordable housing projects in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan
  - Adult Home Initiative - Peer Bridger Program. Helps residents of NYC Adult Homes living with mental health concerns move into community-based housing.

- **Education & Job Training**
  - Howie the Harp Peer Training. Trains participants in mental health recovery so they can help others as well as themselves.
  - Blueprint Supported Education

- **Crisis Respite Center**
  - Alternative to emergency hospitalization for individuals experiencing psychiatric crises
My Work with Community Access

Communications and Development Intern

- Film judge for the Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Festival
- Interviewed tenants who have been helped by Community Access.
- Helped manage social media such as Instagram and Youtube channels.
- Kept the website up to date.
What I Learned During This Internship

- The functioning of non-profit organizations and fundraising.
- Community Access’ unique values and goals: Putting participants in charge of their own recovery.
- Various programs for helping participants: Crisis Respite Center, Howie the Harp, Self Direction.
- Special events: Good Neighbor Gala, Changing Minds Film Festival
- The various experiences of tenants who have struggled with mental health concerns and homelessness.
Limitations

- Remote working did make it harder to connect personally with the CA team.
- I didn’t know about website design at first, but I learned on the job!
- Quarantine meant not being able to meet anyone in person. Zoom wasn’t bad, but nothing beats an in-person meeting.
Throughout this internship, I was a judge on the organization's film contest, the Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Festival.

I connected with tenants who have been helped by Community Access and wrote blog posts about their experiences. I felt that this work was important because these public blog posts could inform those interested in the organization about how CA handles crises and its tenants needs.

I also partially managed the organization's Instagram feed, helping with posts that were topical and helpful with respect to the pandemic and protests in the City. This was important in maintaining CA's outreach in the online field and keeping people informed.

I learned much about non-profit organizations and the experiences of people living with mental health concerns and struggling with homelessness and how CA helps them.
Next Steps & Looking Forward

My time with CA taught me a lot about the severity of the homelessness crisis in New York City and how hard it is for those struggling with mental health concerns especially.

Though I wish I had been able to interact with and help out tenants in person, I am glad I got to be someone they could share their stories with and give feedback to during the lonely times of quarantine.

I hope that my authored publications on the CA website can pave the way for future interns to also write their own articles and blog posts for the organization. I think that the direct involvement of interns with program participants is really important and so I hope that my contributions have set a precedent for that.

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