



Massachusetts Promise Fellowship Newsletter

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By Trisha Mah



Fellow Spotlight: Trisha Mah, ACCESS Boston

My name is Trisha Mah and I serve at ACCESS, the Action Center for Educational Services and Scholarships, located in the Back Bay section of Boston. ACCESS is a non-profit organization that works to ensure that all young people have the financial information and resources necessary to achieve their dream of a higher education. As the Community Partnerships Coordinator, I serve as a financial aid advisor as well as a liaison for several of ACCESS' community partner organizations. Since January, I have helped over 100 students apply for financial aid--helping them with filling out the FAFSA and CSS Profile, applying for scholarships, and navigating the financial aid process. Because I work with community-based organizations, my days are split between student appointments in the office and meeting with students at our partners' sites. In addition to weekly visits to College-Bound Dorchester, I spend three afternoon-evenings at the **West End House Boys and Girls Club** in Allston. There are countless stories to tell from working with the youth of Boston, and I would like to share a few of students I work with that have had a great impact on my service experience.

There is a senior who attends evening school and will be receiving his diploma from Brighton High. He was one of the first students I met with when I began at the **West End House**. He has struggled with his grades and was worried about just making it to college, much less how he is going to pay for it. He expressed his concern about his grades and his chances of getting into college. While talking with him about his chances of getting

into college isn't exactly financial aid-related, I wanted to assure him that he was heard so I listened patiently. I informed him that there are many paths to take to college, some less traveled or encouraged. I assured him that he can still go to college and that I could help him figure out how to afford it. I could tell that after meeting with me, he was more relaxed about attending college. Since our first meeting, he has completed his FAFSA, passed his last math class, and can't wait to start college! He's even considering taking courses over the summer to get a head start. He also has applied to at least two community colleges and one state school. With the encouragement and support of **West End House** staff and myself, his attitude towards attending college as well as his perspective on his life goals has changed from discouraged to excited. He doesn't seem as worried about his chances of getting into college and I feel honored to have taken part in this change.

I also work with another senior who attends Boston Community Leadership Academy. Academically she is pretty strong and already has been accepted to several colleges. She has been working with me almost every week to fill out all of the required financial aid forms (there can be quite a few!). Paying for college is a challenge and the process is quite tedious. However, she does not let this get in the way of her goals. Her dedication to her education is something to admire and it does not stop with just her pursuit of higher education. She also has given some thought into what she will do after graduating college, including becoming a Massachusetts Promise Fellow!