



Public Matters 2022 Participant Bios



Justin Bastinelli is the owner of KJ's Caffe in Chelmsford and Acton. His number one priority is his family that includes 5 boys with ages ranging from 6 to 22 years old. Justin is determined to extend that family throughout the community and wants to help in any way he can whether it's financial or volunteering his time. His passion is being with family and friends, coaching his sons in any sport they choose, and finding new challenges whether it's his work or personal life. Also a former ESPN radio host turned General Manager, his other hobby is also watching any type of competition, most importantly any Boston sports team.



Kelly Bowes is the Coordinator of Civic and Service-Learning at Middlesex Community College, where she manages all aspects of volunteer engagement for students and staff as well as all the democracy education efforts on campus. Prior to starting in the Office of Civic and Service-Learning, she spent 10 years working in Residence Life, including working for 4 years at UMass Lowell, where she had the unique pleasure of living on campus, including living in the Inn and Conference Center overlooking the Lower Locks. She discovered her passion for Higher education while serving as a Resident Assistant at Emerson College, where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Visual and Media Arts. She began her career as a Resident Director at Centenary University in New Jersey, where she also earned a Masters in Counseling. She has also worked at Wentworth Institute of Technology and Salem State University. Kelly is passionate about youth empowerment, equity and access in education, and encouraging young people and underrepresented populations to engage with their communities. Outside of Middlesex, she hosts bar trivia a few nights a week and enjoys running, traveling and spending time with her dog, Dakota.



Brad Buitenhuys is the Executive Director of Lowell Litter Krewe, Vice Chair of the Lowell Conservation Commission, and a member of the Lowell Community Preservation Committee. He graduated in 2007 from UMass Lowell with a B.S. in Civil & Environmental Engineering, and from Wentworth Institute of Technology with a M.S. in Construction Management. He is currently working as a construction site supervisor with a commercial construction company to round out his experience in commercial construction, real estate development and project management, civil site design, land surveying, excavation and carpentry. He is a proud Lowell resident of 13 years with 17 years of experience in the construction industry.



Sovannseila (Seila) Chuop is a paralegal at Northeast Legal Aid, and a Board of Director of the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA). She grew up in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Seila moved to South Korea to pursue her Masters of Law in Seoul, and then moved to Washington D.C to pursue a second L.L.M from George Washington Law School. Her background is in International Law, Diplomacy, and International Relations and Politics. She is very passionate about social work as well as social justice. Her inspiring mantra is "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." Seila is a Lowell resident.



Lauren Ellis is a Program Manager in the Community Education and Training Department and Adjunct Faculty of Middlesex Community College. Lauren has been at Middlesex Community College going on 12 years this March, 2022. Lauren is responsible for youth programming, a host of career training programs, personal enrichment classes and MILES (Middlesex Institute for Life Long Education for Seniors). Lauren has been teaching at the college since 2014 and loves to teach and engage with students whether it is her leadership class or a first year seminar that students enroll in.

Lauren has been featured in the Women of Distinction Magazine and was honored to be a part of two Black History Month panels at Middlesex Community College. She has earned her Masters of Education at Cambridge College and is now pursuing her Doctorate in Education. Lauren is inspired daily by her family, especially her college bound daughter. In her free time she follows her passion of motivating and inspiring people to do their best through connections and consulting in the areas of career, leadership and goal development. Lauren is a behind the scenes type of person, a person who strives for continued happiness and contentment.



Francis Gonzalez is a Senior Loan Servicing Supervisor at Enterprise Bank where she has worked for 18 yrs. She is a graduate of the Greater Lowell Technical High School where she studied Information Processing/Business and learned the skills needed to start my banking career. Francis is a Board Member of the Open Pantry in Lowell, Co-Chair of the Merrimack Valley Out of The Darkness Walk for Suicide Prevention, Wings Committee member for the Lowell Transitional Living Center, and Member of The Merrimack Valley Hope Mission in Lawrence. Additional she supports the work of The End-Fluenza Project & Alzheimer's Association. Francis is a passionate volunteer in

the Greater Lowell Community helping the less fortunate and spreading awareness. She was born in Aguadilla Puerto Rico but raised in the Acre neighborhood of Lowell and is the mother of two wonderful young ladies Francheska and Andralize.



Tara Hong is a Civic Engagement Coordinator at the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association. He is also a full-time student at UMass Lowell where he is pursuing a degree in Political Science. Tara will be the first member of his family to earn a college degree. Tara was born in Cambodia where he lived until 2009 before moving to the United States.



Char Kasprzak is the Manager of Analytics at Lowell Community Health Center. Originally from Milwaukee, she has lived in Greater Boston for almost two decades after earning a degree in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2002. She has worked in numerous analytical roles in state government in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and learned the value and challenges of analyzing "big data" at Massachusetts Health Quality Partners. She earned a master's in public health from Tufts University School of Medicine in 2009. Char's career and passion is for creating systemic change that

leads to better healthcare quality and access for all people regardless of race, language, gender expression, sexual orientation or health status. Other than work, she can be seen hanging out with her three cats, playing the French horn, dismantling the patriarchy, and keeping praying mantises. She was making sourdough before it was cool. Char has been a Lowell resident since 2012.



Nicole Kelly is the Sustainability Coordinator at UMass Lowell. The Office of Sustainability, a subdivision of the Rist Institute for Sustainability and Energy, provides the UMass Lowell community with resources and opportunities to integrate sustainability and progress towards goals of carbon neutrality. In this role, Nicole has contributed to the university's sustainability reporting, urban agriculture program, property and asset management office, energy initiatives, and campus waste, recycling, and surplus operations. Additionally, Nicole's work highlights partnerships and collaboration between campus departments and offices, the university and the City of Lowell, and

beyond to the greater community to expand a network of sustainability conscious stakeholders. Nicole holds a Bachelor of Science from the University of Connecticut in Natural Resources and the Environment and is currently pursuing a Masters degree in Public Administration at UMass Lowell. Growing up in the Greater Lowell region, Nicole has experienced firsthand the growth, development and transformation of UMass Lowell and the City of Lowell.



Kelly Proulx is the Development & Communications Coordinator at the Merrimack Valley Food Bank. Kelly joined MVFB in 2016 after spending six years as a Data Manager at Arizona State University's REACH Institute. Kelly was born and raised in Colorado, earned her Bachelor's degree in English and Anthropology from the University of Notre Dame, and her Master of Nonprofit Studies from Arizona State. She has served on grant review committees for the Greater Lowell Community Foundation and the United Way and volunteered at the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell, and is a

2019 graduate of the Mill Cities Leadership Institute. Kelly lives in Billerica with her husband and 1-year old daughter.



Kartik Shah is a Campus Planner with the University of Massachusetts Lowell. As a part of the facilities management team, Kartik is involved in the long-term planning of the Lowell campus that facilitates world-class research and student success. Kartik has a background in planning, architecture, and real estate development. Before joining UMass Lowell, Kartik worked as a planner and an urban designer in the private sector, helping communities around New England

with urban revitalization and bringing positive change. Kartik holds a Masters in Real Estate Development from MIT and Masters in Urban Design from the University of Michigan.



Amy Watson is a Senior Competitive Intelligence Analyst at Ultimate Kronos Group. She holds a B.A. in English and Religious Studies from St. Michael's College and a Master of Library and Information Science from Simmons University. Passionate about libraries and hands-on-learning, Amy is an Associate Trustee for the Pollard Memorial Library in Lowell and volunteers as the Marketing Committee Chair and lead Grant Writer at Lowell Makes, a community makerspace on Western Avenue.



Bethany Watson has been with Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union for over 18 years. She currently holds the title of Assistant Treasurer – Executive Assistant where she provides her support and expertise to the CEO/President and the Executive Team. Outside of the credit union, Bethany operates a photography business and enjoys volunteering. She has served on the Board of Acre Family Child Care for the past seven years, and currently holds the position of Board Chair. Bethany graduated from Hallmark Institute of Photography and also received her certificate in Project Management from UMass Lowell. She lives in Lowell with her husband, they have four children.



Jess Wilson is a Design Planner for the City of Lowell with a focus on managing the City's parks and open space projects. This role involves extensive community engagement, site/context analysis, and conceptual design work geared toward implementing the goals of the City's Comprehensive Master Plan and Open Space and Recreation Plan. She is also responsible for seeking and managing grant funding to support urban design, open space, and recreational opportunities in the City. Before coming to Lowell in January 2021, Jess lived in Boston and worked as an Urban Designer and Planner specializing in community engagement in the private sector, where she had the opportunity to serve as a consultant to municipalities throughout New England on a wide range of planning projects. She graduated from Roger Williams University with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture in 2014, and completed her Master of Landscape Architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design in 2018. While in graduate school, her research focused on the role of design in processes of gentrification and displacement which ultimately led to a career in urban planning. Jess grew up in the small town of Wayland, MA but fell in love with mid-size post-industrial Cities while living in Providence. She now lives in the Acre neighborhood and recently joined Coalition for a Better Acre's Board of Directors, and also enjoys volunteering with DIY Lowell. As a textile artist/craftsperson in her free time, she is thrilled to put her roots down in the birthplace of the American textile industry and to be living in an adapted mill building with her corgi, Pippin, and her cat, Ruth.