

Liz Nye

lnye@nebg.org

508.869.6111 ext. 143



**New England
Botanic Garden**
AT TOWER HILL

Community Greening Initiative Blooms on Franklin Street: New England Botanic Garden and WooServes Student Volunteers Beautify Downtown Worcester

(July 18, 2022) BOYLSTON – With the help of [New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill](#), a group of local students recently kicked off a summer of community service by transforming a downtown Worcester street median into a beautiful pollinator haven.

The students were part of [WooServes Summer Youth Service Institute](#), a United Way of Central Massachusetts program that engages young people aged 13-17 in volunteer projects to address community needs in health, food insecurity, youth education, access to outdoor recreation, and more. Over six-weeks, students connect with their peers and learn the power they have as young people to make a difference in the community. They also gain valuable insight into local nonprofits working to build a vibrant and healthy Central Massachusetts region.

On July 6, twenty-eight WooServes participants, representing all Worcester Public High Schools, Nativity School of Worcester, Abby Kelley Charter Public School, Shrewsbury High School, and Millbury High School, joined members of the New England Botanic Garden team on Franklin Street in Worcester, near the YWCA. Garden staff provided guidance and all the tools needed to plant over 60 plants in the 3,000 square foot median. Many of the plants, like vibrant red coneflowers (*Echinacea* ‘Sombrero Sangrita’) were selected by Garden horticulturists to support pollinator biodiversity in the city. While students were digging holes and pulling invasive weeds, bees dusted with pollen could already be seen visiting the new flowers.

“Urban environments are part of complex ecosystems, and the presence of plants is essential to everyone’s well-being,” said Grace Elton, CEO of New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill. In cities, trees provide shade that can lessen the harmful effects of heat waves. Plants also improve storm water management and promote biodiverse habitat.

“New England Botanic Garden is a beautiful place to escape into nature, but it’s also an organization committed to initiatives that bring people and plants together to solve environmental issues,” Elton continued. “We’re proud to partner with the United Way to

create opportunities for young people to learn, to give back to the community, and to be inspired by the difference they can make.”

“Volunteering is something that’s always been really important to me,” said Alia Haytham of Shrewsbury. “The feeling you get when you’re helping, and you get to see someone smile—that’s a big part of who I am and who I want to be. I want to make people smile.” This is Haytham’s second year participating in the program.

“The United Way is excited to engage local teens this summer through our WooServes Summer Youth Service Institute. It helps build the next generation of philanthropists and civically engaged leaders,” said Emily McCann, Vice President of Community Engagement at United Way of Central Massachusetts. “Partnering with community agencies like the New England Botanic Garden helps to enrich the WooServes program experience through hands-on volunteer service projects.”

While 2022 marks New England Botanic Garden’s first time coordinating the WooServes kick-off project, the Garden collaborates annually with local organizations to establish and steward plants in Worcester where they are needed most. Currently, the Garden is planting the Lincoln Street rotary and working with Main South CDC to install sidewalk planters in a program known as Planters for People. Throughout the summer and fall, Garden staff will continue to care for the new plants at the Franklin Street median. Flowers will bloom for the community and for pollinators for weeks to come.

To learn more about the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill and its community greening initiatives, contact Liz Nye at lnye@nebg.org or visit <https://nebg.org/>.

###

About New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill

New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill is a nonprofit organization located at 11 French Drive in Boylston, Massachusetts. A regional destination, we are operated on 171 acres by the Worcester County Horticultural Society, one of the oldest of its kind in the country, and are open to the public for garden viewing, trail walking, activities, private events, educational classes, weddings, exhibitions, and more. We are an [AAM-accredited](#) museum that includes an irreplaceable collection of plants. We hope to engage you in our life-long passion for growing plants for their ornamental, economic, and ecological value. Learn all about New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill including its history, mission, and its staff, please visit www.nebg.org.

About United Way of Central Massachusetts

[United Way of Central Massachusetts](#) connects people and resources to improve the community. We do this by partnering with agencies and organizations, and supporting initiatives

aligned on four strategic areas—[safety net](#), [education](#), [family stability](#), and [health](#). Programs focus on taking care of immediate needs and providing the impetus for lasting, positive change within the 30 towns of its service area. United Way of Central Massachusetts is independent, separately incorporated, and governed by a local, volunteer board of directors.