

Maggie's Journey

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I have always been curious - as a kid it was “going through people’s wallets and going places I shouldn’t go” kind of curious. My career has followed a similar track of curiosity and trial and error.

I took a leave of absence from George Washington University, after my first year, I found myself in need of support from the NITEO program at Boston University. After my semester as a student there, I became a peer mentor intern and then a senior peer mentor intern. NITEO helped me gain confidence in employment and that I could find success outside of the traditional 4-year college.

Working there also started my journey in recognizing my own inherent abilities as an educator and mentor. I’d pushed away from education my whole life because my mom is a teacher and I loved to hate anything she loved. It also felt like it came too easily to me. I completely discounted my talents because they came so naturally.

I then went on to an AmeriCorps program called City Year. I moved to Chicago to teach 9th and 10th grade History at an underserved school. It lit a flame within me that I couldn’t help but listen to. It invigorated me to be able to further my students’ learning but also be there for them when they needed a trusted adult to go to. Stemming from my own experiences and time at NITEO, I know how important mental well-being is for academic success. I have incorporated social-emotional skills into all aspects of my work because I was lost with no skills to guide me when I was really struggling. I believe that weaving emotional regulation and mindfulness skills into teaching will serve my students for the rest of their lives.

I LOVED Chicago and it helped me gain confidence in my ability to adapt and thrive in new environments. However, my mind was still set on going back to a 4-year institution and I ended up at the University of Vermont, UVM. I was so excited to get back to the thing I felt I had failed at four years earlier and prove to myself I could do it. Unfortunately, I fell into a similar pattern, just like I did at George Washington, and it crushed me.

I started falling behind in schoolwork, found it hard to make connections with my peers, and had a death in my family. As a result, I ended up leaving UVM in Spring of 2022. I spiraled into a deep hole of shame, with the feeling that I was destined to fail at higher education, and this led to a series of self-destructive decisions. However, with the help of my coach from NITEO, Chelsea, who is still my coach to this day, I was able to slowly feel well enough to get back into the valued role of employee. I even returned to NITEO and did some programming work and skills training for the new peer mentor interns.

Then in the Spring of 2023, I found a job running the summer camp at the Boys and Girls Club, the same one I attended as a kid. It was a perfect fit for me. It was somewhere I felt comfortable, would push me to learn new things, and offer an opportunity to expand on my current knowledge. After the summer ended, they asked me to stay on full-time to run their free drop-in after-school program for ages 8-11, as well as their tween programming for 5th-8th graders. In the fall, I will continue in my role at the Boys and Girls Club and start classes at University of Massachusetts at Boston, as a History major. The plan being to use the degree to teach high school in a couple of years.

This job has taught me so much and I have progressed personally and professionally more than I ever thought I would in my lowest moments. It also helped me see my own talents and abilities and take pride in them. Once I was able to appreciate and embrace my inherent ability to connect with people, mentor students, and create safe environments, I was able to truly succeed.

All of you have amazing abilities and traits that are just part of who you are. Finding those and believing they are strengths and talents will bring you all the success you need. What you can do is special and unique to you. Lean into the things that come easily and ignite your flame. For me, doing the things that feel authentic and right with my soul has given me bumpers on my bowling lane, if you know what I mean. None of this is linear but that's part of the learning and growing.

About NITEO

NITEO is an intensive, one-semester program supporting young adults who live with a mental health condition to develop wellness tools, academic skills, resilience, and work-readiness. The semester-long program, is a simulation of the college experience where students have opportunities to:

- Attend wellness and academic classes to build skills for collegiate, work, and personal success.
- Build lasting relationships with same-age peers and supports.
- Work one-on-one with an assigned College Coach for individualized support around a host of academic, vocational, social, and wellness.

For more information on the NITEO Program:

<https://cpr.bu.edu/wellness-and-recovery-services/niteo/>