The High Road Runs Through the City
Cornell University ILR Summer Fellowships
Buffalo, NY  2011
Derya Akbaba ‘13

- Arranged the first meeting for the Refugee Gardens Partnership, a hopeful collaboration of seven Buffalo grassroots organizations and the Cornell High Road Fellowship.
- Linked the local enthusiasm for a refugee gardens program to the national Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (RAPP).
- Recorded the history of the foundation of Urban Roots by interviewing one of the founding members.
- Became an active West Side Buffalo community member: teaching neighborhood children, exploring Buffalo, and attending local summer events.
- Assisted with daily operation of Urban Roots gardening and customer service, gaining experience and knowledge of working within a different business model, a cooperative.

Derya is interested in international and domestic grassroots community development. Fluent in Turkish, she also enjoys photography. She is from Westford, MA.

I am loving Buffalo. I think I liked it the second I got off the plane on Sunday morning. It’s flat (totally bikable), there’s always a lovely breeze, aaaaammddd the food is AMAZING. Oh, and there is Canada too. . . One thing that Buffalo has confirmed is my belief in the good hard work of people who care for other people. . . from Derya’s Journal

With Derya, in came bright fresh air. She is super, and the High Road fellows have just adopted this community. . .Patti Jablonski, Urban Roots

Urban Roots Community Garden Center
428 Rhode Island Street
Buffalo, NY 14213
716.362.8982
www.urbanroots.org

Urban Roots is a cooperatively owned retail garden center on Buffalo’s West Side, owned by more than 550 members of the community. In addition to providing a convenient and welcoming location for Buffalo residents to shop for garden materials and supplies, they rejuvenate and improve their neighborhood as well as the quality of life throughout Buffalo with workshops, outreach, and partnerships.
The Partnership for the Public Good is a “think and do tank” providing research and advocacy support to nearly 100 partner organizations who share a community oriented vision of a revitalized Greater Buffalo. PPG promotes civic involvement so citizens and the nonprofit community have stronger voices in public policy and are better able to promote the public good.

I give Jeff two thumbs up! A bright, self-starting, and personable student, he accomplished a great deal in his summer here, including a superb fact sheet on triple-bottom-line businesses in Buffalo, which we presented at a public forum. In two months, Jeff really contributed to PPG and to the community.

...Sam Magavern, PPG

Jeff is interested in business development and public policy. He is active in his community and enjoys sports and working with children. Jeff is from Orchard Park, NY.

This fellowship has been life changing. It has changed my perspective on many aspects of life and I hope I can find work like it in the future. ... Week in Reviews were awesome to hear what all of the other Fellows were doing and to see how all of our work was linked under a common goal.

...from Jeff’s program evaluation

*Created a fact sheet on triple bottom line businesses in the city of Buffalo. Analyzed five local businesses as case studies. Provided a summary of the benefit corporation legislation that passed in NYS and the advantages that it can provide to people, planet, and profit.*

*Formulated a Donor Data Base for the Partnership for the Public Good’s Annual Fundraiser that raised $5,000 dollars in profit.*

*Expanded, revised, and updated the PPG website. Created a "News and Events" page that lets viewers see PPG’s upcoming forums, radio shows, and events. Incorporated PPG’s twitter and Facebook into the website to increase awareness among younger audiences.*

*Created a Partnership for the Public Good Twitter account as part of a Social Media Initiative.*

*Took pictures of 14 local businesses receiving subsidies from Industrial Development Agencies and incorporated them into a PowerPoint that was used at PPG’s “Subsidy Reform” forum.*

*Attended multiple local government hearings.*

Jeffrey Baker ’14
I learned about the part that grassroots organizations like Buffalo First! play in public policy. Our big push to get benefit corporations passed and our success in doing so really showed me that while small organizations have an uphill battle when trying to make a difference, they can indeed win those battles. This gave me a better understanding of politics and civic participation because I was really able to see individuals make a difference – being one, myself.

...from Dan’s program evaluation

Dan really belonged at Buffalo First. We were able to understand his career goals and tailor a project to match those goals. He was effective, diligent, and his work quality was superb.

...Sarah Bishop, Buffalo First!

Buffalo First! is a growing non-profit organization focused on building a fair, green and local economy in the Buffalo-Niagara region. They encourage shopping locally, help independent businesses access local goods and services, and give local businesses a united voice for better policies for local businesses. The goal is to root more dollars in the local economy, preserve community, and create a healthier environment.
One of the things that you immediately see is the community that people feel, and how many people are trying to make things better, and to work with the community to do the things that they want and need. It seems like it’s really hard work, but at the same time there is so much hope, and belief that what they are doing will work and that things will improve.

...from Susanne’s journal

Susanne has really impressed us with her knowledge, independence, responsibility, and positive commitment.

...Cheryl Bird, Daemon CSCCE
Abhishek Gupta MILR ‘12

- Contributed to marketing and outreach plan for IIB to asylees and special visa holders from Iraq to resettle and find employment in Buffalo, helping these New Americans become self sufficient without utilizing public services assistance.
- Assisted refugees with their settlement in the U.S. before they arrive by helping with setting up homes, shopping for food, etc.
- Post arrival assistance including refugee intake to explain their rights and responsibilities, scheduling and helping with medical appointments, use of public transportation, etc.
- Helped resettle a refugee family from Burma who speaks some Hindi.
- Attended meetings with NYS DOL in conjunction with United Way to promote better labor and employment plans for the growing immigrant and refugee population in Buffalo.
- Helped with the “job club”; one of the employment programs run by IIB.
- Brain-stormed ideas for a small business grant for refugee population through JOLII program.

Abhi is interested in applying his international experiences to conflict resolution and human resource management. Before coming to ILR, he studied fashion in NYC. Abhi is from India.

The Fridays were a great way to connect with fellow High Roaders and to receive updates on various aspects of Buffalo, which makes this program very unique and exciting. I very much enjoyed discussions and learning more about access to arts and contemporary artists in Buffalo. The tours to Burchfield Penney and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Darwin Martin House were my absolute favorites.

... from Abhi’s program evaluation
Coalition for Economic Justice

The Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ) is an ongoing coalition of labor, faith, community, academic and student activists and organizations which engages in collective action to promote strong, sustainable communities and economic justice for all. CEJ is the Buffalo affiliate of the NYS Labor-Religion Coalition and Jobs with Justice.

David Huang ’13

- Created a questionnaire for a comprehensive voter guide for Erie County and City of Buffalo elections in the fall of 2011, including researching CEJ issues and organizing collaborative efforts with 10 plus community partners.
- Participated in a statewide lobbying action in Albany advocating for a good jobs plan and for accountable, transparent, performance-based operation of the new Regional Economic Development Councils.
- Participated in, filmed, and edited a video on a local press action for economic development and job creation.
- Participated in two campaigns: to end the lockout of 400 Blue Cross/Blue Shield employees, and Don’t Bypass Verizon Campaign. Interacted with local press through phone calls, press releases, and media advisories. Filmed and participated in press conferences, public hearings and weekly prayer vigils involving prominent local clergy.
- Researched subsidies to businesses granted by the New York Power Authority, compiling a spreadsheet of all the WNY NYPA subsidies.
- Improved CEJ social media practices of CEJ. Wrote two Op-Eds to Buffalo News and ArtVoice regarding the new regional economic development councils.

David brought a youthful spirit and openness for learning to CEJ that helped us improve our social media practices and launch a broad-based coalition effort to hold local public officials accountable this election season.

... Allison Duwe, CEJ

Buffalo’s Top 10

9. Waterfront – There is something “Erie”ly peaceful about a big tall highway bisecting a tourist destination with grain elevators on one side and HSBC tower on the other. Oh, and free concerts.
7. Friday lunches – Food for the whole weekend. Those brownies never get old
6. Cooking – I went from putting 2 cans in a pot to stir-frying vegetables and chicken and making fried rice. Can you say progress?
5. Canada – Down the street, literally. I turned 19 the first week of the fellowship. Perfect.
4. Niagara Falls – There is nothing more calming than seeing millions of gallons of water fall on rocks.
3. Biking – My best friend in Buffalo. I spent countless hours on that thing. We shared some good memories.
2. People – This family from a church that I went to invited me back to their waterfront condo for lunch five minutes after they met me. Lots of love in Buffalo.

Thanks for a great summer, Buffalo!
...from David’s journal

David has wide academic interests and is considering a legal career. He is a member of the Cornell Glee Club. David grew up in Taiwan, is fluent in Mandarin Chinese, and is now from Davis, CA.
Prisoners are People Too
237 Main Street, Suite 1200
Buffalo, NY 14203
716.852.4191 ext 110
www.prp2.org

Prisoners are People Too (PRP2) is a grassroots community advocacy organization for prisoners and their families. The organization also seeks to educate the public about the prison system and promote an equitable, just community. Much of the organization’s current work is focused on reform of the Erie County Holding Center.

This fellowship was quite simply amazing. I’ve learned so much and gained a much more professional and educated perspective. The opportunity to be such an essential part of an organization can never be replaced or forgotten; I never thought I would be able to do such satisfying work!

. . . from Sahil’s program evaluation

Sahil Jain ‘14

- Created a policy brief aimed at educating the community on the abuse and poor conditions of the Erie County Holding Center.
- Attended the monthly meetings of the Community Advisory Board on Erie County Correctional Facilities.
- Attended and spoke at the National Fuel Public Hearing held by Public Service Commission.
- Attended City Council Legislative session.
- Protested weekly with Erie County Prisoners Rights Coalition to raise awareness of conditions.
- Created an excel spreadsheet documenting all Prisoners are People Too events since 2005.
- Revamped PRP2.org, making Prisoners are People Too’s website functional and running.
- Created www.ECPRC.weebly.com, website for Erie County Prisoners Rights Coalition.
- Guest Speaker at PRP2 monthly meeting.
- Created a list of nonprofits and organizations for PPG’s list-serve, compiled emails and board members of PPG’s 95 partners, and helped with the PPG’s Annual Fundraiser.

Sahil is interested broadly in human rights and applied economics. He is conversational in Hindi and enjoys philosophy and music. Born in Buffalo, Sahil is from Batavia, NY.

Sahil meant having someone help our organization to do things we never could before. He took initiative, was thoughtful and he grew as the organization did.

. . . Karima Amin, PRP2

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237 Main Street, Suite 1200
Buffalo, NY 14213
716.852.4191
www.ppgbuffalo.org

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The fellowship was an intensive training in working with grassroots organizations. Since we have training in so many areas of study, we have a variety of choices, and nonprofits and grassroots have become one of those potential fields for me to consider. My experience with the organization and with the program has been great. My favorite activity would be the many tours of local historical sites.

. . . from Liz’s program evaluation

Liz has done a great job with her research, very thorough, accomplishing much more than we planned for. She cheerfully takes on any project.

. . .Erin Heaney, Clean Air Coalition

Liz is exploring a variety of career interests, especially those related to human resources. She is fluent in Chinese and has a strong record of seeking out community service opportunities. Liz is from Doylestown, PA.
Alyssa Murrett ‘13

- Created a tax report on WNY’s largest publicly traded corporations, showing the actual tax rate corporations pay compared to the statutory rate mandated by the federal government.
- Conducted research on subsidies awarded to local businesses by the Amherst, Erie County and Niagara County Industrial Development Agencies and the New York Power Authority.
- Examined Buffalo’s Waterfront, chronicling recent attempts for economic development in the area.
- Researched the corporate and government stakeholders and the position that each has taken with regards to waterfront development.
- Surveyed areas designated for community waterfront access and its accessibility to the surrounding communities, specifically the Commodore Perry Community.
- Compiled lists of board of directors for waterfront development stakeholders, the IDAs, and NYPA.
- Documented the recent phone hacking scandal by News of the World and the potential side-effects the scandal may have on the U.S.

Alyssa is interested in public policy, law and public administration. The recipient of numerous leadership awards, she is also a member of Cornell Women’s Club Ice Hockey Team. Alyssa is from Buffalo, NY.

With this experience, I understand how important public policy is for the success and advancement of communities. I will look more closely at careers involving public policy and social justice.

. . . from Alyssa’s program evaluation

Having Alyssa as a Summer Fellow this year made PPG a better organization. She was an enthusiastic presence and her efforts allowed us to exceed our summer goals. We continue to reap benefits of her work.

. . .Megan Connelly, PPG

Public Accountability Initiative

45 Park Street
Buffalo, NY 14201
716.916.0925
www.public-accountability.org

The Public Accountability Initiative (PAI) is a nonprofit, non-partisan research and educational organization focused on corporate and government accountability. Its mission is to facilitate and produce investigative research that empowers citizens to hold their leaders accountable. Research and analysis by PAI has been cited in major media outlets.

Partnership for the Public Good

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People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH) Buffalo is a grassroots, non-profit community organization working to rebuild the West Side of Buffalo. PUSH organizes residents to confront institutions that perpetuate poverty on the West Side and to create and implement an action plan for improving the neighborhood. Their mission is to build a democratic, action-oriented organization capable of addressing the lack of living wage jobs and poor housing conditions.

The experience was absolutely wonderful. Lou Jean did an amazing job exposing us to interesting and influential people all over Buffalo. And it was an honor working with PUSH; they are really doing a wonderful job empowering folks on the West Side. The program was wonderful and I can honestly say that my expectations were exceeded.

. . . from John’s program evaluation

John was integral in turning a vacant lot into an intentional and organic community space for youth in the community. He was able to embed this space in the minds of the people and it rings true today. He showed great skills as an organizer.

. . . Eric Walker, PUSH Buffalo

John Parker ‘12

- Drafted a Memorandum of Understanding for a maintenance agreement between PUSH and the City of Buffalo.
- Drafted a grant application, for PUSH, to the United States Soccer Federation for funds to construct a soccer field on a derelict city park.
- Developed a prototype community garden program for students of the Frank A. Sedita Academy (P.S. 30), coordinating with the school to continue a summer program in which 5 to 15 7th and 8th grade students maintain the garden on a daily basis.
- Assisted in organizing and running the community gardening program for West Side youths.
- Organized youth members of the West Side immigrant community to attend a soccer clinic.
- Canvassed throughout the West Side to convince residents to come to a hearing hosted by the Public Service Commission on National Fuel’s Conservation Incentive Program.

John is interested in globalization, social inequity and organizational behavior. He has studied in Ireland, worked as a carpenter and as a wilderness camp counselor. John is from Brooklyn, NY.
Lauren Schwarzenholzer ‘13

- Created a policy brief aimed at educating politicians and constituents on how to reform the city of Buffalo’s recycling program.
- Updated the Partnership for the Public Good’s Buffalo Briefs, which are statistical snapshots of Buffalo. The topics include but are not limited to: poverty, education, health, housing, racial composition.
- Helped with the Partnership for the Public Good’s Annual Fundraiser.
- Attended several WNY Apollo Alliance Meetings as well as various public hearings including the redistricting of Erie County and the City Council hearing on Erie Community College’s proposed plan to build a medical center in Amherst rather than the City.
- Attended a meeting at the Community Foundation aimed at forming a coalition around people who are passionate about improving Buffalo’s recycling.
- Worked on different publicity initiatives: sharing about the High Road Runs Through the City Summer Fellowship in the East Aurora Bee and East Aurora Advertiser.

Lauren is interested in government, law and policy, both global and local. She loves adventure and sports, including playing and coaching lacrosse. Lauren is from East Aurora, NY.

Coming into the program I was hoping to get my hands dirty in some policy research. I loved the way that my supervisors picked out projects and made a work plan for each student. . . I will forever be thankful to ILR as well as the PPG for providing me with this opportunity.

. . . from Lauren’s program evaluation

Laruen was a High Road leader this summer. She’s as productive as she is creative, serious as she is fun-loving, and her contributions to the program and to PPG are lasting.

. . . Lou Jean Fleron, Cornell ILR

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Everywoman Opportunity Center
237 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14201
716.796.5008
www.everywoman.org

Everywoman Opportunity Center, Inc. is a non-profit corporation committed to helping women in Greater Western New York achieve economic and personal self-sufficiency. Throughout its history, Everywoman has reached out to diverse communities to provide comprehensive employment-related services. All programs and services are designed to be holistic and address all the barriers a woman may face in seeking economic and personal self-sufficiency.

Everywoman Opportunity Center
237 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14201
716.796.5008
www.everywoman.org

Elizabeth is especially interested in women’s rights and women in the workforce; she is active in the ILR Women’s Caucus and related campus organizations. She is also a member of the Cornell University Chorale. Elizabeth is from Vestal, NY.

Elizabeth Spivak ‘13

- Conducted research on facts/statistics on women and the displaced homemaker program.
- Worked with and shadowed career counselor.
- Reviewed and assisted Everywoman participants with: Cover letters, Resumes, Computer skills, Interviewing techniques, Job searches, Job applications, Professional image.
- Taught basic computer skills to Everywoman participants.
- Sorted professional clothes closet and took Everywoman participants to professional clothes closet.
- Attended Western New York Women’s Fund’s “What She’s Made Of” event, featuring Jennifer Buffett of the NoVo Foundation.
- Assisted participants at Greater Buffalo Works program.
- Conducted research on facts/statistics on women and the displaced homemaker program.
- Attended meeting with company doing a clothing drive for the Everywoman Opportunity Center.

This has been such a great experience. I really felt like I fit very well with the Everywoman Opportunity Center and I have learned so much from all the High Roaders and those in the PPG office. I have met so many great people here and seen some truly inspiring work. I have learned so much and will truly miss it and all of you!

. . .from Elizabeth’s program evaluation

Professionally, Elizabeth was an extra set of enthusiastic hands to guide our job seekers toward their goal of employment. Personally, she was a joy to have with us—a perfect match.

. . .Ivy Diggs-Washington, EWOC
Heart of the City Neighborhoods, Inc.
42 Plymouth Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14201
716.882.7661
www.hocn.org

Heart of the City Neighborhoods, Inc. (HOCN) is a not-for-profit Community Development Corporation that creates, facilitates and supports housing and neighborhood development in the Lower West Side. This is accomplished by creating programs to improve the quality of residential housing, and by developing sustainable projects to improve the Lower West Side.

So here’s to Buffalo, to my final journal entry, to my final night in the NetZero house, to a crazy work project that was crazy successful, to all the support from Lou Jean and Megan, to my elderly swimming ladies at the JCC, to eating cinnamon rolls at Five Points. Here’s to Buffalo, the little (big) city that has captured my life and my heart this summer.

. . .from Andrea’s journal

Andrea Thomas ‘12

- Organized an M/WBE (Minority and Women Business Enterprise) development forum for contractors, developers, elected officials and community leaders from the greater Buffalo area.
- Created a 25-page report that analyzed the M/WBE programs of New York State and Erie County. This report provided legislative history, program logistics for contractors, and an explanation of developer compliance regulations. It highlighted the issues and challenges facing the M/WBE system as well as suggestions for future growth.
- Created contracting-related documents including:
  - A booklet to assist current and potential M/WBEs with the process of applying for certification, finding bids, building a network, and creating sustainable business practices,
  - A brochure outlining the financial resources available to M/WBEs in Erie County,
  - A guide for developers and prime contractors to navigate the M/WBE system, and meet government compliance laws.
- Conducted interviews of local prime contractors, subcontractors, and development groups in order to obtain a background for the analysis.
- Attended various meetings with the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, specifically focused on workforce development and healthy home initiatives.
- Assessed the conditions of homes on Buffalo’s Lower West Side for HOCN’s Housing Conditions Survey.

Andrea is planning a career in public service for which she has a global experiential background, studying in Quebec and in Senegal. She is active in many campus organizations including Cornell’s Recreational Fencing Team. Andrea is from Detroit, MI.

Andrea’s work with HOCN this summer was truly an extraordinary professional accomplishment, as she researched, wrote, designed and produced a report and guidebook on minority and women business enterprise contracting, while organizing a successful forum for MWBE contractors. . . She did some fine cooking at the NetZero house too! . . .Lou Jean Fleron, Cornell ILR

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Buffalo CarShare
14 Allen Street
Buffalo, NY 14202
716.898.0850
www.buffalocarshare.org

Buffalo CarShare provides affordable, community-based car sharing services that benefit the environment through practical innovation. A nonprofit initiative of green options in Buffalo, CarShare provides fuel-efficient vehicles to its members from ten hub locations.

My experience exceeded my expectations. I found out a lot about the hidden gems of Buffalo. There are so many historical places and so many other cool places to go and cool things to do. Growing up in the suburbs I never really ventured out into Buffalo for anything other than a Sabres game or concert. There’s so much more to do.

... from Tom’s program evaluation

Tom is awesome. In our service-based organization, he is doing a bit of everything we do every day.

...Creighton Randall, Buffalo CarShare

Tom worked in conjunction with Canisius College to develop a new plan for reaching out to students living on campus. Part of this task involved designing and printing a large ten foot banner to hang outside our Canisius car’s location. Created mini advertisements that will be inside student’s dorm room key envelopes on move-in day.

Created a geographic information systems (GIS) database of all CarShare members, hub locations, and business, churches and other organizations to reach out to for expanding services.

Performed general car maintenance.

Created a member satisfaction survey, compiled and helped analyze results and correlations for a formal presentation at a Buffalo CarShare staff meeting.

Helped organize the New York State Transportation Equity Alliance Transportation Justice Town Hall meeting hosted by Buffalo CarShare.

Tom is interested in entrepreneurship and business development. Active in sports and community service, he also owns his own business. Tom is from Clarence, NY.
Service Learning and Action Research Fellowships for Cornell University ILR Students
Cornell University ILR School  Dean Harry C. Katz
Contact:  Lou Jean Fleron  lj.fleron@cornell.edu  716.852.4191  237 Main Street, Suite 1200, Buffalo NY 14203