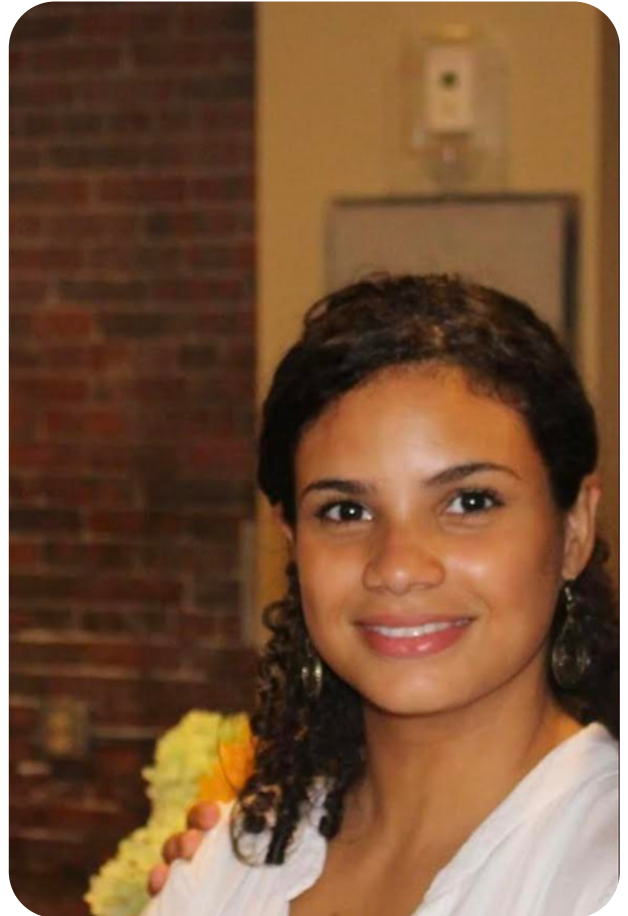


Alumni Spotlight Interview:

Maria Aybar (Class of 2013)

Maria was born in Santiago, Dominican Republic, and moved to the States when she was 13- where she first lived in Naples, Florida. In Naples, Maria felt like an “alien” because, as an ESL student, there were only 15 others in her group. She had to take classes with English-speaking students who made her feel like an outcast. Lowell High School allowed Maria to surround herself around ESL students like herself- most importantly, other Hispanic classmates. She quickly adapted and felt more comfortable in a diverse setting. Lowell is a melting pot of cultures.



Maria got involved in clubs and community work during her senior year, including Latino Connections, which led to her participating in an internship through the Public Services & Civic Engagement Academy. Through this program, Maria was pleased to learn about the many cultures within Lowell. Despite being a well-rounded student academically, her undocumented status limited her options for applying for colleges. Although she had hoped to attend a 4-year college, her financial situation made it unfeasible, meaning she had to navigate the college application process independently.

Maria attended Middlesex Community College, where she studied business for a short time but wasn't passionate about it. Fortunately, she received a scholarship from the President of MCC, which allowed Maria to be a full-time student. Maria graduated from Middlesex Community College in 2017 and continued her journey by transferring to Amherst College on a full ride. Maria is currently furthering her education at Brandeis University, studying management to receive a Master of Public Policy.



Maria on the right and the rest of the team from Lowell Votes canvassing about Voting

Aybar has had many volunteer and internship opportunities, such as working at the Office of Congresswoman Niki Tsongas. Here, she decided her heart was set on social sciences and humanities. MCC allowed Maria to work within the community- which helped her learn about the minority issues within Lowell.

She also has ties to Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA) and the Latinx Community Center for Empowerment. **The Latinx Community Center for Empowerment** started off small but mighty. Maria Aybar helped found the organization in 2018 that 'budded' off of CBA- where she was volunteering at the time. With weekly team meetings, they created an organization that would help Latinx people in Lowell learn English literacy, encourage them to participate in civic engagement, provide free translation services, and help them advance in their careers.

Maria is drawn towards Lowell because there is **“a lot that needs to be done,” - especially for people of color, the undocumented, and the Latinx community.** It is apparent that the Latino community in Lowell is important to her, seeing as she is a part of it herself, which is why she proposed the idea of a **“Latinx archive”** where they would be able to share their history and stories that they never got the chance to.

“I know what it feels like to be invisible...to be silenced.”

This project will shine a light on Latinos who never got the opportunity to speak about their experiences.



Maria Aybar and her husband Diego Leonardo Celebrate at the Lowell Hispanic & Latinx Festival that LCCE team put together last year (Picture by Henry Marte)

To learn more about her organization, visit this website: **WWW.LATINXCENTER.ORG**



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