

## How Cookies & Careers is inspiring hope amid COVID-19

Posted by [Sukanya Gamini](#) in [WE@Liberty](#) on Aug 18, 2020 3:46:11 PM

In Spring of 2019, WE@Liberty established “Cookies and Careers”, a program in which Liberty Mutual employees volunteer to provide career mentorship services to guests of the [Women’s Lunch Place](#) (WLP), a women’s day shelter in Boston. The objective was clear – to empower women in our community by providing one-on-one, tailored career services.

Where do the “cookies” come into play? Before COVID-19, during each weekly visit, the Cookies and Careers mentors brought cookies for mentees to enjoy during their mentoring sessions. To make the experience even sweeter, the cookies were sourced from [Haley House](#), a local non-profit bakery.

Over the past year, the program has paired 24 mentors with 25 mentees from the WLP. The mentors offer a wide range of services including career mapping, job searches, skill assessments, resume building, networking, interview prep and even professional headshots.

We’re excited to share three inspiring stories (all mentee names were changed for privacy):

### **Audrey Newell, Project Leader, GRM Strategy**

My mentee, Emilia, is a 60-year-old immigrant from Eastern Europe. She has dealt with many hardships in her life, including abandonment, abuse, unemployment and homelessness, as well as serious medical issues.

Emilia was born with profound hearing loss and, not realizing she was deaf, struggled in school and dropped out in middle school. Decades following her diagnosis as an adult, she received hearing aid surgery through MassHealth, though she often can’t afford the batteries that power them.

Emilia has worked as a custodian for most of her adult life but was recently laid off from her job. While meeting with her on my first day as a Cookies & Career mentor, she told me through tears that “...having nothing, and having nothing to do, makes [her] feel like nothing.”

Following our first session at the Women’s Lunch Place, I met with Emilia every week of our program. In addition to looking for a job together, we made her first email account, built her a resume, and found an employment agency to take her on as a client. We also got her in touch with social workers she’d lost contact with due to her inability to take phone calls.

While Emilia hasn’t found a job yet, we haven’t stopped trying. She had a promising interview last month and we are waiting on responses to a handful of applications (and sending out more each week). She also recently qualified to receive a free captioned phone so she can communicate with prospective employers and others without my help.

Working with her has shown me how important mentorship, encouragement and friendship are to career as well as personal wellbeing. I'm incredibly thankful for the Cookies & Careers program, without which I'd have never met my friend Emilia, and proud to work for Liberty Mutual, a company that not just allows but encourages me to serve others like her.

**Amy Chapman, Sr. Analyst, Product Analysis, National Insurance Pricing & Analytics**

My mentee Caroline had always worked in healthcare and veterinary services. While she enjoyed her work, it's not what she truly felt passionate about. She decided to make a career change after achieving a personal weight loss goal and went back to school to become a trainer. Caroline has a handful of clients for at-home training. As she looks to grow her personal training brand and pursue her passion for helping women over 50 get fit, the Cookies and Careers program made for a perfect pairing.

To help Caroline meet her objectives of growing her personal training clientele base and communicating her personal brand, we set out to tackle weekly items. Together, we set up a Facebook business page, wrote a business mission statement, created a business logo, helped her get a professional and athletic headshot, and discussed tactics for gaining more clients. The next item we have on the list to tackle is making sure Caroline has a LinkedIn that supports her professional work history and reflects the direction she is looking to go.

The Cookies and Careers mentoring sessions are easily my favorite part of the week. Having the opportunity to step outside of my day-to-day at Liberty and fully devote myself for an hour to helping someone build on their passion has been very rewarding. The knowledge and experiences we have all collected through our lives are hugely impactful to those that have not been fortunate to have those experiences. We have a significant opportunity to create change by opening up and sharing with others.

**Beth Leik, Program Manager, Onboarding & Transitions, Performance and Talent Practices, GLLT**

On our first day with Cookies and Careers Mentoring, I met a wonderful woman in need of career assistance and had the pleasure of also meeting her adorable 2-month old daughter who happily slept through our first session. Martina just recently moved back to Boston from out of state and has been out of a job for the last two years. In our first meeting I learned she loved caring for children and was interested in a job teaching in a daycare facility or as a nanny but had no idea how to get started.

Through research, I helped Martina understand the required skills and training necessary to achieve her goals. At first, she was a bit defeated, feeling like she would never be able to have the time or money to get the required certifications; we then talked about how she could build her skills and experiences over time and create a long term plan leading towards the career she wanted. We explored some child care assistance roles at the YMCA where she could get her CPR, First Aid and other certifications for free. In our final meeting we created her first-ever

resume to use during interviews. While she is still looking for a job to get her started, I hope that I was able to help Martina build the foundation and plan she needs to work towards a career she is passionate about.

At Liberty, my work in Talent Enablement supports our employees to develop skills and pursue meaningful careers; through this program I am able to use my skills and knowledge to help amazing women who are trying to get back on their feet and determined to turn their lives around. Working with Martina and all of the women I have met at the Women's Lunch Place has been incredibly rewarding and shown me through mentoring I can make an impact in someone's life.

In 2019, Cookies & Careers also hosted several donation drives to collect books, reusable water bottles, professional attire, and warm clothes for WLP guests. In addition, mentors have donated \$3,775 to date in the form of [Torchbearers Grants](#).

When the pandemic forced the WLP to close its doors in March, the Cookies and Careers team needed to find another avenue to uphold our commitment, even amidst challenges presented by COVID-19. With in-person mentorship suddenly impossible, the Cookies and Careers program was challenged to find new ways to continue to support mentees from a distance. Mentors formed teams and developed a list of workstreams to provide help and hope to the women of the WLP. Some of these workstreams included:

- **Care Packages:** Mentors collected essential items including hand sanitizer and other hygiene products to be distributed to the women.
- **The Hope Project:** One team created more than 100 handmade cards with positive messages (pictured below) distributed alongside takeaway breakfast and lunch from the WLP.
- **Stimulus Support:** Another mentor team developed a comprehensive resource guide that offered guidance on what financial support they could potentially qualify for as a result of COVID-19.

As the pandemic persists, Cookies and Careers mentors are continuing to think through ways to support the WLP. During this time, we've identified a gap in our ability to support women who aren't able to join us in-person each week. As we start to think about the new normal, we are working together with the WLP to build a virtual community that will allow us to provide WLP members career support digitally from anywhere.

Social distance has truly made our hearts grow fonder! If you are looking for a way to help, you can take a look at the [WLP's amazon smile wish list](#) and either purchase items from there or donate similar items. This list reflects the items that the WLP needs the most. The [WLP](#) also accepts new and gently used donations. No effort is too small to make a difference!