

## AmeriCorps VISTA Joins WTAP to Enhance Computer and Bicycle Programs

The Welcome to America Project is fortunate to have the support of a three-year AmeriCorps VISTA [@americorps](#) commitment, with the focus to build capacity for our refugee computer and bicycle programs. The ultimate goal is to enhance employment opportunities by eliminating barriers to technology and transportation.

We will have a different VISTA for each of the three years. Our first VISTA, Melissa Mahon, is already making an impact. She is a 4.0 Arizona State University graduate (double major, Communication and History) and a returned Peace Corp Volunteer [@peacecorps](#) from Togo, West Africa. She worked with refugees on a literacy project while in university. Melissa speaks French and Ewe. We asked her about her AmeriCorps VISTA project:

*What is the role of an AmeriCorps Vista?*

The role of an AmeriCorps VISTA member is to work with a local nonprofit to help them serve their community more effectively. There are four main principles that guide VISTA service: ending poverty, empowering communities, building capacity, and creating sustainable solutions. VISTA members expand volunteer networks, develop community partnerships, and create systems to empower individuals and communities.

*What are your program objectives at The Welcome To America Project?*

My project is to build capacity for our computer and bicycle programs. Our objective is to get more computers and bicycles to more refugees to create more of an impact in our community. Computers and bicycles are important employment accelerator tools that facilitate job opportunities, English education, and community integration. When we share computers and bikes, refugees have resources to become self-sufficient more quickly in our community. This year we are working to increase the donation and distribution of computers and bikes, as well as increase the impact that these tools can make. We aim to expand the software on the computers we share with refugees, and we want to share more education tools on bike safety and bike repairs. With your help, we can facilitate more positive outcomes for the refugees in our community!

*How can the community assist?*

There are many ways to get involved.

- 1) You can help us spread the word about our bicycle and computer donation drives. Tell your neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family that we are collecting donations for used bikes, used bike U-locks, new helmets, used computers, and used computer accessories on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday

from 8 am-11 am at The Welcome to America Project, 1711 W. University Dr. #158, Tempe 85281.

- 2) Ask your employer, office manager or principal, what your place of work or school does with used computers when they replace them. Let them know that we will make repairs and wipe the computers clean before sharing them with refugees.
- 3) If you are bike savvy, consider visiting our warehouse and taking a bicycle to repair at your home. We are always looking for more people to help get our bikes "road-ready!"
- 4) If you have technical skills related to computer hardware (aka, you could build one), we'll need help in lead volunteer roles once we reopen the warehouse.

Melissa can be reached at [melissa.mahon@wtap.org](mailto:melissa.mahon@wtap.org). We are all a part of the welcomes. Together, let's help refugees to click and roll.