## 2019 - 2020 FIRST® AmeriCorps VISTA Program

### 2019 - 2020 FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA Leaders

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<th>State</th>
<th>City</th>
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<td>FLORIDA</td>
<td>West Palm Beach</td>
<td>Kate Sample</td>
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<td>Keala Cottrell</td>
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<td>MISSISSIPPI</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Zephaniah Long</td>
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<td>NORTH CAROLINA</td>
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<td>Angel Jones</td>
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### 2019 - 2020 FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA Members

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<td>Daniel Wood</td>
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Kate Sample
ksample@firstinspires.org

Kate has spent the better part of 15 years around the FIRST programs. An alumni of the FIRST® Robotics Competition Team 1108 Panther Robotics, she has been involved with all four programs of FIRST in a number of roles including helping to found, support, coach, and mentor teams. Kate's experience with FIRST extends to being a volunteer for all four programs as well. She has held nearly every role, from safety glasses to judge advisor, a Control Systems Advisor and even a well-known emcee and game announcer in the Kansas City area.

Kate chose to be a VISTA because she wanted to pay it forward. She wanted to make sure that other youth had the same opportunity to experience this program. Her goals for this year include getting to know the already existing FIRST community, increasing the number of individuals who recognize FIRST in the community, and ensuring that the growing number of FIRST® LEGO® League students will have a continued pipeline with FIRST® Tech Challenge and FIRST Robotics Competition.
Keala Cottrell began as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA in Fall of 2015. Being an alumni of the program, Cottrell has chosen to give back to both FIRST and the AmeriCorps VISTA Program by serving as a VISTA Leader. When Keala started her time as a FIRST Americorps VISTA her goal was to help enrich her community for those who grew up in similar situations as her. Now as a VISTA Leader she wants to give back to the program on a much larger scale.

Keala relocated from her home town in Portland, OR to Hollywood, FL, in 2018. Since moving to Florida, Keala has found remaining involved and being apart of the local FIRST community helps her feel at home. She hopes to take as much as she can from this experience to not only help inspire others, but also use this opportunity to pursue her own goals and ambitions. Keala aims to pursue a degree in business management and communications.
Zeph Long brings ten years of FIRST experience to the AmeriCorps VISTA Program, having been involved with organization as a FIRST LEGO League participant, and moving on to FIRST Tech Challenge for four years. For the last six years, he has volunteered extensively at FIRST events around the nation. Zeph graduated from high school in 2014 and earned a Bachelors of Science in Natural Science/Mathematics in 2016.

He currently serves as a VISTA leader located in northern Mississippi. His efforts are driven by the belief that FIRST is an inspiring and life changing program that should be available to all students, regardless of their background. In addition to Zeph's responsibilities to the FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA Program, he is also a representative for LGBTQ+ of FIRST, is on the board of directors for the Rainbow STEM Alliance, and is also involved with local organizations focused on advocacy and support of the LGBTQ community.
Angel Jones has extensive training in bookkeeping and entrepreneurship logistics. She has been in leadership roles within sales companies, nonprofit organizations, as well as personal small business ventures. Angel has volunteered for nearly a decade in educational programming and community awareness activities.

Angel learned of FIRST 4 years ago and believes it to be the cure for educational gaps in poor communities. In her own words “Through collaborations and strategic partnerships FIRST can catapult any kid with curiosity and a drive, out of poverty and into purpose. FIRST is about engineering robots but more about the little engineer inside each one of us that’s waiting to build their own future.”

Her background in business began at age 14 keeping accounting records for her father. Jones has since furthered her education to develop these skills, so that she may pass them along to the next generation within her community. Her focus and passion has been centered around coordinating volunteers, students, and employees; as well as her strong dedication to organizing communities to positive action.
**FIRST VISTA Members**

**ALABAMA - Birmingham**

**Emmy Bray**
ebray@firstinspires.org

*Bio coming soon!*

**ARIZONA – Flagstaff**

**Patti Strones**
pstrones@firstinspires.org

Patti initially got involved with FIRST when her children participated on teams in high school. Currently she is a 10-year volunteer for the FIRST Robotics Competition Regional in Arizona as well as a 6 year volunteer for the FIRST World Championships. She began her journey as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA this past November. During her service, her goal is to encourage all students to take advantage of the opportunities provided by FIRST and making sure everyone has access to the programs in FIRST. Helping the community and youth organizations overcome barriers to participating in FIRST. She aims to help the youth in her community to be able to experience what her son and daughter were fortunate to participate in.
FLORIDA – Tampa
Graham Peterson
gpeterson@firstinspires.org
Graham has been involved with FIRST robotics since he was nine years old. As a child with dyslexia, Graham often struggled with feeling confident in school. The FIRST program provided real world academic experiences that boosted his confidence and motivation to keep pushing through school. Through consistent application of the FIRST Core Values, Graham learned team problem solving skills and made lifelong friends. The FIRST program had a profound effect on his social, emotional and intellectual development; one of the goals for his service that he is looking forward to is building the FIRST program in his community so that others may have the same opportunity he was given.

FLORIDA – Tampa
Marissa Schiereck
mschiereck@firstinspires.org
Bio coming soon!

FLORIDA – Okeechobee
Marion Ross
mross@firstinspires.org
Bio coming soon!

FLORIDA – Pahokee
Jose Varela
jvarela@firstinspires.org
Bio coming soon!

FLORIDA – West Palm Beach
Dylan Smith
dsmith@firstinspires.org

Dylan’s experience in FIRST began with his FIRST LEGO League team in middle school and progressed as he later became a member of his high school FIRST Robotics Competition team, Children of the Swamp, which he is currently the design and mechanical mentor for. This is Dylan’s second year as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA. Dylan is grateful to serve the South Florida area which covers seven counties. During his service Dylan assist with support for FIRST LEGO® League, FIRST Tech Challenge, and FIRST Robotics Competition. One of Dylan’s strengths is his expertise and familiarity with the mechanical and technical elements of the programs. By the end of his service, Dylan aims to help develop a strong support structure for the progression of FIRST programs so that students can have an experience that can change their lives.
INDIANA - Indianapolis

Madison Henderson
mhenderson@firstinspires.org

Fate is what brought Madison to serve as a VISTA with FIRST Robotics. Leaving a corporate career in management and recruiting, she became interested in technology and started studying several coding languages. With much of the world’s problems in mind, one day she had an Aha! moment – children are the future and the future is in technology. When the opportunity to work with FIRST presented itself, there was no better fit. She’s serves because she relates to underserved communities and is passionate about building a better future for all. Madison also has a knack for graphic design. She’s very enthusiastic about putting her skills and experience to use in support of FIRST programs.

MISSOURI – Kansas City

Hannah Hadley
hhadley@firstinspires.org

Hannah has been involved with FIRST for many years. She is passionate about the FIRST Progression of Programs and enjoys inspiring the next generation of engineers. Hannah is currently serving in Kansas City, Missouri.
MARYLAND - Columbia
Kiana Fok
kfok@firstinspires.org
Kiana came to know about AmeriCorps through her university. She saw the AmeriCorps Program as a great fit for her and her motivation to help establish growth in her community, especially for those that are impoverished. She joined the program as a VISTA after graduation to begin helping communities in Maryland by bringing FIRST programs to youth.

MARYLAND - Columbia
Gale Arbona
oarbona@firstinspires.org
Octavia Lewis y Arbona (Gale Arbona) is a FIRST alumni with a total of 5 years of FIRST Tech Challenge and Mentor knowledge. Thanks to their experience in FIRST they also use the knowledge gained for costumes and projects. Gale became a VISTA with the desire to help make FIRST accessible for students, volunteers and mentors from all walks of life. They strive to show others that there is something for everyone in FIRST beyond just programming and hardware and how everyone can equally contribute in some way, but more importantly a place for everyone to have fun and express themselves/who they are. Gale has over 10 years experience in various fields ranging from science and football to design and social event planning with a wide variety of knowledge covering these and many other topics.

Pronouns: They/Them/Theirs
NEVADA – Las Vegas
Hafeezah Majeed
hmajeed@firstinspires.org
Hafeezah has been working to serve her community and the underserved since she was a very young girl. Hafeezah shows this determination to help better her community by having worked multiple terms as an AmeriCorps service member. Currently Hafeezah is serving and living in Las Vegas but she is originally from the east coast, an “east coast southern lady at heart” in her own words. In addition to FIRST, Hafeezah is also an American Heart Association CPR instructor at her local community college.

NEBRASKA - Lincoln
Alec Preister
apreister@firstinspires.org
Alec has been involved in FIRST for approximately 7 years, going from FIRST LEGO League through FIRST Robotics Competition. He is excited to be working for the program that had such an impact on him. Working with FIRST inspired him to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering and a career in robotics engineering. His main goal this year is to recruit and develop new teams in Nebraska!
NEW MEXICO – Albuquerque

Jordan Forsythe
jforsythe@firstinspires.org

Jordan first got involved with FIRST when he was on a FIRST LEGO League team in middle school and he has also volunteered at several FIRST events. Jordan started his AmeriCorps VISTA service in Albuquerque, New Mexico after he graduated high school in 2019. He strives to educate and inspire youth throughout his state through FIRST programs as well as gain new experience and learn amazing new skills in his first year of service. Jordan's other interests are music, art, and fitness, he has had a work background in teaching kids about coding, and he's pursuing a career in automotive engineering.

NEW HAMPSHIRE - Manchester

Tyler Jones
tjones@firstinspires.org

In 2016, after graduating from college, Tyler moved to Manchester, New Hampshire to serve with AmeriCorps as a member of City Year New Hampshire. After two years of service, one of which was as a VISTA, he took some time to consider his options before finally deciding to return to national service as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA. During his time with City Year, Tyler was fortunate enough to see the positive changes that FIRST programs can have on students. He chose to return to AmeriCorps in order to contribute to making these positive changes even more accessible and available to children nationwide.
NEW HAMPSHIRE – Manchester
Rosa Cabrera
rcabrera@firstinspires.org
Rosa is grateful for the community and the AmeriCorps family that she has the privilege to serve with. Teaching children something new excites Rosa and brings joy to her day. Before serving as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA, Rosa served in City Year New Hampshire 2018-2019 at a local Manchester Public School in the 5th grade. Rosa also taught after school programming in the arts and most specially FIRST LEGO League as well as Pilot City Shaper before it was even released! After her service, Rosa plans to go back to school for Social Entrepreneurship and explore Computer Science courses.

NORTH CAROLINA – Greensboro
Rebecca Mabry
rmabry@firstinspires.org
Rebecca’s education includes a Bachelor’s Degree in Justice & Policy Studies and a post-baccalaureate certificate in Nonprofit Management. She has 15 years of human service experience in the public sector including criminal/civil courts, local government, and nonprofit organizations. She is excited to bring her experience and passion to her FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA Service this year.
Heleen Bennett
hbennett@firstinspires.org
Heleen is new to FIRST, but is incredibly excited to work for an organization that inspires young people to think critically and engage in hands-on STEM activities that can solve global issues. From 2016 to 2018, she served with the Peace Corps in Ethiopia as an Agriculture Extension Specialist. Heleen's experiences with community development and youth engagement encouraged her to continue pursuing work related to promoting equity for all people. She hopes to utilize her time with FIRST to increase participation amongst marginalized communities within her region. She is currently serving in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Kathleen McTigue
kmctigue@firstinspires.org
Kathleen McTigue began her FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA position in September 2019. Prior to starting this position, Kathleen worked in New York City supporting recently arrived refugees and immigrants through economic empowerment programs. Kathleen has lived and traveled in many parts of Latin America and the Caribbean and has focused her career on urban agriculture and participatory training. Kathleen is thrilled to be part of the international robotics programs offered by FIRST and is interested in expanding her knowledge and network. In addition to her role as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA, Kathleen is mentoring a new FIRST LEGO League team at a public school in Carolina, Puerto Rico.
PUERTO RICO – San Juan
Maria del Pilar Angulo
mangulo@firstinspires.org
Pilar has a PhD in Biology and was a Professor at the University of Puerto Rico. Pilar was particularly touched by low income students. Most of the time, they didn’t have the necessary tools to be able to be successful students. They lacked basic skills, because they didn’t acquire them in their schools. To Pilar, you could see that they had that “fire in their bellies” that they really wanted to succeed and become agents of change. What inspired Pilar to become a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA was that it is important to her to be able to work with low income/unserved students and communities.

PUERTO RICO – San Juan
Jose Porrata
jporrata@firstinspires.org
Bio coming soon!

PUERTO RICO – San Juan
Martha Rivera
martha.rivera@firstinspires.org
Bio coming soon!
PUERTO RICO – San Juan
Nimia Ramos Beauchamp
nramos@firstinspires.org
Nimia is serving in San Juan, Puerto Rico. After her time serving as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA, Nimia hopes to join the Peace Corps or a similar organization in the future. As an alternative to a portrait, Nimia has decided to use a picture that represents her.

Borikén: Taino Daka, Atabey
“*This is my Taino indigenous language and it means: From the Island of the Good People, I am Taino (still here) Mother Earth.*”

SOUTH CAROLINA - Gaffney
Pamela Melling
pmelling@firstinspires.org
Melling began her career with FIRST when she started coaching a FIRST LEGO® Team in 2011 (Food Factor) at the elementary school where she taught. Since retiring from teaching she has continued to coach. She is also judged FIRST LEGO® League since 2013. She began her journey as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA this past June. During her service, she hopes to open the world provided by FIRST to all communities in South Carolina.
TEXAS - McAllen

Eduardo Hernandez Castillo
ecastillo@firstinspires.org

Eduardo serves because he is motivated to make a difference in the lives of those in his community. During his service, Eduardo wants to gain the skills to become a well rounded member of society, and better business skills that can help him in the future when he realizes his dream of starting his own business. Eduardo is a FIRST Alumni and participated on a FIRST Robotics Competition team during high school. Eduardo says his favorite thing about being a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA is being able to see the happiness and the joy that students have when competing and reaching their goals.

TEXAS - McAllen

Victor Menchaca
vmenchaca@firstinspires.org

Victor serves because FIRST has inspired him and made an incredible impact on his life. Victor says his favorite thing about being a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA is giving students who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity, a chance to show their talents and skills in this program. Being a VISTA allows Victor to give back to his community and the FIRST program.
TEXAS - Pasadena

James Wesselman
jwesselman@firstinspires.org

James Wesselman has over twenty years of professional experience as an electrical/controls engineer in the oil/gas and chemical industry. He has Electrical and Environmental Engineering Degrees from Texas A&M in College Station and Kingsville. He holds a Professional Engineer License with the state of Texas.

James began volunteering in FIRST competitions for field technical support in 2017. James is a robot enthusiast having built from scratch his own walking and rolling robot; in addition to multicopter drones and remote-controlled aircraft.

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TEXAS - Pasadena

Reed Thornton
rthornton@firstinspires.org

Bio coming soon!
Daniel Wood  
dwood@firstinspires.org

Daniel has been involved with FIRST for over 5 years. His first experience with FIRST was in high school and to this day is still a mentor for his high school FIRST Robotics Competition team. Daniel seeks to make FIRST accessible to all and to give back to his local community. He enjoys programming and hopes to bring his experience to FIRST. Daniel is currently pursuing a degree in physics and mathematics.