

# 2021 *FIRST*® AmeriCorps VISTA Program

## 2021 - 2022 FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA Leaders

<u>FLORIDA</u> West Palm Beach <b>Kate Sample</b>	<u>FLORIDA</u> Jacksonville <b>Nickie Chatman Brown</b>	<u>MICHIGAN</u> Canton <b>Matt Malinak</b>
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## 2021 - 2022 FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA Members

<u>ALABAMA - Birmingham/Huntsville</u> <b>Emmy Bray</b> <b>Scarlett Bautista</b>	<u>PUERTO RICO - San Juan</u> <b>Martha Rivera</b>
<u>ARIZONA - Flagstaff</u> <b>Patti Strones</b>	<u>TEXAS - McAllen</u> <b>Victor Menchaca</b> <b>Andre Adame</b> <b>Jonathan Palomo</b> <b>Seth Lara</b>
<u>CALIFORNIA – Los Angeles</u> <b>Claire Edwards</b>	<u>TEXAS - Houston/Pasadena</u> <b>David Funk</b> <b>Felicia Royal-Baham</b> <b>Reed Thornton</b> <b>Reggie Williams</b>
<u>INDIANA - Indianapolis</u> <b>Dikshant Sharma</b>	<u>TEXAS - San Antonio</u> <b>DeAnna Wood</b> <b>Thomas James</b>
<u>NEW HAMPSHIRE - Manchester</u> <b>Tyler Jones</b>	
<u>NEW YORK – New York City</u> <b>Lianza Yap</b> <b>Gabriella Guimaraes</b> <b>Laura Abraham</b> <b>Mick Arnold</b> <b>Shalini Khan</b>	

# **FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA Leaders**

FLORIDA- West Palm Beach

**Kate Sample**

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Kate has spent the better part of 15 years around the **FIRST** programs. An alumnus of the **FIRST**<sup>®</sup> 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, Control Systems Advisor and is even a well-known emcee and game announcer in the Kansas City area.

Kate chose to be a **FIRST** AmeriCorps VISTA because she wanted to pay it forward. 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<sup>®</sup> League students will have a continued pipeline with **FIRST** Tech Challenge and **FIRST** Robotics Competition.

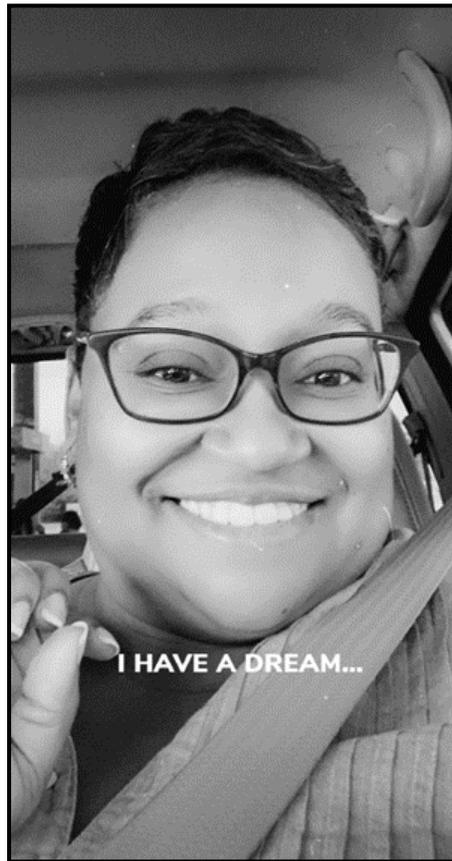


MICHIGAN - Canton

## **Matthew Malinak**

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Matthew joined his high school's FRC Team 862: Lightning Robotics as a freshman in 2011. At the University of Michigan, he graduated with a degree in Industrial and Operations Engineering in 2019 while being heavily involved with **FIRST** through UM's alumni group (FAMNM). Matthew decided to serve as a **FIRST** AmeriCorps VISTA because of his passion for **FIRST**, and to have the opportunity to be able to directly help with **FIRST**'s mission. With a history in **FIRST** volunteering, coordinating, and mentoring at all program levels Matthew is looking forward to bringing his experience and skills to benefit **FIRST** Indiana Robotics.



FLORIDA - Jacksonville

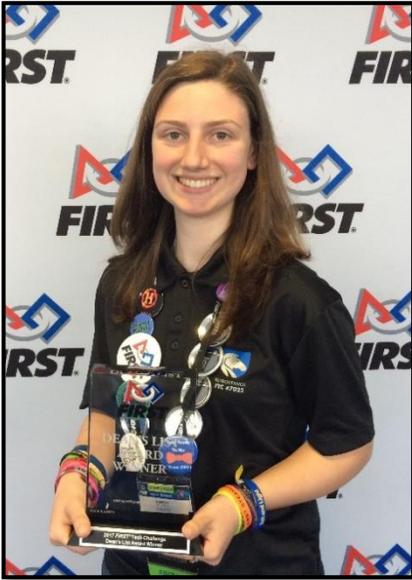
## **Nickie Chatman-Brown**

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Nickie has an extensive background in Education. She has been an educator for 16 years with her first teaching job at the high school she graduated from. Nickie learned about **FIRST** while serving as an AmeriCorps member for Communities in Schools of Jax Duval Reads Program. She was asked to volunteer as the robotics coach at the school where she was serving in the afterschool program. She accepted the position and hasn't looked back since. Nickie has served as a coach and mentor for many teams.

Nickie chose to become a VISTA because she wanted to learn more about the **FIRST** programs and become a resource for other coaches, mentors and volunteers.

## FIRST VISTA Members



[ALABAMA – Birmingham](#)

### Emmy Bray

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Emmy discovered her lifetime passion for **FIRST** when she was six years old and **first** laid hands on a box of LEGO® with the intention to build a robot. Now, she has 14 years of **FIRST** experience and is ready to use it during her time as a VISTA in her home state of Alabama. Over the next year she hopes to create several new teams and setup a sustainable network of support so that, even after her service has ended, her work will continue to grow into beautiful new **FIRST** teams.



[ALABAMA – Huntsville](#)

### Scarlett Bautista

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Scarlett Bautista has been involved with **FIRST** since her freshman year of high school in 2013. She chooses to serve as a **FIRST** VISTA because she feels that it is important to help today's youth become leaders in STEM and in their communities by using the resources and skills that she has gained through **FIRST**. She is currently an electrical engineering student at Calhoun Community College and intends to continue her education at UAH in the spring. For

four years of her involvement with **FIRST**, she was a member of Team 538, The Dragon Slayers. She then was given the position as the Social Media Director for **FIRST** in Alabama and joined the **FIRST** LEGO® League Alabama Planning Committee. **FIRST** has had a great and positive impact on her life and she is very grateful to have the opportunity to be able to share it with those who may not otherwise have the chance to experience it.



ARIZONA – Flagstaff

## **Patti Strones**

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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.



CALIFORNIA – Los Angeles

## **Claire Edwards**

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Claire serves because she wants to support marginalized communities in achieving equity and help disrupt generational poverty. She studied biology in college and her extracurriculars consisted of social justice related clubs and committees. After college, Claire decided to pursue a master's degree in human genetics and genomics with a focus in bioinformatics and planned to go to medical school after that, however, after graduating she realized that her interest in medicine had faded but her love for programming and social justice were stronger than ever. Claire began to search for opportunities that encompassed both her love for STEM and social justice and came across the **FIRST** VISTA program. She is excited to help encourage greater access to STEM programs to underserved schools that will hopefully inspire students to become the next leaders in STEM.



[INDIANA – Indianapolis](#)

## Dikshant Sharma

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Dikshant has had a passion for STEM from a very young age. Growing up, he loved to tinker with RC cars and small electronics. He was able to express this passion for STEM when he joined FRC team 226 his freshman year of high school. Through his time on the team, he learned lots of valuable technical and business skills. These experiences allowed him to transition to working as a jr. design engineer after graduating high school. Now, he's looking to apply what he's learned in the last three years or so to help FIRST teams in underserved communities.



## NEW HAMPSHIRE - Manchester

### **Tyler Jones**

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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 YORK – New York City

### **Lianza Yap**

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Lianza serves as an AmeriCorps VISTA because she has a passion for helping others and making a positive impact in the lives of everyone around her. She has worked in organizations, such as the Peace Corps, that focus on solving real-world problems through a creative interdisciplinary approach with an emphasis on sustainability. As a **FIRST** Tech Challenge alumni, Lianza enjoys giving back to the **FIRST** community through her VISTA service.



## NEW YORK – New York City

### **Gabriella Guimaraes**

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Srikar joined **FIRST** as a VISTA because of **FIRST's** important work in increasing the accessibility of STEM education and opportunities in underserved communities. As a **FIRST** LEGO League alum, he believes that **FIRST's** programs play a key role in inspiring future STEM professionals. Srikar hopes to use his year of service to explore the challenges that face the country's largest school district and how New York City's government, nonprofits, and community work together to address those issues. He is looking forward to working with his incredibly talented and knowledgeable colleagues and hearing about their experiences in education and service.



[NEW YORK – New York City](#)

## **Laura Abraham**

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Laura was born and raised, along with her six siblings, in a rural town outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her days were spent playing in the creek or taking nature walks with my mother. From a very young age, Laura loved nature and science. She graduated from Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania with a degree in education and a minor in biology. After graduation, she went to flight school and became a certified flight instructor. She then obtained a Masters Degree in Aeronautical Science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. She taught high school kids how to fly at a boarding school in Northern, Virginia for 15 years. Laura is so excited to continue promoting STEM to young people! She is honored to be chosen to be a VISTA with NYC **FIRST**.



NEW YORK – New York City

## **Mick Arnold**

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Mick is currently serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA member after obtaining their degree in technical communication and UX this year. As a **FIRST** alumnus, Mick is passionate about increasing the accessibility of robotics programs and empowering others to pursue STEM. After this service year, they hope to use the skills they've gained to provide mentorship to others in the community.



NEW YORK – New York City

## **Shalini Khan**

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Shalini has joined NYC **FIRST** as an AmeriCorps VISTA. She previously served with Americorps in Florida. She has a background working for business technology in the financial, healthcare, and media verticals. She enjoys volunteering and working with children. In her spare time, Shalini is learning to play the piano and guitar.



PUERTO RICO – San Juan

## Martha Rivera

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As an immigrant from Mexico and later on, a military wife, Martha R. Rivera experienced first-hand what it meant to make do with what was available, and thankfully accepted help from those around her. When she relocated to Puerto Rico back in 2002, she felt the need to break the poverty cycle around her, and in her thirties went back to school and acquired a degree in journalism. All three of her sons and even Martha's husband followed her steps and acquired their degrees. But Martha's mission is not over, she knows that she is not able to help all the kids in Puerto Rico, but with **FIRST's**

support, the seeds of curiosity will be sowed, and with time they will bear fruit.



TEXAS - McAllen

## Victor Menchaca

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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 **FIRST** AmeriCorps VISTA allows Victor to give back to his community and the **FIRST** program.

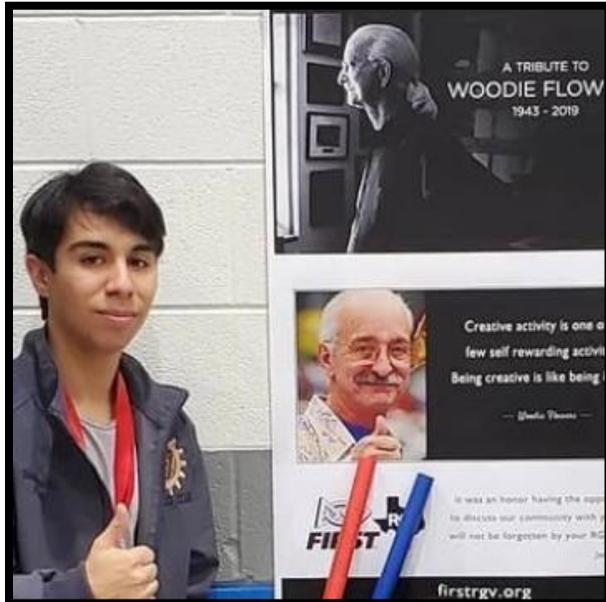


TEXAS - McAllen

**Andre Adame Ceballos**

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Andre serves because he wants to be able to help his community out while inspiring others to pursue a career into a STEM related occupation, just as Andre is doing himself. Andre participated in a **FIRST** Tech Challenge team from his sophomore until his senior year. His favorite thing about being a VISTA is being able to help eliminate poverty in his community.



TEXAS - McAllen

**Seth Lara**

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Seth Lara has been a part of **FIRST** Tech Challenge since his freshmen year of high school. His favorite thing about becoming a VISTA is finding unique opportunities to help his community in order to give back to those in and out of the program.



TEXAS - McAllen

**Jonathan Palomo**

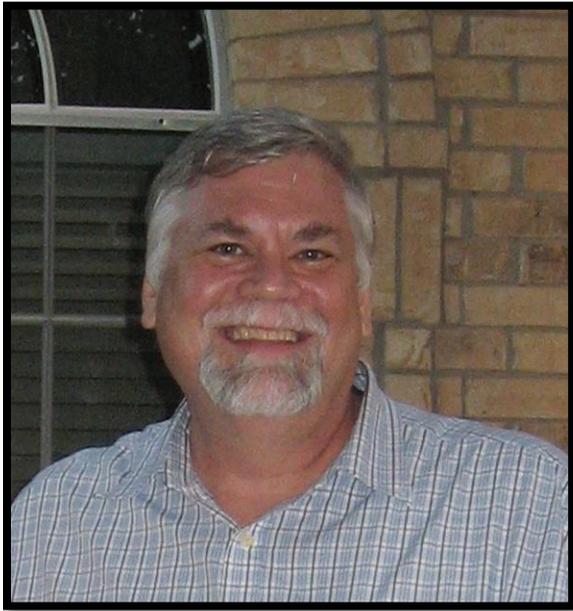
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Jonathan serves because **FIRST** has impacted him ever since he joined his high schools first FTC team back in 2016. Becoming a **FIRST** VISTA in 2020, Jonathan hopes to spread the message of FIRST throughout the Valley. As his service continues, he hopes to spread FIRST to those who have mostly likely never had a program like this before, which engages a students or person in such a level that interest them to reach further into the STEM field.

TEXAS - Houston

**David Funk**

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David has been an electronic, LEGO, and robot enthusiast since a very early age. Trained in electronics engineering technology, he has worked for large phone companies, major computer manufacturers, and contracted at Los Alamos National Labs and Sony Studios.

David has been involved with **FIRST** for 6 years. He is a mentor for two **FIRST** Robotics Competition teams and two **FIRST** Tech Challenge teams. He has served as a referee for **FIRST** Tech Challenge competitions and as a judge for **FIRST** LEGO League competitions.

As a **FIRST** AmeriCorps VISTA he would like to help build **FIRST** programs in the Houston area, bringing STEM education to young students, showing them the wonders of technology. Having raised 5 daughters, he is especially interested in seeing young girls expand their interest in STEM and break through the old stereotypes that seek to derail girls in later school years.

David enjoys sharing his knowledge, skills and experiences to young people. He especially likes to see the "light bulb moment" when a student or mentee has that "got it" moment and finally understands a new subject.

David is trained in CPR/AED/First Aid and was his group Floor Safety Coordinator while employed at a large computer manufacturer.

TEXAS - Houston

**Felicia Royal-Baham**

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Felicia became a VISTA as a result of long-time community advocates and mentors reaching out to her. She has assisted her own children by making sure they have been involved in community service projects because so many older women in her community and church have asked her to sign her children up for organizations like Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of America, Jr. Knights and Jr Daughters of St. Peter Claver, **FIRST** LEGO League, etc. Without the advice and guidance of these mentors, her children probably would not have known the value of community service. Felicia has always felt like she was just a parent playing chauffeur for her children, but actually she was learning a valuable lesson as well. She learned that community service makes an impact in other people's lives and there are always other people in more need than her.

Being a **FIRST** VISTA helps me feel that she is making a positive impact, big or small, in someone's life. Maybe that impact will grow into a larger impact by spreading from her sharing in the same way that it spread from my mentors to her. They simply asked and involved her children, which has led to her asking and involving other children in positive community-based projects and organizations.



TEXAS - Houston

**Reed Thornton**

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Reed has been involved with **FIRST** for over 7 years. He is a **FIRST** Alumni and participated on a **FIRST** Robotics Competition team and a **FIRST** Tech Challenge team during high school. After high school he is now a mentor for the **FIRST** LEGO League, **FIRST** Tech Challenge and **FIRST** Robotics Competition community teams and is also a referee for **FIRST** LEGO League and **FIRST** Tech Challenge competitions. As a **FIRST** AmeriCorps VISTA a goal for his service is to help build the **FIRST** program in his Houston community so others may have the same experience and opportunity he was given.



[TEXAS – Houston](#)

**Reggie Williams**

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Reginal Williams recently graduated from Texas Southern University, where he received a Bachelor of Science in Electronic Engineering Technology. He is serving so that he can give back because he can see the personal impact that **FIRST** has had on each of his three daughters' lives. He sees this as an important opportunity to be a voice to help others from the community learn about **FIRST** and gain exposure. After graduating high school, Reggie went to the Army for four years and trained as a Combat Documentation Specialist in Denver

Colorado. He has worked for many corporations, including Continental Airlines as a lead agent, Brush Country Taxidermy Studios as a habitat and wildlife artist, Weatherford International as a Computer Numeric Control machinist, and National Oil Varco as a vertical mill and lathes CNC machinist. He was a member of the 10K Disaster Relief Team and is certified in CPR, (SAMA) Non-violent Crisis intervention, and received Swift Water Rescue Training at Fathom Academy. He would desire to use this experience as an opportunity to network more. Reginal is a family man and enjoys spending time helping his three daughters in robotics competitions, gardening, archery, and travel.

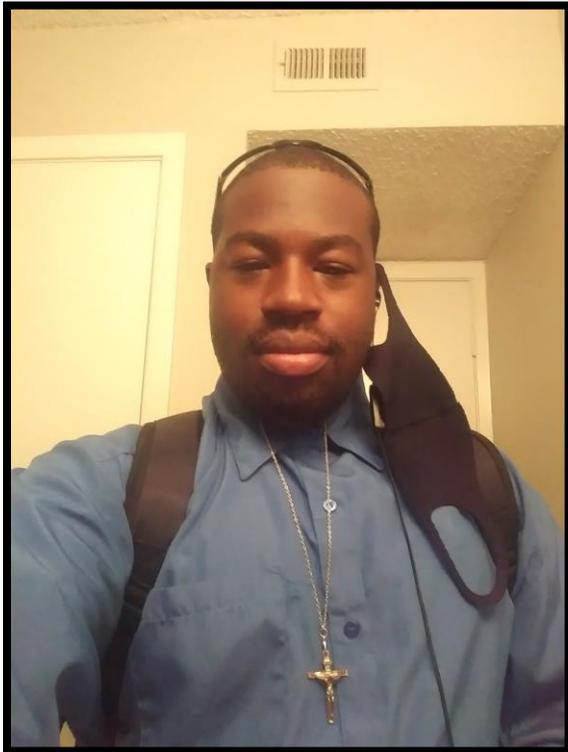


[TEXAS – San Antonio](#)

**DeAnna Wood**

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DeAnna Wood is a FIRST alumni competing with FRC team 5754 Brooks Academy Robotics for 4 years in San Antonio. She decided to serve as a **FIRST** VISTA in order to give everyone the opportunities that she received, and she believes everyone has the potential for greatness but not the necessary tools to achieve it. So, she works to achieve the goal of giving everyone an equal opportunity.



[TEXAS – San Antonio](#)

## Thomas James

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Thomas James was born in San Antonio, Texas, but raised in Beaufort, South Carolina, where he lived for twenty years before moving back to his hometown in San Antonio, Texas in 2015, where he currently resides. His interest in robotics motivates him in pursuing his bachelor's degree. He was a former member of PILAU Program in 2010 he also has an associate degree in Applied Science-General Technology and three certificates in Architectural Design II, Mechanical Design, and Basic Design at TCL(Technical College of the Lowcountry). His experiences being in Information Technology, Industrial Technology, and being a toys sales associate at Walmart will be an important asset to the team, which include his passion for robotics, positive attitude, determination, as well as his hard work ethic. What type of work do you enjoy? What

expertise and skills do you already possess? I love robotics that what I want to build my business around. I have use CAD (computer-aided design) such as Autodesk Inventor and I'm still learning how to use the program to build houses or tools or my favorite, robots. My interested in FIRST Robotics is an easy one, I love robots. What I hoping to gain from this experience is to be a better roboticist and a better entrepreneur and leader. My favorite thing about being a VISTA is being myself and enjoying that fact the robotics is all around and helping kids to be better young man and woman in this generation or the next.