

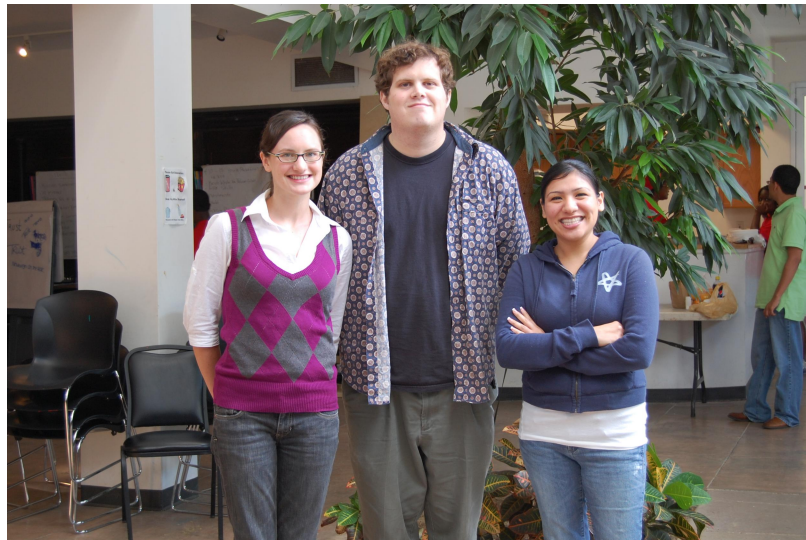
City of Newburgh

Press Release

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For immediate release
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Three New AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteers Join City of Newburgh



Lauren Barth, Sean Bennett, and Crystal Salas are new City of Newburgh AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteers

Three new AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteers have come to the City of Newburgh under the auspices of the City's Department of Human Services. Lauren Barth, Crystal Salas, and Sean Bennett join Kimberly Bersin and Barbara Simon, who have completed their first year of service, and have opted to stay on for another term. They are in Newburgh to assist in the mobilization of resident-centered efforts to revitalize the City's neighborhoods.

For more than 40 years, AmeriCorps VISTA, founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965 and incorporated into the AmeriCorps network in 1993, has been on the front lines in the fight against poverty in America. VISTA volunteers serve full-time for a year at a nonprofit organization or local government agency, working to fight illiteracy, improve health services, create businesses, strengthen community groups, and much more. They serve at no charge to a municipality, receiving a stipend from the AmeriCorps organization.

Lauren Barth is a graduate of Wesleyan University in Middletown CT, with a B.A. in Government and Psychology. Most recently, she was a Student Researcher in Middletown, CT, working with local organizations to gather parent perceptions of children's mental health and related services, with the goal of designing a project at a local school aimed at keeping young people with mental health problems out of the criminal justice system. She also has experience in coordinating Community Gardens. She is assigned as a Youth Development Specialist for the City of Newburgh through the Newburgh Neighborhood Ambassadors Program.

Crystal Salas comes from the Bronx, where she was active in helping to connect families with educational opportunities. She is a graduate of Houston Baptist University, with a B.S. in Political Science and Spanish and ultimately plans to attend Law School. She is assigned as a Community Organizer, and will be working closely with the Hispanic community to foster development of neighborhood revitalization plans, and assist in designing and coordinating capacity building and leadership training for key stakeholders. Because of communication difficulties, people of Hispanic descent often miss out on the help they need, Crystal said. She would like to help them connect with opportunities and to feel more a part of the community.

Sean Bennett, from New York's Capital Region, earned a Master of Regional Planning degree from Cornell University. He also has a B.A. in Political Science and Urban and Regional Planning. During graduate school, he was impressed with what VISTAS were doing in Binghamton, which he incorporated into his thesis, "Binghamton's Neighborhood Assemblies: Creating Opportunities for Partnership and Empowerment."

He will be working closely with the Director of Human Services to construct a strategic plan for neighborhood development, to research and identify funding sources to support key initiatives of the Ambassador's program, and to create a research and fund development manual. .

What prompted these highly talented and well-educated young people to choose service to community over a possible high-paying job in the private sector? Crystal was inspired by Ghandi and his philosophy of "You must be the change you wish to see in the world". Lauren "enjoys this kind of a challenge," and she wants "to make a contribution."

Sean sees Newburgh as a city that wants to "build itself" and he would like to help create self-sustaining opportunities that can make that happen.

Yaniyah Pearson, Director of Human Services commented, "I am very appreciative to have such a resource in our City. The VISTA volunteers, past and present, are the epitome of service. They receive a mere living allowance and are on call 24-7. They have come from near and far to help rebuild the city in a way that includes the voice of the people who live here. I am looking forward to learning right along with them as the year unfolds."