



# News Release

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **CONTACT**

Melissa Byrd  
Community Housing Partners  
540.382.2002 ext. 305  
[mbyrd@chpc2.org](mailto:mbyrd@chpc2.org)

## **COMMUNITY HOUSING PARTNERS ANNOUNCES SPONSORSHIP OF AMERICORPS VISTA PROGRAM**

### **CHP One of 67 NeighborWorks Organizations Nationwide to Host VISTA Members for Year-long Stint**

**Christiansburg, VA** – Thanks to the one of the largest AmeriCorps VISTA programs to date, southwestern Virginia has just received a welcome infusion of young energy and talent who will work to create environmentally-responsible and economically-viable housing opportunities in the region.

Community Housing Partners (CHP) is excited to announce that Emily Albright of Jericho, VT; Charlie McFarland of Greensboro, NC; Mackenzie Stagg of Alabaster, AL; Dylan Stevens of Chaumont, NY; and Jackson Simmons of Blacksburg, VA will serve for 1 year as AmeriCorps VISTA members at the organization's corporate office in Christiansburg.

As a NeighborWorks member organization, CHP is participating in the sponsorship of the volunteer program in which up to 168 VISTA members will be sponsored by 67 local NeighborWorks organizations in 35 states. The VISTA members will work in local communities like Christiansburg to strengthen areas hard hit by the recession and bolster financial fitness and asset building among low- and moderate-income homeowners and renters.

Each of CHP's VISTA members will work on a number of assignments designed to help revitalize and stabilize neighborhoods suffering the negative effects of a difficult economy. VISTA members will support our homebuyer education and counseling program and the Resident Services department by creating and implementing programs that assist low- to moderate-income families with issues around money management and financial literacy. Other VISTAs will increase the capacity of our in-house architectural studio to design 20 new affordable, sustainable single-family homes, and rehabilitate 4 low-income rental properties. All

of their efforts will support NeighborWorks' and CHP's goal to increase community stabilization and revitalize communities that have been impacted by foreclosures and the downturned economy.

"The VISTA members are a valuable asset to our team," said CHP President & CEO Janaka Casper. "They are bright and talented individuals who have already begun to help low-income individuals and households achieve and sustain self sufficiency and personal financial success."

CHP's participation in NeighborWorks' VISTA program sponsorship is one strategy that the organization is employing to address an array of goals:

- Increase the capacity of local NeighborWorks organizations by adding full-time staff members at a time when they need it most;
- Attract and retain new and diverse talent to the community development field;
- Contribute to a growing sense of national service in the nation by supporting those who are interested in serving their communities.

"Our nation's communities are facing unprecedented challenges in the wake of the foreclosure crisis and recession. NeighborWorks America strongly believes that national service and volunteer programs like the AmeriCorps VISTA program are a valuable resource that can play an important role in helping the community development field strengthen and revitalize communities. We are proud to sponsor one of the largest VISTA programs to date and look forward to welcoming the VISTA members through the doors of our local network organizations," said Ken Wade, CEO of NeighborWorks America.

For more information about NeighborWorks' sponsorship of the AmeriCorps VISTA program, please contact Erin Angell Collins, 202-220-6317, [ecollins@nw.org](mailto:ecollins@nw.org).

**About NeighborWorks® America:**

NeighborWorks® America creates opportunities for people to improve their lives and strengthen their communities by providing access to homeownership and to safe and affordable rental housing. Since 1991, we have assisted nearly 1.2 million low- to moderate-income families with their housing needs. Much of our success is achieved through our support of the NeighborWorks® network — more than 230 community development organizations working in more than 4,400 urban, suburban and rural communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

In the last five years, NeighborWorks® organizations have generated more than \$15 billion in reinvestment in these communities. NeighborWorks® America is the nation's leading trainer of community development and affordable housing professionals. To learn more, go to [www.nw.org](http://www.nw.org).

### **About Community Housing Partners:**

Community Housing Partners (CHP) is a 501(c)(3) Community Development Corporation established in 1975 to serve the needs of low-income and low-wealth individuals in the southeast. Our mission is to create affordable, green, sustainable housing opportunities and services for the people and communities we serve.

CHP's activities include sustainable development, architectural design, construction, energy services, homeownership, housing management, and resident and youth services. These efforts, in concert with public and private partnerships, enable us to create and sustain communities of choice that are environmentally friendly, economical to operate, attractive, well-maintained, and durable for the long term.

Since its inception, CHP has expanded its service area to encompass 3 states; assisted or produced more than 2,000 single-family houses; built a multi-family housing inventory of over 4,700 units; and assisted more than 189,500 individuals with their economic, housing, and social needs. Our clients include elderly people, women and children in transition, formerly-homeless people, single female heads-of-household, the chronically mentally ill, at-risk youth and other families and individuals of low-income and low-wealth.

CHP is a chartered member of NeighborWorks® America, and a member of both the Housing Partnership Network and the Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises. For more information about CHP, visit [www.communityhousingpartners.org](http://www.communityhousingpartners.org).

### **About the VISTA members:**



From Jericho, VT, 24-year-old **Emily Albright** attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, during and after which time she worked for Scott & Partners Architects in Essex, VT. Albright received her Bachelor of Architecture last year, and looks forward to her time as a VISTA member “as a chance to partake in a productive adventure where I can see new places and explore new options while still being able to contribute to the community.” The self-described game enthusiast also enjoys biking, cooking, and travel.



University of North Carolina Charlotte graduate **Charlie McFarland** recently received his Bachelor of Architecture and has logged hours working in Charlotte at Perkins Eastman Architects, The Charlotte Community Design Studio, and Ryan-Harris Urban Design and Planning. Passionate about camping, hiking, and other outdoor activities, the 24-year-old McFarland would like to become a licensed Architect and work in the realm of sustainable development. “I chose to participate in the VISTA program because of the opportunity to work with CHP. I am very excited to gain experience from a place where development, architecture, construction, and so many other fields related to the built environment happen under one roof,” said the Greensboro native.



The only VISTA member from southwestern Virginia, 24-year-old William “Jackson” Simmons grew up in Blacksburg and attended New River Community College, where he received his Associates Degree in Business Management in 2007. Simmons most recently worked at the Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center as a Conference Technician, though he plans to one day run his own business. A lover of music, sports, and outdoor recreation, Simmons says he chose to work for CHP in the VISTA program because he “knew it would be a great experience that would have a huge impact on my life in a positive way. I enjoy helping people and wanted to have more of a behind-the-scenes impact in the lives of others. In VISTA, I knew I would be faced with challenging tasks that I had not encountered in my previous work experiences and that meeting those challenges would lead me to becoming a more well-rounded individual and feeling a great sense of accomplishment.”



Hailing from Alabaster, AL, **Mackenzie Stagg** is 24 years old and received her Bachelor of Architecture from Auburn University in 2008. Stagg has spent time working at Giattina Aycock Architecture Studio in Birmingham, AL, but prefers to play Ultimate Frisbee in her free time. According to Stagg, “I believe that my training can be used for more than creating buildings. I also think we should use our skills for breaking down society’s issues and pulling together the resources needed to solve problems. This is a fit with the VISTA model and this seemed like the perfect time to be a VISTA. The economy is less than ideal and finding full-time employment is tough, so I decided to commit a year to helping others through the VISTA program.”



Twenty-four-year-old **Dylan Stevens** graduated this spring from State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry with a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture. While in school, he worked as a Landscape Architecture intern at Bernier Carr and Associates in Watertown, NY. An avid golfer and sailor, Stevens would like to eventually join a Landscape Architecture firm which specializes in Urban Design and Planning.

The Chaumont, NY native sees the VISTA experience as “an opportunity to gain some really interesting and rewarding experience in the field of Landscape Architecture, in an atmosphere unlike any typical entry-level position.”



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