



Together,
WE
WELCOME

Event Presenters

Matt Berens, WTAP Board President

Matt is a business and transaction attorney with over 35 years experience and is a member of the law firm of Berens Blonstein PLC. He has been a volunteer and board member at WTAP since 2011 when he was made aware of the needs of refugee families through assisting in WTAP deliveries. He enjoys keeping up with his five grown children and two grandchildren, as well as coaching football and hiking with his spouse. <http://berensblonstein.com>

Mike Sullivan, WTAP Agency Director

Mike is familiar to many refugees and volunteers. He helped at his first WTAP welcome/delivery in 2008 and became a lead volunteer in early 2016. Mike was hired as the Director of Programs and Community Engagement in 2017, where he recruited, trained and scheduled volunteers who help WTAP with home visits, refugee welcomes/deliveries, donation intake, packing, sorting and Clothing Closets. Mike became Agency Director in January 2019 with a vision for WTAP to leverage strengths in first impressions, to make second, third and more impressions as a means of accelerating refugee self-sufficiency. Mike is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, with a B.A. in Economics. Prior to his WTAP work, Mike had a successful career in biotechnology, helping the medical community in their treatment of chronic illnesses. <https://wtap.org> [@welcometoamericaproject](https://twitter.com/welcometoamericaproject)

Riley Novak, HeartBEATS

Riley is a senior at Arizona School for the Arts and has been a volunteer with WTAP since 2015. As a musician and arts advocate, she has experienced the power that music and the arts have to bring people together and strengthen the community. She was inspired to found HeartBEATS as a way to break the language barrier and share the universal joy of music with her new refugee neighbors. WTAP partners with this youth-led organization to create meaningful connections between the Phoenix refugee community and volunteers through music programs and activities. HeartBEATS provides music kits to share on refugee visits, hosts music activities at Clothing Closets and creates music events for the refugee community. <https://www.heartbeatsaz.org> [@heartbeatsaz](https://twitter.com/heartbeatsaz)

Yaseen Jamaludeen and Shahana Saludeen, PCs for Refugees

Yaseen is an IT Architect in a technology consulting firm and is a volunteer for all seasons supporting a variety of causes. Starting in the 90s he taught himself how to use computers. His knowledge and dedication to helping others learn led him to active involvement with PCs for Refugees. His wife, Shahana, a naturopath and massage therapist, is also an active participant in PCs for Refugees. Their mission to share technological resources with refugees as a means of speeding their paths to self sufficiency, WTAP partners with PCs for Refugees. WTAP accepts computers in donation and PC4R works out of the WTAP warehouse to ready computers for refugees. A computer is installed on every welcome. PC4R also works on special projects, schools for example, to make certain that refugees have access to technology. PCs for Refugees believes in guiding refugee communities toward self-sufficiency, and setting them up for success in today's technology-driven world. <https://pcsforrefugees.com> [@pcsforrefugees](https://twitter.com/pcsforrefugees)

Shelly Brown, Phantom Cyclist

Shelly is an elementary and special education teacher, currently working as a private educational instructor. She is the founder of Phantom Cyclists, an organization that provides bicycles to refugees in Arizona. Shelly is also an avid mountain biker, hiker and she is passionate about horses. Transportation is a major challenge for refugees, who must rely on public transportation to travel to jobs, school, doctor appointments and more. WTAP partners with Phantom Cyclist to make certain that these pursuits are more accessible. A bike broadens employment possibilities by shortening commutes, adding hours to a refugee's day. WTAP receives both new and gently used bike donations for children and adults. WTAP works with Phantom Cyclist to repair bikes and ready them for delivery. Bikes are distributed at every welcome through resettlement agencies, schools, ethnic community-based organizations, as well as through online requests via the WTAP website. [@phantom_cyclist](https://twitter.com/phantom_cyclist)



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Matthew White, Freekicks

Matthew is President of Freekicks, and organization founded by his older brother, Connor. This local organization's mission is to inspire people to find happiness and hope in life, within themselves, and in their communities, through soccer. Freekicks passion is soccer, so the organization is committed to giving soccer gear to others who may be unable to play for whatever reason. With the first "free" kick of a ball, something transpires within an individual that gives rise to an inherent human strength, release of spontaneous joy, a realization of one's own abilities, a desire to connect with others, and an awareness of self. Matthew believes soccer is a game of life where we can forget about our troubles and just play, where we can be part of a team or community, and where we can tend to our own spirit. With Freekicks, soccer balls are included with every welcome, and through the organization's donation collections, also fill Clothing Closets with needed soccer gear. Connections are made instantly and are everlasting for refugees and volunteers. WTAP works with Freekicks to support Phoenix-area refugee soccer teams. <http://www.freekicks.net/> [@freekicks_az](https://www.instagram.com/freekicks_az)

Alenga Alukula, WTAP Driver

Alenga arrived in the United States in 2016, after spending 20 years in a refugee camp in Tanzania. His parents and siblings fled civil war and life-threatening dangers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since arriving in Phoenix, Alenga has become a well-respected leader in the Congolese and refugee communities. He volunteered with PCs for Refugees to help ready and share computers with resettled refugees. Because of his deep connection to the community, Alenga has also been instrumental in WTAP bike sharing and Share-A-Meal initiatives. He is also a principal founder of the newly established FC Congo AZ soccer team, a community rallying point for the AZ Congolese community. Alenga is on target to graduate from Arizona State University this year, with a degree in Global Management. Post graduation, he hopes to leverage refugees passions in order to catalyze social change, and provide them with service and storytelling resources to make a real difference in our world. We look forward to learning about Alenga today, his vision for resettled refugees and how WTAP assist these aims.

Alex Mlinda, Musician

Alex is a talented refugee from Democratic of Congo. Alex's story is one of tragedy and triumph, resilience and renewal. As a young child he and his family fled immediate danger in DRC only to be split up during their escape. He lost contact with his mother, presumed dead. He arrived at camp with his father but his father passed away from injury shortly after they found safety. Years later, Alex learned that his mother was in fact, alive. They were united however they were considered separate refugee cases. If they combined their cases it meant many more years in refugee camp for both of them. Instead, Alex was granted asylum to the United States but had to leave his mother, hoping that her case would soon be resolved. It is still in process. Alex's coping skills include faith and creative arts. He's a very talented musician and singer. Refugees are allowed a single suitcase when they leave camp and travel to resettle in a new country. He had to leave his guitar and coping tool behind. When WTAP welcomed him and learned his story, it was evident he missed his guitar. A local band, The Maine, worked with Fender to present Alex a brand new guitar last year. Alex paid things forward by playing at the HeartBEATS Music Feeds the Soul fundraising virtual concert earlier this year. He has also released original music! [@esaumlinda](https://www.instagram.com/esaumlinda)