

Health Extension

THE PEACE CORPS: CREATING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you help translate host country development plans into community level action, thus improving the lives of local people. You arrive, not with funds or equipment, but with skills and knowledge as well the willingness to adapt them to your community. A successful project is one that continues to function effectively after you leave.

Before starting your two-year assignment, you receive up to three months of training that focuses on language, cross-cultural, and technical skills. It is usually provided in the country where you serve. The training focuses on language and cultural training to give you an understanding of the country's governmental system, cultural norms, and interpersonal relations. This assists you in becoming an integral member of the community. Technical training enhances your ability to effectively transfer your skills and knowledge to host-country people.

YOUR WORK AS A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

There is a growing awareness that at the base of many health problems lies not only a lack of resources and facilities, but a lack of information. As a Peace Corps Health Education Volunteer, you work with the community to encourage people to adopt behaviors that promote health, prevent illness, treat disease, and facilitate rehabilitation. You may train regional health workers in preventative care or preparing village health workers and community residents to provide for their own health needs. You may advise the community on how to improve their delivery systems, health interventions, and resources. In collaboration with community members, your projects may include:

Maternal/Child Health

- Assist a traveling immunization team to show village mothers the benefits of child immunizations which may include handling the logistics for the team.
- Train health workers or community volunteers to set up infant growth monitoring systems and teach women about nutrition or malaria prevention.
- Conduct workshops on health related topics.

Nutrition

- Help communities improve their health status by educating mothers about the benefits of breast feeding, appropriate weaning practices, and maintaining a balanced diet.
- Promote a nutritious diet that includes vitamins and minerals, particularly Vitamin A, Iron, and Iodine.
- Teach women, farmers, or school children to grow gardens that will provide variety to the food their families consume.

HIV/AIDS Prevention Education

- Collaborate with local AIDS Coordinators to provide education and counseling services, especially targeting women and youth. Activities may involve using radio for information dissemination, facilitating support group discussions, developing an AIDS Action Center and conducting outreach programs.

Water/Sanitation

- Work with communities to manage their water and sanitation resources or increase access to adequate water and sanitation services. Facilitate the adoption of new hygiene practices to help prevent the occurrence of water-borne diseases.

Nursing

- Help a country meet its demand for qualified professionals by developing curricula and teaching nurses, auxiliary health workers and other health professionals.

In whatever capacity you serve, you are a catalyst for change. Although you work in situations where few resources are available, the local people are usually eager to learn. Health education classes may be held in an open air meeting place. Clinics and health care centers, if available, vary considerably in terms of equipment, medical supplies and sanitary conditions. Your can-do attitude, patience and sensitivity to your community's needs are essential to empowering people to make informed choices about their health. Your success hinges on the ability of the community members to take their own destiny in hand to ensure the continued operation of their health systems.

EXAMPLES OF HEALTH PROJECTS

Nicaragua. Volunteers are working in rural towns with community leaders and the Ministry of Health to train community health workers in conducting workshops on mother/child health care and family nutrition. The projects are based on a community action plan that focuses on their urgent health needs.

Gabon. The rapid spread of infectious diseases, including HIV, presently poses the greatest social, economic and health challenge. Collaborating with health care professionals, Volunteers develop programs that help the members of youth and women's groups develop the skills needed to successfully conduct peer education activities. They also address other issues of concern to youth and women, such as money management, income generation, literacy, and a variety of health related activities.

Nepal. In an effort to increase the quality of health care at the village level, Peace Corps Volunteers provide classroom and practicum instruction to nursing students. They are responsible for all lesson planning and testing. They are also involved in several campus-related projects, such as an AIDS Education and Prevention Program and a Vitamin A Program. In addition, Volunteers are involved in community activities such as literacy education, gardening, and latrine construction.

A REWARDING EXPERIENCE

Service as a Peace Corps Volunteer offers you a unique opportunity to learn about critical development issues from the inside by helping people address community problems that they themselves have identified. You can make a tremendous contribution to the lives of others. At the same time, you discover that your experience is as much about your learning as it is about teaching.

Volunteer service develops or accentuates your professional abilities and enhances your personal growth. Virtually all returning Volunteers agree they have received far more than they have given. Recent college graduates gain hands-on experience and sometimes further define their career goals. Others confirm their commitment to their profession and receive career-boosting international experience. Retirees bring their accumulated life experiences to those that need and respect them.

Many employers place great value on the Peace Corps experience. You will find that your worldview, resourcefulness, and cross-cultural skills set you apart. You can have easier access to federal government jobs or earn college credit or scholarships because of your Peace Corps service. Whatever you decide to do after Peace Corps, you will bring with you a rare knowledge of the world, of people, and of yourself.

While there may be days of frustration and disappointment, there will also be a lifetime of satisfaction. The courage, patience and fortitude you call upon helps you understand why Peace Corps is still the toughest job you'll ever love.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

The majority of Health Extension volunteers are recent college graduates. They have three to six months of experience in the health field. It is common for this experience to have been gained through volunteer work on campus. Those holding nursing certificates have demonstrated an interest in working in community health education. Health Extension volunteers usually possess several of the following competencies:

- well developed counseling and teaching skills;
- hands-on care giving in a hospital or clinical setting;
- compassion and a strong desire to be of help to people;
- leadership and organizational abilities.



It is the policy of the Peace Corps to provide equal opportunity in all its programs for all persons and to prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, age (over 40), sex, disability, political affiliation, and sexual orientation in the recruitment, selection, placement, service, and termination of Peace Corps Volunteers.