



## Peace Corps – Reducing Risks and Supporting Volunteers

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The health, safety and security of Peace Corps Volunteers are the agency's highest priorities. The Peace Corps devotes significant resources to providing Volunteers with the training, guidance and support they need to remain healthy, safe and productive throughout their service.

### **REDUCING VOLUNTEERS' RISK OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SUPPORTING VICTIMS**

The Peace Corps has established new policies and practices that reflect its strong commitment to reducing risks for Volunteers and responding effectively and compassionately to those who are victims of crime, including sexual assault. The agency has:

- Issued Peace Corps' Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims, a set of core principles to ensure the agency provides timely and compassionate support to Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault.
- Developed a comprehensive Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR) program that has two components: risk reduction and response. Each component incorporates best practices in the field of sexual assault and applies them to new, proactive training materials for Volunteers and staff, and to new protocols and procedures for mitigating and responding to sexual assaults. The program includes policies that encourage Volunteers to seek support from the Peace Corps, a sexual assault response team model that coordinates the response between different offices at the Peace Corps, and agency monitoring and evaluation of the program to ensure its effectiveness.
- Established procedures for responding to sexual assault that outlines a Volunteer-centered approach and sets forth actions staff must follow to respond promptly and effectively to an incident. The agency has conducted staff training on these procedures at all posts.
- Created the Office of Victim Advocacy, a centralized resource to assist Volunteers following a crime. The Victim Advocates within the office ensure that each Volunteer is made aware of, and receives access to, services provided by the Peace Corps in cases of sexual assault, stalking and other crimes. The office is led by skilled and experienced staff who are available 24 hours a day. Following the initial response, the Office of Victim Advocacy continues to assist Volunteers as needed, including accompanying Volunteers to their country of service to attend meetings with law enforcement or during court proceedings, and assisting them with FECA applications and claims following completion of service.
- Prepared new standardized and comprehensive training for Volunteers on sexual assault awareness, risk reduction strategies, agency reporting and response protocols, and bystander intervention. This training is delivered during pre-service training to all Peace Corps trainees at every Peace Corps post.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, to collaborate and share resources on sexual assault risk reduction and response.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security to collaborate and share resources in the follow-up to crimes committed against Peace Corps Volunteers.

- Formed the Peace Corps Volunteer Sexual Assault Advisory Council, comprised of external issue experts and former Volunteers. The Council reviews Peace Corps' sexual assault risk reduction and response training and policies and procedures to ensure they incorporate best practices, and provides a thorough evaluation of the agency's work.
- Launched a 24-hour sexual assault hotline pilot program staffed by mental-health clinicians that allows Volunteers to anonymously receive information about Peace Corps services available to them and options for reporting the assault if they choose to do so.
- Delivered training to Peace Corps Medical Officers on enhanced protocols for the clinical management of Volunteers who have been sexually assaulted based on current Center for Disease Control guidelines and the National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations. If a Volunteer chooses to undergo a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE), the Peace Corps will offer the exam in accordance with host country laws.

### **COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY TRAINING AND POLICIES**

The Peace Corps coordinates a global safety and security strategy. At every post, a specific Volunteer safety system is designed to minimize risks and promote effective and safe service. To enhance safety and security for Volunteers, the agency has:

- Trained overseas staff in how to respond appropriately when Volunteers bring allegations of wrongdoing to their attention. Peace Corps staff members must take appropriate measures to ensure Volunteers' safety and confidentiality, and ensure the allegation is given serious consideration, including referral to the Office of the Inspector General as appropriate.
- Trained Volunteers on policies and procedures for bringing confidential communications and allegations to the attention of appropriate staff members.
- Improved the medical care provided to Volunteers by giving medical professionals at headquarters overall responsibility for hiring, credentialing and managing Peace Corps medical officers at each post; by providing those medical officers with enhanced guidance on how to handle serious medical issues; and by establishing the Health Care Quality Assurance Council to monitor and report on ongoing healthcare issues.
- Provided overseas staff with guidance on the specific procedures to follow when Volunteers express concerns about their safety or any situation that may threaten the well-being of Volunteers.
- Developed standard operating procedures for overseas safety and security coordinators, who are responsible for coordinating the safety and security programs that support Volunteers at each post.
- Revised notification procedures for serious incidents to ensure key staff members are immediately informed of major crimes against Volunteers, so they can respond appropriately.

### **COMPASSIONATE SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF FALLEN VOLUNTEERS**

The Peace Corps is committed to supporting the families of Volunteers who gave their lives in service to the ideals of the Peace Corps. The agency has:

- Formalized the practice of sending a Peace Corps staff member to be with the family of a deceased Volunteer within 24 hours of the notification of death, unless the family specifically requests otherwise. The designated staff member serves as the agency's primary liaison with the family.
- Partnered with the Federal Employee Education and Assistance (FEEA) Fund to establish the Peace Corps Emergency Relief Fund, which provides monetary assistance to Peace Corps Volunteers and their families in the event of natural or man-made disasters, as well as uninsured personal crises.