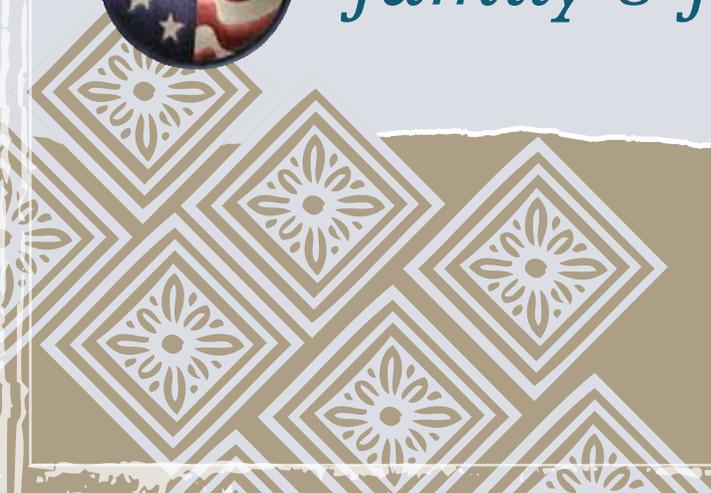




# *family & friends*

Resource Guide



Since its launch in 1961, the Peace Corps has aimed to promote world peace and friendship by:

- *Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.*
- *Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.*
- *Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.*

Nearly 200,000 Volunteers have served in the Peace Corps, about 8,000 of whom are currently placed in over 75 countries. They work in education, youth and community development, health, HIV/AIDS, environment, agriculture, business development, and information and communication technology. The Peace Corps is an independent U.S. government agency.



*“Our advice for parents whose children have a desire to go into the Peace Corps is to let them fulfill that desire. If the child is selected, the parents should feel extremely proud because it is an honor. The Peace Corps is a life-changing experience. It will be the hardest job they’ve ever had and the one they will love the most.”*

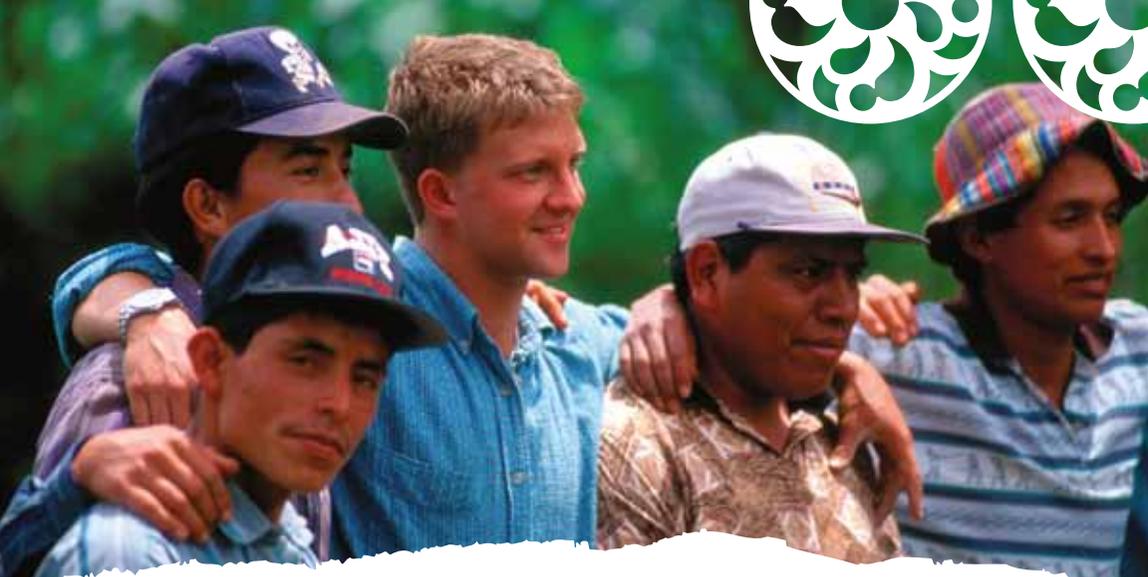
*Rebecca and Ronald Tubbs,  
whose daughter served in Ukraine*



*“My parents served as older Volunteers. It was hard to have less communication, but I understood what they were doing was important and I am very proud of what they did. Retirees should consider it. I know I certainly will.”*

*Daniel Becker,  
whose mother and stepfather served in Bolivia*

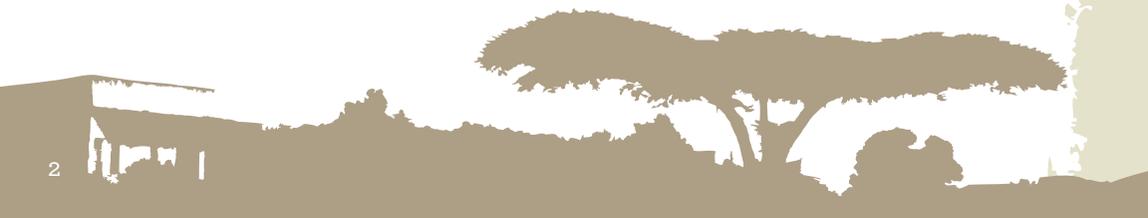




*This booklet is designed to help answer the most frequently asked questions and provide information that can alleviate concerns and facilitate a supportive role in the Volunteers' success. The love and encouragement from folks "back home" is tremendously helpful for Volunteers as they embark on the experience of a lifetime.*

### For Parents, Family, and Friends

If a loved one is considering applying to the Peace Corps or currently serving in the Peace Corps, congratulations! Serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer is an exceptional experience, one that furthers the cause of world peace, and provides an incredible opportunity for personal and professional growth. It is a tribute to be a Peace Corps Volunteer, as the selection process is a competitive one; approximately one-third of all applicants proceed to country placements and begin training.





# The Health and Safety of the Volunteer

The health and safety of the Volunteer is the Peace Corps' highest priority. One of the advantages to serving abroad with the Peace Corps is the safety net that comes from the agency being part of the federal government. Every country where Peace Corps serves has a medical staff and a safety and security coordinator assigned to provide health services and train Volunteers. These positions are supported by the Peace Corps offices of Safety and Security,

Medical Services, and Special Services in Washington, D.C.

There are inherent risks to living and traveling in countries where Peace Corps serves. The Peace Corps aims to protect Volunteers with a thorough training program, medical and emotional support, and a comprehensive safety and security program, the highlights of which are outlined in the next few pages.

*“We are given wonderful medical support by the Peace Corps medical officers in the country. If there is any problem that can’t be taken care of locally, the Peace Corps will fly us back to the United States to get the best medical care there is – whatever might be needed. And this care, including dental, is absolutely free, including all prescription drugs.”*

*Helen Raffel,  
Volunteer in Uzbekistan, China, and Morocco*

## Equipping Volunteers for Safe and Productive Service



The Peace Corps takes an integrated approach to Volunteer training. Through language, cross-cultural, and health and safety instruction, the two- to three-month training is designed to raise the Volunteers' awareness of their new environment, build their capacity to effectively handle the many challenges they will face, and provide tools they need to adopt a safe and appropriate lifestyle. This includes testing for adequate communication skills in the local language before placing the Volunteers in their individual sites. During this period, most Volunteers live with a host family to fully immerse themselves in the new culture. Guidance about host country cultural expectations includes Peace Corps training on how personal choices in dress, living arrangements, means of travel, entertainment, and companionship

may have a direct impact on how Volunteers are viewed, and thus treated, by their communities. The Peace Corps emphasizes that mature behavior and the exercise of sound judgment will enhance personal safety. The Peace Corps has global and country specific policies and procedures in place that support safe and healthy Volunteers.





## Volunteer Health

The comprehensive medical evaluation in the second stage of the application process ensures that the placement of a Volunteer is in a country that has adequate facilities to accommodate that Volunteer's health care needs. The Peace Corps staff includes a medical officer at each country's post. A majority of these medical officers are American-trained and in all instances have been approved by the Peace Corps quality assurance chief. The medical staff briefs Volunteers on staying healthy, provides them with the basic medical skills and supplies needed to do so, and provides primary care as needed. If a health problem occurs that cannot be treated locally, the Peace Corps, at its own expense, will send the Volunteer to an appropriate facility in a nearby country or back to the United States.

Prevention is an important part of each Volunteer's health care. All requisite vaccinations or medications are given before and during a Volunteer's service.

---

### Other Measures

- *Up to 25 hours of health education, which integrates emotional health, as part of pre-service training*
  - *Mid-service and close-of-service physical and dental exams*
  - *Medical newsletters and training during service*
  - *Visits by the Peace Corps medical officer to the Volunteers' sites*
  - *The country's medical officer is on-call 24/7 for emergencies*
- 

The Peace Corps assumes the costs of all medical and dental expenses during an individual's service as a Volunteer.



## Volunteer Safety

### Where They Live and Work

The Peace Corps assesses and approves the sites where Volunteers will live and work, ensuring these locations are appropriate and safe. Site selection is based on many criteria, such as site history; access to medical care, banking, postal, and other essential services; access to communication, transportation, and local markets; availability of adequate housing and living arrangements; and agreements with host country authorities and communities. Volunteers have work counterparts assigned to them in their communities. Volunteers often live with or near a host family. Peace Corps program managers and medical staff visit periodically to monitor issues related to the

Volunteers' site assignments. If a Volunteer's safety or well-being is at risk or compromised, the Peace Corps staff will help resolve the situation or move the Volunteer to another location.

### **Building Relationships is Key to Volunteer Safety**

The unique arrangement of Peace Corps Volunteers living within the community they serve integrates them through close interpersonal relationships with host-country members. This integration fosters a safe environment as the Volunteers are considered to be part of the local community and, as such, valued and protected as extended family members and respected colleagues.



### **Additional Safety Information Resources**

- *Comprehensive safety and security information is available at [www.peacecorps.gov/safety](http://www.peacecorps.gov/safety)*

## Peace Corps Responds to Volunteers' Safety Concerns

Volunteers are trained and expected to report safety concerns or incidents to the appropriate Peace Corps staff member. The staff is prepared to provide appropriate medical, emotional, and administrative support as each case warrants, and Volunteer confidentiality is respected.

## Emergency Communications and Planning

The Peace Corps addresses larger security concerns through country-specific Emergency Action Plans (EAP) that are in place in each Peace Corps country and for which each Volunteer is trained. These plans, developed to address such events as natural disasters or civil unrest, are tested and revised annually. A component of the EAP ensures that Volunteers can be contacted in case of an emergency and for important notices. In a crisis, the Peace Corps coordinates with the U.S. embassy in each host country to share information, develop strategies, and coordinate communications.

If a situation arises in a country that poses a potential threat to Volunteers, the Peace Corps will immediately assess the nature of the threat and respond in a manner that maximizes the Volunteers' safety and well-being. If the decision is made to remove Volunteers from a country, the Peace Corps will initiate calls to the emergency contact numbers each Volunteer has identified.

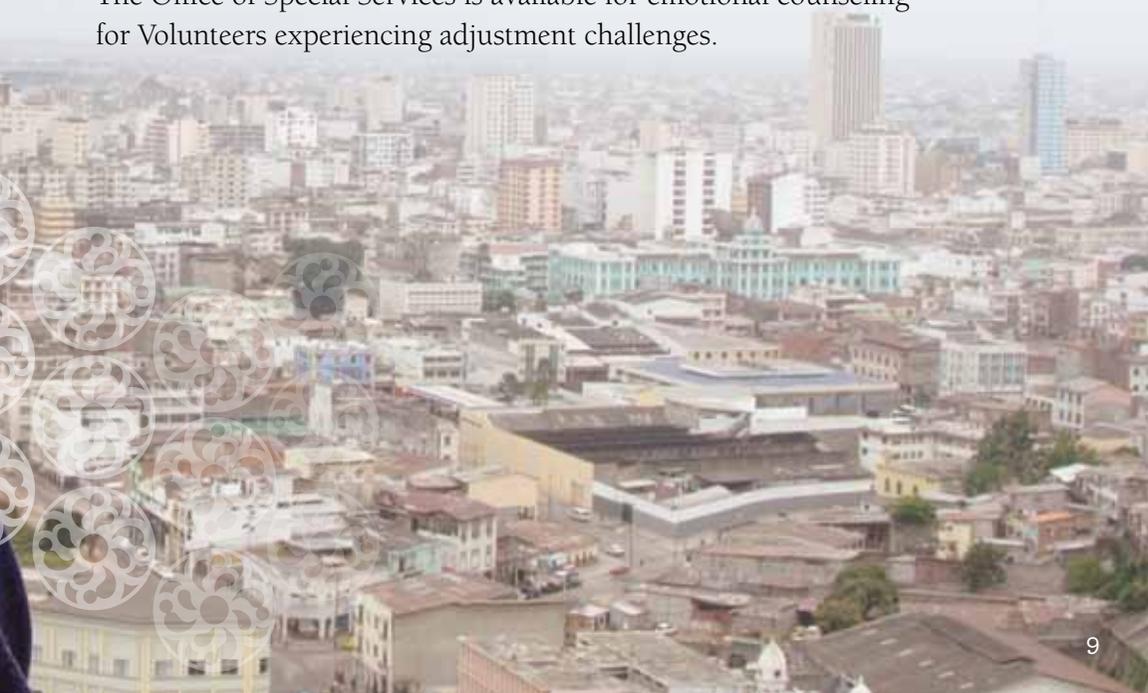
Most Volunteers live and work in communities at some distance from the Peace Corps office. As part of the Peace Corps safety and security procedures, Volunteers are instructed to stay in touch with the Peace Corps office on a periodic basis. They are required to report their whereabouts when they travel from their community, and are required to receive Peace Corps authorization if they intend to leave the country of assignment for any reason. Although some Volunteers consider notification of travel and keeping regular contact with the Peace Corps office restrictive, it is necessary to ensure Volunteers can be contacted in case of emergency.

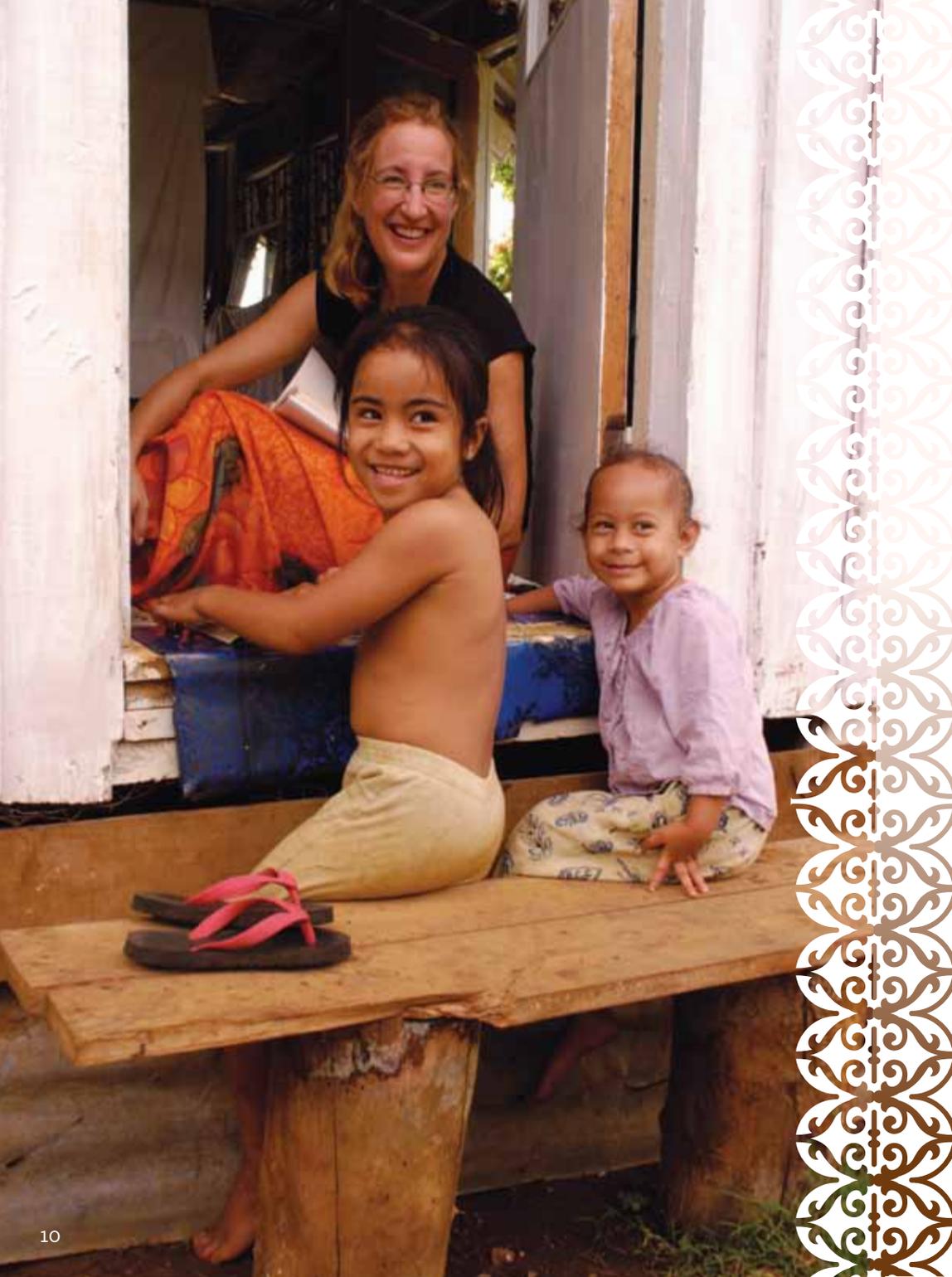




## Once Invited, Making an Informed Choice to Serve

When an applicant is invited to serve in a particular country, general information, safety and security data, and specific information about potential challenges is provided in the *Welcome Book*, part of the invitation kit. Challenges can include unwanted attention; harassment; health and safety risks; and cultural behaviors that an American might find uncomfortable or offensive. With this information, potential Volunteers can make informed decisions about whether Peace Corps service is appropriate for them and whether they are prepared to live in their host country, where their primary support system is local community members. Once the Volunteers are in-country, Peace Corps staff will keep them informed of security issues and provide training and guidance for maintaining their safety and well-being. The Office of Special Services is available for emotional counseling for Volunteers experiencing adjustment challenges.





# Staying in Touch with the Volunteer

In our current culture, we have become accustomed to broad communication access through text messaging, instant messaging, cellphone calls, and e-mail. While technology continues to increase even in the most remote places of the world, each country will have varying degrees of availability and reliability. In some countries, cellphones are common. In others, Internet cafés may be nearby. In all countries, Volunteers can use computers when at the Peace Corps office. After adjusting to the particulars of a Volunteer's location, staying in touch with the Volunteer is possible.

Keep in mind that another country's postal system may not always be consistent or may take longer to distribute mail than in the U.S. It is not uncommon for correspondence to take several weeks for delivery and perhaps be delivered out of sequential order. For this reason, it is suggested to number letters to keep track of correspondence. Also, consider carefully before sending items of great value. Packages, unfortunately, can get lost.

*“I was posted in the bush and once a month I would go to the provincial capital and make calls. We had a parents’ link so if someone was able to talk to their parents, those parents could call someone else’s parents back in the States with our news. The parents got to know each other pretty well.”*

*Tracie Wright-Schnapps  
Volunteer in Cameroon*



## Visiting a Volunteer

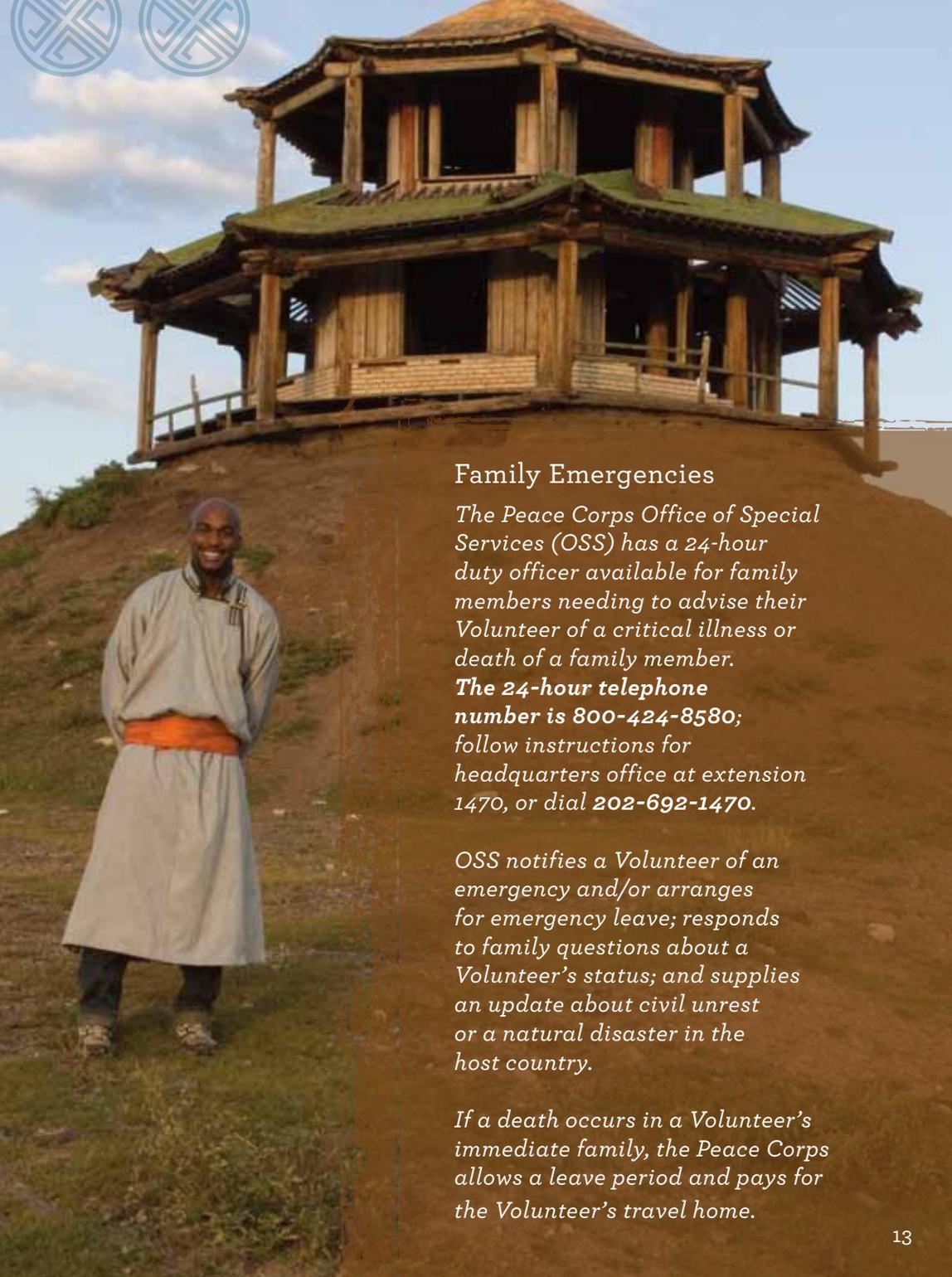
Some families and friends visit their Volunteer during his or her service. This is always an exciting time for everyone, including the Volunteer's community. Families who, at their own expense, want to visit a Volunteer are welcome to do so after the Volunteer's two- to three-month pre-service training

and the first three months of service are both complete, and before the last three months of service. When making plans, families should work closely with the Volunteer to time a visit. Work schedules can be complex, and Volunteers need to obtain approval from their Peace Corps and host-country supervisors for vacation days to spend time with visitors.



### ***When planning a trip, visit these valuable resources***

- *The State Department's website for Visa information at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)*
- *The Centers for Disease Control's website for immunization and travel health information at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)*



## Family Emergencies

*The Peace Corps Office of Special Services (OSS) has a 24-hour duty officer available for family members needing to advise their Volunteer of a critical illness or death of a family member.*

***The 24-hour telephone number is 800-424-8580; follow instructions for headquarters office at extension 1470, or dial 202-692-1470.***

*OSS notifies a Volunteer of an emergency and/or arranges for emergency leave; responds to family questions about a Volunteer's status; and supplies an update about civil unrest or a natural disaster in the host country.*

*If a death occurs in a Volunteer's immediate family, the Peace Corps allows a leave period and pays for the Volunteer's travel home.*



*“Peace Corps shaped our son in terms of turning what had been only thoughts into a career path. While he was serving in the area of public health, he got his commitment to medical school. Now he is a second-year resident in emergency medicine at a hospital.”*

*Phil Graitcer,  
whose son served in Malawi*

# Benefits of Serving

## *Personal Development*

The Peace Corps requires serious commitment and hard work. Volunteers leave the comforts of home and what is familiar, immerse themselves 24/7 in another culture, apply technical skills, and learn a new language that must be used every day – to shop for food, obtain transportation, develop friendships, and conduct work. The unique challenges of Peace Corps service make for a tremendous growth experience. Practical skills are gained, and intangible benefits come with making a difference in people's lives and relying on oneself to respond to the needs of others.

The benefits of the Peace Corps don't end with overseas service. It's an experience to draw upon throughout a lifetime. As is often said, the Peace Corps isn't simply something great, it's the beginning of something great.



*“My daughter matured ten years in her two years in the Peace Corps! She made great friends, helped others, grew in her own self-confidence, and is now in law school working to improve all our lives.”*

*DeWitt Perkins,  
whose daughter served in Senegal*

Benefits of Serving:

## *Professional Development*

The skills Volunteers gain through their Peace Corps experience can enhance careers in business, education, nonprofit organizations, and government. The Peace Corps also opens doors to graduate school through university partnership programs and provides experience that has recognition and value among admissions departments. In a survey of returned Volunteers over a 35-year period of Peace Corps history, 70 percent indicated that their Peace Corps experience had a positive impact on their careers.



*“Successfully completing Peace Corps under fairly challenging circumstances speaks a lot about character, fortitude, and the ability to take on difficult problems. When I see applicants with Peace Corps in their background, it is a real positive.”*

*Frank Fountain, Senior Vice President,  
External Affairs and Public Policy, Chrysler  
Returned Volunteer, India*

## Skills for the Global Marketplace

Fluency in foreign languages, international experience, and cross-cultural understanding are highly sought-after assets in today's global economy.

View a list of some of the notable returned Peace Corps Volunteers at [www.peacecorps.gov/notables](http://www.peacecorps.gov/notables)

## Receive Advantages in Federal Employment

Volunteers who complete two years of service receive one year of noncompetitive eligibility for employment in the federal government. This means that at the employing agency's discretion, if a Volunteer meets the minimum qualifications for a position, he or she can be hired without going through the standard competitive process. Those who are employed by the federal government after their Peace Corps service can receive credit toward retirement for their years of Volunteer service.

## Transition and Job Placement Support

Before departing from their country of service, Volunteers are prepared for the transition back to the U.S. during their close of service conference. When Volunteers return to the U.S., the Peace Corps Office of Returned Volunteer Services provides them with transition assistance related to jobs and education.

---

## Returned Volunteer Services

- *Publishes a semimonthly online newsletter with job announcements, graduate school information, and career-related articles and advice.*
  - *Sponsors career events throughout the year in Washington, D.C. and other cities around the U.S.*
  - *Helps returned Volunteers translate their field experience for prospective employers and other professional contacts.*
-



Benefits of Serving:

## *Financial Opportunities*

The Peace Corps pays for travel to and from the country of service, pays a monthly stipend to cover living expenses, and provides dental and medical care. Volunteers also receive two vacation days per month of service, a total of 48 days over two years.

The Peace Corps recognizes that returning from overseas requires some adjustment, so Peace Corps provides Volunteers with a transition fund of just over \$6,000 for a full 27-month tour.

Volunteers in the Peace Corps who have Perkins loans are potentially eligible for a partial cancellation benefit. School loan deferments exist for several federal programs, i.e., Stafford (formerly known as guaranteed student loans), Perkins, direct, and consolidated loans. Some commercial loans may also be deferred during Peace Corps service. Because the rules that authorize deferment are complicated and subject to change, it is best for applicants to contact their lending institutions to see how this benefit applies to their particular situation. Recruiters can also provide an FAQ sheet with answers to many student loan-related questions.

## *Graduate School Advantages*

The Peace Corps offers two unique programs that combine Peace Corps service and graduate studies. Through partnerships with colleges and universities across the United States, Volunteers can earn academic credit for their Peace Corps service and/or may be awarded financial support.

### **Before and During Service**

***Master's International*** allows Volunteers to incorporate Peace Corps service as credit in a master's degree program in a variety of fields at over 50 academic institutions nationwide.

### **Following Service**

***Fellows/USA*** offers returned Volunteers scholarships or reduced tuition at approximately 50 participating campuses in a variety of subject areas, combining graduate study with substantive, degree-related internships that help meet the needs of underserved U.S. communities.

*A list of participating schools and fields of study can be found at [www.peacecorps.gov/gradschool](http://www.peacecorps.gov/gradschool)*





*“An unexpected WOW has been the degree to which we have shared in our son’s Peace Corps experience – learning about the country and culture, getting to know other Volunteers and their families and sharing our worries, triumphs, and the unbelievable sense of pride in what they are doing.”*

*Eleanor Hoagland,  
whose son served in Guinea*

*“We’re really proud of our daughter for being involved with the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps Partnership program was a bonus because she was able to bring that village in Africa back here. It’s a great way to get involved with other countries in the world.”*

*Susan and Jim Chandler,  
whose daughter served in Uganda*

### **Helpful Resources**

- Peace Corps website pages dedicated to Family and Friends at [www.peacecorps.gov/family](http://www.peacecorps.gov/family)
- *On the Homefront* is a Peace Corps handbook provided in hardcopy 3-5 weeks prior to a Volunteer’s pre-departure orientation and available online at [www.peacecorps.gov/homefront](http://www.peacecorps.gov/homefront)



*“Being parents of a Peace Corps Volunteer, the most important part is to communicate as much as possible so you can understand what they are going through and what they are experiencing.”*

*Petra and Fred Peng,  
whose son served in the Philippines*



## How Parents, Family, and Friends Can Play a Part in the Volunteer Experience

There are multiple ways to be involved with your Volunteer's experience.

- Support your Volunteer by staying connected through e-mails, letters, phone calls, and packages.
- Develop relationships with a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer group (see [www.rpcv.org](http://www.rpcv.org)) or join/create a support group founded by parents and family members. These groups are outside of the Peace Corps and are generally organized around a particular country or training group.
- Visit the Volunteer.
- Get involved in the Volunteer's projects through donations to the **Peace Corps Partnership Program**. Volunteers often identify additional local needs in working with community leaders and may undertake secondary projects such as building schools, latrines, or water wells, adding books to libraries, or providing technical trainings. Family, friends, or civic groups back home can support a Volunteer's project by giving even a modest sum through the Peace Corps Partnership Program.

See [www.peacecorps.gov/contribute](http://www.peacecorps.gov/contribute) for current projects and information on giving.

# Life is calling How far will you go?



The Peace Corps Office of Special Services (OSS) has a 24-hour duty officer available to respond to family questions about a Volunteer's status, supply an update about civil unrest or a natural disaster in the host country, or to reach a Volunteer during a family emergency:

**24-hour emergency telephone**

**800-424-8580**

(follow instructions for headquarters office, ext. 1470)

**or 202-692-1470.**

Family and friends are invited to attend information sessions about the Peace Corps held throughout the country and online. Find upcoming events at [www.peacecorps.gov/events](http://www.peacecorps.gov/events)

**Friend us, fan us, follow us:**

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/peacecorps](http://facebook.com/peacecorps)

**Twitter:** [twitter.com/peacecorps](http://twitter.com/peacecorps)

**YouTube:** [youtube.com/peacecorps](http://youtube.com/peacecorps)

**Flickr:** [flickr.com/photos/peacecorps](http://flickr.com/photos/peacecorps)



**Recycled**  
Supporting responsible  
use of forest resources

Cert no. SGS-COC-004394  
[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)

© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

[www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov)

**800.424.8580**