

My Peace Corps Volunteer Experience Peace Corps Azerbaijan

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I joined the Peace Corps to not only I learn about different cultures and to challenge myself but to give back what I was given – the opportunity for higher education and a better livelihood.

Twelve years ago, in September of 1996, my sister and I arrived in the United States of America to join my family after living in a refugee camp in Thailand for 13 years. From the moment we arrived, we were given the opportunity to get a good education. We finished high school in 2000 and went to college, where we both received our bachelor degrees from Wichita State University.

My sister has her degree in Electrical Engineering and is currently working for Boeing Company. I received my degree in Political Science in 2004. My motivation to work for those in need is rooted in my childhood. During my time in the refugee camp, I experienced poverty and hardship, yet my family was assisted in many ways by NGO's workers. Therefore, I decided to join the Peace Corps upon completing my university degree, which I believe would put me in a position to help those who are enduring the same difficulties that I overcame.

I received my Peace Corps placement in early May 2006, almost two years from the time I completed my application. The Peace Corps invitation letter stated that I would be going to a country in Eastern Europe. I was very excited at that moment because I did not know very much about the region besides its history with the Soviet Bloc. After almost two years of waiting, I immediately accepted the invitation to join. A couple weeks later, I received my Peace Corps assignment package, which stated I would be stationed in Azerbaijan. I was a little bit confused at first because I was sure that Azerbaijan is not part of Eastern Europe. Then I looked it up on the map. Azerbaijan is located on the west coast of the Caspian Sea, in between Eastern Europe and Central Asia. My initial disappointment turned to excitement as I thought about the very challenging to work in the country I had rarely heard of and know nothing about.

From my hometown, Wichita, Kansas, I left for Philadelphia on June 22, 2006 for the staging orientation. At the staging, we were prepped for what it would be like to be a Peace Corps volunteer and what to expect when we arrive at the country of our service. We also had to learn and be familiar with Peace Corps rules and policies. After a few days in Philadelphia, a group of 47 of us left for Azerbaijan on June 26, 2006. We arrived in Azerbaijan on the evening of June 28, 2006. Everything proceeded rapidly once we arrived. We were transported immediately to Sumgayit, the city just north of Baku where we were stationed in the first 3 months.

The Peace Corps Azerbaijan volunteer's service is divided into three major sections: pre-service training and adjusting to site, work and implementing projects, and close of service and readjusting back to the life in the US.