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## **Progress in Implementation of the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011**

***December 2014***

### **Introduction**

On November 21, 2011, President Obama signed into law the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act. In part, the law codified existing Peace Corps practices and policies, many of which were put in place to better protect and support Peace Corps Volunteers. The Kate Puzey Act also imposed new mandates and gave the agency new authorities. While many provisions relate to safety and security, the law addresses a range of topics.

The Peace Corps is committed to successful implementation of the Kate Puzey Act, and over the past three years, has strived to design a program with real impact. Below is a brief summary of the agency's progress. This summary does not include provisions that are being implemented solely by Peace Corps' Office of Inspector General (OIG). Quality improvement is a continuous effort, and the Peace Corps is constantly monitoring and evaluating its program to identify opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response Program and Intra-Agency Working Groups**

The Peace Corps has implemented a *Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR) program* designed to reduce the risk of sexual assault and ensure Volunteers receive compassionate, timely and comprehensive support. The SARRR program, developed with the assistance of the Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice, includes:

- More than 30 policy changes;
- Extensive sexual assault training for Volunteers and staff;
- New clearly defined procedures for mitigating and responding to sexual assault, including procedures that provide enhanced services and reporting options for Volunteers who are sexually assaulted;
- An internal campaign to raise awareness of sexual assault; and
- Monitoring and evaluation of the SARRR program to improve effectiveness.

The agency is also incorporating the topic of sexual assault risk reduction and response into all major training events for both staff and volunteers.

## **Costs and New Personnel**

The Peace Corps has and will continue to commit the budgetary resources necessary to ensure full implementation of the Kate Puzey Act. The agency has added staff with expertise in sexual assault, victimization and trauma – including victim advocates, psychologists and clinical social workers – in the Office of Victim Advocacy, the Counseling and Outreach Unit (located in the Office of Health Services), the Office of Safety and Security, and the Office of the General Counsel to focus specifically on implementing the SARRR program and the Kate Puzey Act, and better support Volunteers who are victims of crime.

## **Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response**

- Enhanced Training for Volunteers: In 2011, the Peace Corps launched new standardized, comprehensive training for Volunteers on sexual assault awareness, risk-reduction strategies like bystander intervention, reporting to the Peace Corps, and response protocols. The new training was reviewed by and incorporates input from outside stakeholders and nationally recognized experts – including the U.S. Department of Justice; the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN); and Peace Corps' Sexual Assault Advisory Council.

The Peace Corps held six regional conferences in 2011 where hundreds of overseas staff were trained on how to deliver the new training. In 2014, more than 1,500 Volunteers reported using bystander intervention strategies.

In 2014, the Peace Corps revised this training based on feedback from Volunteers, staff focus groups and the Advisory Council. The revised training includes a new safety module on how to address unwanted attention, which is now part of the required global Volunteer training curriculum.

- New Training for Staff: All key sexual assault responders have received training on Peace Corps' sexual assault protocols and how staff can best support Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault. In December 2012, the Peace Corps launched a mandatory online sexual assault victim sensitivity training for all overseas and headquarters staff. In 2013, all staff were trained on the SARRR program, and in 2014, additional training on the SARRR program was provided to new and backup staff. Pre- and post-test assessments measure the effectiveness of staff training.
- Sexual Assault Advisory Council: The Peace Corps Sexual Assault Advisory Council – consisting of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and leading experts and professionals in the field of sexual assault – convened in July 2012 and issued its first report in November 2012. The Council's annual congressional reports for [2012](#), [2013](#) and [2014](#) noted the extensive progress the Peace Corps has made in building

its global SARRR program and offered valuable recommendations for improving the agency's sexual assault-related policies, services and training. The Council meets twice a year and provides valuable expertise as well as a Volunteer voice on agency policies and products.

- Improved Medical Support for Victims of Sexual Assault: The Peace Corps has hired experts in sexual assault, victimization, and trauma – including victim advocates, psychologists and clinical social workers – to further support Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault. The agency continues to collaborate with outside experts in the clinical sexual assault field to enhance technical guidance for Peace Corps Medical Officers regarding post-assault clinical care.
- Restricted Reporting of Sexual Assaults: The Peace Corps instituted a new policy that provides a Volunteer who has been sexually assaulted with the option to choose either a restricted report or a standard report when reporting the incident to the Peace Corps. Restricted reporting enhances Volunteers' privacy by strictly limiting access to information and details about an assault to only those providing support services requested by the Volunteer. Under restricted reporting, Volunteers who might not have come forward due to confidentiality concerns can now access the full range of services provided by the agency. Standard reporting provides Volunteers with the same support services as well as an opportunity to initiate an official investigation.
- Stalking: The Peace Corps established a stalking policy modeled after best practices in addressing and responding to stalking incidents, including the model Campus Stalking Policy developed by the National Center for Victims of Crime Stalking Resource Center.
- Sexual Assault Response Liaisons: The Peace Corps established Sexual Assault Response Liaison (SARL) positions at each Peace Corps post. SARLs are available to accompany Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault through the in-country response process. Each post has two designated SARLs who receive 40 hours of comprehensive training on sexual assault awareness, impact, victim sensitivity, victim relations, and Peace Corps policies and procedures related to sexual assault. SARLs are co-managed by the Office of Victim Advocacy and the post Country Director.
- Improved Medevac Procedures for Victims of Sexual Assault: The Peace Corps created the Medevac Support Program and revised its policies and procedures to ensure that Volunteers who are medically evacuated as a result of a sexual assault are accompanied by a Peace Corps staff member, unless they specifically decline, and when evacuated to Washington, D.C., they are met at the airport by a Peace Corps staff member or representative. New procedures give Volunteers who are medically evacuated a choice of medical providers to the extent possible. In addition, the agency has implemented the online Health Provider Satisfaction Survey for Volunteers to provide feedback to the Peace Corps about the care they received.

- Anonymous Hotline for Sexual Assault Victims: In 2013, the Peace Corps launched a six-month, anonymous sexual assault hotline pilot program in Armenia, Togo, Tanzania, Jordan, Indonesia, Guyana, and Jamaica. The goal of the hotline – staffed by Peace Corps mental health clinicians – was to provide Volunteers with information about Peace Corps services available to them, options for reporting an assault, and crisis counseling.

After consulting with experts in the field and reviewing the results of the hotline pilot program, the Peace Corps is working through the contracting process to outsource the hotline to an outside, expert body. This will ensure Volunteers view the permanent hotline as truly anonymous and independent from the agency.

## **Protecting and Supporting Volunteers**

- Protecting the Safety of Volunteers: The agency issued guidance in 2011 to overseas staff on specific procedures to follow when Volunteers express concerns about their safety or in any situation that threatens their well-being. In 2012, the Peace Corps amended the Peace Corps manual to state that if any Volunteer feels at risk of imminent bodily harm at his or her site and requests to be moved, the Volunteer must be expeditiously removed from that site. All Safety and Security overseas staff have been trained in these procedures.
- Confidentiality Protection: The Peace Corps has worked continuously to improve its protections for Volunteers who report allegations of wrongdoing. Under these policies, Peace Corps staff must take appropriate measures to protect Volunteers' safety and confidentiality, and ensure allegations are given serious consideration, including referral to the OIG, as appropriate. Retaliation against Volunteers is strictly prohibited. Both Volunteers and overseas staff have been trained on these policies.
- Office of Victim Advocacy: The Peace Corps established the [Office of Victim Advocacy](#) (OVA) in the spring of 2011. OVA is a centralized resource to assist Volunteers who are victims of crime. The office is staffed with three highly trained, professional Victim Advocates who are available 24 hours a day. OVA ensures that Volunteers are made aware of, and receive access to, services provided by the Peace Corps in cases of sexual assault, stalking and other crimes. From June 2011 to November 2014, the office responded to more than 1,800 incidents and requests for assistance from Volunteers, Returned Volunteers, and concerned family members.
- Incident Tracking and Reporting: The Peace Corps has a global system to track and record incidents against Volunteers, as required by the Kate Puzey Act. The agency reports annually on crimes against Volunteers, and reports are posted on the Peace Corps [website](#). The collected data is used to analyze trends in countries and across regions, to provide invitees and trainees with current information on risks in their host countries, to develop new and improved training materials, and to track and mitigate new and emerging risks to Volunteers. In addition, the Peace Corps hired a specialist to design and field the agency's first anonymous crime victimization survey

based on input from the National Institute of Justice and best practices for surveying crime victims.

- Legal Counsel for Victims of Crime: The Peace Corps revised its policies to reflect the agency's enhanced authority to pay attorney and court costs for Volunteers who are parties, complaining witnesses or otherwise participating in the prosecution of crimes committed against them.
- State Department Memorandum of Understanding: In May 2012, the Peace Corps and the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security signed a memorandum of understanding formalizing, among other matters, how staff of the two agencies responds to crimes against Peace Corps Volunteers.
- Access to Communications: The Peace Corps adopted a clear, uniform standard in the Peace Corps manual regarding Volunteers' access to communications, and has surveyed all of its posts to ensure that they are in compliance with this standard. The agency reported to Congress on these efforts in May 2012.

## **Other Provisions**

- Annual Volunteer Survey: As required, the Peace Corps conducts annual, confidential surveys of Volunteers and shares global survey results with Congress. The Peace Corps revised its performance plans for Country Directors to ensure that results from the annual Volunteer survey are considered in annual reviews of performance. The survey provides the agency with Volunteer feedback on the usefulness of sexual assault risk reduction training that Volunteers receive.
- Early Termination: The Peace Corps tracks early terminations of Volunteers, and provides annual reports to Congress on early termination rates among Volunteers, including demographic data associated with early termination.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Implementation of the SARRR program includes important monitoring and evaluation systems for the program's activities based on best practices from the evaluation and sexual assault fields. Quality improvement is a continuous effort, and the Peace Corps is constantly monitoring and evaluating program implementation and outcomes to identify opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness. An optional, anonymous Response Quality Survey also enables Volunteers who have been sexually assaulted to give feedback on the quality of services they received from the Peace Corps.
- Country Portfolio Review: The Peace Corps completes annual Country Portfolio Reviews to objectively evaluate its allocation of resources across the countries where the Peace Corps serves or is considering service.

Learn more about safety and security in the Peace Corps at <http://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/learn/safety/>.