

Peace Corps Belize

Annual Report 2015





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Live with host families



Assist with farming



Assist with home chores



Participate in local culture



Work with health education



Participate in local events



Tour the country!



Make long lasting friends

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PEACE CORPS BELIZE TIMELINE



1962

•Belize receives its first group of Peace Corps Volunteers. These are assigned mainly to schools teaching English and to the Agriculture Department of Belize.

1973-1979

•Peace Corps Volunteers are assigned to different organizations in Belize assisting with projects involving Marine Biology, Veterinary Labs, English Education, Special Education, Engineering, Construction, Agronomy, and Radio and Telecommunications.

1981-1983

•Peace Corps Volunteers worked with Primary Schools on the Rural Education and Education Program (REAP).

1984

•Belize High School of Agriculture opened in OW. A Peace Corps Volunteer secured a grant from USAID to assist with the opening of the school and was a teacher there for two years.

1996

•A Peace Corps Volunteer assisted with the creation of the Green Iguana Conservation Project to protect the species in Belize.

2000

•Peace Corps Volunteers assisted with the launching of computer labs in high schools. They worked with Belizean counterparts and developed IT training curriculum for teachers.

2006 - 2010

•Peace Corps Volunteers are assigned to different organizations and rural communities focusing on 4 main projects – Health, Education, Youth Development and Organization and Business Development.

2012

•Peace Corps Belize bypassed its training class to revise its programs and signs a Memorandum of Understanding with Belize's Ministry of Health to focus primarily on community health education.

2012

•The homestay program is also introduced where Peace Corps Volunteers are required to live with host families for their 27-month service.

2013

•The first group of Peace Corps Belize Health Volunteers commences their service in Belize under the Rural Family Health Project.

2015

•The first group of Peace Corps Belize Health Volunteers ends their service very successfully.

2016

•The fourth group of Peace Corps Health Volunteers is scheduled to arrive in June 2016.



MISSION AND HISTORY

In 1961, Senator John F. Kennedy challenged a group of idealistic students at the University of Michigan to consider serving their country by living and working in developing countries. From that inspiration grew the Peace Corps, an organization whose purpose is to promote world peace and friendship.

While much has changed since the first group of Volunteers served, the three goals of Peace Corps have not. These goals remain as relevant today as they were 54 years ago:

1. *Help people or interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.*
2. *Help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.*
3. *Help promote a better understanding of other people on the part of Americans.*

Over the past 54 years, nearly 220,000 Volunteers have served in 140 countries, providing training in the areas of health, education, business, information technology, environment, agriculture, and youth development.

PEACE CORPS BELIZE BRIEF HISTORY

In 1962, the first group of Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in what was then British Honduras. Since then, more than 2,000 Volunteers have served in Belize. They have worked primarily in:

- Education
- Youth Development
- Health
- Small Business Development
- Environment

Volunteers have been assigned to NGOs, government organizations, schools and businesses and communities to improve the quality of life of Belizeans.

In 2012 Peace Corps Belize introduced its Rural Family Health Project in close collaboration with Belize's Ministry of Health, focusing mainly on health education in rural communities. For 2015 a total of 49 Volunteers served in 51 different /rural communities across Belize.

Peace Corps, works closely with the Ministry of Health and is currently seeking opportunities to expand work to meet the Ministry of Education priorities as well.

FROM THE COUNTRY DIRECTOR



What an incredible year 2015 has been for Peace Corps Belize and the Rural Family Health Project. For Volunteers, government and organizational collaborators, host families and communities, and Peace Corps staff, it was a year of great successes, challenges and transitions. This year marked Peace Corps Belize's 53rd consecutive year working alongside the people of Belize—one of the longest continuously running Peace Corps programs in the world. And that's no small feat, for Peace Corps has

served in over 140 countries around the globe! It is a testament to the Peace Corps' commitment to the people of Belize and the warm and collegial welcome that we have received from Belizeans over these many years.

2015 saw the first group of Rural Family Health Project Volunteers, BH1, complete their service with satisfaction, heavy hearts and deep gratitude. They departed Belize in late summer to reunite with their families, take on new jobs, begin graduate studies, launch entrepreneurial ventures, and travel. One thing that is certain, Belize will forever reside in their hearts and minds.

As Nina Hernandez, Peace Corps Belize Country Director 2005-2010 referenced in her farewell address, 2015 was an important year for assessing the impact of our presence in Belize in meaningful ways. Throughout this report, you will find wonderful stories of the human connection and successes that make Peace Corps service so unique, but also key metrics numerically summarizing the impact that Volunteer service results in. We are proud to share both these personal challenges and the outcomes, which together, have been achieved.

2015 was also a banner year for Peace Corps Belize as we welcomed our first Peace Corps Response Volunteer. Paige joined us in November to work with POWA, a non-profit organization based in Dangriga that aims to combat HIV/AIDS, all forms of violence, and gender equality. She works with her colleagues at POWA to support people living with HIV or AIDS and their families with a focus on their health, wellness, and wellbeing.

This year also marks the first year of our Peace Corps Volunteer Leader (PCVL) program. Third year Volunteer, Jason, has charted new territory in the role of PCVL, providing ongoing support and guidance to Peace Corps Volunteers in their sites, as well as collaborating with and building capacity within GO Belize, a youth-focused non-profit organization focused on the complementary areas of youth development and adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

Finally, I would like to thank the extraordinary people who have welcomed me as I transitioned in as the new Peace Corps Country Director. I feel truly fortunate to have received such a warm reception, supportive environment, and thoughtful guidance from Peace Corps staff, Volunteers, Ministry partners, host families, counterparts and communities alike. I am deeply appreciative of the incredible program established here, the many strong and vibrant partnerships, and am inspired by your collective commitment to Peace Corps' mission of world peace and friendship. In addition to all the successes described in this 2015 Annual Report, I look forward to working with you to launch new opportunities, realize unexpected outcomes, and build even deeper connections between our two nations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Melanie Emerson".

Melanie Emerson
Belize Peace Corps Country Director



Country Director delivering remarks during girls summer camp



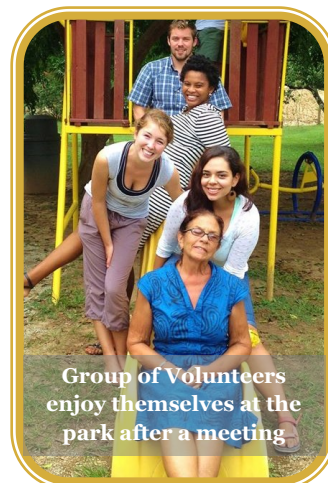
Volunteer and counterpart delivering health education session to children



Volunteers and counterparts working together for training



Volunteer and counterpart measuring a child at health center



Group of Volunteers enjoy themselves at the park after a meeting

VOLUNTEER PLACEMENTS IN BELIZE

COMMUNITY TRAINING

BY RACHEL

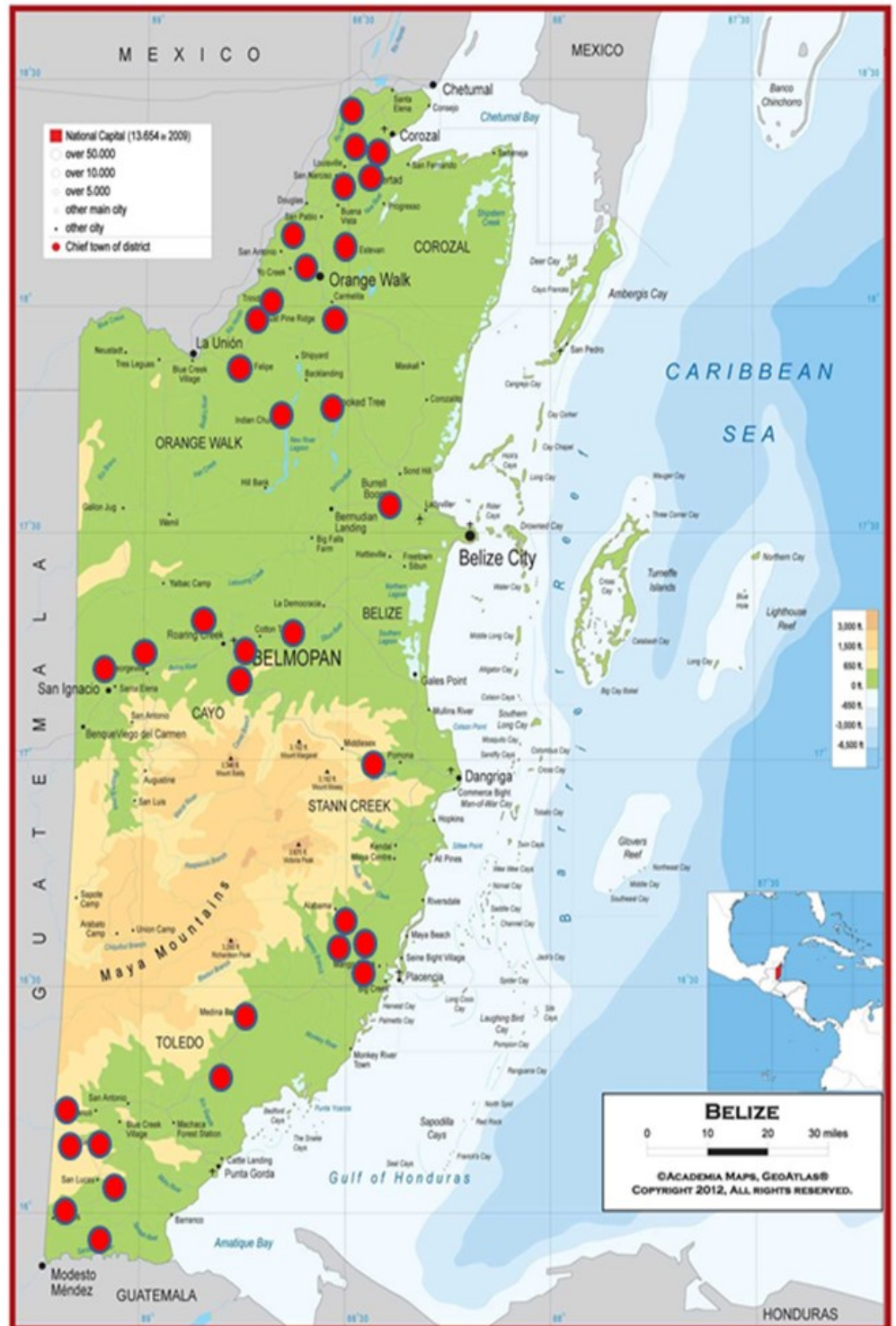
Bright and early in the morning, I headed to a community training that my counterparts and I were facilitating on water, sanitation and hygiene. Right outside my house was Venedicto (who lives right across the street from me) willing to assist me in carrying water filters and buckets. Venedicto's family is part of the majority of my village that collects drinking water from hand-powered ground wells bored many years ago.

The clay sediment visible in the buckets of water filled at these pumps is representative of the more numerous disease-causing microbes that are invisible to the eye. The buckets pictured here have state of the art reusable water filters attached through a small hose and were part of a generous donation made to the village. In order to maximize the impact of this donation, we held meetings and trainings and raffled off the filters to participants that successfully completed the sequence.

We covered topics ranging from the importance of hand-washing with soap, to an open forum on the barriers to latrine construction and use, to proper management of diarrheal disease.



Volunteer and neighbor walking to a community training



“As the new Peace Corps Country Director, I feel truly fortunate to have received such a warm reception, supportive environment, and thoughtful guidance from Peace Corps staff, Volunteers, Ministry partners, host families, counterparts and communities alike.”

Melanie Emerson, Belize Peace Corps Country Director

THE RURAL FAMILY HEALTH PROJECT

Launched in 2013, the Rural Family Health Project (RFHP) is implemented in close collaboration with the Belizean Ministry of Health (MOH) to address the country's priority areas of maternal and child health, and chronic non-communicable diseases.

The purpose of the RFHP is to support Belizean rural families in adopting positive behaviors to improve and maintain their health. Peace Corps Volunteers assist in the planning, coordination and implementation of health promotion, education and training activities alongside rural Community Health Workers and other community leaders.

September 2015 marked 2 years since the Rural Family Health Project was introduced. Since then, over 5,500 individuals have been educated on health topics and over 700 activities have been carried out by Volunteers. Over 200 of these activities were conducted in conjunction with schools.

Volunteers work along with their community counterparts and community leaders. According to the 2014 Belize Peace Corps counterpart survey, 91% of counterparts indicated that PCVs will leave a lasting impact on their communities.

SELECTING COMMUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT

In close collaboration with Belize's Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education (MOE) Peace Corps undergoes a thorough process every year to identify communities for a new group of incoming Volunteers. Input is also obtained from currently serving Volunteers and Peace Corps staff.

Peace Corps then decides which communities will receive Volunteers based on factors such as safety and security, language, host family availability and counterparts availability. To do this Peace Corps staff set up meetings (3 for new communities and 2 for returning communities) in the specified communities where they meet first with the leaders (Alcalde, chairman, village council, water board chair, church leader, etc), and second with members of the community, and finally they meet with the counterparts (Community Health Worker, school teachers and principals, nurses, youth group leaders, etc). When conducting these meetings the MOH Health Educators, from the district where the village is, accompanies the staff; where there is a currently serving Volunteer, s/he also attends the meetings.

After the first meeting, the village leaders decide whether or not they would like a Volunteer placement in their community and they submit an application to Peace Corps requesting a Volunteer. They then proceed in identifying host families for the Volunteers in and subsequently a Volunteer is placed.

RFHP OBJECTIVES:

The project emphasizes behavior change and individual empowerment through carefully designed activities that target the following objectives:

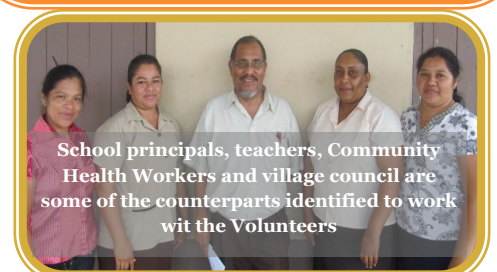
- ⇒ Engage communities in participatory health education and promotion activities.
- ⇒ Enhance the technical capacity of community health providers and partners.
- ⇒ Empower mothers and caregivers to make positive maternal and child health choices.
- ⇒ Foster positive individual lifestyle changes to prevent non-communicable diseases.



The entire community is invited to participate in community meetings to learn about Peace Corps.



Modest housing and host families are selected based on specific criteria determined by Peace Corps.



School principals, teachers, Community Health Workers and village council are some of the counterparts identified to work with the Volunteers

VOLUNTEER LIFE IN BELIZE



Two Trainees learning to make tortillas for Maya Culture Day



Volunteer with host brothers



Volunteer helping host sisters in tortilla making



Volunteer in her bedroom



Trainee having fun with children after culture day

Volunteers in Belize are placed in rural communities with populations ranging from 250 to 3,500 people. These communities often lack paved roads, have limited transportation services, and may be without electricity or running water. Because Belize is a small country, Volunteers rarely live and work farther than three hours (by public bus) from a larger town where services may be more accessible.

Volunteers are placed with a host family for twelve weeks of pre-service training at one of our Community-Based Training sites and with another host family once they begin their two-year service in their permanent site. Volunteers understand that living with a host family means making personal lifestyle changes and they recognize the advantages of doing so.

Volunteers learn one of Belize's local languages through the 12 week pre-service training but mostly through daily interaction with their host families and community training members. Currently Volunteers learn one of three local languages: Kriol, Q'eqchi or Spanish. Training host families also are dominant speakers of the local language that the Volunteer will learn during training. Through this, the host family assists the Volunteer with full immersion, experiential knowledge about Belizean culture, and community integration.

Living with host families also enhances Volunteers' safety as host families can provide Volunteers with invaluable advice and guidance related to safety and culture.

Accommodations with host families are modest but all Volunteers have their own room, bed, chair, and table to work on. Though each home will vary, Volunteers share common living areas with host families. Volunteers leave behind a lifestyle of modern amenities and understand that living with a host family requires an open mind, cultural sensitivity, patience, and flexibility. The rewards, they also realize, are immeasurable.

Besides changing their lifestyle, Volunteers also learn to work with Belizean counterparts throughout their service. They work with Community Health Workers, Rural Health Nurses, school principals, school teachers, village chairmen, youth group leaders, women leaders among others. Volunteers develop strong relationships with these counterparts and carry out all their activities in their communities along with their counterparts.

Ultimately, Volunteers participate in a rich cultural exchange with Belizeans that furthers Peace Corps' goal of promoting world peace and friendship.

“Peace Corps Volunteers are very valuable especially in regions that we don’t have a lot of trained teachers. I think they fill an important gap, a gap that can change the lives of students forever.”

Dr. Carol Babb—Chief Education Officer, Belize Ministry of Education

VOLUNTEERS LIVING WITH HOST FAMILIES

In 2013, Belize launched the 27-month Homestay Program under which all incoming Volunteers would serve. This program allows Volunteers to live with host families, as part of that host family, through their entire service. The 27-month Homestay Program was an integral part of the Volunteer support initiative which was developed to improve Volunteers' safety, identify sites and integrate Volunteers. The intended outcomes of the host family program are that Volunteers:

- Become active participants in Belizean culture.
- Learn and practice a local Belizean language (currently Kriol, Q'eqchi, or Spanish).
- Actively participate in village life and become full members of the communities in which they live.
- Enhance their safety through the establishment of a local support network.

It was in June of 2013, that the first Belize Health 1 cohort served under the new Homestay Program. Every year a cohort departs from Belize and a new cohort is received.

The 27-month Homestay has yielded excellent outcomes particularly in the area of Volunteer safety. While crime against Volunteers has not been completely eliminated, there has been a significant reduction in the numbers of reported crimes against Volunteers. In 2011 there were a total of 26 reported incidents and a total of 14 in 2012. This trend abated after 2013 with the implementation of the 27-month Homestay - only 1 incident was reported in 2013 and a total of 4 incidents were reported in 2014. Other Peace Corps countries with homestay programs have also registered a decrease in the numbers of reported incidents against Volunteers.

The Homestay Program is certainly contributing immensely to Volunteer safety and security. In addition to improved safety, the Homestay has resulted in stronger networks allowing for increased opportunities for integration, cultural exchange and friendship building. We have definitely seen where, through the 27-month Homestay, Goals 2 and 3 are being achieved. We understand that the Homestay Program is not perfect but we continue to refine the Program to ensure success for Volunteers, host families, counterparts and communities-at-large.

SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY INTEGRATION - BY KARINA

Feeling comfortable in my site, working effectively with my counterparts, and being accepted like a true member of my host family - I am at a point where all of these apply to me.

Moving to my community, I remember feeling daunted at the prospect of integrating, of getting to know a brand new family and finding a comfortable work rhythm with my counterparts.

After nearly nine months as a volunteer I feel that, although I have so much more to go and so much more to learn at my site, I have already come so far. Every challenge, every obstacle, every move I have had to make has only made me a stronger, more resilient volunteer. The ability to bounce back, the all-important combination of strength, positivity, and humor, and choosing to view these situations as opportunities for growth and learning- I am resilient. I take this with me daily, brushing off the small failures and setbacks and getting back to work the next day. This wouldn't have been possible without the support from my host family. I know I have time for the major project successes. I'll get there sooner or later. For now, I'm enjoying this moment where I feel gratitude for where I am and optimism for where I will be in the near future.

“My daughter, because she is my daughter, gets along very well with all of us at home; we cook together—Belizean and American meals—we eat together, she has taught me how to exercise, and we spend time talking just about anything. When she leaves it will be hard but I believe her promise of keeping in touch and visiting us sometime in the future.”

Raquel Wicab—host mother



Volunteer and host mom

Goal 1 Activities

73



Activities targeting healthy pregnancies, safe deliveries, and healthy newborns

119



Activities targeting improved quality of child care

89



Activities targeting the improved nutritional status of children

Goal 1: Maternal, Neonatal, Child Health

Families will adopt positive behaviors and practices that contribute to the health of women and children

Outputs Goal 1

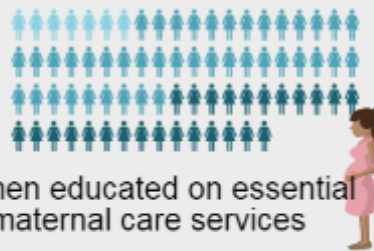
15-17 (9%)

18-24 (56%)

25+ (35%)

75

women educated on essential maternal care services



766

individuals educated on the prevention of childhood illnesses



199

women educated on exclusive breastfeeding



258

individuals educated on nutritional needs of children from 12 to 59 months of age



GLOW girls and Volunteers during summer camp

Trainee spending her first days with new family members

Community girls during garbage collection in the village

Volunteer talking to students about healthy eating during a community health fair

Community Health Worker taking blood sample from patient

Volunteer enjoying a fun conversation with host family

PROJECT — BY THE NUMBERS

124

Activities targeting increased knowledge of risk factors of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

141

Activities targeting healthier eating habits to prevent NCDs

Goal 2 Activities



162

Activities targeting increased physical activity and healthy lifestyles

Goal 2: Non-Communicable Disease Prevention and Mitigation

Community members will adopt behaviors shown to reduce the risk of NCDs (non-communicable diseases).



Outputs Goal 2



1754

■ Males (25%) ■ Females (75%)

individuals educated on non-communicable diseases

Number of individuals participated in a household/ community gardening training session

70

FY 2014

580

FY 2015



2021

individuals educated on the importance of daily physical activity



275

individual participated as facilitators or observers in a Volunteer/partner-supported cooking lesson or demonstration

■ Females (240) ■ Males (35)

Data presented represents activities occurring Fiscal Year 2015, from October 1, 2014- September 30, 2015.



Volunteers at their last gathering before ending their service



Volunteer enjoying children's company after a long day of work



Volunteer and host family



Trainees preparing land for gardening during pre-service training

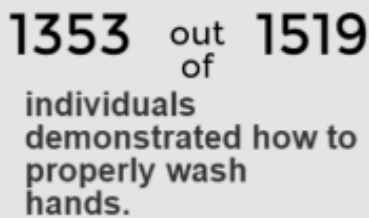
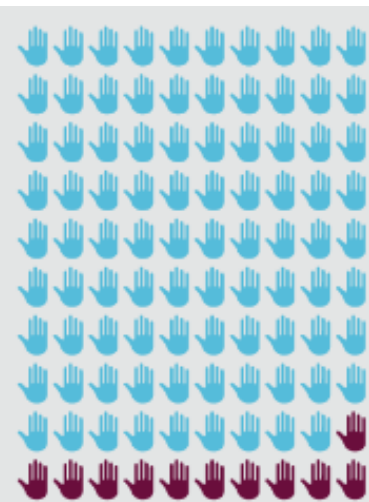
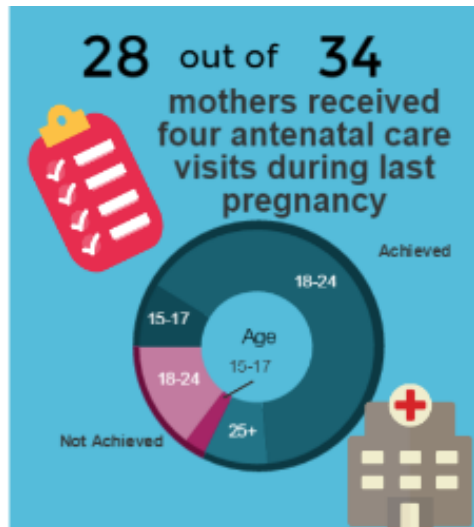


Volunteer delivering physical education session at school



Volunteer introduces Trainee to village life and village beauty

THE OUTCOMES



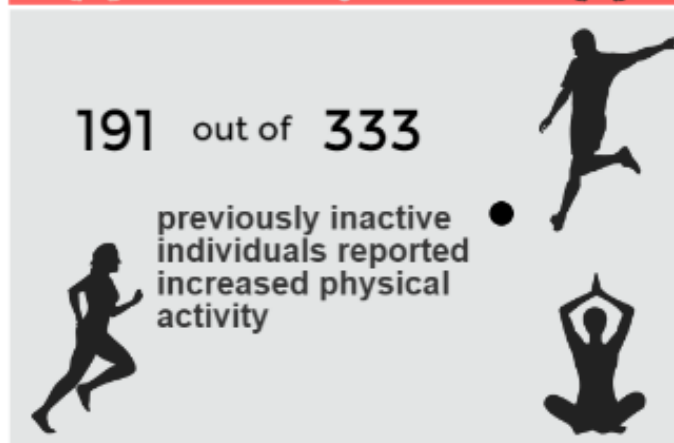
Goal 1: Maternal, Neonatal, Child Health



Goal 2: Non-Communicable Disease

312 out of 720

individuals able to identify ways to incorporate physical activity into their daily routine.



WORKING ALONG WITH BELIZEANS

Throughout the duration of their service, Volunteers do not work alone; they work very closely with Belizean counterparts. These counterparts, to name a few, could be Community Health Workers (CHW), Rural Health Nurses, school principals, vice principals and teachers, village chairmen or Alcaldes, youth group leaders and women group leaders.

Belize's Ministry of Health, in collaboration with village leaders, identifies and trains CHWs who work closely with the Rural Health Nurses and the Peace Corps Volunteers. Together they carry out numerous activities promoting healthy living and prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) as per the RFHP. Some of these activities include: community health fairs, house-to-house visits, NCDs open houses and campaigns, physical fitness programs, healthy pregnancies lessons, malnutrition on children lessons, sanitation and hygiene programs and latrine building programs. In the words of one of the CHWs, *"Thanks to the help of my Volunteer, we are able to hold our first ever Community NCD 'open house'. The 'open house' opens every Wednesday from 7-11 am and every Wednesday we see approximately 20 patients. I am so happy that thanks to the 'open house' many patients are able to keep their diabetes, blood pressure and weight under control."*

Volunteers also work a lot in the community schools. At the schools they work closely with the school principal, the vice principal and teachers. Together they work to educate children on healthy living, physical fitness, hygiene, among others. One of our counterparts tells us, *"The impact the Volunteer has made on this community is tremendous; from better care for the sick people in the community, to more people exercising and practicing healthier eating, to better health education for school children and pregnant women, to major things like our first community pre-school will now be opened in major part thanks to her. We see the difference."*

Besides their primary project working with schools and with the CHWs in the community, Volunteers also engage in secondary projects that benefit the community. To do this they work closely with other counterparts in the village. Some work with the village chairman, the Alcalde, youth group leaders or women's group leaders. Some of the activities that they carry out together are: starting pre-schools, re-vamping libraries and literacy programs, involving the youth in constructive activities, conducting summer camps for children and re-modeling buildings to create "Women Centers" for women to sell their products.

Counterparts play a very important role in the lives of Volunteers during their service. While Volunteers may share their expertise with counterparts and train them in technical aspects of their work, counterparts, on the other hand, share their knowledge and skills especially as it comes to working with Belizeans, the culture and the guidelines that may differ from the USA to Belize.

Counterparts as well as Volunteers leave long lasting impacts on each other's lives and on the lives of the people they serve.

"I love my Volunteer like a daughter; we have very close communication not only for work related activities but also in our personal lives. Our relationship is so strong that when she leaves it will really hurt me."

Justina Teck, Community Health Worker



Volunteers and counterparts during a training activity



Volunteer observing 2 counterparts during a training activity



Volunteer & counterpart during handwashing session with preschoolers



Counterpart and Volunteer during teamwork activity



Volunteer and counterpart

THE 3 C'S THAT MARK SUCCESS AS A BELIZE PCV - BY RACHEL

“High blood pressure is a hidden killer across the globe, but it remains particularly incognito in my village where understanding of the inner workings of the body is minimal. As part of a campaign to increase awareness of the risks of non-communicable diseases and deepened understanding of their causes and risk factors, my CHW decided to do a series of NCD-focused educational events. The session on blood pressure was great.

We had the benefit of another PCV's presence, who not only contributed to the facilitation of a great session, but she also provided the technical expertise for the companion activity of bead making out of magazine paper. The session went well - we showed a video, had physical demonstrations of what healthy and unhealthy blood vessels feel like, and my CHW did a great job explaining the risk factors. For the latter 45 minutes we made beads, which have since become a weekly activity. The excitement over a new skill was palpable, and women have since donated to buy beads to accompany the paper made beads. The use of recycled material is serving as inspiration for other recycling and upcycling projects. That day continues to stick out in my mind as a highlight from my PCV service thus far. It had the three C's that mark success, that got me excited, about work for this project: collaboration (between counterparts and other PCVs), credible health information, and creativity.

Volunteer, counterpart and winners of a healthy snack competition organized by the Volunteer and counterpart



THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH A HEALTH FAIR - BY LAUREN

“I wasn't sure what my village's Health Fair would consist of so I felt very reluctant to make any promises to people but hearing the enthusiasm and anticipations from them motivated me to lead an event that would exceed their expectations. With support from my Community Health Workers, the Village Council and school leaders we started planning.

In the end, I can say with confidence that the Health Fair was extremely successful, with around 115 patients seeing a doctor (that's ~4% of the population of my community!) and over 500 people (20%) passing through our Health Education Tent. Along with these amazing outcomes, I feel the need to express how impossible all this work would have been without the help of so many different resources in the village and from around Belize.

This event has truly taught me the power of relationships, and how different parts of a community can join together to make one grand event that has such great potential. I am so lucky to have work partners that are so eager and willing to work alongside me. I think back to my first three months of integration and how I struggled with the idea of simply existing as a community member (instead of starting projects just yet), and it feels extremely fulfilling to understand first-hand the benefits of my successful integration in multiple parts of my community.

This health fair gave me so many new hopes and plans for the future of my village which are sure to challenge me but will be so rewarding.



Trainees after a long day at a health fair in a training community

HAVING FUN WITH PHYSICAL FITNESS - BY MICHELLE

“On any given weekday, between 3-10 women and girls show up to an exercise group that my counterpart and I initiated. We've lost almost 100 lbs together, and we also do healthy snacks weekly. Recently, we decided that we wanted to do something to take it up a notch.

I asked my group what they thought about doing a monthly activity that was based on physical fitness. The day of our first excursion was a beautiful one. The sun was shining, and we all piled into the truck to head to the river. Once we were there, I led the ladies in a structured water aerobics class, and we held several swimming races. There were some women who did not know how to swim, and we worked together to teach them. [For our snack we ate fruit salad and chicken ceviche].

At the end of the activity, one of the ladies from my group asked me when we were going to go to the river again. To me, this was a sign that it was a successful day. I am hoping that in the future, we will do more day trips-perhaps go visit and climb a Mayan Ruin, create and execute an obstacle course on the field, or organize a marathon, to name a few. I am looking forward to seeing how creatively my group members can make exercise and eating right fun.



Volunteer and school children during a physical education session at school

REDUCING CHILDREN'S MALNUTRITION - BY SUMMER

“In my village, my CHW and I have seen about thirty cases of children who are either stunted, underweight, on incaparina (a complementary supplement given by the rural health nurse to children suffering from malnutrition) or all three. In order to alleviate this problem we have been working with these children and their mothers on proper nutrition.

We started by going from house to house taking a baseline measurement of height and weight of each child and plotted it on a growth chart. We explained to mothers where on the chart their children were and educated them on proper nutrition, and how malnutrition affects their children. In addition to home-visits, we conducted cooking lessons that incorporated incaparina and more vegetables on a daily basis for more nutritious foods into a child's diet.

Since we started we have seen a large decrease in the rate of malnourishment in my community. We originally started monitoring about thirty children and currently we are monitoring only eight. To continue monitoring children, my CHW and I are now planning to have a measurement day once per month where children will be weighed and measured and mothers will learn about nutrition and malnutrition.



30 children were monitored by community health worker and Volunteer in a village for malnutrition



“The 3 C's that mark success as a Belize PCV are: collaboration between counterparts and PCVs, credible health information, and creativity.”

Rachel - PCV Belize

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH LESSONS FOR WOMEN - BY DANIEL

“My Community Health Worker and I noticed that women in the village get pregnant on a pretty regular basis. I've also noticed that the culture tends to encourage women to give birth at their homes as opposed to the hospital. Because of this, the CHW thought that it would be a good idea to give lessons in the village on having a healthy pregnancy and how women can take care of themselves and their babies following birth. I also thought of using this as a time to open up a discussion as to why it is important to go to the hospital and also the difficulties that arise from giving birth at home.

The CHW and I began to advertise August as Mother and Child Health Month. We worked together to come up with different presentation topics: healthy pregnancy, labor and a healthy newborn, family planning, breast feeding, and weaning foods. We also invited two Volunteers to assist with the lessons. Since they are women, we felt that the village ladies would be more responsive to them. We were also able to get the Rural Health Nurse to come and speak to the women about family planning as it was something that neither of us felt comfortable doing on our own.

We had an average of 18 women show up each week. During the first week, with one of the female Volunteers as our guest, we were able to get the women talking about the difficulties that came along with giving the birth in the hospital and we explained to them why it was important, and even convenient, despite the difficulties. We engaged the women in some games to answer questions at the end of each session. For the weaning food lessons, we gave out a variety of fruits and vegetables so that the women could use the foods to feed their children. We also gave out samples of foods we cooked for the women. It was an extremely successful lesson! We even had our largest turn out when the Rural Health Nurse came to present on family planning. This was when I realized that even if the women don't start using family planning methods immediately, the seed has at least been planted. They now know that they can obtain family planning from the health center or hospital anytime they're ready. These lessons went really well, and I was excited to see how much the community benefitted from the lessons.



Trainee behind a "birth plans and newborn care" booth at a health fair

REMODELING SCHOOL'S UNUSED LIBRARY - BY EMILY

“Sure, we have a library,” my principal said, “and we really want to use it, but it needs some work.” I opened up the door to find a mountain of old posters, some sort of scaffolding, half-used boxes of art supplies, and yes, in the corner, boxes of books. The reader in me was delighted. My school had books, who knew? I asked the vice principal, who was in charge of the library, if I could make organizing the room my project while I integrated into the village. She wholeheartedly agreed, and I went to work moving out everything that shouldn't be in a library and sorting the books by reading level.

Curious students peered through the windows and came to help me during break time, constantly asking when they would be allowed in. “As soon as it's done!” was my constant reply, and during the first week of second term, that's exactly what happened. The staff collectively decided that they wanted their students to visit the library every Monday and turn in a book report every Friday, so they drew up a timetable and created report forms for their classes. Since we opened the library, the school has used funds to build three tables and two new bookshelves. Donations of books from local non-profits have helped our small library to grow, and slowly I am seeing more kids express interest in reading even when they don't have to take a book for a class. With the help of the vice principal, we started a summer reading program and extra literacy classes for kids who are struggling, and they can't keep their hands off the books even when we're working on another activity. I always tend to think of Peace Corps successes as large endeavors that take a lot of debate and planning, but sometimes all that's missing is a little collaboration to put together the pieces of a project that's just waiting to happen!



Trainees and children enjoying reading at the community library

HEALTHY SNACKS AT COMMUNITY SCHOOL - BY DANIEL

“An early goal as a Volunteer in my community was to develop a snack store at the school which provided healthy alternatives to the junk food and candy that they were already offering. Through meetings with my principal, vice principal and Community Health Worker we promoted a plan to make healthy snacks sell while trying to maintain the profit margin that currently existed. Through relationships with suppliers, my counterparts were able to get reduced prices on oranges and bananas.

The first day the peeled oranges, bananas and choco bananas sold like hot cakes. As this project has progressed it has become a staple of the snack shop as kids are enjoying the healthier options on the menu. Through further encouragement by my counterparts and I the lunch staff began adding more vegetables to the meals they provided to their students. This is a huge benefit towards keeping the children healthy and parents not worried about poor nutrition for their children while at the same time maintaining economic conditions affordable.

This program has created a better learning environment for the teachers as well as encouraging the students to eat healthy. As the program moves forward my work partners are encouraged to add more healthy options to the menu which will increase the likelihood of sustainability and awareness of healthy foods.



Volunteers and students working on a project

FROM UNUSED OLD CORNMILL TO “WOMEN'S CENTER” - BY MOLLY

“My counterpart (the Community Health Worker—CHW) and I had participated in the Project Design and Management Workshop provided by Peace Corps. During the training, we had talked extensively about the needs of our community and we identified the women's group as a particularly important source of our focus. We worked together to develop a vision map for our idea; remodeling a corn mill owned by the women's group to be used as a women's center and store.

Upon return to my village, we met with the women's group. My CHW was exceedingly proud to be sharing her knowledge with the women. They enthusiastically embraced the idea, and we started writing out goals and objectives for our project. We decided that we wanted the women's center to be a place where the women could cook, sell snacks, sell handicrafts and support education sessions and trainings. After compiling a budget, the women elected a representative to serve as the point-person. Avilena and I sat down to write a grant with the help of two other PCVs.

Peace Corps Partnership Program approved the grant and the project is currently being implemented with anticipated completion of June 2016.



Community youth assisting in park painting project

“I WANNA SEE YOU BE BRAVE” GLOW CAMP - BY DOREEN

“In the afternoon of a bright sunny day, 32 shy and quiet Belizean girls arrived for the start of a 6-day leadership and girl empowerment camp called Girls Leading Our World (GLOW). By the end of the week, these same girls were outgoing and boisterous as they cuddled around their new friends, begging the counselors to take “just one more picture, please!”

At GLOW Camp, the girls participated in sessions about self-esteem, gender roles, goal setting, peer pressure, and volunteerism. They listened to Belizean women from across the country share their stories and words of advice. They explored the concept of leading healthy lives, through topics such as nutritious meals, physical activity, methods for coping with stress, and HIV awareness and stigma reduction in a culturally appropriate manner. The hope is that through GLOW Camp, these young girls will grow to become successful and active citizens in their communities.

Four Peace Corps Volunteers and six Belizean counterparts began planning this camp more than a year ago by forming GLOW Clubs in their local communities. These clubs promote self-esteem, self-expression, and self-reliance for girls between the ages of 10 and 14. GLOW girls from four different villages were involved in local fundraising projects to earn their way to camp this summer. GLOW represented an opportunity for girls to break out of their shells and meet other girls from different communities and cultures, connect with strong Belizean women as role models, and discover the capacity for positive change within them. GLOW Camp was a great success for everyone involved. In the words of one camper, “See you next year!”



“Winning first place in a soccer marathon [where I was the leader of my village’s team] in my co-Volunteer’s site, beating two other Belize teams, three Guatemala teams, and scoring the first goal to start it off certainly makes a super great weekend day for a Peace Corps Volunteer.”

Dan—PCV Belize

FIRST COMMUNITY PRE-SCHOOL PROJECT - BY MOLLY



“In Belize, the official age to enter school is five years old, but in recent years, the establishment of preschools around the country has promoted early childhood education. Due to the language barrier and the lack of early stimulation, some children in my village struggle to advance in primary school. A number of students have difficulty reading and writing in English and are unable to successfully pass onto the next grade. To address this challenge, a committee was formed in my village, of which I was a member, with the goal of creating access to early childhood education by establishing the first preschool in my community.

My counterparts (members of the committee) and I followed the procedures required by the Ministry of Education for the establishment of a government pre-school and a census was taken which revealed 43 preschool-aged children in the village. The chairman of the village approved the community center to be used as the preschool. We then sent the application to the Ministry of Education, followed by a visit in which they gave recommendations for necessary changes to be made in order to meet the standards for their approval. We then worked together to draft funding letters and distributed them to local businesses. Through the collaboration of community members, preschool parents and local businesses, required changes were completed.

We have conducted five meetings with parents interested in enrolling their children in the preschool and have registered 28 students. The group decided on uniforms, materials and expected parental collaboration. While we waited for the license from the Ministry of Education to begin the school year, my work partner and I prepared the preschool by putting together materials for the classroom and composing a curriculum.

In establishing the first preschool in my village and raising awareness about the importance of early childhood education, we hope that both students and parents will place a greater importance on education. It is our hope that early stimulation in the preschool will promote a better attitude toward learning and will provide the students with the foundations they need to excel in primary school.

SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE FIELD — 3RD GOAL

PEN PAL PROJECT LEADS TO PEACE CORPS' SECOND AND THIRD GOAL - BY CELESTE

“While at home on vacation I spent a few hours at PK Yonge Developmental Research School in Gainesville, Florida with the students. This was as part of a pen pal project that I was working on here at my village's school and with the children at PK. I had purchased a few books from the Belize Zoo to donate to their library that showed the animals here. Of course, the tapir was one of their favorites. I also read them a book I wrote, *I Belize We Will Be Best Friends Forever*. Following the book, they learned about all the different Mayan Ruins, the barrier reef, and the different cultures living in Belize.

While I was answering some of their questions, I also touched on the fact of how their school and home life were also somewhat different. Sharing with them some of the local foods that are grown, hunted and fished around or near the village sparked an entire new set of questions... “Do they have McDonalds or Dominos Pizza?” “Where do they shop for groceries?” “What is their mall like?” Trying to explain the typical Belizean village home life was a little tricky, as I did not want the students to envision the kids living in conditions that are often portrayed on the TV ads. On the other hand, I did want them to know that village life is simpler with smaller homes, sometimes without electricity or inside plumbing.”

The project was a great success! I plan on continuing this partnership with the students of my community's school and PK Yonge once I am a RPCV, as they all have all become Ambassadors of Peace for their respective countries.



Belizean children (top) and American children (bottom) after receiving their pen pal letters from each other.



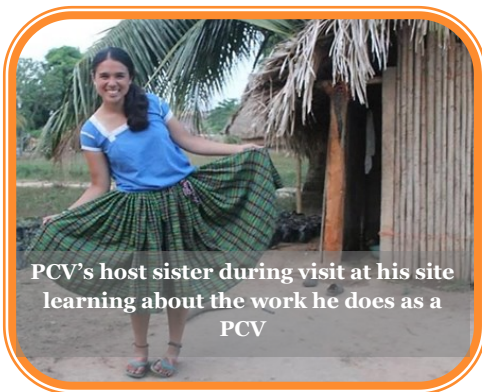
INFLUENCING OTHER AMERICANS TO JOIN PEACE CORPS - BY DAN

“After 9 months in my village my 21 year old sister, fresh out of college, decided to visit me. Her goal was to live like me, doing the things I do, eating the things I eat, and getting the experience that no tourist could ever pay for. While planning for her arrival, the one goal that I proposed for her to work on before this experience was for her to put herself out there, be open, not to be hesitant in asking questions and be genuinely interested. There isn't a great transition from the culture of the States to a Q'eqchi village (my opinion).

In the first week she was here, she was as busy as me, helping to teach health sessions at school, getting to know my family more, eating the normal Q'eqchi meals and touring beautiful spots in my village. I also had her involved in the planning and creation of health sessions in the school giving her equal share of the duties.

Wanting to bring a new skill to the children of my village and regretting not learning more craft projects while in the States, I proposed that my sister run her own session as an after school extracurricular activity. My sister is great at making friendship bracelets, which are easy to make colorful bracelets that the students could enjoy. I figured this session could work on goals two and three and be a fun activity to counter-balance the usual health work that takes up most of my time. The session ran for four hours, giving the kids enough time to learn slowly, succeed, and be rewarded with a colorful bracelet.

With Peace Corps as a strong option my sister is looking towards for her near future, this had been a great direct experience for her to really test the waters and see what being a volunteer is all about. As the last day of her visit came to an end, I had my sister go through the MRE process of looking at a session. We were surprised with the number of students who had attend the bracelet session which was much more than we had estimated. It was at this moment that my sister said she was hooked and that once she reached home, she would start working on her Peace Corps application.



PCV's host sister during visit at his site learning about the work he does as a PCV

“I am excited to say that my CHW has not only helped me carry out my work at the village, but has also been a major motivator! I am extremely proud of the growth that I have seen in him. He is excited and motivated about the health of the village. None of the work that I am doing would be possible without him.”

Daniel—PCV Belize

FRQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who are the Peace Corps Volunteers and why do they choose to do this work?

Each year, thousands of Americans ages 18 and over, who are interested in public service abroad, apply to become Peace Corps Volunteers. One of the goals of the Peace Corps is to help the people of other countries gain a better understanding of Americans and our multicultural society. The agency actively recruits people with a variety of backgrounds and experiences to share with the communities where Volunteers serve around the globe. Americans who sign up for Peace Corps undergo a competitive and extensive year-long application process. Peace Corps attracts idealistic individuals willing to share their technical experience with others and eager to learn about other cultures.

What do Volunteers do?

Volunteers are trainers, mentors and change agents who partner with others in rural communities to improve the health of Belizeans on a day to day basis. Volunteers help to identify priorities and to use their own strengths and learn new skills to achieve that change.

Can Volunteers help secure funding for projects?

Peace Corps differs from other aid groups in that it has a unique development philosophy focused on building capacity for long-term sustainability. Volunteers can help train others in the area of fundraising and grant writing, but the emphasis must be on equipping others with these skills to ensure that when the Volunteer leaves, community members are able to carry out these activities independently.

How can I apply for a Volunteer?

Peace Corps will consider applications from involved and active community groups interested in working alongside a Volunteer who can provide training and technical support for a period of two years. Only communities with a willing Community Health Worker and/or school partner that meet the criteria set by Peace Corps will qualify. Volunteers do not provide financial support and they do not take the place of others to fill a job placement slot. If your community is interested in learning more, call Peace Corps Belize at 822-0340 or toll free 0800.Peace.BZ.

THANK YOU!

Thank you to the Belize Peace Corps Staff for their valuable feedback. A huge thank you to the Peace Corps Volunteers in Belize for providing their stories and photos.

A special note of thanks to the Communications Committee for putting the annual report together: Emily Griffith, Sarah Schafer, Braeanna Hillman, Melanie Emerson and Dora Najarro.

THANK YOU!



PCV with host family after home decorations for end of year holidays



PCV and GLOW girls enjoying dinner during GLOW camp



"Riguas" are typical mestizo tortillas made out of ground green corn, roasted and served hot with fresh cheese.

"My family is very large and very welcoming. Every night we sit around the table after dinner and they tell me about local medicine, illnesses and beliefs, Mayan legends and Obeah sorcery and other stories from the village. So neat, even if I do go to bed totally spooked afterwards."

Jade - PCV Belize

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