



DO's

- Eat healthy food like apples, dairy products, and grains.
- Brush and floss every day.
- Visit a dentist at least once a year.

DON'Ts

- Eat candy and other sugary foods/drinks (especially soda).
- Chew sugary gum.
- Eat junk food.
- Chew on ice.

Annual Report 2017



Peace Corps  
Belize



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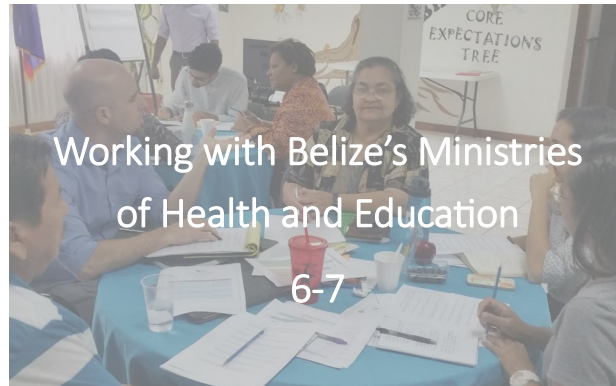
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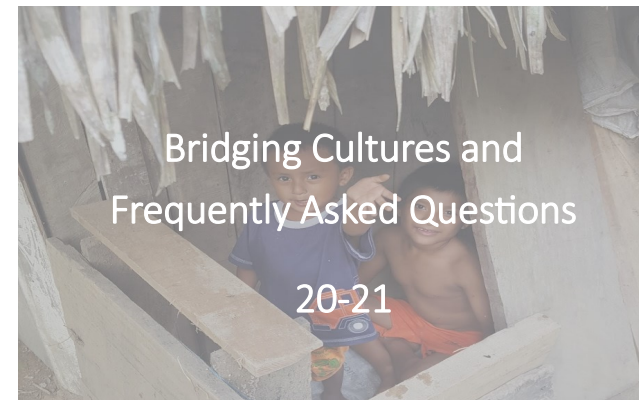
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## From the Country Director

Volunteers, Ministry counterparts, host families, village leaders and Peace Corps staff worked hard to make 2017 a year full of growth and learning, cultural exchange, and project successes. On a day-to-day basis, in all six districts of Belize, in Kriol, Q'eqchi and Spanish-speaking communities, two-year Volunteers lived with, integrated into, and collaborated with communities to implement the Rural Family Health Project, mirroring the Ministry of Health's national health priorities. In Belmopan, Peace Corps Response Volunteers were placed within and worked closely with the Ministry of Education to refine and test portions of Belize's forthcoming Literacy Intervention Project. Whether two years or six months, all these Volunteers worked with a dedicated array of Belizean counterparts, friends, families and community members to implement the three overarching goals of Peace Corps focused on skills transfer and cultural exchange. Each Volunteer strived to embody Peace Corps' core mission of worldwide peace and friendship through their work, relationships and experiences.

2017 marked Peace Corps 55th Anniversary in Belize, and this report highlights select milestones from those more than five decades working alongside and in concert with Belizeans. That longevity is a testament to the Peace Corps' commitment to the people of Belize. It is also a testament to Belizeans' camaraderie with and commitment to Volunteers by welcoming them with open arms, working collegially, offering warm hospitality, keeping them safe, and teaching them the cultures and languages of this great country.

This report is designed to provide an annual snapshot of Peace Corps' activities in Belize, including statistics and empirical data which chronicle the progress toward the goals of our formal and complementary projects, but also tell the stories that connect each one of us with the personal experiences, challenges and triumphs that are inherent in the Peace Corps experience. Through this report, please take some time to get to know the many efforts underway, accomplishments made, and visions being molded into reality across the country.

It has been a year of learning, growth and progress and I would like to thank everyone who made this work and collaboration possible – communities, host families, local leaders and organizations, Ministry counterparts and officials, Peace Corps staff and, of course, Volunteers. I look forward with great anticipation to witnessing the continued advancement of our collective goals for Belize and Peace Corps' mission of worldwide peace and friendship.

Melanie Emerson  
Country Director, Peace Corps Belize





# Peace Corps History in Belize



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 remained the same. These goals are as relevant today as they were 55 years ago:

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

Over the past 56 years, nearly 220,000 Volunteers have served in more than 140 countries, providing training in the areas of health, education, business, information technology, environment, agriculture, and youth development.

In 1962, the first group of Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in what was then British Honduras. Since then, 2,030 Volunteers have served in Belize. They have worked primarily in:

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

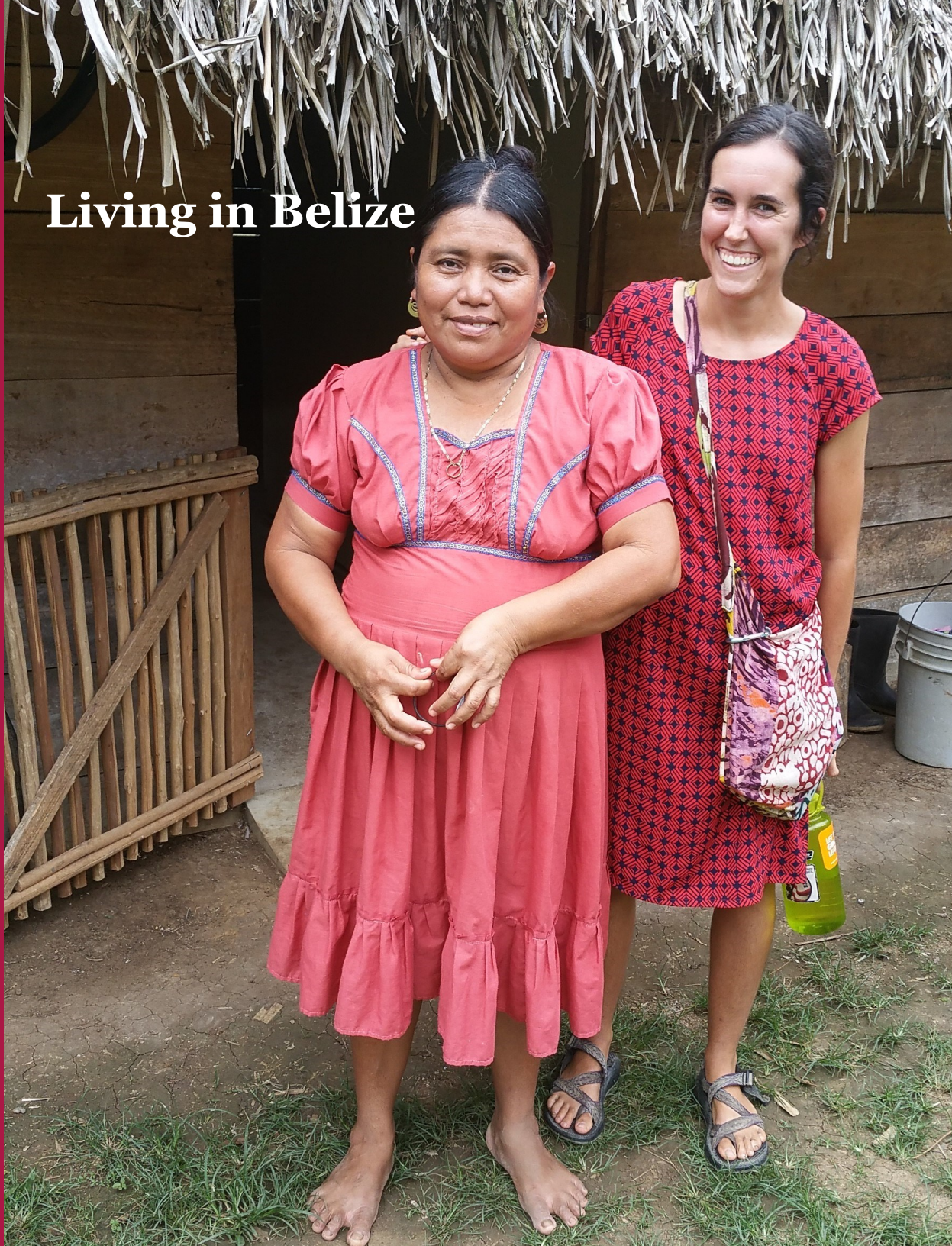
Volunteers have been assigned to NGOs, government organizations, schools and businesses, and reside within Belizean communities to improve the quality of life of Belizeans.

In 2012, Peace Corps Belize initiated the Rural Family Health Project (RFHP) in close collaboration with Belize's Ministry of Health (MOH), focusing on health education and promotion in rural communities. Since the RFHP was launched, a total of 105 Volunteers have served in over 60 rural communities in all districts of Belize.

In addition to its work with the Ministry of Health, Peace Corps works closely with the Ministry of Education to deliver the Health and Family Life Education curriculum in rural schools. This year, Peace Corps and the Ministry of Education formally expanded their partnership to include early childhood literacy through specialized Peace Corps Response Volunteers.



## Living in Belize



Volunteers in Belize are placed in rural communities with populations ranging from about 250 to 4,000 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.

In 2013, Belize launched the 27-month Homestay Program for Volunteers which requires Volunteer to live with host families, throughout their service. Under the Homestay Program, Trainees are placed with a host family for eleven weeks of Pre-Service Training (PST) in Community-Based Training sites. Once they are sworn in as Volunteers they then live with another host family for their two-year service in their permanent sites.

Volunteers learn one of three local Belizean languages assigned: Kriol, Q'eqchi or Spanish. Formal language training continues throughout Pre-Service Training, but Volunteers augment their learning through daily interactions with their host families and community members. Throughout PST, the host family assists the Trainee with language learning, community integration and with adaptation to the intricacies and nuances of Belizean culture. Living with host families also enhances the security, as they provide invaluable advice and guidance related to safety and cultural norms.

While each Belizean household is different, all Volunteer accommodations with host families are modest. Volunteers share common living areas with host families but each Volunteer has a private room, a bed, a chair and a table to work on. By coming to live in a rural village, all Volunteers leave behind an accustomed lifestyle and understand that living with a host family in Belize requires an open mind, cultural sensitivity, patience, and flexibility. The rewards, they also realize, are immeasurable.

Besides adopting a different lifestyle, Volunteers also learn to work with Belizean counterparts throughout their service. In their villages, they work with Community Health Workers, Rural Health Nurses, school principals, teachers, village councils, alcaldes, youth groups, women's groups and church leaders, among others. Volunteers develop strong alliances with these counterparts and carry out their activities and projects collaboratively.

Ultimately, Volunteers engage with Belizeans in a rich cultural exchange which furthers Peace Corps' mission of promoting world peace and friendship.





1973-1979 Peace Corps Volunteers are assigned to organizations in Belize assisting with projects involving marine biology, veterinary labs, English language, athletics, special education, engineering, construction, agronomy, and telecommunications.



Late 1980's & 1990's—Peace Corps Volunteers write management plans for Guanacaste National Park, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, Tapir Mountain & Cockscomb Basin and advance environmental education for the Green Iguana Project and the Belize Zoo.

Mid 1990's - Early 2000's—Peace Corps Volunteers support the fledgling Educational Services toward inclusive education for hearing- and sight-impaired students; participate in Special Olympics, and Stella M. ...

Mid 1980's Peace Corps Volunteers worked with Ministry of Education to construct teacher housing in rural villages in Stann Creek and Toledo districts to attract and retain teachers.

1962— Belize receives its first group of Peace Corps Volunteers. These are assigned mainly to schools teaching English and to the Agricultural Department of Belize.



Early 1980's Peace Corps Volunteers work with primary schools on the Rural Education and Agriculture Program (REAP); Belize School of Agriculture opens 1986.





# 55 Years in Belize!

2000's Peace Corps worked with Education Support for the new and on efforts of at-risk and at-impaired physically delayed children. Partnered with Rotary, BCVI and Marris.



2012— Peace Corps Belize bypasses its training class to revise its programs and signs a Memorandum of Understanding with Belize's Ministry of Health to focus primarily on rural community health education. Peace Corps introduces the homestay program in which Volunteers live with host families for their 27-month service.

2013—The 1st group of Peace Corps Belize Health Volunteers commence their service in Belize under the Rural Family Health Project.



2006-2010— Peace Corps Volunteers are assigned to different organizations and rural communities focusing on 4 main projects— Health, Education, Youth Development and Organization/Business Development.



2016— Peace Corps Belize signs Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education for Response Volunteers. The first group of Response Volunteers work closely with the Ministry of Education on an Early Childhood Literacy Intervention Program.



2018 - Peace Corps Belize moves into its new home on George Price Blvd in Belmopan





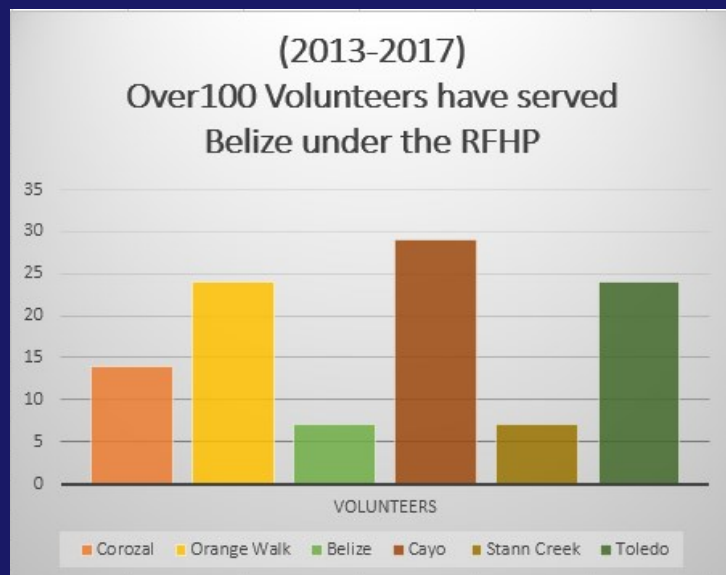
Launched in 2013, the Rural Family Health Project (RFHP) is implemented in close collaboration with the Belizean Ministry of Health to address the country's priority areas of maternal, neonatal and child health and chronic, non-communicable diseases.

The purpose of the RFHP is to support Belizean rural families in adopting positive behaviors to improve and maintain their health. 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

In order to implement behavior change interventions in their communities, Peace Corps Volunteers work along with their main counterparts (Community Health Workers and school educators) as well as with village leaders, Rural Health Nurses and MOH District Health Educators to plan, coordinate and implement health promotion, education and training activities.

September 2017 marked 4 years since the RFHP was introduced. In the past year alone, over 10,000 Belizeans in rural communities across the country have benefitted from health education and health promotion activities on topics aimed at improving and maintaining health.



**Working with the Ministry of Health: The Rural Family Health Project**



Established approximately 20 years ago, Peace Corps Response (PCR) is a lesser known Peace Corps program that sends experienced professionals to undertake short-term (3 to 12 months), high-impact assignments in communities around the world. This year, Peace Corps Belize worked with Belize's Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture (MOE) to incorporate four PCR Literacy Intervention Specialists into the MOE's important work on increasing literacy in Belize.

While discussions between Peace Corps and the MOE regarding collaboration on literacy initiatives date back to 2014, planning for a formal partnership through PCR began in August 2016. And on May 23rd, 2017, four Peace Corps Volunteers stepped off a plane at Philip Goldson Airport to begin a six month assignment with the MOE. The Volunteers arrived with more than one hundred fifty years of combined experience in teaching literacy, reading recovery, training trainers, and school administration. This vast experience was leveraged toward the MOE Literacy Intervention Project's goal of ensuring all students will either a) be reading fluently and accurately at or above their grade level or b) be the subject of appropriate, targeted interventions. The Volunteers worked tirelessly with their MOE counterparts to revise a teacher manual and accompanying literacy intervention toolkit, train teachers on its use in and out of the classroom, evaluate its effectiveness, and submit a comprehensive report and recommendations to senior MOE management.

A June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 Memorandum of Understanding between Peace Corps and the MOE to develop projects and activities in the early childhood literacy sector through the assignment of Peace Corps Response Volunteers ensures the collaboration will continue and Peace Corps expects to welcome a second cohort of PCR Volunteers in 2018 to further the work being done through the partnership.



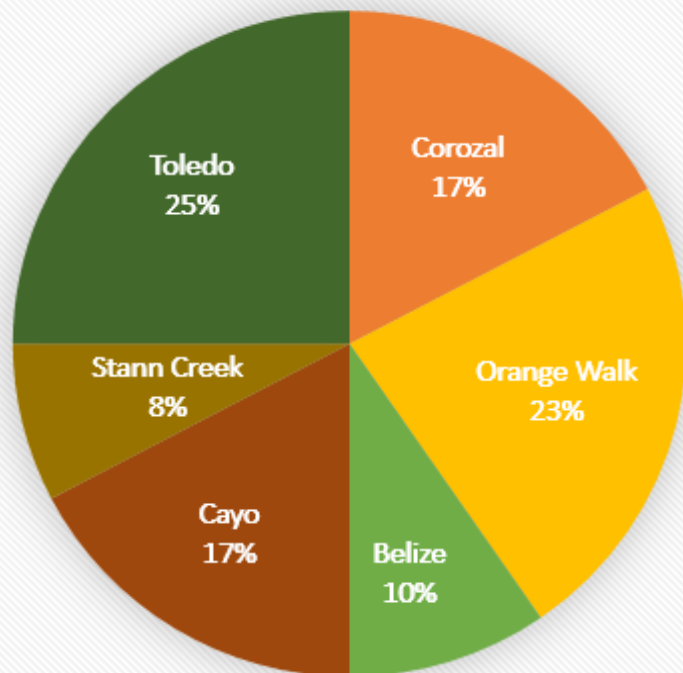
## Expanded Partnership with the Ministry of Education: Early Childhood Literacy Intervention Program



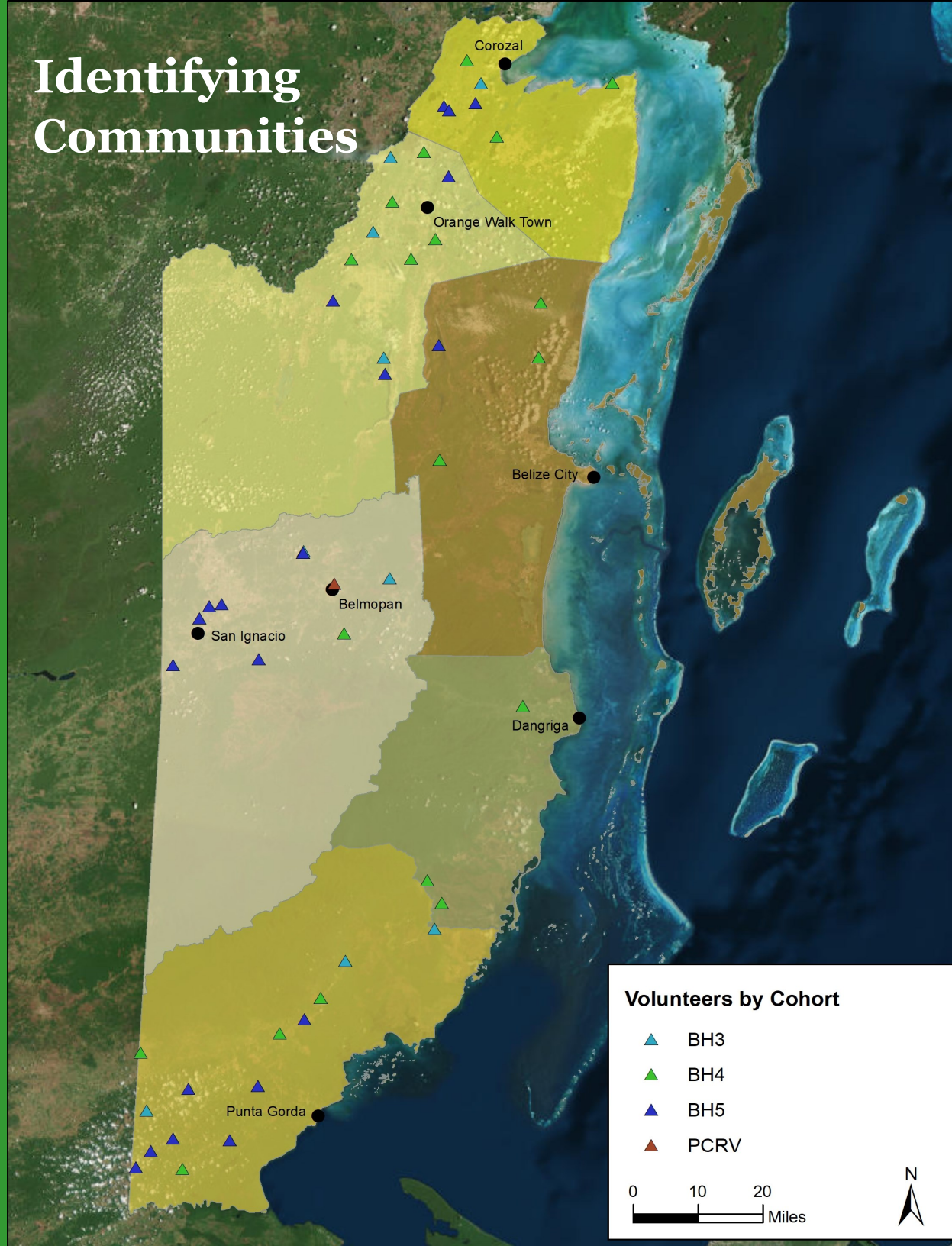
In close collaboration with Belize's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health, Peace Corps Belize undertakes a rigorous process every year to identify and select rural communities to host new Volunteers. This process involves a series of meetings between Peace Corps staff and Ministry officials, village leaders, prospective counterparts, other community members and currently-serving Volunteers to gauge buy-in, discuss needs, select and cultivate host families, and develop plans for working with the incoming Volunteers.

Peace Corps selects which of the interested communities will receive Volunteers based on factors such as safety and security, language, community needs, host family availability and counterpart interest. In 2017, Volunteers lived and worked in 52 Belizean villages with predominant Q'eqchi, Kriol or Mestizo culture. Since 2013, over 60 rural communities in all six districts have benefitted from the RFHP.

### Over 60 communities benefited from the RFHP in 2017



## Identifying Communities





# Working with Belizeans



Throughout their service, Volunteers do not work alone; rather, they work very closely with Belizean counterparts. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with village leaders, identifies and trains Community Health Workers who are volunteers themselves and who work closely with Rural Health Nurses, District Health Educators, Peace Corps Volunteers and other community members. Together they plan and carry out various activities promoting healthy living with emphasis on maternal and child health (MCH) and non-communicable diseases (NCD), as per the goals of the RFHP. Some of these activities include: community health fairs, promoting school or backyard gardens, home visits, NCD open houses and educational sessions, physical fitness programs, lessons on maintaining healthy pregnancies and promoting exclusive breastfeeding, sessions addressing childhood illnesses and malnutrition, hygiene education and sanitation projects.

Volunteers also work extensively in the local primary schools. In the schools, they work closely with the school principals, vice principals and teachers. Together they work to educate children on health-related topics such as nutrition, exercise and hygiene by co-teaching the Health and Family Life Education and Physical Education Curriculum with classroom teachers.

Besides their primary projects with Community Health Workers and schools, Volunteers also work with their many counterparts on secondary projects that benefit the community. Some work with the elected village officials, youth leaders or women's group leaders on activities such as re-vamping libraries, developing literacy programs, involving youth in extracurricular activities, organizing summer camps for children or other community events.

Counterparts play a central role in the lives of Volunteers during their service. While Volunteers share their expertise with counterparts and help to build their capacity in technical aspects of their work, counterparts similarly share their knowledge, skills and experience with Volunteers, providing invaluable assistance in navigating the many cultural differences between their home and the host country. Counterparts and Volunteers leave long-lasting impacts on each other's lives and on the lives of the people they serve.



## Empowering with Knowledge



Malnutrition is a significant problem facing many Q'eqchi' communities across Toledo District. This issue leads to developmental and health problems, such as child stunting and non-communicable diseases. Lack of access to vegetables is a major contributor to malnutrition.

To combat this issue and teach a valuable life skill—how to grow your own food—the school teachers and I worked together to launch the village's first annual home garden contest. Eleven interested students and their families constructed impressive beds out of all natural and recycled materials, and seeds were supplied. To build capacity, my primary counterpart and I conducted home visits every two weeks and held three home garden training sessions that covered the importance of eating vegetables as well as basic organic gardening techniques, such as natural insect repellents, composting, and seed storage for sustainability. Plenty Belize hosted the final meeting, and the whole school and many interested community members attended. Finally, an award ceremony was held in which four official winners were awarded garden tools, and all participants received consolation prizes and Certificates of *Vegcellence*. Gardens produced calaloo, cucumbers, and watermelon. One family of nine ate calaloo for the first time! Several families are now consuming more vegetables and employing newly learned skills.

After successful completion of the first contest, many community members are excited to participate in next year's competition, and my local counterparts are equipped with the knowledge and motivation to carry on this project long after I leave.

—Grace



# Empowering with Knowledge



It was the first week of pre-school. A four-year-old boy was playing in the school's playground. As he prepared to go down the slide, he grabbed a rope hanging on the nearby swing-set and wrapped himself with it. When he launched down the slide, the rope caught his neck, choking him. While his teachers were distributing snacks to the rest of the class, a bystander saw the situation and immediately reacted. She speedily jumped the playground fence and released the rope from the child's neck. He was flushed, unable to speak, and rapidly breathing. As the teachers became aware of the situation, they ran over to comfort him, and decided that they would tell his parents what happened during pick-up time.

Within minutes, news of this situation swarmed through the village. His parents began to receive phone calls from family and friends about the situation. They sped from work to his classroom only to find him perfectly fine. After managing the situation, the Principal sat down with me and said, "We need to establish safety protocol for our school." I then suggested that we organize a teacher workshop on how to respond to common emergencies. And so, with the joint effort of the school administrators, the Red Cross and myself, we certified nine teachers and two school administrators in Adult, Child, and Infant First Aid/CPR.

As heart disease remains the number one cause of death worldwide, skills such as CPR and First Aid are becoming of even greater importance. Peace Corps Volunteers in the Rural Family Health Project work in the field with community leaders to address health-related challenges in areas where resources are scarce and the need is great. As a former American Red Cross Instructor, I was able to work alongside local counterparts in training community leaders to administer these life-saving skills. By empowering them with this vital knowledge, my counterparts and I helped to increase the preparedness and response of the community leaders for future health and safety concerns.

— Morris





## Counting Successes

### Goal 1

#### Improving Maternal and Child Health

1727

Individuals were educated on the prevention of common childhood illnesses



595

Individuals were educated on essential maternal care services



475

Individuals were educated on exclusive breastfeeding



336

Individuals adopted a new behavior to reduce the risk of under-nutrition in children under 5



177

Mothers reported exclusively breastfeeding infants for their first six months





# The Rural Family Health Project

## Goal 2

### Reducing the risk of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases

4042

Individuals were educated on Non-Communicable Diseases



3967

Individuals were educated on the importance of daily physical activity



2892

Individuals demonstrated how to properly wash hands



2100

Individuals were able to identify ways to incorporate physical activity into their daily routine



1914

Individuals showed improvement in knowledge of Non-Communicable Diseases



730

Individuals were educated on harmful effects of alcohol and other substances



408

Individuals reported consuming 3 servings of fruits or vegetables and 1 protein in a day



355

Individuals demonstrated how to prepare complementary foods and make a nutritious meal





# Integrating Wellness



Children are always looking for outlets to express their energy, searching for attention and guidance, and are motivated by a fun time. Specifically, boys in Standards 4, 5, and 6 need this ever so more as they proceed through critical years of social development. With this in mind, I reached out to two proactive and positive-minded individuals in the village about starting a BRO (Boys Reaching Out) club. They were both interested and we then met and discussed how to help develop these young boys into capable and productive young men who will be positive contributors in their community. Excitement was running through the school when BRO was announced, and continued to grow once the boys knew that along with me, these two men will be leading the club.

There is a large disparity on childhood development, and it is very clear when you talk to these children about their emotions, friendships, self-expression, and role models. The two leaders expressed to me their desire to guide the children through their development and help them along. Over the course of a few months, we have seen these boys develop socially much more quickly than originally expected. Their newfound understanding and respect for rules and for each other has been monumental. The kind words has been inspirational, and their ability to work together has been proof of strategic programming from the leaders.

Looking ahead, my counterparts and I are very excited to bring our boys to BRO Camp 2018, where they will have the chance to learn more soft skills, and have a chance to put these new skills to the test, along side boys from every district in Belize. The boys will have an incredible chance to learn from guest speakers, game situations, cooking in the kitchen, and working with their team leader. There is no ceiling for these children.

We are thrilled about what has been achieved thus far, and are even more excited to see the potential in this growing group of boys and what they can give back to their families, communities and country.

—Nick



When I arrived to my village, I discovered that many people were eager for the new Volunteer to start a Zumba group. After a month of women expressing interest, I decided on a time and place for the workout group.

On day one, I had four participants. The women were timid and unsure of the equipment-free, bodyweight exercises I was demonstrating. They giggled as they attempted push-ups, burpees, and sit-ups. They breathed heavily and took breaks. I reassured them that the first day would be the hardest. Sure enough, over a year later, the class looks quite different. About 15 women come regularly. They are good friends, which helps keep them motivated. The women are proud of their progress. They have more confidence in their bodies, knowledge of fitness and nutrition, and ability to lead. When I am unable to attend, they plan amongst themselves so practices continue.

In addition to knowledge about nutrition, exercise, and weight loss, the women have achieved a difficult behavior change. For my 15 regulars, workout is part of their daily schedule. Since it has become a habit, I am confident they will be able to continue this positive health change indefinitely. From our fitness checks, I have witnessed every woman either lose or maintain her weight. The greatest weight loss is 30 pounds, with an average of 12 pounds. Additionally, all of the women's pulse rates (upon physical exertion) have decreased. Their maximum number of push-ups and sit-ups has also universally increased. Short-term benefits include weight loss, fitness and nutrition education. Long-term benefits include reduction in chronic, non-communicable diseases, women empowerment, capacity building, friendship, and improved self-esteem. The group also provides inspiration for the community as a whole. Villagers see, on a daily basis, that anyone can take the steps to live a healthier life.

- Eileen



## Integrating Wellness



This year, our village has not just developed a new health center, but it has developed the volunteer force needed to make it a real service to the community. Community leaders, the Health Committee and I found out early on through a needs assessment in the village that a health center was a strong need of the community. We were lucky to have a donor approach the village to meet that need right away.

This center and its monthly clinics came with a good deal of extra work for the Community Health Workers (CHWs) though, so as a team, help was recruited. Active community members were found to take over the management of the clinic, improving it step by step to better serve the community and doctors. Two new CHWs were recruited, who work hard to extend community education and outreach, especially bringing in new patients to attend the monthly medical clinics. The team believes that if well used, the medical clinics could be expanded to become bimonthly or even weekly.

The new CHWs and the Health Committee, together, drive the group forward. There are also other community members who are excited to be learning new skills and come to every clinic to do their part and more.

So far, the success lies in the dedicated community volunteers who are already showing improvements in the skills that Peace Corps and the Ministry of Health strive to instill as part of their goals and objectives. The increase in leadership shows a strong promise of sustainability for our work in the Rural Family Health Project for years to come.

- Grant



# Advancing Community Health Priorities





## Advancing Community Health Priorities

The beginning of 2017 kicked off the implementation phase of my village's latrine project. Thanks to Peace Corps Partnership Program and Water Charity, a years' worth of data collection and project design was put into action. The project commenced with the newly formed Latrine Project Committee of nine community members attending a two-day workshop through a local non-governmental organization. Participants attended sessions on different ways to manage waste and the benefits of latrines, the construction of the composting latrine, and the management of the latrine. The Committee, consisting of both men and women, had the opportunity to gain knowledge on sustainable waste management and how it can translate into sustainable farming practices by using the safe and clean compost produced by the latrines. Ideas were shared and the next steps for the project were outlined for a successful implementation.

After returning from the training, the committee members facilitated information sessions in their respective churches to share what they had learned at the training. Each of the five churches held their sessions providing for further discussion with all community members. The members of the Latrine Committee used the skills and knowledge they learned to confirm their roles as project leaders.

The goal of this project was not only to provide five latrines, but to create a knowledge base and skillset among community members that they can use in the future to build latrines for their households. The idea is that this project is phase one of a larger community wide latrine construction project to provide families with clean and sustainable latrines.

The project continued with hands-on latrine construction training in the village and subsequent building of the latrines and hand washing stations by the church members.

— Amanda





## Furthering Community Goals

While doing a community assessment, the village's school principal and I saw the need for better literacy among the school children and decided to put our hands into action. We started by working with the teachers of the lower division and along with them, we worked individually with some of the kids who were struggling with reading. We also conducted occasional reading/writing lesson with the classes. Later, during a random conversation with the principal we thought of repurposing an old library that had been abandoned and locked up for several years. After hours and hours of hard work, we turned the old library into a new, welcoming, neatly organized library where the kids enjoyed going to read books.

When the library was fully functioning we started having weekly "Library Days", where weekly each class would come to the library and the kids would pick a new book to read. Over the summer school break, I continued the "Library Days" but expanded them to include more reading and literacy activities. Over 30 kids came out at different times over the summer and there was an average of 20 students each day. When the school year started again, we continued with the weekly "Library Days" and began including more educational elements. With the young kids, we read stories aloud and asked questions to test reading comprehension. With the middle and older kids, we ask them to give a summary aloud of the books we read and then read a story together, aloud. We also created a "Reading Stars" program where students earned stars for reading books.

Over the many months of this program, the school teachers, principal and I have really been able to see improvements in many students' abilities to read and comprehend their reading. The library renovations and the library program have been a huge success. The teachers and students are proud of the space and the teachers are excited about moving more encyclopedia and resource books into the library so that they can use the space more often. We have also chosen and trained a library committee of students and they are very proud to have been selected for this leadership opportunity and are taking it very seriously.

- Adria Z.



For months and months, our community noted the dire condition of our local health clinic. The tattered walls, dusty bare floors and echoing empty space left a grim impression on those who used the space. As our monthly mobile clinics continued, we noticed a slight drop in the attendance at each clinic day. For those in attendance, many of the children were experiencing stunted growth, and mothers were suffering from diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. The mothers routinely expressed their concern of their family's health, and the state of our clinic. My counterparts and I envisioned a clean, inviting renovated clinic that had a kitchen space for healthy cooking demonstrations to combat effects of malnutrition.

Over the next several months, we were able to draft and fund a grant to implement a clinic renovation project. With the help of a local youth group, the Belize Youth Movement, we were able to begin our project. Over the course of 5 days, we washed the inside and outside walls of the clinic, and painted over 6,000 square feet of wall space. After painting, we identified a local craftsman who leveled, sealed, cut, and placed over 1,000 square feet of tile. Local counterparts and myself also constructed a small kitchen inside the clinic space. Lastly, a local mural artist painted a large mural inside the clinic space, serving as a growth chart for the children.

A few weeks after the health center was renovated, we held an inauguration ceremony. Several community members, representatives from the Ministry of Health, and myself all spoke to the audience. Our ceremony served as a formal invitation to the community to utilize the clinic for health services and education, as well as to give the people a better understanding of Peace Corps and what can be accomplished with the collaboration of local counterparts. During my speech I outlined the goals and objectives we accomplished during the project and called the community to not only continue to open their hearts to Volunteers and Peace Corps, but to work together in the spirit of peace and friendship. To conclude the inauguration ceremony we cut the ribbon and everyone was introduced to their new renovated clinic.

This event and project will hopefully imbue the community with a renewed sense of ownership over their health and serve to unify the community as a demonstration of collaboration and vision.

- Matt H.



## Furthering Community Goals





## Bridging Cultures

In November 2017, I prepared a traditional American Thanksgiving lunch for my extended host family, counterparts, and village friends at the beautiful lagoon in my site. Everyone enjoyed learning about how my family at home in the U.S. celebrates this holiday with food and sharing in one another's company. My host siblings assisted me in preparing games that we all played after the meal, which were more typical to Belize customs at social gatherings. The event was a beautiful exchange of American and Belizean cultures and was a great integration tool in my first few months at site.

- Emily



One of my favorite American holidays and traditions is Thanksgiving. I love spending the time preparing a feast for my loved ones that I haven't seen for years and getting to share stories and create new memories as we laugh and talk about fond memories. This year I was saddened that I wouldn't have the chance to spend this cherished holiday at home with my family but instead of thinking of it negatively I took it as a chance to share this honored tradition with my host family and some of my extended family. My host mom and I spent days cooking and preparing different dishes to combine both traditional American Thanksgiving dishes with popular dishes in Belize. What we ended up with was stewed chicken, mashed potatoes, tortillas, biscuits and apple pie for dessert. My host mom asked me to sit at the head of the table and explain all about Thanksgiving and why it is celebrated in the United States. It was a wonderful celebration that I know I'll remember for years to come.

- Lissette



Whenever I mention to someone outside Belize that I am a PCV in a Mestizo Spanish speaking community their response is "you probably fit perfectly"; however, integrating in a Mestizo community as a Latina was not easy. In one of the first conversations I had with my host mother, she said "I was expecting a *gringa*". At the beginning of my service I was constantly reminding people that I, too, was American; even though I was born in Peru, I lived most of my life in the U.S. It seemed that not being born in the US discredited my credentials, and somehow I found myself talking less about my Peruvian heritage. Not much time passed for my village to get to know me and I can honestly say I couldn't be in a better place. They now know how proud I am to be Peruvian and at the same time I represent the U.S., and now they take me as one of them. I am blessed to have found my third home.

- Claudia



## 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. Peace Corps actively recruits people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences to share with the communities they will serve around the globe. Americans who apply to the Peace Corps undergo a competitive and extensive year-long application process. Peace Corps attracts idealistic individuals who are willing to share their technical experience with others and are eager to learn about other cultures.

## What do Volunteers do in Belize?

Volunteers are trainers, teachers and mentors. They are agents of change who partner with locals in rural villages to identify community needs, establish educational priorities and apply their skills, knowledge and experience on a daily basis to improve the health of Belizeans.

## Can Volunteers help secure funding for projects?

Peace Corps differs from aid groups in that it has a unique development philosophy focused on building human 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 to serve in my community?

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 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 hosting a Volunteer, call Peace Corps Belize at 822-0276.

# Frequently Asked Questions







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