

ANNUAL REPORT

2020



**Peace
Corps**
BELIZE



Children playing football on a rainy and muddy day!

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Message from the Country Director

2020 just may go down in modern history as the most unprecedented year in the 21st century. The COVID-19 pandemic upended so many aspects of our plans, our hopes – our very lives. Given the far reaching implications of the pandemic, it might be difficult to applaud ourselves for anything that took place during this year. Nevertheless, this annual report is an ideal opportunity for Peace Corps Belize and its partners to look back and reflect on all of the achievements of the past year.

For the first time in its existence, in 2020, Peace Corps saw the global evacuation of Volunteers due to the pandemic. While Belize has felt the tremendous void left by the absence of Volunteers, Post experienced a lot of changes and transitions during the year. For instance, the Peace Corps Belize Rural Family Health Program (RFHP) underwent a program redesign. Post's programmatic emphasis shifted from partnership and work with community health workers to a school-based focus on health education. This modification marks Peace Corps' continued support to strengthen Belize's priority to educate youth about healthy lifestyle and practices. As the country continues to strive to address low literacy rates, the Response initiative was still needed.

Post continued to liaise and engage with its national partners, counterparts, and host families to reaffirm Peace Corps' commitment to its partnerships. The 58 year long relationship continues to be an indication of Peace Corps' dedication to the people of Belize and to working toward the country's development on its own terms. Though the majority of this year was without Volunteers, we thank community members, host families, ministry counterparts and local leaders who worked with and hosted these American citizens while they were in-country.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who helped Peace Corps Belize navigate 2020. I stand assured that when the time is right and the conditions are safe, Volunteers, local staff, and Belizean communities will continue to work collaboratively to advance Belize's development goals and Peace Corps' mission of world peace and friendship.

Sincerely,
Tracey Hébert-Seck,
Country Director, Peace Corps Belize

The Peace Corps 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 at the inception:

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 60 years, more than 250,000 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, 2,090 Volunteers have served in Belize, working primarily in Education, Youth Development, Health, Small Business Development, and Environment. Volunteers have been assigned to NGOs, government organizations, schools and businesses, and have resided within Belizean communities to improve the quality of life of Belizeans by supporting the Belizean government's development goals. In 2020 Volunteers lived and worked in 40 rural villages and 6 towns with predominant Q'eqchi, Kriol or Mestizo cultures.

In 2012 Peace Corps Belize began collaborating with the Ministry of Health and since 2013 Volunteers and local counterparts have been working, under the Rural Family Health Project, to educate Belizeans on maternal and child health and non-communicable diseases. Since then, 70 rural communities in all six districts have benefitted from the RFHP.

In 2017, Peace Corps Belize began supporting the Ministry of Education's National Literacy Strategy to have all standard one (U.S. Grade 2) students reading at grade level or receiving targeted literacy intervention by bringing Peace Corps Response Volunteers (PCRVs) to work with standard 1 teachers and principals. Since that time 18 PCRVs have served in 5 District Education Centers.

On March 15, 2020 Peace Corps Director Jody Olsen made the difficult decision to temporarily suspend all Peace Corps operations globally and evacuate all of our Volunteers. The decision to reopen Belize will require a thorough review by a panel of subject matter experts at Peace Corps Headquarters, along with approvals by senior office heads and the Director. Peace Corps Headquarters in Washington, D.C. and Peace Corps Belize staff are committed to the reopening process.

A photograph of three people standing in a greenhouse. On the left is a man in a light blue button-down shirt and white pants. In the center is a woman wearing a bright pink short-sleeved blouse with a colorful floral pattern on the hem and a grey skirt. On the right is a woman in a red polo shirt and black pants. They are all smiling. The greenhouse has a blue plastic covering and metal support structure. Large green leafy plants are visible in the foreground and background.

RPCV Elizabeth and her counterparts at their greenhouse (a project collaboration).

Upon coming to my site, I quickly learned that improving the quality of life is something the community was trying to improve upon. The previous Peace Corps Volunteer and the Community Health Worker (CHW) had worked on a latrine project that assisted 15 families in obtaining latrines. During meetings with the village leaders, they brought up the importance of continuing with another latrine project to benefit the remaining 19 families. The CHW and I created a schedule of events that would lead to the completion of the project through the grant process of Peace Corps.

The CHW and I went to each of the 19 families and introduced the project to them. We also held a brief presentation on the importance of proper hygiene and why it's important to use a latrine instead of practicing open defecation. We conducted a needs assessment to confirm their willingness to contribute labor for the construction and lumber for the superstructure. We explained to them that the grant would only provide funds for cement and the zinc roofing. All the families were eager to participate in community led education sessions explaining the importance of proper hygiene, waste removal and latrine maintenance.

RPCV Matt and his community school principal.



The next step was to fill out the Peace Corps grant application form. The CHW was very familiar with the whole process so we went through and filled out each portion of the application over the span of a couple of days. We had to visit the local cement store to get quotes on all the supplies we'd need covered by the grant. After submitting the application, we were prepared to have a meeting with the Peace Corps Grant Committee but, unfortunately, I was evacuated along with all other Volunteers due to COVID-19, so we could not go through with the grant.

While the project was never really able to get off the ground, I am confident that the community will be able to apply for a grant from a different source now that I'm gone. They were in complete control of the project, as I was there mainly for guidance and to assist with writing. Also the community members who had been a part of the project up until my departure gained an enhanced understanding of the importance of proper hygiene and sanitation. They learned a great deal about the grant application process and harnessed their abilities to come up with compelling reasons for an external resource to help them out." - RPCV Matt

“Community in the lead”

(by RPCV Matt, 2019 - 2020)



Peace Corps Belize Post-Evacuation

Following the evacuation of all Volunteers worldwide in March 2020, Peace Corps Belize had to make significant changes to its operations due to the pandemic. Staff transitioned to teleworking from home while coming to terms with what Peace Corps without Volunteers meant in their daily work lives. Zoom, WhatsApp, Skype, and phone calls became the norm with only limited, essential staff going to the office. Understanding that staff needed flexibility and empathetic support, Peace Corps Headquarters, from Director Olson on down, emphasized a policy of "maximum flexibility" understanding the far reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals and families.

Peace Corps globally, and in Belize, recognizes that our staff are the backbone of the organization and our most important resource. As a result, Peace Corps Belize remained fully staffed throughout 2020 and will continue to do so until it is safe for Volunteers to return.

Since March 2020 Peace Corps Belize staff have focused on a number of areas:

1. First and foremost, planning and preparing for the return of Volunteers when the conditions in the U.S. and Belize allow for their safe return.
2. Partnership engagement with our Ministry counterparts
3. Supporting evacuated Volunteers as they navigated their next steps after the close of their service.
4. Staff development of knowledge and skills covering a range of topics:
 - Intercultural Competence, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ICDEI)
 - Leadership, Management, and Supervision
 - Online course instructional design and development
 - Graphic design and video editing
 - Health and Wellness during Pandemic Stress
 - Emotional Intelligence and Mindfulness
 - Best Practice Methodologies with global Peace Corps staff

Staff has drawn on the advice they often give to Volunteers to remain flexible, practice resilience and self-care, and to accept what is outside of our control. Staff remains committed to the Peace Corps Mission of world peace and friendship and looks forward to the day they can welcome Peace Corps Volunteers back to Belize!

“My service to Belize through Peace Corps”

(by Anthony Williams, General Services Manager)

“

It was 1988, while working at my previous job, the Chamber of Commerce, when a vacancy for a General Services Clerk at Peace Corps was shared with me and my co-workers were encouraging me to apply. Wanting to know more about the vacancy and Peace Corps, I reached out to a co-worker who happened to be Peace Corps Volunteer Walter Jerkins, back then. Walter gave me only positive information about Peace Corps and encouraged me to apply as well. Walter's information and a conversation with my supervisor gave me the final push to apply for the position. The next thing I knew was that I was working for Peace Corps!

The idea of working for an international organization and the whole Peace Corps culture was new and different to me but I think it is one of the things I enjoy the most until present date. This keeps me interested in my job and motivates me to continue working here. You have to have love and passion for what you do. I am a firm believer that you have to enjoy what you do. I enjoy what I do! I enjoy it every day! Having a change in management from time to time, working with different people from different backgrounds, seeing different cultures; from Belize and abroad, and much more are opportunities that not all organizations provide. This, and many other things, I think helps staff develop personally and professionally. Peace Corps cares for their staff. They provide opportunities for training and for personal development.

So why do I continue working for Peace Corps? I think that from the early days I have always been proud of the accomplishments of Peace Corps and I see this in my country. I saw the benefits in every community I visited that had a volunteer working there. I saw computer labs, science labs, gardens, libraries, health fairs, sports clubs, environmental clubs, one of the first agricultural colleges in Belize, one of the first vocational trainings in Belize City, marine biology work and even a photo lab. And there were much more, these were just to name a few. I saw so many things that Peace Corps Volunteers have contributed to my country and I'm proud to have been there supporting them. I saw all those things hands-on and that motivates me to continue working for Peace Corps.



I can go on and on with my years with Peace Corps, but I will close by saying that longevity at a job comes with genuinely enjoying what you do. Waking up every day looking forward to enjoying the work that you are about to do. The moment you do not feel that anymore, I think it is time for self-reflection and asking yourself “why am I not happy doing what I'm doing?”

- Anthony, General Services Manager



“Grateful for the Journey”

(by Michelle Arnold, Program Manager, YHWP)

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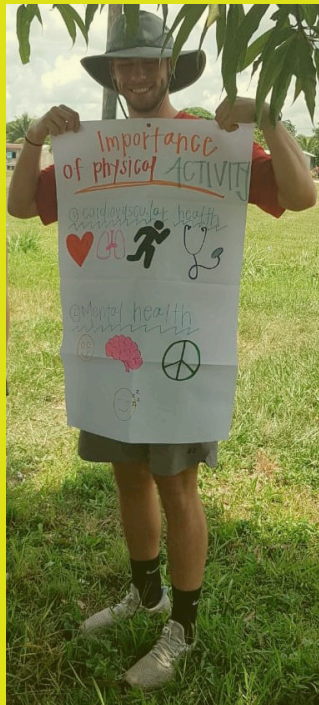
My journey of service started many years ago as a college undergraduate at the University of Illinois when I dared to venture of campus to the other side of the railroad tracks in my small college town. Working with school-aged children in an after-school and free breakfast program, coordinating monthly parent dinners and even volunteering as a flag football coach were tremendously meaningful and became the joys of my life. The impact of those experiences and relationships influenced me to change my college major from Biology to Sociology. Eventually I earned a Master’s degree in Youth and Community Development Management. I later went on to serve on the board of directors for a few non-profit organizations who empowered and gave voice to marginalized people. This experience was the bridge to a unique opportunity to participate as a delegate in the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism Prep-Conference in Geneva, Switzerland.

Over the years, my belief has remained steadfast in the capacity of individuals to be resilient and transform their lives when they are seen, supported and empowered. My values, professional and personal life experiences delivered me to the doors of Peace Corps Belize in 2018. And, what a rewarding journey it has been! One that reminds me often of a quote by Tony Robbins, “The only limit to your Impact is your imagination and commitment.” Imagination and commitment are encapsulated in Peace Corps’ approach to its development work, of building capacity and fostering sustainable development. Without a doubt, nothing is greater than witnessing Peace Corps volunteers and Belizean counterparts diving in together to tackle challenges and deficits in their communities, only to emerge champions and better versions of themselves.

One such memory is that of a big success story coming out of a small Q’qechi village in the Toledo district. A former Peace Corps Volunteer of the Rural Family Health Project and his community counterparts planned for months, soliciting the help of the Ministry of Health DHE in Toledo, Ms. Ruby and other stakeholders to execute the village first ever community health fair. Working in cooperation, the volunteer, the community health worker and the village leaders saw the value of the investment in hosting the health fair. The fair’s focus aligned with the project goals of educating the community about non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity; and the prevention of childhood illnesses. There were booths, games, healthy foods and snacks and most importantly community spirit and support demonstrated by a huge attendance. Villagers were able to takeaway information on how to change their behaviors in order to benefit their overall health.



There are no similar days in the work we do at Peace Corps Belize. We are incorporated in transformational stories of all shapes and forms across this great Jewel. The intersectionality of human growth and community development continues to be the heartbeat and compass for my journey of service, and I am deeply grateful.” - Michelle Arnold, Program Manager, YHWP



Volunteers' work and life in Belize





A Community Health Worker and District Education Officer conducting a health session during a health fair.

Closing the Rural Family Health Project

In 2013, Peace Corps Belize implemented the Rural Family Health Project (RFHP) in close collaboration with Belize's Ministry of Health (MOH), to address the country's priority areas of maternal, neonatal and child health and chronic, non-communicable diseases in rural communities. During the life of the RFHP, Peace Corps Volunteers and Belizean Counterparts together made a significant impact on the country's health awareness and behavior changes. A total of 125 Volunteers have served in 80 rural communities in all six districts of Belize.

The purpose of the RFHP was to support Belizean rural families in adopting positive behaviors to improve and maintain their health. The project emphasizes behavior changes 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

A highlight of the health work came in 2018 when the Ministry of Health launched a Community Health Platform in 50 rural communities. This platform is a mechanism in which various community members and leaders, in addition to the Community Health Workers (CHWs), work together to address health concerns in their village. Our Peace Corps Volunteers who served in the pilot communities had the opportunity to be a part of this initiative, while continuing to enact our approach to development that emphasizes building capacity and sustainable development in communities.

The year 2020 marked seven years since the inception of the RFHP. During this time period, the project has served over 20,000 Belizeans in rural communities countrywide. Village members benefitted from numerous health education and health promotion activities related to the goals of the RFHP: maternal and child health and non-communicable diseases. At the annual Close of Service conference, Peace Corps Volunteers were able to present a report to our Ministry counterparts, the Director of Health Services and HECOPAB Technical Advisor on their cohort's accomplishments in service to Belize.

We take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation for our RFHP formal partnership with the Ministry of Health, specifically the HECOPAB unit under the leadership of Mrs. Kathleen Azueta-Cho. Over the years we developed meaningful work relationships with many community leaders, teachers, parents and NGOs. The guidance of our RFHP Project Advisory Council was invaluable. And to the many Belizean families across this great country, we extend a heartfelt thank you for opening your homes and hearts to share your culture and keep our Volunteers safe.

The number of Belizeans impacted by the stakeholders involved in this project tells a story, one of capacity building and growth. Every home visit; HFLE and PE lesson at schools; gardening projects; village council clean-up campaigns and health fairs; women's workout groups; youth sports tournaments; and mobile clinic health education sessions done in partnership with a Peace Corps Volunteer, advanced our collective vision of a healthy Belize. We remain grateful and committed to the opportunity to serve.



“A school Garden Club”

(by RPCV Rachel)

“

One of my proudest projects was the school garden/Garden Club. The previous Volunteer had worked hard to establish a community garden during her time in the village, but many participating groups had since dissolved, and by the time I arrived, “the garden” was indistinguishable from the rest of the overgrown field. However, Ms. Angie, one of my counterparts, had expressed interest to me about starting the garden again so I was open to the idea even though it had not been sustainable in the past.

Peace Corps’ training session on gardening helped make that idea a reality when they provided us with resources from the Ministry, as well as seeds and soil to get started. The opportunity to start a garden was exciting to me as good nutrition and the availability of healthy foods is crucial for the prevention of non-communicable diseases. I worked with a counterpart to chop and prepare the field, and a class of Standard V students came to the property and helped make the beds and plant seeds. In Garden Club, we started with a session about nutrition, types of produce the children may see in a garden, and information about the basic care a garden and plants need. We then worked as a team to water, weed, plant, and harvest produce.

In February and March, RC School classes began taking turns watering the garden and Infant I and II classes came on a tour of the garden to learn about living things, how plants grow, and identify different kinds of plants. Ultimately, the garden produced over \$100 of produce for members of the community and participants in Garden Club. They helped to harvest and sell the produce at fair prices, ensuring that villagers had access to fresh vegetables such as cucumbers, sweet peppers, habaneros, cilantro, radishes, cabbage, okra, corn, and lettuce. The profit was used to buy more seeds, fertilizer, and tools for the garden. The intention was to use the rest of the money to host a small party for Garden Club participants towards the end of the year. However, a change of plans due to my evacuation from country, means that it is now at Ms. Angie’s discretion as to how to use the rest of the money. She intends to start the garden again, so I hope she is able to use the money to fund the garden’s sustainability!”

- RPCV Rachel

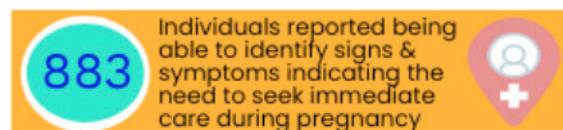
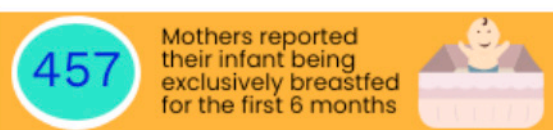
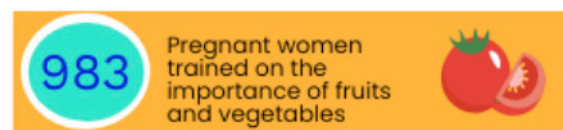
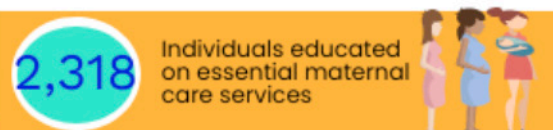
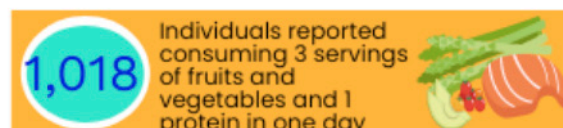


RPCV Rachel touring the
Infant I and Infant II class
children at the garden.

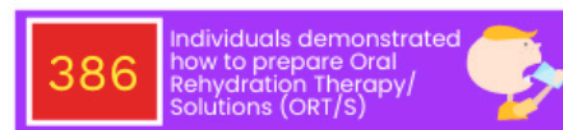
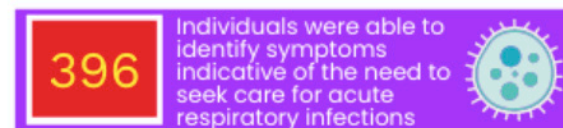
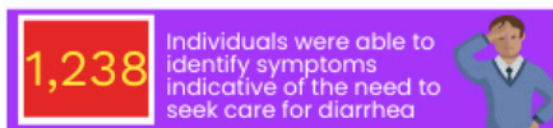
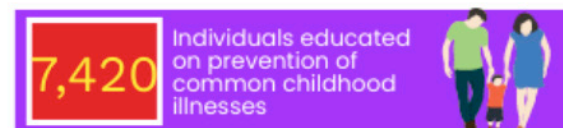
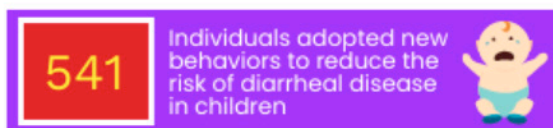
Accomplishments from the RFHP

GOAL 1: Families will adopt positive behaviors and practices that contribute to the health of women and children.

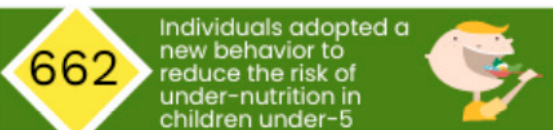
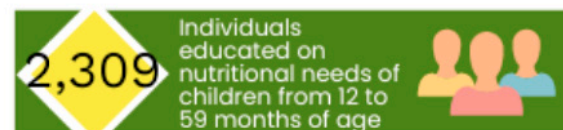
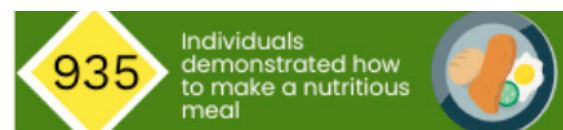
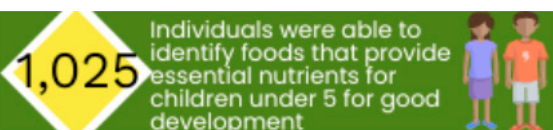
Objective 1.1:
By September 2018, 700 mothers and caregivers will adopt healthy practices that contribute to healthy pregnancies, safe deliveries, and healthy newborns.



Objective 1.2:
By September 2018, 2450 mothers and caregivers will adopt evidence-based activities on prevention and care of common child illnesses resulting in the improved quality of child care.



Objective 1.3:
By September 2018, 1750 mothers and caregivers will adopt healthier infant and young child feeding practices contributing to improved nutritional needs.

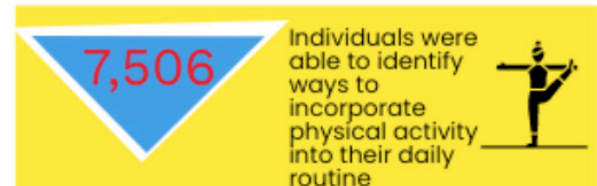
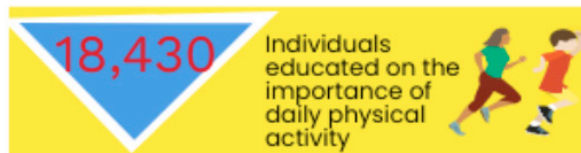


GOAL 2: Community members will adopt behaviors shown to reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases.

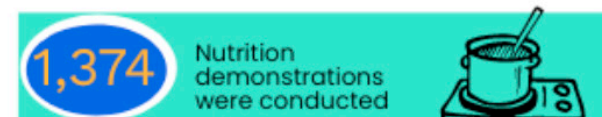
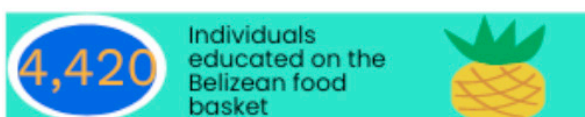
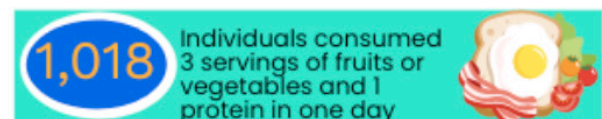
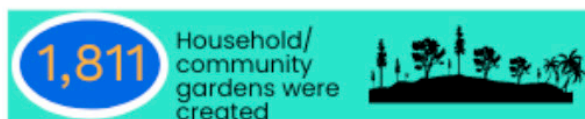
Objective 2.1: By September 2018, 11,200 individuals will demonstrate increased knowledge of risk factors to prevent non-communicable diseases.



Objective 2.2: By September 2018, 7,200 individuals participate in physical activities to reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases and promote healthy lifestyles.



Objective 2.3: By September 2018, 2,450 individuals will adopt healthier eating habits to reduce the risks of non-communicable diseases and promote healthy lifestyle choices.



RURAL FAMILY HEALTH PROJECT

2013 - 2020

Achievement Highlights

RFHP SAW ITS LARGEST ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

13,614

YOUTH under 19



thousands of children received education on non-communicable disease through PCVs co-teaching HFLE

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

18,430



Teachers/CHWs and PCVs worked together to improve physical activity through consistent PE classes and workout groups

CLEAN HANDS **9,482**



Handwashing lessons were delivered throughout primary school levels along with teachers and CHWs.

1,811 GARDENS

PCVs worked with household and schools to establish gardens to promote healthy living



THROUGHOUT THE LIFE OF THE RFHP, VOLUNTEERS WORKED WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND EXCEEDED MANY OF THE PROJECT TARGETS.

Following Peace Corps' global guidance, Peace Corps Belize underwent a program review in 2018 to ensure that our focus is on the niche best served Volunteers supporting the Government of Belize. This process included a thorough evaluation of the program. All stakeholders at the grassroots and national levels, Volunteers and community partners participated in this process which concluded in June of 2019. The program review revealed that Youth Health is a priority development sector in Belize. The data from RFHP also confirmed that our Volunteers were already making significant impact across Belize through co-facilitation of youth health activities with counterparts:

- * 18,430 physical activities were conducted through primary school PE classes, sports activities and workout groups.
- * 9,482 clean hands achieved through handwashing lessons delivered at the primary school level countrywide
- * 1,811 combined household and school gardens achieved in an effort to promote healthy living

Peace Corps Belize solidified that our development work in Belize would focus on Youth Health. In partnership with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology we are pleased to launch the Youth Health and Well-being Project (YHWP). The original launch date of May 2020 was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the evacuation of our Volunteers. Commencing in 2021, the Youth Health and Well-being Project will see its first cohort of trained Volunteers in the field, working with schools and counterparts to achieve the following:

Goal: Belizean youth lead healthy and empowered lives to realize their full potential into adulthood.

Objectives:

1. Increase the knowledge and skills of youth to improve their health and well-being through health and life skills education (HFLE).
2. Increase the knowledge and skills of adults* to effectively support the health and well-being of youth.
3. Increase the capacity of school-based staff and community leaders** to provide youth health and life skills education.

In order for a school to be considered as a placement site for a YHWP Peace Corps Volunteer, the following criterion are closely evaluated: 1) Project alignment and work available for the Volunteer in a primary school setting; 2) The community meets the medical, safety and security qualifiers; 3) the community supports the Volunteer through our Homestay Program, and, 4) just as important, school counterparts such as the teachers, sports coaches, members of the PTA and the school administration are available, willing and excited to work alongside a Peace Corps Volunteer in order to transfer knowledge, skills and build the capacity of the school community.

* Adults who can contribute to an enabling environment for youth to lead healthy and empowered lives may include: families, caregivers, and community groups

** Community leaders may include: CHWs, village council members, librarians, sports coaches

Starting the Youth Health and Well-being Project



RPCV Daniel with children from his Standard V class.

Continuing the Literacy Intervention Program

Established approximately 20 years ago Peace Corps Response (PCR) sends experienced professionals to undertake short-term (3 to 12 months), high-impact assignments in communities around the world. With a sustained and solid collaboration with Belize's Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture (MoE), 2020 marked the third year of Peace Corps Response Program's service in Belize, building capacities for a more solid implementation of the



School Teacher with small group intervention children.

Literacy Intervention Strategy put forth by the Belizean government. Volunteers partnered with MoE officials, principals, and teachers on a shared national mission of ensuring that all Standard One (U.S. Grade 3) children will either a) be reading fluently and accurately at or above their grade level or b) be receiving targeted interventions.

Building upon the successes and responding to identified challenges of the previous years, the Ministry of Education expanded the Standard One Literacy Intervention project to more schools, districts and sub-districts for the 2019-2020 school year. With capacity development at the heart of the Response Program, during this time, nine Peace Corps Response Volunteers (PCRVs) served as literacy support specialists coaching and supporting a total of 123 teachers at 94 schools across 5 districts and conducted 991 coaching visits. PCRVs provided ongoing instructional coaching in areas of:

- literacy resource development;
- literacy screening administration and results analysis;
- formation of intervention groups;
- detailed intervention implementation;
- small-group instruction and management.

A major project achievement was the establishment of intervention groups in all project schools. This represented a step forward from the previous year's results in which many schools had difficulty initiating these groups. Notably, this year's efforts bore the fruit of intervention support for 713 students. Additionally, data collected from the project reveal evidence that coaching support provided to teachers by PCRVs contributed to a greater level of student performance than in non-project schools. As a result, the MoE considers seeking further support toward developing a similar program for lower school grades.

With the continued progress of the Literacy Intervention Project, Post enthusiastically prepared and anticipated the arrival of six Response Volunteers in June 2020. The third year of the project's implementation aimed to scale up support to additional schools with a continued focus on classroom management strategies, more detailed intervention planning, and wider support for school administrators, managers, District Education Officers, parents and the larger community; however, this goal was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With a hopeful outlook for 2021, recruitment efforts pressed on, and Peace Corps Belize continued to consult and dialogue with the Ministry of Education for their guidance as preparations for re-entry commenced.

Peace Corps Belize Response Program acknowledges the MoE, school administrators and standard one teachers for prioritizing literacy, and for inviting Peace Corps Response to assist in achieving the literacy goals set forth for the children of Belize. Peace Corps Belize intends to maintain its unyielding commitment to the people of Belize through its continued partnership with the Ministry of Education on the Standard One Literacy Intervention Project in 2021.



There are kids in New York City who need to learn to read, too. Why do you have to join the Peace Corps to help kids in another country?" one of my New York friends asked me. Being a Peace Corps Volunteer was something I wanted to do to serve the US now that I was retired and it was a dream I had put on hold for over 30 years.

I arrived Belize as a Response Volunteer for a 9-month position. After 2 weeks of training, I was placed with a host family and worked an 8 to 5 job visiting teachers in their classrooms, conducting professional development workshops and helping to administer reading assessments to the children. My teachers were spread throughout the lovely little capital city of Belmopan, and its surrounding villages. I was responsible for training them to work with their lowest level readers to improve their reading abilities while the rest of the class did other work independently. My 11 teachers were unfamiliar with this style of teaching.

Surprisingly, after administering the reading assessment, we discovered that all of the students in my schools were reading far below grade level. One of my teachers, Miss Jenny, learned that nearly every student in her class couldn't read. There were a few children who couldn't even spell their name. "Miss Judy, I knew they were low level, but I had no idea they were this low!" Miss Jenny sighed. Even the principal had not realized how dire the situation was. "Miss Jenny, we'll work with the whole class to get them reading," I assured her. Truthfully, my focus was supposed to be only on the intervention group, but how could anyone ignore the rest of these little ones?

Miss Jenny and some of her students.



"Superstars"

(by RPCV Judy)

I visited Miss Jenny at least once weekly for coaching. We discussed lessons to improve the skills of the intervention students as well as independent activities for the rest of the class where they could practice simultaneously. I gave her suggestions, which she not only used them all, but even improved upon them. The children were engaged and they were having fun! Even the poorest readers in the intervention group wanted to show me their newly learned skills and words that they could read.

As I visited other teachers, I knew that some of them were struggling with their Literacy intervention. The students' progress was slow and I began to worry as we all wanted the children to succeed and learn to read. I asked the teachers to do something that none of them had ever done in their teaching careers. I got permission to take them to visit Miss Jenny to watch her teach a Literacy lesson. I had set up inter-visitations in New York City before, so I knew how powerful observing a peer could be. Plus, I was quite aware that my role as a Peace Corps Volunteers was to build capacity.

When we got into Miss Jenny's classroom, the teachers were impressed as they observed her creativity and the children's eloquent participation. After the class, the teachers reported that they gained new insight were clearer about how to conduct their Literacy classes. I was so proud of all of them and I was extremely satisfied with the inter-visitation.

Overall, every class showed improvement. And as for Miss Jenny's class, by the end of my service, her students wrote their own original adventure story and had a publishing party to show off their Literacy skills to their parents and friends. They all had transformed into readers and writers. All of my teachers and their students became my Belizean Superstars! - RPCV Judy

	Cayo	Belmopan	Corozal	Orange Walk	Stann Creek	Toledo	Totals
# of teachers in initial August CPD*	44	30	14	75	57	64	284
# of PCRVs	1	1	1	2	2	2	9
# of schools PCRV worked with	14	8	19	17	15	21	94
# of teachers who received coaching support from a PCRV	21	11	22	22	23	24	123
Estimated avg. length of coaching visit (mins)	40	102	150	128	75	96	98
# of coaching visits**	161	110	155	176	218	171	991
Avg.# of coaching visits per teacher	7.67	10	4/10****	8	9.5	7.1	8
# of school visits***	131	87	138	195	179	201	931
# of students pre-tested	357	246	417	430	559	404	2,413
# of students who received interventions	90	57	156	155	117	138	713
# of students who were post-tested	85	54	103	140	115	160	657

Accomplishments from the Literacy Intervention Program



RPCV Dahn ringing the bell as a sign of successfully closing her service.

*Initial training session refers to CPD provided in August 2019 in each district. Topics covered included Standard One Screening Administration, data analysis, intervention lesson planning, literacy foundations such as phonological/phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and classroom management.

**Coaching activities included activities such as: co-analyzing assessment data, co-forming intervention groups, co-planning intervention activities, modelling interventions, observing language arts and providing teacher feedback, and exploring new strategies with the teacher.

***School visits included both coaching and non-coaching activities. Non-coaching activities included: relationship building with teachers and principals, administration of pre and post assessments, and informal support to teachers of other grades.

****In Corozal, the first number represents average visits to Cycle 1 schools and the second number represents average visits to Cycle 2 schools.

Fifty years of promoting
world peace and friendship.



“Having the opportunity to work with a teacher that really wants to learn and soaks up all you have to offer, then puts it into practice is like watching magic unfold before your very eyes. What an honor!”

- a Returned PCRV



“Wow, I knew that my students were doing better but I had no idea how much better until I saw the second screening results! I can’t wait to test them again in June after I’ve had more time with them and I finally get what I’m doing.”

- Stann Creek Teacher

“I am committed to continuing with the intervention project.”

- Toledo Teacher

“The Intervention Program is a very strong tool that I was able to implement in my class. It was a very difficult and challenging task, but (the PCRV), whenever he came to school, he wouldn’t dictate what to do – he would explain. He would first show me how to implement whatever game or strategy I use, and that was what helped us, the children and myself, facilitate the journey through the program.” - Cayo Teacher



Left to right (Governor General, Sir Collville Young, Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. Keith Gilges, Peace Corps Country Director, Tracey Hébert-Seck, Ministry of Health Representative, Dr. Rene Godoy, & RPCV Adam) at a Swearing In Ceremony.



Belizeans' experience working and living with Volunteers

Besides adopting a different lifestyle, Volunteers also learn to work with Belizean counterparts throughout their service. In their villages or towns, in order to implement behavior change interventions, Volunteers work with Community Health Workers (CHWs), Rural Health Nurses, School Principals, Teachers, District Education Officers, 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.

RFHP Volunteers and their counterparts plan, coordinate and implement health promotion, education and training activities. 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 health 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. RFHP Volunteers also work extensively in the local primary schools along with 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 CHWs 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.

Response Volunteers, on the other hand, work closely with District Education Officers and teachers to implement literacy intervention strategies to help children enhance their literacy. Each District Town has Education Officers who are the main counterparts for Response Volunteers. Together they visit schools in their nearby villages and there, along with primary school teachers, they provide literacy interventions to children facing challenges. They also collaborate with the Ministry of Education to provide teachers with training on literacy intervention.

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.

I have been a Community Health Worker (CHW) for the past 7 years and it is through my CHW work that I learnt about Peace Corps when our Regional Coordinator introduced us. We were told that we only had to apply to request a Volunteer. I participated in the request process and in all the meetings that Peace Corps has here in the village prior to the arrival of the Volunteer.

As CHWs we do a lot of home visits (visiting the diabetics, hypertensive and any other sick person in the village or where requested), we visit schools to give healthy talks to the children and we also coordinate health fairs in the village. When I learnt that a Health Volunteer was coming to our village I was very excited as it was the first time! I was even happier when I met Rachel and started working with her. Rachel and I got along very well and we communicated a lot. We saw each other almost daily! She was always willing to help in everything related to my CHW work.

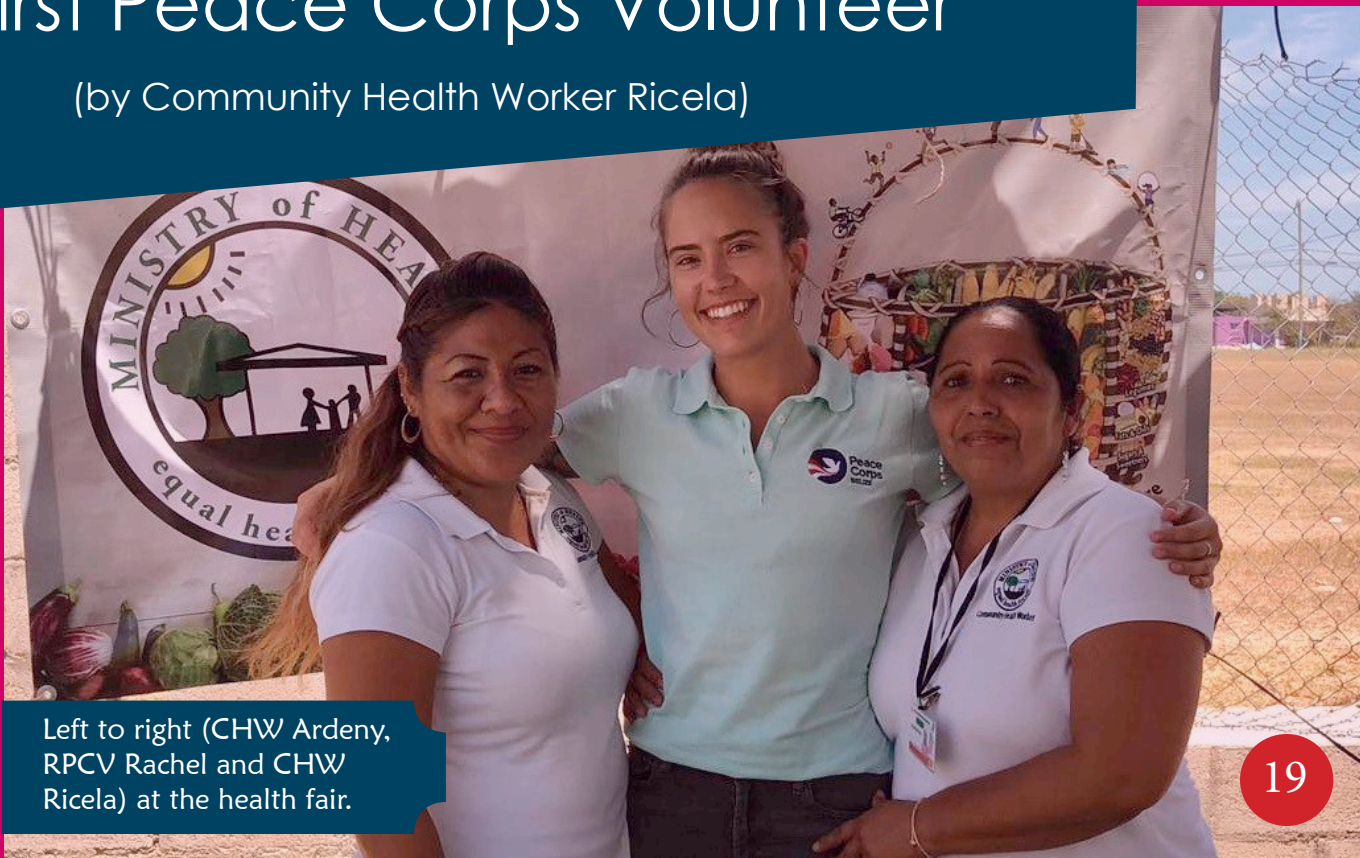
Oh I learnt so much from Rachel! One of the biggest things that I learnt from her was to do school sessions and presentations in community activities. First I was nervous to do school sessions as I am not a teacher and I felt I couldn't do the sessions well. Rachel, however, managed the sessions very well with the students. She was very skilled with that. When we went together to deliver school sessions it was excellent!

I remember when we both planned a big health fair which turned out to be very successful. We invited all the participating organizations including Ministry of Health, the Police Department, Ministry of Transport and Oceana. We also did posters and placed them around the village. We had a huge turn-out with hundreds of people, including school children, at the health fair. Rachel and I conducted health presentations for both the children and adults. Oh we were a great team! I had done health fairs on my own before and it was a bit challenging. When Rachel and I planned the health fair it was smooth and turn out great! We even invited CHWs from other villages. From that health fair I learnt a lot that will help me to organize future ones. Working with the schools and inviting school children is something I definitely want to consider. I want to schedule another health fair but this will be when COVID-19 permits.

Rachel has a nice way of speaking to children and people, in general. The children loved her as she treated them very well. When children saw her they ran and hugged her. She manages to get people's attention. Here in the community, people miss her and they always ask me about her as they know I still communicate with her. Everyone here loved her. One of the most treasured memories I have of Rachel is when I met her parents and sister. We had dinner together. It was like we were one big family." - Ricela, Community Health Worker

"My first Peace Corps Volunteer"

(by Community Health Worker Ricela)



Left to right (CHW Ardeny, RPCV Rachel and CHW Ricela) at the health fair.



“Transforming gender lenses through football”

(by RPCV Emily, 2017 - 2019)

“

In my community, there is a high prevalence of diabetes and hypertension due primarily to unhealthy diets and lack of physical activity. In recent years, the onset of these chronic diseases has begun in younger populations in the village. Based on responses from individual home interviews that one of my counterpart any I had conducted, we realized there was a need for after-school activities to engage school-aged youth in positive behaviors, diverting them from negative influences such as drugs and alcohol. One day, there was an opportunity to start a female football team at the primary school. My counterparts explained to me their need for a head coach for the girls team, and I agreed to take on the role.

While my counterpart has been primarily responsible for the logistics of the team, from recruiting players to compiling paperwork, I have led practices and training for weekly games. The team, consisting of 16 girls ages 9 -14, practices Mondays -Thursdays and has games on Friday afternoons. In the first few weeks of practice, I trained the team on basic techniques, including passing, dribbling, and shooting, to ensure that all the girls were on a similar skill level. The team eventually began to scrimmage against each other, sometimes even mixed with the boys' team, providing opportunities to teach them about the rules of the game and develop physical endurance. At the end of every practice, I lead mini-lessons and team discussions on positive values such as perseverance, courage, leadership, honesty, respect, and self-control. We even recite a team mantra that speaks of their individual value, strength, and beauty as girls. In addition to encouraging physically active lifestyles, I serve as a role model for the girls who often times lack adults in their lives who set healthy and positive examples.

The team was very successful in the first round of the district tournament, advancing to the second round of games. The girls have developed more self-confidence, enthusiasm for sports and exercise, leadership skills, and responsibility since starting the team. I am hopeful that their knowledge of the importance of regular physical activity will motivate them to continue into adulthood. Additionally, we have discussed cultural gender norms as a team, as it is often taboo for females to play sports and engage in physical activity in the community. The girls were empowered to take the initiative to stand up for themselves when faced with opposition, demonstrating boldness and assertiveness. Their example will inspire other females in the community to participate in physical activities in the future, ultimately leading to the prevention of the far too common hypertension and diabetes.” - RPCV Emily

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 villages and towns to identify community needs, establish educational priorities and apply their skills, knowledge and experience on a daily basis to improve the health of Belizeans and literacy in primary school children.

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?

To request a Youth Health Volunteer, under the Youth Health a Well-being Project, a primary school principal needs to submit an application to Peace Corps Belize. We consider primary schools with a minimum of 100 enrolled students, who prioritize the teaching of HFLE and PE in their curriculum, engage in sports, school gardens and school based clubs. We also that the applying school have an active PTA. Volunteers do not provide financial support and they do not take the place of others to fill a job placement slot. Like two-year Volunteer assignments, Peace Corps Response supports existing programs and other critical needs led by host country leaders with trained Volunteers – not financial support. Assignments range between 9-12 months and must promote sustainability by facilitating systems improvement and organizational change. PCR provides technical expertise to existing projects in one or more of the following agency sectors: Agriculture, Community Economic Development, Education, Environment, Health, and Youth Development. If your community is interested in hosting a Volunteer, call Peace Corps Belize at 880-0332, 880-0340 or 880-0276.

Frequently Asked Questions



Belize Health 6 & 7 cohorts of Volunteers - the 2 cohorts that were evacuated due to COVID-19.



Peace Corps has been serving the world since 1961 and while much has changed since then, the three goals of Peace Corps have remained the same.

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.



7069 George Price Blvd
Belmopan, Cayo, Belize



(501)822-0276



belizedesk@peacecorps.gov



<https://www.peacecorps.gov/belize/>



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