



**Peace Corps**  
PHILIPPINES

RE-ENTRY EDITION

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Data in this report are drawn from the most recent available statistics from Peace Corps Philippines.

For any inconsistencies found subsequent to printing, please email us at [info@ph.peacecorps.gov](mailto:info@ph.peacecorps.gov)

FRONT COVER: Education Peace Corps Volunteer Colleen L. engaging in a lively discussion with her elementary school students at her site.

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# ***COUNTRY MESSAGES & OVERVIEW***



## Message from Leadership and a Peace Corps Post Overview



Peace Corps Philippines  
Country Director



Philippine National Volunteer  
Service Coordinating Agency  
Executive Director



Peace Corps Philippines  
Overview



## PEACE CORPS PHILIPPINES COUNTRY DIRECTOR

**“The success of our program is due in large part to the strong partnerships that have been created over the decades.”**



Marguerite Roy  
Country Director  
Peace Corps Philippines

Mabuhay from Peace Corps! On behalf of our whole team here in the Philippines, I am pleased to present our 2023 Annual Report. This is the first annual report that we have prepared since Volunteers returned to the field following the COVID pandemic in January 2023.

Since 1961, more than 10,000 Volunteers have answered the call to work with the Filipino people in developing their communities. Our program's priorities have evolved over time as the world is a radically different place from the one which inspired the formation of the Peace Corps. Yet the fundamentals of cooperation and cultural reciprocity remain unstirred. It is the steadfast positivity, motivation, and ingenuity of Volunteers and Counterparts that is the manifestation of the agency's mission.

The success of our program is due in large part to the strong partnerships that have been created over the decades. It is only with support from our partner organizations, communities and individuals

that Volunteers can engage in meaningful service.

We express our great appreciation to the Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency (PNVSCA), Department of Education (DepEd), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and numerous Local Government Units (LGUs). For welcoming our Volunteers into their hearts and their homes, we profoundly thank the community members who host them.

Finally, I applaud the commitment, tenacity, energy, and collaborative spirit that our Volunteers bring to Philippine communities. It is through their grassroots work and strong intercultural bonds that the Peace Corps remains a viable, constructive presence here today. As the country's needs change, so too will our Volunteers continuously adapt.

With each new year, we all rededicate ourselves to learning and sharing in tandem with our partners.

Maraming salamat po!



# PNVSCA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**“It is with great pleasure that I and the Philippine National Coordinating Agency congratulate the U.S. Peace Corps Philippines for yet another banner year of strengthening international cooperation and volunteering...”**



Donald James Gawie  
Executive Director  
PNVSCA

It is with great pleasure that I and the Philippine National Coordinating Agency congratulate the U.S. Peace Corps Philippines (USPC) for yet another banner year of strengthening international cooperation and volunteering for development with the successful return of in-country volunteers, mobilizing international volunteers as catalysts for local volunteering through the Volunteer Service Initiative (VSI).

The return of Peace Corps Volunteers (PCV) demonstrates USPC Philippines' resilience in adapting to the evolving landscape of volunteering for development. The resumption of the US Peace Corps' work in sectors of education, youth development, and coastal resource management is a much welcomed assistance by PNVSCA and the local institutions and communities they serve as this contributes to the country's post-pandemic recovery. 2023 also marks the birth of the Volunteer Service Initiative which is Peace Corps' way to mainstream volunteerism and increase

youth community engagement.

This initiative builds the capacity of youth volunteers in the community with the support of Peace Corps Volunteers assigned in the municipalities. VSI recognizes volunteerism as an effective means to respond to the community's emerging needs. This initiative is supportive of PNVSCA's advocacy to mainstreaming local governance in all sectors and for foreign volunteers to be a catalyst for local volunteering.

PNVSCA would like to thank U.S. Peace Corps for its support and partnership with the Agency for a responsible and impactful volunteering for development. We look forward to our continued partnership in making volunteerism a way of life for every Filipino.

Mabuhay ang bolunterismo!

# In 2023 Peace Corps Philippines Welcomed Back Both Traditional and Response Volunteers



## PEACE CORPS MISSION AND GOALS

The Peace Corps is a volunteer program with a mission to provide social and economic development overseas through technical assistance, while promoting mutual understanding between Americans and the populations it serves. Volunteers work with governments, schools, and non-profit organizations. The Peace Corps Act (1961) articulates three core goals that contribute to the Peace Corps mission of world peace and friendship: (1) to help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women; (2) to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served; and (3) to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

## PEACE CORPS PHILIPPINES 2023 REENTRY

This year, Peace Corps Philippines marked the return of Peace Corps Volunteers after nearly three years of absence due to the global COVID pandemic. The first group of 37 Volunteers arrived in January for the regular two-year service, followed by the arrival of four Peace Corps Response Volunteers in May. In September, the second cohort of 54 two-year PCVs arrived a few days after the arrival of three Peace Corps Response Program Volunteers. By the end of the year, 98 Volunteers swore-in to serve the Philippines, demonstrating strong commitment and dedication to work alongside Filipino communities through strong partnerships with a mission to promote friendship and pursue community development.



# Peace Corps

**32** Children, Youth, and Families Volunteers

**30** Education Volunteers

**29** Coastal Resource Management Volunteers

**7** Peace Corps Response Volunteers

**98**

Peace Corps  
Volunteers serving  
post-pandemic

# SECTOR SPOTLIGHTS

*Traditionally, Volunteers serve for 24 months in the three program areas of Children, Youth, and Families; Education; and Coastal Resource Management, while Peace Corps Response Volunteers serve for seven months in areas complementing the three program areas, as well as Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management.*



## Sector successes and stories for 2023...



Children,  
Youth, and  
Families (CYF)



Education  
(EDU)



Coastal  
Resource  
Management  
(CRM)



**Peace  
Corps**

RESPONSE

# Children, Youth, and Families (CYF)





**Youth effectively transition to become healthy, productive and civically engaged adults.**

## **Areas of Work**

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- Life skills
- Civic engagement
- Financial literacy, employability, and money management skills
- Gender equality
- Positive youth development

## **Key Activities**

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- Leadership training
- Project Design and Management training
- Thematic advocacies on women and girl empowerment, gender equality, child protection and prevention, anti-bullying, sexual reproductive health, and disability rights
- Youth employability sessions
- Youth development sessions
- Strengthening youth groups
- Camps and congresses
- Tutorial sessions



## Children, Youth, and Families



LEFT: Batch 279 CYF Volunteers with Program Manager Ambet Yangco, Cultural Integration Coordinator George Ciriaco, and Program Assistant Joeel Pasar striking the wacky group pose.

Peace Corps Volunteers in the CYF sector play key roles as facilitators, mentors, and coaches for Filipino youth, supporting their own growth and development. Volunteers engage with vulnerable youth and communities throughout the Philippines. These in particular are children in conflict with the law, victims of abuse, abandoned children, and teenage mothers.

Volunteers actively assist with the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). They also collaborate with DSWD-accredited non-government organizations (NGOs), and government youth like the Pag-Asa Youth

Association of the Philippines (PYAP) and the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) to offer sessions on life skills, money management, self-care, reproductive health, basic education, and job placements. Through these activities, Volunteers promote community involvement and positive growth for young people, working hand-in-hand with house parents and other service providers.

In 2023, CYF took the lead in promoting volunteerism through the Youth Volunteer Service Initiative (VSI) Workshop. The event provided an opportunity for young people to engage in addressing the development agenda that affects them. Workshop

participants included Peace Corps Coastal Resource Management (CRM) Volunteers and their local counterparts, together with foreign volunteer organizations such as Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement (OISCA), and Global Initiative for Exchange and Development (GIED).

Looking ahead, Peace Corps Philippines, in partnership with Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency (PNVSCA), will continue to promote volunteerism as a tool for development.

# CYF Projects and Activities



The word cloud generated above represents reported projects and activities that Volunteers have established at their sites. Volunteers are encouraged to share their talents, skills and experience to provide their community and themselves with an enriching component to their service.

# | **Laban. You Are Not Alone**



ABOVE: PCV Nghi N. donning the uniform with her Maternal Wellness team.

**“My time in the Philippines is characterized by a fighting spirit, a promise that we can accomplish just about anything if we do it together.”**

Nghi N. | CYF PC Volunteer

*Laban.* A word in Bisaya that translates to “fighting,” may be the perfect word to narrate the context of my Peace Corps service so far. It encompasses not only my own approach to handling service but also the spirit I have witnessed from my Filipino colleagues as we embarked on the task of building a mental health program in a birthing clinic.

When I first got to Cebu, I thought I knew exactly what my work would look like. My job description was simple, screen expecting mothers for depression and then referring them to professional support if needed. Rinse and repeat. Well, it turned out that my simple Volunteer job quickly morphed to include anything

else under the sun that the clinic might need at the moment. I had no other option but to say, “*laban*” and dive headfirst into my new responsibilities. And when I was nervous about the success of my service, every one of my colleagues made it clear that I would have nothing less than their full partnership and support, despite having full time roles of their own. They would say to me, “*Laban. You are not alone. We can do this together.*”

And because of this *laban* spirit, our little birthing clinic in Cebu established the foundation of a mental health program for perinatal mothers, the first of its kind on this island. This brings us one



ABOVE: PCV Nghi N. showcasing their newly built Wellness Room.

## SECTOR SPOTLIGHTS - Nghi's Volunteer Story

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step closer to our clinic's vision of providing holistic care to expecting moms, encompassing not only the physical but also the mental, emotional, and spiritual as well.

One activity that is close to my heart is our support group for high-risk moms where they can share with each other about their joys or anxieties during their pregnancy journey. This program, I believe, is a true testament of

the innate sense of community that runs through the blood of the Filipino people. Just like the advice my colleagues gave a young, idealistic 22-year-old who knew nothing but wanted to do everything, I now see moms in the program tell each other the exact same thing. "*Laban*. You are not alone. We can do this together."

Now as I continue my service, I find myself falling back on the word *laban* and the

sentimentality that it holds. In the end, my time in the Philippines is characterized by a fighting spirit, a promise that we can accomplish just about anything if we do it together.

**"*Laban*. You are not alone. We can do this together."**

Nghi N. | CYF PC Volunteer



ABOVE: The support group for perinatal moms flashing the heart sign using their fingers.



## The Spectrum of Human Experience

The opportunity to be immersed in community has forced me to engage in cultural interaction and self-exploration in ways I never have before; it has opened my mind to the true uniqueness of the human experience and how we can channel these experiences to maximize change.

As part of the Peace Corps' Youth Volunteerism Service Initiative (VSI), I collaborated with many communities to incorporate youth camps in four municipalities in the province of Benguet. I quickly realized how much support I had and how willing people in the community were to work together to support these camps. The eight trained youth leaders in their

municipalities are now craving the next phases of these camps for the future of their communities.

What struck me most was how empowered and capable the youth and the communities are. Though they are the same province, the culture from one municipality to another varies greatly here. Regardless, these youth continuously collaborated with each other and found the most effective way to disseminate the information into their communities for successful youth camps. They each varied in confidence level and experience, but I was able to see them all grow individually throughout the process. These in life experiences

were apparent; it only took a little push of confidence to open up the potential for an incredible series of youth camps spanning an entire province.

I thought and have always considered myself an empathetic and understanding individual, however this experience has forced me to stretch those qualities further than I have ever been challenged to before, strengthening my relationships with counterparts, locals, and youth halfway across the world.

My Peace Corps experience has taught me how much more to the spectrum of the human experience there is to explore and how it is possible to utilize these experiences as a catalyst for positive change.

**“...it is possible to utilize these experiences as a catalyst for positive change.”**

Josh B. | CYF PC Volunteer

LEFT: PCV Josh B. co-planning with youth leaders on how to revamp local youth organizations in their communities.



## | Developing Project WeSpeak

**“They are also the greatest illustration of the impact that can be made when differences are harnessed and similarities are wielded to pursue a shared vision.”**

Jedaia D. | CYF Counterpart



ABOVE: Counterpart Jedaia D. and PCV Sam A. co-conducting a seminar.

I have worked with four Peace Corps Volunteers since 2015, the fourth of whom I am proud to be working with right now. Sam, from Batch 279, is a colleague, friend, and a role model rolled into one awe-inspiring woman.

A former Peace Corps Volunteer and our Director of Operations aimed to address the question, “what can be done to prevent human trafficking and sexual violence?” This aspiration became a reality when passionate individuals brought iSpeak to fruition, envisioning a future where children are not exploited and every adult’s freedom is protected.

The Peace Corps played a vital role in the creation

of iSpeak. There is still more work ahead in the coming months, but I am ecstatic that Sam and the Peace Corps will continue to be a driving force behind the growth of iSpeak. This year, we are hoping to launch WeSpeak, an offshoot initiative conceptualized during Peace Corps’ Project Design and Management Workshop, intended to be managed and owned by local youth in one of the cities in Cebu. WeSpeak, like iSpeak, will focus on sexual violence prevention.

In the months since we’ve journeyed together in pursuit of the mission to care for survivors of human trafficking and abuse, as well as raise awareness about modern-day slavery, I am lucky to have been given the privilege to

work with someone who’s willing to bridge so many gaps – cultural, social, political, psychological – in the name of service and in the hopes of creating a safe space where children and youth can express vulnerability. A space designed to empower and embolden them.

I believe that what we are doing with iSpeak and WeSpeak is a testament to the power of passion, service, and connection – values that Sam, the Peace Corps, and our organization live by. They are also the greatest illustration of the impact that can be made when differences are harnessed, and similarities are wielded to pursue a shared vision.

## | A Positive Impact in Our Community

I first learned about the Peace Corps while working in an NGO. During that time, I worked as a counterpart with a Peace Corps Volunteer. The Volunteer did a great job and I gained valuable insights from our collaboration. Upon transferring to my position at the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO), we requested a Volunteer that would collaborate with us in implementing projects and programs for children and youth, and in particular with Pag-Asa Youth Association of the Philippines in our municipality. It is an association that aims to promote development of out-of-school youth and other disadvantaged youth.

Our current Volunteer, Brian, is a great help to the LGU. He is a good person with a desire to learn about Filipino culture. And most importantly, he is willing to listen and make a positive impact in our community.

Brian helps with day-to-day administrative tasks inside the office, showing determination and willingness to learn about our daily operations. He also helps in special occasions at the LGU, and even supporting us in winning the Mayor's Choice Award during the LGU dance competition.

Alongside his good work in the office, he steps out into the local community. He organized events with our

youth leaders, like Kris who is a graduate of the Regional Youth Development Session co-facilitated by Brian. Kris and Brian co-lead the Volunteer Service Initiative (VSI) in our municipality.

With the support of the LGU, our Mayor, partner agencies, our Peace Corps Volunteers Brian and Aida, MSWDO staff, and, of course, youth facilitators, the 2023 VSI rollout has been fruitful, with active youth involvement and interest.

The success of VSI has led us to incorporate it into our 2024 MSWDO budget. Brian and I will be training the youth leaders in 2024 to talk about child sexual abuse prevention, cyber safety, and gender sensitivity.

**“And most importantly, he is willing to listen and make a positive impact in our community.”**

Sherwin L. | CYF Counterpart



LEFT: Counterpart Sherwin L. and PCV Brian S. work together in a game called Baka ng Baka that normalizes reproductive terminology.

## | The Padua Host Family Story

**“...there are so many people all over the world that abound in good work, are rooted and grounded in love and that we can do the same.”**

Melody P. | CYF Host Sister



ABOVE: PCV Brian S. joining the 61st birthday celebration of his host father.

When I was asked if someone could stay at our house, I had zero idea about the Peace Corps, but I said “Yes.” That “Yes” has brought Volunteer Brian into our home. He has blended well with us and has led to lasting joy in our family.

Back in May, Brian stayed home alone as all of us traveled to Pangasinan for a birthday celebration he was unable to attend. Brian went to church worship that Sunday at our home congregation, even

though we were out of town. Afterwards, he ate alone and realized the difference of eating together as a family. At the same time, we too were realizing that we missed him. My father kept telling me to send a message to Brian telling him that he missed him. Initially I felt awkward in sending the message because I am 37, the first born and I cannot remember my father verbally telling me he missed me. But because my father persisted, “I sent “We’re on

the beach now. All of us remember you. So Papa said sabihin ko sayo, everyone misses you.” Since then, everyone at home has become more vocal in saying we miss and love each other.

I have heard my mother telling Brian not to go back to the U.S. and how hard she laughs from his jokes. I have seen how happy my father is when Brian joins him in videoke. And, I have felt how kind and sincere Brian is. Brian has blended so well with our family. The Peace Corps has showed us that there are so many people all over the world that abound in good work, are rooted and grounded in love, and that we can do the same.

LEFT: PCV Brian S. sharing pancit and cake with his host family.



# Coastal Resource Management (CRM)





**To assist local government institutions, communities, and individuals in managing their coastal resources, and to connect ecosystems from ridge to reef in sustainable, healthy, and productive ways.**

## **Areas of Work**

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- Coastal resources and ecosystems protection and conservation
- Coastal resource monitoring and assessment trainings
- Participatory Integrated Coastal Resource Management (ICRM) planning
- Community-based solid waste management
- Sustainable fishing practices in the community

## **Key Activities**

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- Participatory Coastal Resource Assessment (PCRA)
- Coastal Resource Management (CRM) Planning
- Marine Protected Areas (MPA) establishment and enhancement
- Strengthening of community-based organizations
- Coastal clean-up
- Environmental education
- Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns
- Alternative livelihood programs



## Coastal Resource Management

**“ ...committed to help uphold and promote sustainable management of coastal and aquatic resources and ecosystems.”**

Cheryl Montoya | CRM Program Manager



ABOVE: Divers conducting Biophysical Assessments in Bohol.

The Coastal Resource Management (CRM) program of Peace Corps Philippines is committed to help uphold and improve the country’s programs, projects, and policies that promote the appropriate and sustainable management of coastal and aquatic resources and ecosystems. CRM Peace Corps Volunteers are assigned to work in and with the local government units who are at the forefront of promoting and implementing CRM. Together with the LGU and their partner CRM stakeholders, PCVs are engaged in activities and programs such as environmental education, community-based capacity building, participatory resource assessments, solid waste management, habitat protection and conservation, and sustainable fisheries management.

At the beginning of their two-year service, CRM PCVs assist in ecological and organizational profiling, working with their work partners and coastal communities using tools such as the Participatory Coastal Resource Assessment (PCRA), Marine Protected Areas Management Effectiveness Assessment Tool (MEAT), Fisheries Management Assessment

Rating Kit (FishMark), and other systems. They also learn the local language in their respective sites, enabling them to work at the grassroots level and effectively integrate with their communities.

CRM PCVs across Luzon and Visayas support their LGU by co-planning, co-organizing, and co-facilitating activities like drafting a CRM plan, conducting Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns, building capacity of stakeholders in mangrove area assessment and rehabilitation, fisherfolk and fishing vessel registration, marine protected area management efforts, solid waste management programs, and coastal clean-ups, among others. Through the service of our CRM PCVs, Peace Corps strengthens LGU capacities by providing technical support in writing and institutionalizing science-based and data-driven plans and documents that support and strengthen their local ordinances and policies, as well as the local communities for sustainable management of coastal resources.

# CRM Projects and Activities



The word cloud generated above represents reported projects and activities that Volunteers have established at their sites. Volunteers are encouraged to share their talents, skills, and experience to provide their community and themselves with an enriching component to their service.



## | Bring Back the Green Program

**“... learners and teachers gained a better understanding of proper waste segregation.”**

Rachel P. | CRM PCV



ABOVE: Teachers and the mayors of each classroom in Grade 8 receiving their bartered rice and noodles.

Solid waste management is an issue globally, and many communities in the Philippines struggle to mitigate their solid waste problems. I was inspired to co-spearhead a trash bartering project called ‘Bring Back the Green Program’ with a local high school. In collaboration with the school and the Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office (MENRO), we strived to engage youth in waste segregation in efforts to develop and apply healthy habitats for solid waste management. Our objectives were to first, educate youth on the importance of solid

waste management and proper waste segregation practices; second, involve the youth in coastal and street clean-ups; and third, provide an opportunity to feed the youth by bartering trash for food in a contest format.

Our program provided an opportunity for every classroom to barter their trash for food. MENRO bartered sachets for rice at a 1:1 ratio (1 kilo trash = 1 kilo rice) and the local high school bartered 2 noodle packs for every kilo of non-sachet plastics. We kicked off the program on International Coastal Clean-up Day, September 16, by implementing coastal and street clean-ups. Grades 7-9 participated in the street clean-up while grades 10-12 joined the coastal clean-up. We segregated, weighed, and recorded the weight of the trash collected and instructed the learners to keep their sachets for the barter once this activity was complete. For nearly two months following the clean-up, we visited all 28 classrooms weekly to segregate and collect trash. The learners and teachers were instructed to segregate it daily into four separate sacks: biodegradables, sachets, plastic bottles, and other plastic materials.



ABOVE: PCV Rachel P. assisting learners with waste segregation.

## SECTOR SPOTLIGHTS - Rachel's Volunteer Story

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During my weekly visits to the high school, the learners, teachers, and myself would work together to segregate the trash properly, especially if the guidelines had not been followed. Occasionally, segregating the trash was unpleasant, but the youth, and educators, stepped up to the challenge with a smile and segregated the solid waste. Getting your hands dirty is not an understatement. At the Final Reveal event we awarded certificates to every classroom that participated in the contest and bartered the appropriate amount of rice and noodles based on the amount of waste collected from each classroom. We announced the classrooms with the highest waste collected for each grade level and awarded them with winner certificates.

Overall, we reached approximately 62 educators and over 1,000 youth from grades 7 through 12 from the local high school.



ABOVE: Learners from Grade 11 washing the sachets for the barter at the Final Reveal.



ABOVE: Learners from Grade 9 cutting open their sachets to be bartered for rice.

We bartered over 160 kilos of trash and the school received a total of 14 kilos of rice and nearly 300 noodle packs.

I was very impressed with the willingness of the youth to step up and participate in the program. It was amazing how quick and cooperative the learners were in assisting with segregating trash. By conducting this program, the learners and teachers gained a better understanding of proper waste segregation and why solid waste management is important. Hopefully, the youth and educators will think twice about trash and will eventually transfer some of those new practices to their own households.



## | Dalaw Turo for Learners

Our municipality, in cooperation with the Department of Education began a traveling teacher program, *Dalaw Turo (visit-teach)*, in Tagalog. The program brought professionals in a variety of subjects to schools throughout the municipality to teach and engage learners in a half-day program. The goal was to expose learners to different teaching styles and diverse materials. The first school to host *Dalaw Turo* was the local elementary school.

The program aims to give presentations to all 41 elementary schools in the area and expand the scope to include the high schools as well. The first assembly was held on November 30 and

restarted in January. Now, the *Dalaw Turo* will be presenting a program once per week. My role is to co-lead a program session and give a presentation on the importance of biodiversity.

I faced some challenges in co-designing a lesson that was appropriate for all grade levels attending, which were from first to sixth grade. But with the help of Joseph, an Education PCV, we came up with a demonstration of a food web. Learners volunteered to draw different parts of the web: trees, grass, insects, the sun, animals, and a farmer for example. Then, they came up to the front of the assembly and connected the parts of the food web with strings. Different parts of the web

dropped their string to demonstrate the impacts of droughts and plant diseases just to name a few examples. The program also included three other speakers, one from the local Municipal Environment and Resources Office (MENRO) and two social workers. The MENRO officer gave a presentation about the importance of recycling and waste segregation practices. Meanwhile, the social workers encouraged the learners to bring the proper documents for school registration.

It had been years since I had taught children in a school setting, and I had never taught a group this large. I'm sure that, with practice, my presentation will get better.



**“...the program brings professionals in a variety of subjects to schools to teach and engage learners in diverse materials.”**

Tim C. | CRM PC Volunteer

RIGHT: PCV Tim C. conducting sessions at the school assembly at the local Elementary School.



# | Restoring our Coastal Resources



ABOVE: The dive team preparing for underwater assessment with PCV Rachel P.

Our municipality in Bohol is an integral part of the Danajon Bank Double Barrier Reef, which is one of the only six double barrier reefs in the world. The municipality was devastated by Typhoon Odette in December 2021 damaging both the land and the coast. In an effort to measure the damage, it was imperative to conduct underwater assessments in our Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). In June 2023, a composite team of divers from the Bohol Provincial Environment Management Office (BPEMO), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Bureau of Fishery and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and PCV Rachel co-conducted biophysical assessments on the nine marine sanctuaries within the municipality.

After the assessment, PCV Rachel co-presented images and videos of the sanctuaries' current conditions and provided initial observations. Illegal fishing was noted in the MPAs due to lack of buoys, guard houses, and enforcement boats that were washed out or damaged by the typhoon. Rachel urged the Sangguniang Bayan (SB) to increase their

funds to restore the marker buoys lost during the typhoon. The SB approved the request for PHP100,000 and will be installing the buoys in the second quarter of 2024. Rachel also co-conducted 12 Management Effectiveness Assessment Tool (MEAT) assessments on MPA management. The MPA governing bodies that completed their biophysical assessment were shown images and videos of the condition of their marine resources. The fisherfolk organizations who saw the images presented as well as the results of the MEAT assessments became motivated to attend the MPA Reorganization Meeting and Planning Workshop in September 2023 facilitated by BPEMO. This was an important first step towards the rehabilitation and restoration of our coastal resources.

The condition of our MPAs sparked motivation and enthusiasm. The fisherfolk and Municipal Fishery and Aquatic Resources Management Council (MFARMC) initiated the information and dissemination campaign to educate their fellow fisherfolk community on the importance of protecting and conserving their resources. They demonstrated that taking action involves not just a single individual but an entire community. Fisherfolk have the power to conserve and manage their MPAs not only for this current generation, but also for the next generation.



## | Championing Infrastructure Tourism

**“Only a year has passed with Vanessa, but it feels like it has been more than five with all we have accomplished together.”**

Earl Vincent E. | CRM Counterpart

*“Padayon ug laban lang”* or move forward and keep fighting, is the motto we live by at our Tourism and Information Office, and Volunteer Vanessa P. is no exception to this motto. In fact, on her first day in the municipality, following a courtesy call with the Municipal Mayor, Vanessa joined the tourism officers for field work. We attended a series of meetings with leaders from different barangays, to fulfill our Cultural Mapping Program that encompasses all 29 barangays in our municipality. The program kickstarted various initiatives, projects, and activities that we have now been working together on in the office that will continue throughout her service.

Only a year has passed with Vanessa, but it feels like it has been more than five with all we have done and accomplished together. Vanessa has made outstanding contributions to the office by aiding us with the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority and the Department of Tourism's (DOT) “Tourism Champions Challenge,” where a total of 180 million pesos was awarded to municipalities nationwide. The DOT National Office challenged local government units from across the country and invited them to submit infrastructure-based project proposals for a chance to have their projects funded. Vanessa collaborated with other key departments in our LGU to help develop the project proposal.

Fortunately, out of the nearly 100 LGUs that submitted nationwide, our proposal was selected as one of the top 15 projects. We were extremely proud that our project proposal had been identified as one of the top projects. It ensured us a minimum funding of 7 million pesos to carry out our project, the development of a nature park. We were honored with second place in the Visayas granting us 15 million pesos. However, during Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos' address, he announced that every LGU would be awarded an additional 5 million pesos landing us a total of 20 million to fund our nature park. This feat has been the cherry on top of Vanessa's first year of service.

Vanessa has gone beyond what is required as a Volunteer. She has since been a friend and prominent team member in the Tourism and Information Office and throughout the entire LGU. We cannot be more grateful to have her with us.



ABOVE: PCV Vanessa P. and Counterpart Earl Vincent E. commemorating the swearing in of Batch 279.



## | The Virtucio Host Family Story

**“It has been a life changing journey for us and our lives will never be the same.”**

Cherry F. Virtucio | Host Sister



ABOVE: PCV Vanessa P. and her host family celebrating Christmas together.

Hosting a Volunteer is an incredibly complex thing, it holds the potential to develop connections through shared experiences, emotional empathy, trust, and support. We all know that these qualities transcend beyond the family. After all, it is the reason we can love strangers and form new ties.

April 15 was the day we were officially introduced to our Volunteer. The first thing in my mind was, “this girl may



ABOVE: PCV Vanessa P. and her host family celebrating a birthday.

survive three months max in our place because, you know, living the provincial life is very hard for us Filipinos, how much more for this ‘American girl’ that was born and raised in the city.” But I was wrong. One day turned into weeks, weeks turned into months, and months turned into nearly a year, and we are still counting.

The last 10 months we have faced challenges together. From fighting over food, everyday breakfast of *tinolang isda* (fish stew), to playing games in lines for groceries or jeepneys, and even the roosters’ *toktogaok* every morning. But, the most fun and memorable parts have been the sharing of cultures, every dinner conversation, every walk we take, all the daily happenings, and basically every chance we

get to just hang out and bond. It has indeed been a life changing journey for us, and our lives will never be the same again. Learning that different cultural backgrounds don’t matter as long as we understand and respect each other. We may have different points of view and have been brought up in different cultures but in the end, learning and growing together is what matters most.

We are very blessed to have an understanding Volunteer accept us. We give a huge thank you to Peace Corps for placing Vanessa with us, for giving us the opportunity to be her home in the Philippines.

# Education (EDU)





Peace Corps Volunteers in Education work with educators, learners, and community members to gain access to personal, professional, and academic opportunities through literacy education in English.

## Areas of Work

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- English language proficiency among teachers and learners
- Remedial reading
- Learner-centered teaching techniques
- School-community linkages
- Library resources

## Key Activities

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- Co-planning and co-teaching with Filipino counterparts
- Co-organizing and co-facilitating training seminars for teachers
- Co-designing and co-implementing remedial reading programs
- Improving library resources
- Developing and implementing activities that support learning



## Education

**“The latest cohort of Education Volunteers has been instrumental in rebuilding Peace Corps’ footprint and connection with its local partners in the post-pandemic era.”**

Jessica Sucgang | EDU Program Manager



ABOVE: Education Volunteers examining new reading resources with Bagong Kulturang Pinoy during a partnership series training.

Peace Corps Volunteers in Education work with teachers, learners, and community members with the goal of helping learners attain English communication skills to gain access to academic and professional opportunities.

They co-plan, co-teach, co-organize, and co-facilitate activities with their Filipino counterparts to improve English comprehension, develop the capacity of teachers to use English as a medium for instruction, and increase the ability of the community members to support learners’ access to learning. Volunteers have been instrumental in rebuilding Peace Corps’ footprint and connection with

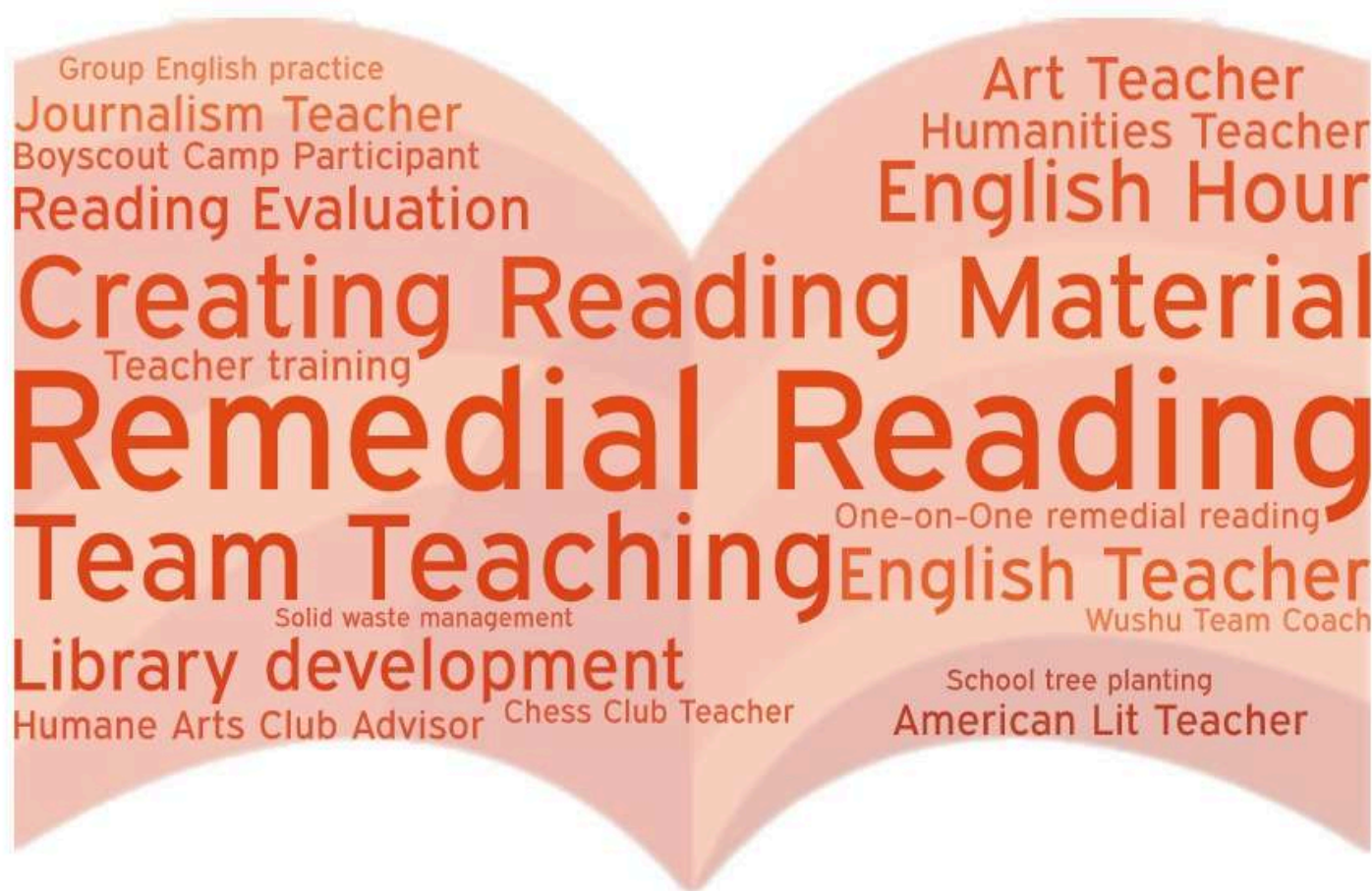
its local partners in the post-pandemic era. In support of the Department of Education’s National Learning Recovery Program, Volunteers have been developing resources that learners and teachers can use in their catch-up and reading remediation program. These resources are now being piloted by the Volunteers and their counterparts in their respective schools. Their efforts in addressing the learning gaps of learners during the COVID-19 school are gradually gaining ground traction.

To sustain the momentum, Volunteers are now developing secondary projects that focus on literacy, library

development, and environmental education. Education Volunteers are engaging in multi-sector activities with fellow Volunteers and have been collaborating closely on special projects with cross-sector Volunteers in addressing issues that directly affect Filipino learners such as climate change and mental health awareness.

Finally, the Volunteers are organizing and facilitating professional development activities in their school to ensure that Filipino teachers are capacitated with learner-centered and 21st century teaching pedagogies.

# EDU Projects and Activities



The word cloud generated above represents reported projects and activities that Volunteers have established at their sites. Volunteers are encouraged to share their talents, skills and experience to provide their community and themselves with an enriching component to their service.



## Growing Together With NURSEREAD

**“...as the learners grow in their language and science education, so too will the plants they care for.”**

Chris P. | EDU PC Volunteer



ABOVE: PCV Chris P. conducting reading sessions in the NURSEREAD Gazebo.

Project NURSEREAD aims to equip learners with reading and environmental skills, vital for personal development and beneficial for the community's future. Its primary aim is to create a space dedicated to enhancing reading skills and to establishing an outdoor garden area for environmental education. We are hopeful that, as the learners grow in their language and science education, so too will the plants they care for.

In its indoor component, the project involves constructing and equipping a space designed for reading and tutoring. This area will include analog materials and modern technology to support a sustainable and focused learning environment. It will provide a setting for one-on-

one tutoring, small group classes, and quiet study, thereby enhancing reading ability and academic performance.

In its outdoor section, learners will engage in discovering and cultivating endemic species and fruit-bearing plants. This practical experience in plant-caring and environmental stewardship is designed to educate learners about sustainable agricultural practices, ecological restoration, and food security.

A single individual could not reach these goals alone. Achieving progress in both reading enhancement and environmental education has been an exercise in *Bayanihan*: an invocation, invigoration, and mobilization

of community spirit. It requires trust, patience, persistence, communication, and heart. This group effort could never take off without the school community's belief in the value of strong reading skills and the importance of environmental education, a foundational effort that existed long before I arrived and will surely thrive long after I've gone. I count myself lucky to have played a small role in its story so far.



ABOVE: A shed torn away, soon to be replaced by the NURSEREAD Gazebo.

# | Developing the NURSEREAD Project

At our school in La Union, we have the privilege to work alongside a Peace Corps Volunteer, Chris, to aid in our school's most dire academic concern: literacy. Together, we developed a noteworthy project called NURSEREAD which aims to alleviate learners' literacy struggles while also making a lasting impact on the environment within our school and the broader community.

Originating post-PDM workshop, our faculty and staff commenced planning in November 2023. The project focuses on addressing the literacy gap in our community. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our learners struggle with reading. NURSEREAD will be a

calm and conducive place surrounded by plants where learners can develop their reading skills.

Chris is helping us reach our goal by conducting one-on-one reading sessions for learners with difficulty in reading, inviting and encouraging them, providing the learners with a comfortable, conducive, and friendly atmosphere where learners can engage in communication even if they are not native English speakers. With continuous practice, this experience will improve the literacy levels of our learners.

By reading together, we both learn something from each other. As written by Dr. Seuss, "The more that you read, the

more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." I was able to reflect that there is no such thing as a small act of service, because every act creates a ripple with the learners in our institution. By conducting reading sessions together, we will produce better readers, and with better readers, we can create positive outcomes in our community.

I realized that teamwork is truly essential when it comes to projects like this. The success of any plan will depend on cooperation and joint effort. Without the presence of our Peace Corps Volunteer, we wouldn't be starting this great opportunity to have progress with our learners' reading skill.

**"By conducting reading sessions together, we will produce better readers, and with better readers we can create positive outcomes in our community."**

Eunice M. | EDU Counterpart



ABOVE: PCV Chris P. co-teaching a remedial reading session.

## | An Act of Bayanihan Spirit

**“...many learners had no idea that there could be a potential roadmap to college without the hefty costs.”**

Angel P. | EDU PC Volunteer



ABOVE: PCV Angel P. meeting with the Mayor to discuss the construction of a library resource center for his school.

Being part of the first batch of Volunteers since the COVID pandemic, I have been able to observe how the epidemic completely ravaged the education system in the Philippines.

In my site, learner reading levels were critically affected, falling behind three to five grade levels. Many classrooms were dilapidated and awaiting funding for reconstruction efforts and repairs, and teachers were tasked the impossible to teach full classes of 40 plus learners varying in grade level. Many schools did not have adequate reading materials to work with, and relied heavily on outdated, simplified learning modules to supplement their instruction. I immediately felt the pressure of the task I was given to

improve literacy rates amongst earners at my school. But there was hope. Luckily, the team at our school, was ready to support me in my endeavors, including the planning of a game changing project for our school.

During the first few months, I met with the stakeholders of our community and assessed the needs of the school community based on their testimonies. It became clear that there was a large gap between high school and college, as there was no guidance to adequately prepare learners to attend higher education. Many were completely unaware that there were hundreds of schools that are now tuition-free due to a recent law in the Philippines subsidizing selected schools.

There are also scholarships available to fund books and other expenses associated with attending college. However, without a centralized location for any of this information, many learners had no idea that there could be a potential roadmap to college without the hefty costs.

After brainstorming with my counterparts, we were settled on the idea of building a fully functional library for the school and having it act as a college and career guidance center. We decided to put all our eggs in this project and called it *Project Gabay*, meaning guidance. Our children need to be able to read to achieve their dreams; having a library seemed like a great place to start!

## SECTOR SPOTLIGHTS - Angel's Volunteer Story

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Currently, we have mobilized our efforts to gain the support of book donors, the local barangay captains, and the Mayor, whom all demonstrated enthusiasm at the prospect of reaching the goals of *Project Gabay*. With the community contributions and grant funding, we are optimistic that soon we can provide this dream library for our kids. This will support literacy development and prepare our learners for life after high school by closing the learning gaps.

One of the greatest gifts of a Peace Corps journey is the cultural exchange that happens each and every day. Just months into my service, I

have already taken to heart one aspect of Filipino culture called *bayanihan* spirit. It is the idea of giving from your heart without any expectation of something in return. Today, I see the *bayanihan* spirit in the parents that come together to clean the schools of their children, or to fix broken chairs, tables, and other necessities before the school year begins. As an Education Volunteer, you are at the center of where parents, learners, teachers, government officials, and the greater community intersect; each giving what they can with limited resources to support the education of their children. It is essential to recognize that the community may just need

a platform to collectively plan solutions, and as a Volunteer, we can be a channel to connect the pillars that lift the community. Together with the support of Peace Corps, international donors, and our community assets, we can pave the way to a brighter future for our learners in the same *bayanihan* spirit that is so deeply rooted in this country.

**“As an Education Volunteer, you are at the center of where parents, learners, teachers, government officials, and the greater community intersect.”**

Angel P. | EDU PC Volunteer



ABOVE: PCV Angel P. co-teaching Grade 9 learners a lesson on English pronunciations.

# | Inspiration through Collaboration

Working with Peace Corps has been a fulfilling and motivating experience for me. Every day brings new opportunities for personal and professional growth, and the chance to make a positive impact on the community we serve. Collaborating with a Peace Corps Volunteer has not only deepened my understanding of different cultures but has also given me new perspectives on our profession. One of the most interesting parts of this experience is seeing how both Volunteer Angel and I have grown personally and professionally. Our constant exchange of ideas, learning from each other, and working together has given me a fresh

approach to problem-solving and has expanded my world view. This partnership has introduced me to new ways of thinking critically, significantly improving my skills. Working with Angel has given me a unique insight into the challenges faced by disadvantaged communities. His dedication to his mission inspires me to strive for better results in everything I do. Together, we tackle constant challenges head-on, coming up with creative solutions and making a real impact to our learners.

Apart from the meaningful work we do, our partnership is filled with a friendly and positive atmosphere. We

approach each task with excitement and curiosity, turning even difficult situations into opportunities for growth and learning. Our bond has grown to the point where we consider ourselves practically brothers.

As our partnership continues to evolve, I look forward to achieving even greater success. Our shared goal is to leave a lasting impact on the school and community we serve. Challenges are expected, but by combining our strengths, skills, and perspectives, we can make a meaningful and lasting change. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with Angel and I am optimistic about our future accomplishments together.



**“Collaborating with a Peace Corps Volunteer has not only deepened my understanding of different cultures but has also given me new perspectives on our profession.”**

John T. | EDU Counterpart

LEFT: Counterpart John T. and PCV Angel P. celebrating Angel's swearing-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

## | The Mallare Host Family Story

**“We are comfortable having Joe here at home, and we enjoy his company. We are learning with him, and he is also learning with us.”**

Geraldine M. | Host Mother



ABOVE: PCV Joe S. enjoying the company of the Mallare family.

When we were asked if we could be a host family to Volunteer Joe, we were happy to accept. Teachers from the school immediately went to my house for an inspection, along with members of the Peace Corps' Education Programming Team. On April 15, 2023, Joe arrived. We all had a meal together and I informed him that we live a very simple life. We took him around town, walked along the beach and introduced him to our community. In the first month, I taught him how to cook Filipino dishes and he learned quickly.

We eat lunch together and we always have dinner as a family. We often go to the market together and whenever there is a chance, we walk to and from the beach while eating *pandesal* (bread).

Whenever Joe feels unwell, I accompany him for a check-up. When I attend out-of-town seminars, he cooks dinner, checks if the gas tank is closed, unplugs devices, and ensures that doors are locked before going to sleep. He cares for our home and he also walks with my kids returning from school.

Sometimes, we get surprised when Joe talks because he is very straightforward; his culture is different. We learned to understand him, though I also guide Joe on dealing with us and our cultural differences. Now, he is familiar with the community and our home, and he is comfortable being alone. In the kitchen, he knows where to find everything he needs for cooking or baking. Most of the time, we go to school and come home together; we treat him as a member of our family.

We are comfortable having Joe here at home, and we enjoy his company. We are learning with him, and he is also learning with us. We appreciate that he is simple and very independent.



LEFT: PCV Joe S. baking cupcakes for school children in his host family's kitchen.



REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
PHILIPPINE NATIONAL VOLUNTEER  
SERVICE COORDINATING AGENCY

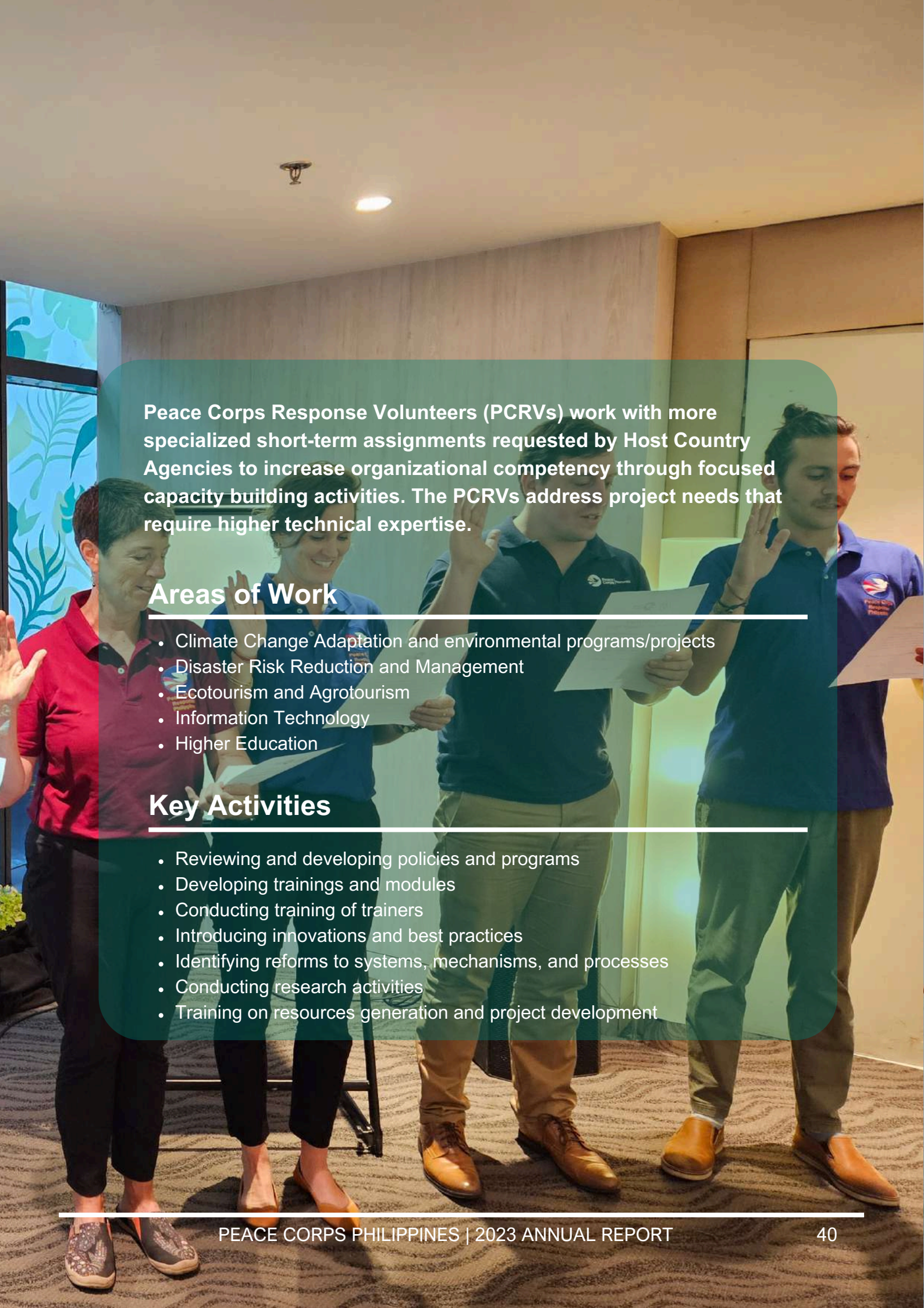
# Response

VOLUNTEERING IN THE  
PHILIPPINES



Peace  
Corps

RESPONSE



**Peace Corps Response Volunteers (PCRVs) work with more specialized short-term assignments requested by Host Country Agencies to increase organizational competency through focused capacity building activities. The PCRVs address project needs that require higher technical expertise.**

## **Areas of Work**

- Climate Change Adaptation and environmental programs/projects
- Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
- Ecotourism and Agrotourism
- Information Technology
- Higher Education

## **Key Activities**

- Reviewing and developing policies and programs
- Developing trainings and modules
- Conducting training of trainers
- Introducing innovations and best practices
- Identifying reforms to systems, mechanisms, and processes
- Conducting research activities
- Training on resources generation and project development



RESPONSE

# Peace Corps Response Program

**“Volunteers work alongside their counterparts by providing demand-driven activities through expertise coaching and knowledge transfer.”**

Milosil Cruz | PC Response Coordinator



ABOVE: Former Country Director Jenner Edelman swearing-in the first three Peace Corps Response Volunteers that arrived in April 2023.

Peace Corps Response is a unique and innovative program that mobilizes experienced and qualified professionals who provide technical assistance in Peace Corps countries world-wide, providing short-term assignments of seven to ten months.

The Response Program responds to specific and more specialized technical needs as requested by local partners

with a goal of increasing organizational capacity and ensuring knowledge transfer and sustainability.

Volunteers work alongside their counterparts by providing demand-driven activities through expertise coaching and knowledge transfer.

The programming strategy for placement of Peace Corps Response Volunteers (PCRVs) in the Philippines

address relevant issues such as climate change adaptation, disaster risk management, and environment.

Upon re-entry of Volunteers in 2023, three PCRVs arrived in May and four in September. A total of seven PCRVs were fielded in the Environment (4), Education (2), and Information Technology (1) program areas. The partner organizations they worked with include national agencies, state universities, and local government units. To date, two out of the seven PCRVs have successfully completed their service and the remaining five continue to serve.



LEFT: PCR V Julie N. presenting her project at the opening of the Tamarindu Festival.



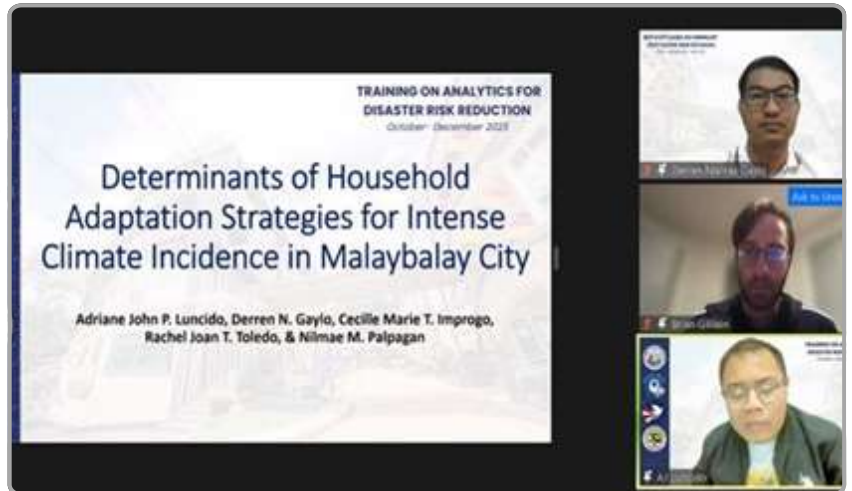
Peace Corps

RESPONSE

## Virtual Service Pilot

**“The VSP program is leveraged as a strategy to finally establish partnerships in areas not suitable for in-person Volunteer placements.”**

Tale del Rosario | PC Response Program Assistant



ABOVE: VSP participant Brian G. engaging with local counterparts during their weekly virtual meeting.

Under the Peace Corps Response Program, the Virtual Service Pilot (VSP), an innovative service model, was launched in 2020 to help meet the evolving needs of our Host Country Partners and expand opportunities for Peace Corps participation through virtual online engagement. U.S. private citizens donate 5-15 hours per week of their time and expertise for six-month virtual assignments, both

synchronously and asynchronously. The Virtual Service Pilot complements the work of the 2-year traditional and Response Volunteers and allows the Peace Corps to engage with partners on shorter-term projects that can be completed remotely and in areas off-limits to in-person Volunteers such as Mindanao.

In the Philippines, participants provide virtual support to

partners in the following program areas: climate change, disaster risk management, environment, education, and youth development.

In 2023, three Virtual Service Pilot Participants (VSPPs) worked with different partner organizations on marine biodiversity research and disaster risk management, where one of the three has completed the virtual assignment to a Peace Corps restricted area. The VSP program is leveraged as a strategy to finally establish partnerships in areas not suitable for in-person Volunteer placements.



LEFT: Peace Corps staff conducting the Host Country Agency orientation to partner agencies with VSP participants Brian G. and James S.



Peace  
Corps

RESPONSE

# Teaching Data Science

**“I wanted to do everything I could to help the students and contribute to the exciting research on campus.”**

Erin K. | Peace Corps  
Response Volunteer



ABOVE: PCRV Erin K. demonstrating R Programming to university students.

I joined Peace Corps Response to use my education and professional experience to help others. I also wanted to live in a new country, build connections, and gain a cross-cultural perspective.

When I arrived at the university, I found a community of brilliant researchers. I wanted to do everything I could to help the students and contribute to the exciting research on campus. I was hired as a Biochemistry Expert and while I did use biochemistry for some projects, I soon realized I could best contribute using a different skill set. After attending several thesis presentations by university students, I noticed that although many used data

analysis methods, they had no formal training and there was no curriculum at the university for biology students to learn these skills. I asked how students learned the data analysis skills and most of them watched YouTube videos and searched through online resources. Since I knew about data analysis and computational biology methods, I was happy to teach anyone interested.

I organized and designed workshops on principal component analysis and other data science topics specific to what students work with. This initiative was a hit, and the more times I presented the workshop, the more classes and research groups requested I present to them. I met with research group

leaders and professors to develop the curriculum specific to their group needs.

I started by presenting to a small group of faculty and students from many research teams. After the first workshop, we received many additional requests. One of the most important takeaways from the workshop series is R Programming, a valuable tool for scientists of all disciplines. Empowering the students to start coding gives them the potential to learn a competitive skill. The workshops also taught me to be flexible and adaptable in development work.

I always say the hardest part of programming is getting started. This initiative came about from simply recognizing a community need and collaborating with staff to help students meet that need.



RESPONSE

## Operating in the Spirit of Integrity

**“...if one operated with integrity and a dash of courage, a difficult situation can sometimes result into something way beyond your expectations.”**

Bill F. | Peace Corps  
Response Volunteer

I applied for this Volunteer posting in 2019 and in 2020 I was ready to go with a set departure date. Then the COVID happened. By the time Peace Corps Response resumed operation in May 2023, the ground has shifted under my posting. The work I was supposed to do was mostly already completed in the school that requested my assistance. Making some small changes at the margins of those systems would have been easy, but very much not in the spirit of the Peace Corps' goal of long-term sustainable development.

In order to stay true to the Peace Corps vision and to my



ABOVE: PCRV Bill F. celebrating the Christmas holidays with faculty staff.

personal standards of integrity, I really had only one choice: transform my Volunteer engagement into an audit, which necessarily means finding problems and this unavoidably involves some friction. Auditors by its authority aren't always popular people. I was coming from a place of facing bad news head-on and in a spirit of transparency, I did exactly that. I have carefully set the stage for what I believe was an extremely positive outcome. My background in IT led to some discoveries that actually helped the school improve its systems.

The school's executive director was impressive in the way that she recognized the scope of the issues. Like all of us, she has her set of

constraints (including the budgets), but within the scope of what is possible, she was incredibly supportive.

I certainly understand Filipino culture better. I was also quite intentional about understanding and communicating cultural differences, in a way that I believe has deepened my colleagues' understanding of American culture, both the good and the bad.

In terms of the 'emotional arc' of my volunteer experience, it showed me that if one operated with integrity and a dash of courage, a difficult situation can sometimes result into something way beyond your expectations. Indeed, getting a good result under challenging circumstances is all the more satisfying.

# ***INITIATIVES***

*Initiatives are cross-programming priorities that Peace Corps promotes globally. Working alongside communities across countries, Peace Corps helps turn the world's challenges into shared triumphs.*



## Peace Corps Initiatives for 2023



Climate Change  
Initiative



Volunteer Service  
Initiative (VSI)

## | PC Response Hosts the DRR Study Tour



ABOVE: Cultural dancers welcoming the Peace Corps DRR Study Tour delegation in Cebu island.

From March 5-14, 2023, Peace Corps hosted the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Early Warning System (EWS) study tour for six Peace Corps staff from other countries, featuring best practices in the Philippines. This initiative, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), aims to strengthen U.S. Government efforts to support host country partners worldwide in adapting to climate change and building more resilient, sustainable communities.

“The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world and has a wealth of experience and expertise to share with other countries in effective DRR and EWS at all

levels of government,” said Peace Corps Environmental Specialist Neil Boyer during the opening program.

The visiting delegation included Peace Corps DRR focal persons and environmental and climate change experts from the Eastern Caribbean, Guyana, Paraguay, Malawi, Mozambique, Tonga, and the United States. While in country, they learned Philippine DRR and EWS best practices firsthand from national and sub-national Peace Corps partners including the Office of Civil Defense, PAGASA, the Climate Change Commission, and LGU partners in Pasig City, Baguio City, La Trinidad Municipality in Benguet, and

San Francisco in Camotes, Cebu.

Back in their home countries, the DRR focal persons will apply their experience in the country and introduce DRR-focused Peace Corps Volunteer assignments requested by their own government partners, just as the Peace Corps has been doing through its specialized Response Program in the Philippines since 2007.

Volunteers will be supporting DRR and climate change-related priorities requested by host communities in all the three sectors in Peace Corps Philippines.

# | Building Host Country Volunteerism



ABOVE: Peace Corps Volunteer Grayson B. welcoming youth participants to his youth camp focused on COVID-19 and HIV prevention and reproductive health.

### Youth Volunteer Service Initiative

Peace Corps Philippines' Batch 279 Volunteers of Children, Youth, and Families sector successfully implemented the Youth Volunteerism Service Initiative (VSI) Project. Peace Corps facilitated the Training of Trainers for 12 Peace Corps Volunteers and their local Counterparts, with support from PNVSCA, LoveYourself, and Breakthrough Action. The trained PCVs and Counterparts conducted a series of Youth Camp Training of Trainers for a total of 160 youth leaders coming from 13 municipalities all over Luzon and Visayas.

From July to October, these 160 youth leaders consequently conducted over 80 day-camps that reached approximately 5,000 youth who received basic training on youth mental health, Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH), HIV Prevention, and COVID-19 Prevention. All the activities include voluntary HIV testing, and more than half of the participants were seen to have voluntarily tested contributing to the goal of destigmatizing these tests.

### Youth Volunteerism Workshop

Peace Corps Philippines, in partnership with LoveYourself and with support from PNVSCA, facilitated a Youth Volunteerism workshop for seven Environment PCVs and seven Education PCVs alongside two youth leaders from each of the Volunteer sites. Foreign volunteer organizations such as the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), The Organization for Industrial and Cultural Advancement (OISCA), Global Initiative for Exchange and Development, Inc. (GIED), and other foreign volunteers participated alongside local youth counterparts. The youth were all leaders in their schools or newly elected SK officials. A total of 80 participants joined the workshops that focused on harnessing the power of Volunteerism among the youth in the following areas: Volunteering for Education, Volunteering for Environment and Climate Change, and Volunteering for HIV and Health.



ABOVE: CYF Program Manager Ambet Yangco, and Peace Corps Volunteers Tim C., Vanessa P., and Joe S., joining organizational representatives and youth leaders in an outdoor activity on youth volunteer engagement.

# ***PARTNERSHIPS***

*Peace Corps is passionate about working with strategic partners to strengthen the impact of our mission. Through our collaborations, we expand opportunities for Volunteers and their communities to exchange knowledge and replicate best practices in development efforts where Volunteers serve.*



## Strategic partnerships for 2023...



Small Projects  
Assistance  
(SPA)



Project Design  
and Management  
(PDM)



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# SPA Marks Its 40th Anniversary

This year we recognize the 40th Anniversary of our Small Project Assistance (SPA) Program. In January 1983, Peace Corps launched the SPA Program with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). SPA represents the largest and longest-running partnership between the two agencies.

Designed to catalyze locally led development by supporting the bold ideas of community members, over \$44 million in USAID funds have enabled the SPA Program to support life-changing projects around the world. SPA grant projects have generated an additional \$34 million in local community and third-party contributions in the last four decades.

This assistance has funded small-scale projects in more than 115 countries that have reached nearly 30 million community members. This funding, averaging \$2,500 per grant, is paired with a minimum 25 percent community contribution, and demonstrates how we can leverage our longstanding connections with communities and our technical expertise to support demand-driven and community-centered development.

To celebrate the 40th anniversary, USAID produced a SPA Program video featuring the collaboration of staff and Volunteers from Peace Corps Liberia, Philippines, and Mexico along with the community changemakers they work with. The video honors the inspiring work of our colleagues and members of the Peace Corps network worldwide. In the video interview, Sheila Chan, the Small Grants Coordinator in Peace Corps, remarked that one of the key features of this funding is that “it’s community centered and demand driven. It

is not based on what the funder wants, but what the community needs.” The crew traveled to the municipality of San Estaban, Ilocos Sur, featuring the LGU and how their team has flourished on their own with the funding support from SPA and the assistance of a CRM PCV.

Peace Corps Director, Carol Spahn, is all praises for SPA, “On this milestone anniversary, I want to express my sincere gratitude to all staff who have championed the SPA Program over the years. From directly implementing grant activities, to supporting Volunteers and community counterparts through the grant application and management processes, you have been critical to the success of our partnership with USAID.”

***“It’s community centered and demand driven. It is not based on what the funder wants, but what the community needs.”***

Sheila Chan | Small Grants Coordinator

RIGHT: The SPA / USAID video crew highlights the sustainable SPA project where work partners conducting sea grass assessments using transects.





## Re-launching the PDM with Batch 279



ABOVE: CRM PCVs and counterparts still managing to smile minutes before their panel presentation at the PDM 279 Workshop.

In November 2023, Peace Corps relaunched the Project Design and Management (PDM) Workshop for Batch 279, funded by USAID through the Small Project Assistance (SPA) funds agreement. Each Volunteer attended the event with up to two work counterparts and a youth leader where a total of 28 Volunteers and 57 Filipino youth and work counterparts attended the skills training.

The PDM is part of the PCV's in-service training event given at least five months into their service, when Volunteers are already primed to start working on community projects with their counterparts. The goal of the 3-day workshop was to provide skills in identifying community projects that align with local priorities while building on their local assets and strengths. This means putting a premium on what already exists and strengthening the

capacity of the community to improve their situation and resolve issues on their own.

Donald D. Gawe, the Executive Director of the Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency (PNVSCA) graced the occasion and reiterated the importance of youth participation and volunteerism in community development. With biodiversity as the theme for the event, Cherry Montojo, USAID's Development Program Specialist and SPA point of contact, together with Rebecca Guieb, USAID Regional and Coastal Marine Specialist, presented the agency's biodiversity programming and challenged participants to find a connection to link their projects to biodiversity conservation.

Every year prior to the pandemic, the pool of trainers came from current-serving PCVs from the previous batch, together with their work



## Re-launching the PDM with Batch 279

partners. Without prior Volunteers, the PDM was facilitated by former Filipino counterparts with prior knowledge of the PDM and long-time experience working on community projects with their PCVs. Two facilitators were assigned to each sector in EDU, CYF, and CRM.

Facilitators conducted the sessions using the experiential learning model. Ice breakers, games, activities, and incentives were used throughout the day to keep energy high. They learned to work together as a team, collectively determine feasible realistic projects, identify, and maximize local resources, learn about Peace Corps funding requirements, and experience first-hand how to prepare visual aids and present their project ideas before an expert panel. The

workshop sessions for the first two days focused on the skills on project identification while the third day was on Peace Corps grants, project idea presentations, and gallery walk.

The highlight of the PDM was the presentation of 28 projects developed by all three sectors, before a panel of Peace Corps staff and U.S. Embassy guests. Presentations were done in groups of three, where projects were reviewed by expert panelists.

With the first batch of Volunteers back in the field, this event set the stage for Volunteers and work partners to learn practical ways of working together to build relationships, promote knowledge exchange, and make lasting and measurable impact.



ABOVE: EDU PCVs and counterparts striking the wacky pose together with their Peace Corps sector team.

# Editorial Team

Our appreciation goes to all the Volunteers and their host families and work partners who submitted articles and photos for this publication. We are particularly grateful for the talents, time, and positive energy of the following Peace Corps Volunteers of Batch 279 whose leadership and priceless contribution have made all this possible:



**Angel**

Education Volunteer



**Vanessa**

Coastal Resource  
Management Volunteer



**Joe**

Education Volunteer



**Grayson**

Children, Youth, and  
Families Volunteer





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PHILIPPINES

PEACE CORPS PHILIPPINES

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