



- ▶ Development of Self
- ▶ Then & Now: HIV/AIDS Programs
- ▶ Careers in Public Health

Red Ribbon Summer Camp for HIV+ Kids

There's no way to sugarcoat it: Children with HIV/AIDS have it hard. The majority were born with the disease, and many have faced terrible stigma all their lives. Often, their family lives are in disarray. In countries where stigma and discrimination run high and HIV knowledge low, it can be particularly challenging.

According to UNAIDS, Eastern Europe continues to have the largest increase in HIV incidence in the world, and Ukraine has had one of the highest burdens of the disease with an estimated 0.9 percent of the population of 44 million living with HIV in 2012. In October, UNAIDS recognized Ukraine as the first country in the region to reduce new HIV infections between 2001–12.

A Ukrainian government report to UNAIDS stated there were 2,722 children with HIV in treatment, but other numbers are hard to confirm as the country doesn't track or publish HIV



Children with HIV/AIDS play games at Camp OHALOW—Overcoming HIV and Leading Our World—sponsored by the HIV/AIDS Working Group in Peace Corps/Ukraine. Photo: Courtesy of PCV Abby Anderson

data for youth aged 15–24.

In Ukraine, PCV Abby Ander-

son is working to make it easier for children with HIV/AIDS. Anderson

is co-director of Camp OHALOW—Overcoming HIV and Leading Our World—for children with HIV/AIDS aged 9–14.

Anderson said stigma around HIV/AIDS is still strong in Ukraine: A former director of the camp was refused service at a restaurant because she was wearing a red ribbon bracelet. One camper was outed as being HIV-positive and assaulted in her community. Another child's friends found out she was HIV-positive and told her she should stop taking her medication because she wasn't going to live anyway.

"The camp reaches a highly stigmatized population. Kids deserve a chance to not have to worry about revealing their status and be with tolerant, loving people and just have fun," she said. Further, "The life skills empower them. 'You can do anything with your life, and let's see if we can

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 ■■■■■■■■■■▶

After 10 years of PEPFAR, focus on orphans and vulnerable children heightens

In 2003, President George W. Bush made a commitment to provide \$15 billion over five years to fight the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. Reauthorized by Congress in 2008 for another five years, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has supported antiretroviral treatment for 5.1 million people to date, with a goal set by President Obama of treating 6 million by the end of 2013.

In 2005, the Peace Corps began working with orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS in Uganda; the next year PEPFAR issued guidance on supporting this population. The guidance laid the plan and structure for PEPFAR programs, focused on health and nutrition, education, psychosocial support, child protection, and economic strengthening.

According to Erin Lawless, program specialist for the Peace Corps Office of Global Health and HIV who focuses on orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV, the 2006 guidance "puts families first, serving the child through strengthening the family."

"For so many children who are orphaned, family care is best," she said.

Lawless said a second guidance was issued in 2012, based on the evidence of the results of the first guidance's efforts.

"Between 2006–12, PEPFAR was able to see what really worked, and went more in-depth about what can be done, with tangible strategies and interventions that can be done on the ground with families and children," she said.

"2006 set the tone, and 2012 outlined the strategy of what worked."

To implement the new PEPFAR guidance, the Peace Corps has piloted a training program, and the first five sessions are on the agency's intranet.

"The first five [sessions] in pre-service training are looking at an overview of care for children in PEPFAR, looking at global strategies and identifying strengths and needs when looking at families and children affected by HIV."

Lawless said the second part, expected to be published in the second quarter of 2014, is more in-depth: Each training will focus on one of the five PEPFAR

service areas, teaching Volunteers what they need to know to work with families in those areas and equipping Volunteers to do real activities.

"Our approach is to work with community groups," she said. "Evidence has shown that for parents caring for children affected by HIV, who are financially strapped, being in groups has proven to be really great. There's stress reduction for overall health and connectedness, and being connected to the community helps them and their families."

Though Volunteers are working with large numbers of orphans and vulnerable children specifically in Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, and Swaziland, Lawless said, "Every post has done a really great job to tackle this, based on the evidence and connected to the PEPFAR guidance."

Beyond the 2012 PEPFAR guidance and the new Peace Corps trainings, Lawless said there was a third document that helped shape the Peace Corps work in this area: USAID released a whole-of-government "Action Plan for Children in Adversity" in December 2012 that

complements the PEPFAR guidance. USAID's action plan, focused on all vulnerable children, is the first time that the U.S. government agencies that fund international development agreed to align their funding sources around three goals: to build strong beginnings, put family child care first, and protect children from violence and exploitation.

The Peace Corps is implementing pilots in Rwanda and Cambodia.

Lawless said that while the Peace Corps hasn't tracked how many total Volunteers are working with orphans and vulnerable children, most are. She added that the new reporting tools will capture that data.

Additionally, Lawless said the Peace Corps is creating an early childhood development health training package, scheduled for release in early 2015. The agency already has education and literacy modules for early childhood.

"Early childhood development—the first 1,000 days of life—are so important for child development," she said. "It has a lifelong impact on kids."

That Was Then ... This is Now

Making Progress in HIV/AIDS in Host Countries



Since the agency's founding, community health has been a core focus for Peace Corps Volunteers, who have contributed to several international public health efforts. Since 2004, one significant effort is the global response to HIV and the Peace Corps' participation as part of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Every Volunteer serving in Sub-Saharan Africa is now trained in HIV prevention and awareness, regardless of primary sector assignment. Last year, a third of all Volunteers serving worldwide worked on HIV-related projects in communities ranging from urban cities to remote villages, beyond the reach of many public programs or

nongovernmental organizations.

Shelley Smith, chief of programming and training in the Peace Corps Office of Global Health and HIV, has been working in public health for more than 20 years. Following her Peace Corps service in Ghana, she worked as the health specialist in what was then known as Peace Corps Office of Training and Program Support from 1992–98 to assist the agency in developing its first global HIV/AIDS strategy. Now back at Peace Corps headquarters, Smith has noticed some major differences, as well as similarities, with respect to the Peace Corps' past and current work in HIV/AIDS.

"One of the major differences is that in the '90s there was only a focus on HIV/AIDS prevention. This was the pre-treatment era and the scope was very different," Smith said. "We were working in an emergency environment. USAID was providing some resources to the Peace Corps to support training of Volunteers but it was in a very limited number of countries."

Last year, the agency used PEPFAR funds to extend its work in HIV in 47 countries overseas. Posts use PEPFAR resources to enhance their HIV/AIDS programming and in-country training, field additional PCVs and PCRVs in sup-

port of PEPFAR goals, and provide support for community-initiated projects.

"It's exciting to see how much the Peace Corps as an agency has embraced the importance of our work in HIV/AIDS," Smith said. "The partnership with PEPFAR has really allowed us to grow in our role of what we can do. Before, our programming was much more experimental, and we were trying to see what could work. Now we have much better technical materials and ways to track our impact around the world."

One of the HIV/AIDS programs Smith originally helped develop—curriculum for Cameroon—in the 1990s is still in use and was recently cited in the Cameroon Host Country Impact Study as having had a major impact on government policy. The program, originally called Teach English, Prevent AIDS (TEPA), was developed by teams of Peace Corps Volunteers, their counterparts, representatives from the ministries of Education and Public Health, and Peace Corps headquarters staff. Through the use of a Peace Corps manual, TEPA enables Volunteers to teach English while also providing students a safe space to learn about HIV/AIDS and develop life skills that reduce their vulnerability to infection.



Student members of a youth club in Cameroon, who are trained as peer educators and work in their community to educate fellow students and community members on health topics including HIV/AIDS.

"It was really amazing to see that a program I helped develop in the '90s is still functioning and has made such a huge impact," Smith said. "The Cameroon Host Country Impact Study states, 'The use of HIV/AIDS-related materials, not only for the fight against the disease, but also in teaching English, was cited at the government level as being one of the areas in which changes in government policy are attributed solely to the influence of PCVs' activities and the Peace Corps' development approach.' This really speaks to the ability Volunteers have to make a difference in the field."

CAMP OHALOW FROM PAGE IIIIIIIIIII ► help you."

The camp is run by the Peace Corps/Ukraine HIV/AIDS Working Group and was started in 2011 by PCV Laura Braff. Based on the Camp GLOW format, the camp draws youth from all over Ukraine. Working with a counterpart from the All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV, Camp OHALOW is organized by two PCV co-directors (Anderson and Daniel Cline), one Ukrainian director, PCV coordinators, PCV and Ukrainian counselors, and local psychologists and social workers.

Because of the stigma, confidentiality has been a major challenge for the camp. Anderson said that while local medical professionals have a duty not to disclose HIV status, if the information gets out, there can be discrimination: Children can't go to school; families can't find work.

"We change the name of the camp every year to ensure confidentiality and help protect the kids," Anderson said. Previously, the camp had been space-themed; this year's theme will be "Ocean Commotion."

In 2013, the camp was seven days for 62 campers; in 2014, it will be 10 days for 40 campers. Though the Anderson said they liked hosting more children, they found it takes time for

the youth to feel safe before they can open up to the counselors and each other. Thus, the directors opted for a longer camp with fewer participants to maximize the benefits for attendees.

The camp is a mix of fun activities, life skills training, group counseling with a psychologist, Ukraine-mandatory "rest," swimming, and evening camp activities and games, such as talent shows, discos, amazing race contests, minute to win it, or capture the flag, followed by time for reflection. Days are punctuated by strict twice-daily medication schedules.

"Kids have to take their medications either one or two times per day," she said. "If they don't take their medication, it won't work with their body any more. We have to be very careful in the morning and let them out 15 minutes before the kids need to take their meds."

Because of attending Camp OHALOW, the girl whose friends convinced her to stop taking her meds learned how the medications work with her body and has been taking them consistently since then.

Anderson said one unexpected outcome of the camp is how it transforms and educates the counselors, who are often Ukrainian college students.

"One really cool thing is our Ukrainian counselors bring the knowledge of



HIV-positive children in Ukraine make art at Camp OHALOW, a camp for children living with HIV/AIDS.

the culture, we train them in PEPFAR and about living with HIV—and their attitudes about people living with HIV change after the camp," she said. "They say, 'I absolutely understand that these kids are normal. I'm not afraid to touch them.'"

That stigma reduction ripples through the counselors' communities. "It's incredible because they go back, and they tell them, 'I went to this camp and I'm not afraid [of people with HIV/AIDS]. It's really cool and inspiring.'"

Camp OHALOW is partially funded through the President's Emer-

gency Plan for AIDS Relief, with additional funding coming through a Peace Corps Partnership program grant.

Because of the success of the summer camp, Anderson said the HIV/AIDS Working Group is hosting day-long mini Camp OHALOWs throughout Ukraine with local HIV/AIDS organizations.

Information about Camp OHALOW can be found at ohalow.webs.com; or for more information, email ohalow@gmail.com or miniohalow@gmail.com.

Ask the Career Counselor: From Education to Public Health

Welcome to the new Q&A format of Career Corner. If you have a question about post-Peace Corps employment, email career development specialist Jodi Hammer at rpcvcareercenter@peacecorps.gov.

Dear Peace Corps Career Counselor:

I have a bachelor's degree in education and am currently serving as an ESL educator with the Peace Corps in Cameroon. Although my primary project is teaching English in a grade school, I've had the opportunity to do a lot of health work through secondary projects such as HIV/AIDS awareness and healthy lifestyles, and I've found that is my true passion. I would love to continue working in public health upon returning to the States but am worried I may be stereotyped as a teacher since most of my titles have been teaching related. I've also heard I need a master's in public health to work in that field so that seems like another barrier. Any advice?

Dear PCV:

It is very common for Volunteers to discover new interests and passions during their service, and that's actually one of the best things about the Peace Corps. Many Volunteers, like you, are looking to make career changes based on these newly identified passions once returning from service. So rest assured, just because you worked as an English teacher during your Peace Corps service does not mean you are limited to pursuing only teaching opportunities as your next job.

What you will need to do, however, is to refine your résumé by tailoring it to the sector you are seeking employment in and, more specifically, for each job you target. Because you are hoping to work in the health sector, be sure to include bullets under your Peace Corps job entry that highlight the HIV/AIDS work you did in your secondary projects: the programs you managed, grants

you wrote, how many people were empowered as a result of your trainings. Incorporate keywords found in each job description to demonstrate to the hiring manager that you are a good fit, and consider reordering your bullets by moving the more relevant ones closer to the top.

Regarding your question about whether an MPH is required to work in the field, although many public health jobs do require an MPH, especially more technical and higher-level positions, it is not always necessary. For many non-technical, support, and outreach positions, especially entry-level professional positions, a bachelor's degree will suffice. All organizations, regardless of their focus, have support departments that are essential to their existence. You might be able to find a position within one of those areas that taps into a natural strength of yours, such as your social media, writing, or administrative skills, for example. Getting such a support job

will allow you to gain an inside view of the organization while interacting with individuals in technical and senior-level positions that require an advanced degree, before deciding if pursuing an MPH is really what you want.

Be advised, however, there can be a lot of competition for public health jobs, and many of the applicants may indeed already have an MPH or other master's degree. In today's competitive job market, often employers will include "bachelor's required, master's preferred" as an easy way to weed through the huge stack of résumés and get their pile down to a manageable number for further consideration. To combat this, consider beefing up your education section by including a second entry, such as a study abroad experience or your Peace Corps pre-service training. Having a second education item will make it harder for HR personnel to eliminate you than if you only list your degree alone.

Peanut Butter Pumpkin Soup

INGREDIENTS
 4 TBSP. UNSALTED BUTTER
 4 CUPS COOKED PUMPKIN
 2 CUPS MASHED SWEET POTATOES
 1 CUP PEANUT BUTTER
 6 CUPS CHICKEN STOCK (OR BULLION)
 1 TSP. SALT
 1 TSP. BLACK PEPPER
 FRESH CHIVES (OPTIONAL, FOR GARNISH)

DIRECTIONS

Melt butter in soup pot over medium heat. Stir in pumpkin, sweet potatoes, and peanut butter. Add stock, salt, pepper, and stir well until smooth. Reduce heat to simmer and cook for 20 minutes.

Before serving, garnish with chives.

Recipe from "Where There Is No Restaurant," Peace Corps/Guinea's cookbook



Peanut Butter Pumpkin Soup



PEACE CORPS WEEK

FEBRUARY 23-MARCH 1, 2014



CLASSROOM CHALLENGE
 There are more than 215,000 PCVs and RPCVs around the world. How many U.S. classrooms can we reach by March 1, 2014?

VIDEO CHALLENGE
 What do Americans know about your Peace Corps country?
 What do you wish Americans knew about your Peace Corps country?

HOW WILL YOU ANSWER THE CHALLENGE?
peacecorps.gov/pcweek

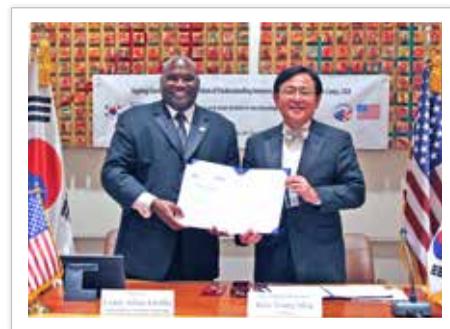


Peace Corps, Republic of Korea Announce Volunteer Collaboration

The Peace Corps announced an agreement with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), an aid agency of the Korean government, to expand collaboration on global development and international volunteer programs. The Peace Corps and KOICA will share best practices, technical resources, and training capabilities to improve international volunteering programs; elevate the profile of volunteering and service; and address urgent development challenges in education, health, and community and youth development.

KOICA works to fight poverty and support social and economic development in developing countries while enhancing international cooperation. KOICA's volunteering program, World Friends Korea, was launched in 2009. In 2012, World Friends Korea sent more than 4,000 volunteers, including about 3,000 short-term volunteers, to 55 countries to share their knowledge and skills with local communities.

The Peace Corps opened its program in Korea in 1966, and more than 2,000 Peace Corps Volunteers served there before operations closed in 1981. The Peace Corps and KOICA programs overlap in more than 30 countries.



Representatives from the Peace Corps and Korea International Cooperation Agency sign the collaboration memorandum of understanding.

Peace Corps Launches Program in Kosovo

Kosovo represents the Peace Corps' 140th country of service

On September 9, the Peace Corps announced an agreement to bring Volunteers to the Republic of Kosovo, representing the agency's 140th country of service since its establishment in 1961. The announcement was made during an official signing ceremony at the Office of the President in Pristina, Kosovo, where the agreement was signed by the President

of the Republic of Kosovo Atifete Jahjaga and the Peace Corps Associate Director of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection Helen Lowman. Kosovo is the Peace Corps' first entry into a new country since opening a program in Cambodia in 2007.

The first group of approximately 20 Peace Corps Kosovo Volunteers, scheduled to arrive in June 2014, will teach English at local secondary schools. Peace Corps staff have arrived in Kosovo and are working with the Kosovar government to identify the local community placements.



U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo Tracey Ann Jacobson (left) and President of the Republic of Kosovo Atifete Jahjaga sign the Peace Corps host country agreement.

New World Wise Schools Website Expands Cross-Cultural Learning

The Peace Corps launched a newly redesigned Paul D. Coverdell World Wise Schools website to help bring the Peace Corps experience home to American classrooms. The redesigned website makes it easier for educators to find free, cross-cultural learning materials, including videos, lesson plans, podcasts, publications, and even an online game, that promote cultural awareness, broaden perspectives, and encourage service among students.

On World Wise Schools' new user-friendly website, educators can connect their students with current Peace Corps Volunteers as part of the Correspondence Match program to exchange ideas, stories, pictures, and artifacts that help students learn about the people, geography, and cultures of the world.

Collaboration with Johns Hopkins University for Public Health Abroad Strengthened

The Peace Corps announced the signing of a global memorandum of understanding with Johns Hopkins University on behalf of its Bloomberg School of Public Health to strengthen collaboration and increase opportunities for Peace Corps Volunteers in public health. Volunteers serving in 22 countries can now work directly on projects implemented by the Bloomberg School's Center for Communication Programs (JHU-CCP), which works with organizations worldwide to tackle health-care issues such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, reproductive health, and water and hygiene.

With extensive field operations throughout Africa, Asia, and Central and South America, JHU-CCP creates

strategic communication programs that influence political dialogue, collective action, and individual behavior. The center has active programs in more than 30 countries and, since 1988, its programs have reached more than 1 billion people.

Peace Corps Marks 50 Years in Malawi with New Global Health Service Partnership Volunteers

The Peace Corps celebrated 50 years in Malawi in August with the country's launch of its Global Health Service Partnership program at a ceremony at the Presidential Statehouse in Lilongwe. The celebration featured Malawi President Dr. Joyce Banda, U.S. Ambassador to Malawi Jeanine Jackson, Peace Corps acting Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet, and Seed Global Health Chief Executive Officer Dr. Vanessa Kerry.

Eleven of the 30 Volunteers sworn in as the first class of the Peace Corps Global Health Service Partnership program in July will serve their one-year assignments at local health-care institutions in Malawi. The new Volunteers will serve as medical and nursing educators, working alongside local faculty to train the next generation of health-care professionals. Along with Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda are also participating in the new program.



Malawi President Joyce Banda (left) and Peace Corps acting Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet

More than 2,600 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in Malawi since the program was established in 1963. Today, there are 130 Volunteers in Malawi working in the areas of education, environment, agriculture, and health.

Engaging Students in the Fight Against Hunger

The Peace Corps and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are raising awareness among students on U.S. campuses about efforts to fight global hunger and poverty, and sharing information about how students can engage through the Feed the Future Campus Food Security Tour. Each tour stop includes presentations by leaders in international development and agriculture, open forum discussions, and a sustainability fair featuring local organizations, campus groups, and academic departments focused on food security and sustainability.

The tour visited Virginia Polytechnic University—an institution at the forefront in addressing global food security—in November.

The campus tour kicked off at the University of California, Davis in spring 2013. In 2014, the tour will visit Colorado State, Michigan State, and Oregon State universities. All of the universities house innovation labs and collaborative research programs resulting from a unique partnership among U.S. universities, developing country institutions, and USAID.

Feed the Future is the U.S. government's global hunger and food security initiative. Led by USAID, it leverages the resources of 10 federal agencies. The Peace Corps plays a unique role in Feed the Future by taking important food security messaging and practices to the grassroots level.

Gender and Development of Self



By JULIA SCHULKERS | PCV Thailand 2012-14

Spending two years in the Peace Corps as a lesbian and hiding my identity affected me so deeply that I feel compelled to stand up and speak out to my community: my Peace Corps community, my American community, my LGBTQ community, and my rapidly growing global community. This is (part of) my story.

More than a year ago, I sat in a large hotel banquet room with 49 other Peace Corps Volunteers for reconnect training, a time when we reconvene to review our first six months at site and look forward to the next two years. During the training, the medical officer played a documentary of returned Peace Corps Volunteers who contracted HIV/AIDS during their service. In the outdated film, a group of 20-somethings gathered around a fireplace to share their stories. One person shared a thought that I've carried with me throughout my time here, pulling it out every once in a while like a well-worn note. He said this: "You never think it will happen, but you deeply miss being touched."

I blogged about my response to this video in a post called "Human touch in the Peace Corps" and wrote about Volunteers' struggle to cope with the lack of human touch in our time overseas. Recently, when someone contacted me about publishing the post, I headed over to my site to review it. The piece lacked something: It had a disconnect I couldn't put my finger on. So much has changed since that time, not just for myself, but in the world. In America, tragic violent shootings occurred nationwide, the government endured a difficult shutdown, the Supreme Court ruled the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional, the Peace Corps opened service to same-sex couples, among various other things.

After much reflection, I concluded the very thing disconnected from that post was me.

Despite my close relationships with Thais, culturally, I knew I'd never fit into their idea of what a woman was. As long as I denied my gender expression and

sexuality, that missing piece would keep me feeling slightly disconnected from the only immediate community I had. Knowing what I know now, I wish I could tell any Volunteer struggling to maintain parts of their identity in service to find a way to express this part of yourself—or at least learn to own it, to love it. It's not until we come to terms with and accept ourselves that we can allow others in. Sometimes, embracing our vulnerability softens our hearts. It lets the love in.

In Thailand, traditionally, a good Thai woman speaks quietly and keeps to herself. She smiles everywhere she goes and, when men comment on her beauty and her body, she giggles the "compliment" away. Oftentimes, she works hard hours in the rice fields before returning home to cook delicious food for everyone and wash the laundry. Frequently, she feels pressured not to play sports with boys for fear others may call her a "tom" (dyke) or think she is weird. Over years, she fashions herself into a suitable woman for marriage, and may face questions from family members about why she hasn't found a man yet. Simply put, I am not that woman, but interestingly, I tried to be.

In America, my sexual orientation elicited little challenge or adversity. When I came home at age 20 with a crush on a girl, no one batted an eyelash, not even Grandpa who has seen it all by now. A closet never existed in my world so when people spoke about coming out, I had no closet to come out of. I dove right in to a supportive LGBTQ community at home and didn't look back. But that all changed when I arrived at my site in rural Thailand.

After trying to integrate into my village for over a year—stockpiling negative comments about toms or ladyboys and building a small scar of resentment—I started to crumble. I lied through my teeth for over a year, making excuses that I was a single woman too busy with work to find a husband. All the while, the relationship with my (then) long-term girlfriend back in America began to cave under the weight, as did I. Some days, I couldn't tell the truth from the lie anymore, and all I knew was that something was very wrong inside. Sometimes I thought it was me: I thought I was doing something wrong and I was failing to be a good, Thai woman, and therefore a successful Volunteer. After my relationship ended, and everything blurred together in what I'll always remember as my low-point of service, I promised myself that the only way I could fulfill my 27-month commitment was to start making big changes in my life.

Around the same time, the Gender and Development (GAD) committee I served on began planning two big projects that came at a serendipitous time in my life. The first was a hugely successful School-Related Gender-Based Violence



Julia (third from left) and her counterpart Sujitra (second from left) with student leaders and camp participants at the Encourage Choice, Empower Gender camp

training for educators. The second was a GAD camp, "Encourage Choice, Empower Gender," funded by PEPFAR aimed to teach Thai youth and counterparts about subjects related to preventing HIV/AIDS. Within the committee, five other Peace Corps Volunteers and I sat down to plan the rotations and activities. Over three days, eight Thai counterparts and 24 Thai youth gathered to learn about how to prevent drug and alcohol abuse, practice safer sex, overcome stereotypes about gender roles, love yourself and respect your body, empower gender identity and equality for all persons, and raise HIV/AIDS prevention awareness. I realized something extremely important: If I planned to stand up in a front of a group of adolescents and Thais to educate them on the global health problems associated with gender identity, roles, and subsequent stereotypes, I must come to terms with myself.

In July, under a thin veil of courage, I asked a teacher in my school, Sujitra, if she would be willing to attend the camp with me as a counterpart and co-teach a lesson. We attended the same camp as participants the year prior so she knew the overall subject matter. To my surprise, she agreed, and in Thai-time fashion we began planning about one month later. Once we began, I finally revealed to her that our rotation exclusively dealt with gender roles and identity. "Why do we have to teach this subject?" she asked. "I don't know anything about it. Why can't we just do drugs and alcohol? I'm familiar with that."

I sat in front of her and paused to reflect on a proper, thoughtful response. Before I knew it, I was fighting back tears and replied, "I've lived here for almost two years and I've never told anyone that I am a lesbian. I felt scared, unaccepted, unloved, and even wrong at times." I paused and dabbed my eyes with a tissue, juggling the reminder that crying in Thai culture is awkward and inappropriate. I continued. "I felt so unhappy, and I don't want that for anyone else in the world. I want to

teach people about acceptance. We have the chance to open their minds and help people understand. I just want people to understand." She stared at me for a couple seconds, then simply nodded her head and smiled. It was warm; it was genuine; it was good. Not once afterward did she question the importance of our teaching.

My experience in the weeks afterward will remain tucked in both my mind and my heart throughout my life. Two incredibly bright student leaders eagerly assisted in teaching the difficult topics with Sujitra and myself. Their enthusiasm and openness inspires me still. One female student leader courageously admitted that she was transgender in front of 30 camp participants as an example of identity and expression. I beamed with pride and followed suit, explaining that even in my feminine attire and 3-inch heels, I was a lesbian. We stood there as a team and as a community, united in our mission to start changing ideas about gender from the ground up.

In the camp closing ceremony, Sujitra stood up in front of 50 people, and to my surprise, said this: "Honestly, [when Julia asked me to co-facilitate], I had known her for an entire year and I thought that I knew her very well. Everyone in the community had come to love her. I was very surprised to learn that she was a lesbian, but I stopped and thought, I already love her anyway, this does not change anything." She concluded, "I think I can say today that I am incredibly grateful to have Julia as a friend and I am glad I had the opportunity to come teach about these issues at this camp. We love you, Julia. Thank you. Thank you, everyone."

At the end of it all, on the other side, I came to recognize that the human touch I missed greatest of all, wasn't necessarily physical, but that deep, human connection that brings the world together.

Julia Schulkers is an Education Volunteer in Thailand with secondary projects in gender equality and women's empowerment.



NOTES *from the* FIELD

A Brief Look at Posts and Projects

Albania

English Camp Fosters Creative Thinking for Students

PCV Danielle Nesmith (2012–14) recently collaborated with a local teacher and fellow PCVs in Albania to organize an English camp. This year will be its second, attracting more than 40 students aged 11–17. The two-day camp's activities included English language games, leadership and team-building exercises, and more traditional American camp activities like scavenger hunts. Nesmith said the camp challenged students intellectually and helped them think outside the box.

Costa Rica

Hair Salon as Model for Female Entrepreneurship

PCV Farid Mozafari (2012–14) is helping three women in his Costa Rican community to open a hair salon that will help them support their families. The salon will also serve as a teaching tool for 18 other women studying business-related topics at a local women's club. The project aims to help women in the community understand that economic opportunities exist for them and to catalyze female entrepreneurship.



PCV Mozafari with three women who will receive business training

Guyana

New Camp Builds Leadership for Boys

Peace Corps Response Volunteer Melissa Trainor (2012–13) organized the first Camp STOMP: Supportive Teamwork Opening Minds Positively in Guyana. Camp STOMP gave 30 boys aged 14–17 the opportunity to develop skills in leadership, positive decision making, healthy living, and short- and long-term goal-setting. The three-week camp incorporated a number of activities focused on empowerment and education as well as a mentorship program that connected participants with male role models for discussions on healthy choices and future goals. Campers also learned about HIV/AIDS, effective communication, and relationship skills. The Peace Corps' Volunteer Activity Support and Training grant program provided funds from the

President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief to help make the camp a reality.

Guinea

Magazine Helps Young Women Tackle Tough Issues

PCV Juliette Keeley (2011–13) worked with a group of young women in Guinea, aged 18–24, to publish a magazine that tackles tough issues routinely faced by young women in the country. The magazine, called Aicha, featured articles written by the women on topics that interest them, including education, fashion, agriculture, women's rights, and more sensitive topics such as HIV/AIDS and early marriage. The magazine was published in French and has sold more than 1,000 copies in 10 cities across Guinea.



Guinean writers and PCV Keeley (right)

Indonesia

Marathon Event Helps Boost Local Economy

PCV Shane Butler (2012–14) recently planned and hosted the first-ever marathon in the Mount Bromo region of Java, Indonesia. The event brought more than 900 runners from some 30 countries to the region, bolstering the local economy and fostering intercultural interaction. Another 5,000 spectators joined in the festivities, which included an arts and culture festival. Proceeds from the event will fund supplies and staff for local school libraries.



A cultural festival held in conjunction with Indonesia's first marathon

Jordan

Camp Helps Youth Plan for their Future

PCVs Rob Delaney (2011–13) and Will Evans (2011–13) will host a camp called Boys Respecting Others (BRO) to build

the character of Jordanian youth. The camp is funded in part by the Peace Corps Partnership Program and ensures future community ownership. The camp will encourage 30 students across Jordan to work together on critical thinking tasks and to consider their career goals and how they plan to achieve them. The ultimate goal of the camp is to challenge students to define a positive role for themselves in Jordan's future.

Kyrgyz Republic

Volunteer Musical Group Helps Break Down Cultural Barriers

PCVs Maryn Lewallen (2012–14) and Luke Willson (2012–14) have created a band performing local songs to break down cultural barriers in the Kyrgyz Republic. The band has performed on Kyrgyz national television, at local opera houses, and at the U.S. embassy's 20th anniversary gala in Bishkek. The band plays mainly Kyrgyz folk and pop songs, which has been a powerful connective force across linguistic and cultural barriers.



PCVs Andrew McNaughton (from left), Maryn Lewallen, Luke Willson, and Luther Flagstad

Namibia

Educational Tour Promotes Cultural Awareness and Diversity

Ten PCVs, in collaboration with Peace Corps/Namibia's diversity committee, organized a week-long educational tour of Namibia for 40 of the country's at-risk youth. The students, aged 12–18, participated in educational sessions on the ecological future of Namibia, leadership skills, entrepreneurship, community service, and financial literacy. At the conclusion of the tour, students shared their personal cultural experiences with fellow group members. The tour is aimed at promoting awareness of other cultures and an appreciation of diversity among Namibian youth.

Panama

Building Skills With Trash

Volunteer Karolina Maslanka (2012–14) is working on trash management in a rural community in Panama. In the 2013 school year, the community school recycled more than 7,500 pounds of

recyclable materials. Through this effort they are learning to conserve the environment, perform community service, and become leaders. As a reward for their outstanding participation in the program, Maslanka took a group of 25 students and nine parents from three schools on a field trip to a national park. During their first visit to a national park, the students admired the nature of their homeland and presented their recycling programs to the other schools to learn from each other's experiences.

Tanzania

Computer Training Seminar Opens Doors for Community

PCV Elizabeth Crompton (2011–13) recently conducted a seminar in Tanzania on using a free, open-source computer operating system that is accessible in developing countries. Learning to search the web for information is a critical skill in Tanzania due to the lack of offline computing resources. Seminar participants also created an online community using the open-source operating system to help other students develop their computer skills. The ultimate goal of the seminar was to foster computing and programming skills that teach self-reliance and problem-solving and improve students' employment prospects.

PEACE CORPS | Times

A publication for Peace Corps Volunteers serving worldwide

Staff

Director of Communications	Maureen Knightly
Deputy Director of Communications	Melissa Silverman
Editor	Sarah Blazucki
Staff Contributors	Erin Durney Mary Fuller Jodi Hammer
Design and Layout	Juan Carlos Polanco Bethany Poteat
Interns	Rachel Roberts Varun Jayaraman

We welcome all Volunteer submissions and suggestions. Contact us at:

Peace Corps Times
c/o Office of Communications
Paul D. Coverdell
Peace Corps Headquarters
1111 20th Street NW
Washington, DC 20526
or email: pctimes@peacecorps.gov