

Peace Corps Times

January - June 2015

Diverse America Diverse Perspectives

Boons and Barriers:
How aspects
of racial diversity
impact Volunteer
service

Let Girls Learn

Peace Corps, First Lady collaborate
on new girls' ed initiative

Reading the Signs

Reaching deaf communities
in the U.S. & abroad



Showcasing Host Country Heroes

This year, for Peace Corps Week's Video Challenge, 40 Volunteers submitted videos highlighting their "Host Country Heroes" between December and February.

The Office of Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services and other headquarters staff selected the three top winners and two honorable mentions, weighted with YouTube views. The winners were announced during Peace Corps Week in March via Facebook.



1st Place: Cara Sandquist The Gambia

Meet Haruna, an active member of his community who started a school from nothing. He transformed a community that was reluctant education would tamper with their cultural values to a community proud of the school they helped build.

<http://bit.ly/hostcountry1>



2nd Place: Gabriella Ullauri Mozambique

This video introduces a talented young artist who, despite his economic situation and distance from a large city, has learned to use art as a coping mechanism and a way of life. Through a combined need to pay for his materials and his desire to help others, he recently enrolled in physical therapy school.

<http://bit.ly/hostcountry2>



3rd Place: Kyle King Ecuador

The video is narrated as a letter written to King's host family's infant daughter, who died at just 3 months old. Through this letter, King demonstrates the strength and beauty of the Toapanta family and Ecuador.

<http://bit.ly/hostcountry3>

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Director of Communications

Maureen Knightly

Deputy Director of Communications

Melissa Silverman

Editor

Sarah Blazucki

Design and Layout

Marcos Alices

Sarah King

Juan Carlos Polanco

Print Officer

Michael Johnson

Staff Photographer

Alex Snyder

Staff Contributors

Jenna Bushnell

Courtney Clark

Erin Durney

Jodi Hammer

Kyle Livingston

Shelley Savage

Jessica Williams

Interns

Katlyn Hirokawa

Seth Huiras

August Shitama

Volunteer submissions and
suggestions are welcome.

Contact us at

pctimes@peacecorps.gov

Peace Corps Times

c/o Office of Communications

Paul D. Coverdell

Peace Corps Headquarters

1111 20th Street NW

Washington, DC 20526

Editor's Letter

In this issue, we broach a subject that has been a topic of discussion both at headquarters and in the field: racial diversity. While frequently discussed in broad terms at headquarters, we don't often have deeper conversations about how racial differences impact Volunteers and employees in the U.S. and abroad. Occasionally, we talk about race as a factor during service: how black Volunteers might find it easier to "blend in" in African countries, or white Volunteers in Eastern European countries, or how Volunteers might be the only minorities in their host communities.

We don't often talk intentionally about the racism Volunteers might face, whether it's being charged more/less at the market or being thought of as more/less intelligent, whether it's your host family never having met anyone with your skin color or trying to reconcile being a Peace Corps Volunteer for a country with a history of racial injustice and discrimination.

As a Peace Corps family, many of us assume we are enlightened and knowledgeable about race. We work in the international development space; we work with and for people of various racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds; we have friends of different races and backgrounds than ourselves; we must know what we are doing, right? And yet, we still encounter obstacles.

Our mission is to share knowledge and culture with people in other countries, and to bring their cultures back to the U.S. to share with Americans. Fundamentally, we work to build capacity of other peoples to foster sustainable peace. Sharing the diversity of the U.S. is part and parcel of what we do. Is it not then part of our mission to make sure we are having these dialogues both at headquarters and in the field? In truth, we need to acknowledge our own challenges, even as we work to improve the lives of people around the world.

These dialogues, though painful at times, are needed. We, as Americans working in international development, need to examine our own biases, we need to acknowledge any privileges we might have, we need to look at systemic discrimination, we need to see and hear the stories of the "other." And, if our mission is to promote peace, is it not fitting that we also encourage efforts for peace in the U.S.?

—Sarah Blazucki
Editor

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Agency News



Nepal PCVs Temporarily Removed

Following the April 25 earthquake, the Peace Corps announced the removal of 53 Volunteers and 32 trainees from Nepal. The 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck the Himalayan nation at about noon local time some 50 miles northwest of Kathmandu, and caused widespread devastation. Staff, Volunteers, and trainees were not injured in the quake or aftershocks.

Volunteers were working on food security projects. Some 3,705 Volunteers have served in Nepal since the program opened in 1962.

Jordan Program Suspended

The Peace Corps suspended its program in Jordan in March due to the regional security environment. All Peace Corps Volunteers have departed the country, but the Peace Corps plans to maintain its office in Jordan.

There were 37 PCVs in Jordan working on youth development. Over 560 Volunteers have served in Jordan since the program opened in 1997.

Volunteers Return to Work in Vanuatu, Post-Cyclone

In response to a category 5 tropical cyclone that hit the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu on March 13, Volunteers were evacuated and have since returned. The 66 two-year, trainee, and Response Volunteers were evacuated before the storm, and taken to Sydney, Australia, where they stayed for about two weeks. After a safety and security assessment, the Volunteers returned to their sites, and are contributing to rebuilding and replanting efforts.

Since the program opened in 1989, more than 665 PCVs have served in Vanuatu in the education and health sectors.

Response Volunteers Set to Return to Ukraine

A small group of Response Volunteers are slated to return to Ukraine in May, over a year after Volunteers were evacuated because of safety and security concerns related to the political climate. Volunteers will be placed in the central and western parts of the country.

The Peace Corps is recruiting two-year applicants for an October start date, and plan to have a class of 30–50 return. Volunteers will be teaching English and working in youth and community development.

In February 2014, 230 PCVs were evacuated from Ukraine. Since the program opened in 1992, 2,750 PCVs have served in the Eastern European country.

Azerbaijan Program Suspended

The Peace Corps suspended its program in Azerbaijan in December; all 49 Volunteers have closed their service and departed the country.

Since 2003, when the program opened, 550 PCVs served in Azerbaijan working in youth and community economic development and English education.

Agency Sees Record-Breaking Application Numbers

The agency announced that 17,336 Americans applied for two-year service positions in fiscal year 2014—a 22-year high for the agency and an increase of more than 70 percent over the previous year. The highest number ever was 18,159 in 1979, with the next highest of 17,438 in 1992.

The record number in 2014 follows historic changes to the Peace Corps application and selection process that have made applying to the Peace Corps simpler, faster, and more personalized.

In July 2014, when these changes were launched, the agency saw an increase in applications of more than 400 percent over July 2013 and the highest total number of applications received in one month in more than 15 years. In 2013, only 23 percent of those who started the application submitted it. Now, approximately 95 percent of those who start an application submit it. Since the reforms were implemented, 54 percent of all applicants have selected the option to serve anywhere they're needed, and 49 percent have selected the option to serve in any of the six work sectors.

Global Health Service Partnership to Expand

Secretary of State John Kerry announced in December the U.S. government's commitment to invest additional resources in the Global Health Service Partnership (GHSP), a unique public-private partnership with the Peace Corps, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the nonprofit Seed Global Health. Kerry said PEPFAR's new human resources for health strategy would include a \$116.5 million investment that will strengthen the capacity of health workers to address HIV/AIDS across Africa, and expand the role of GHSP and Seed Global Health to boost the number of clinicians.

This innovative partnership sends U.S. health-care professionals abroad, through the Peace Corps Response program, to focus on teaching and expanding clinical capacity. In its inaugural year (2013–14), 30 GHSP Volunteers in Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda taught more than 2,800 medical and nursing faculty and trainees and 85 new courses and trainings.

Peace Corps Week Marks 54 Years

In honor of the agency's 54th anniversary, the Peace Corps celebrated Peace Corps Week from March 1–7. A variety of events and activities took place across the U.S. to encourage current and returned Volunteers to highlight their host country heroes and the friendships and relationships they developed with local community members during their service.

Some 90 Peace Corps Week festivals took place across 30 states, giving the American public the chance to learn about the countries and people Peace Corps Volunteers serve. In coordination with U.S. schools, community centers, and boys and girls clubs, returned Volunteers hosted festivals to share photos, music, culture, and stories from their countries of service.

Total Volunteers: States and Schools

Top States

1. California (926)
2. New York (412)
3. Washington (320)
4. Florida (305)
5. Illinois (284)

Top States Per Capita

- # of Volunteers/100,000 residents
1. Vermont (7.8)
 2. District of Columbia (6.7)
 3. Washington (4.6)
 4. Colorado (4.5)
 5. New Hampshire (4.3)



Peace Corps and First Lady Collaborate to ‘Let Girls Learn’

Around the world, 62 million school-aged girls aren’t in school. That’s equal to nearly one-fifth of the population of the U.S. It’s a staggering number.

To address this need, First Lady Michelle Obama has formed a collaboration with the Peace Corps to expand girls’ access to education.

As part of a broader whole-of-government initiative, the agency will focus on three main areas: building local capacity by training Volunteers and community leaders to be champions of girls’ education, implementing projects through the Peace Corps Partnership Program and the newly established Peace Corps Let Girls Learn Fund, and placing additional Volunteers in targeted countries to help promote girls’ education and empowerment.

Following the kick-off announcement on March 3 at the White House, the first lady and Peace Corps Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet visited Cambodia in mid-March to highlight one of the countries included in the new effort.

In Cambodia, Obama and Hessler-Radelet attended the first field-based Volunteer training on March 21 in Siem Reap, bringing a message of encouragement and empowerment to the Volunteers.

“When girls get educated—when they learn to read and write and think—that gives them the tools to speak up and to talk about injustice, and to demand equal treatment,” Obama said at the training. “It helps them participate in the political life of their country and hold their leaders accountable, call for change when their needs and aspirations aren’t being met.”

The first lady continued, “And that’s really my message to all the young women here today—that Let Girls Learn is about giving girls like you here, all the girls who are here, giving you a voice in your communities and in your country. That’s why

we are all here. It’s why we’re all here—we’ve got a lot of us here—because we know that you all have so much to say and so much to contribute. And when you have the chance to fulfill your potential, there’s no limit to what you can achieve.”

The Peace Corps will begin the targeted effort in 11 countries this year: Albania, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Georgia, Ghana, Moldova, Mongolia, Mozambique, Togo, and Uganda.

Volunteers will be able to apply for grants from PCPP and the new Let Girls Learn Fund for projects such as hosting Girls Leading Our World—GLOW—or technology camps.

In addition to the Peace Corps, the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, and Millennium Challenge Corporation will participate in the Let Girls Learn initiative.

Change for girls

First Lady Michelle Obama (center), her chief of staff Tina Tchen (left) and Peace Corps Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet chat before a roundtable discussion on the Let Girls Learn initiative in March during a kick-off trip to Cambodia.

Top Metropolitan Areas

1. New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA (335)
2. Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV (284)
3. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA (263)
4. Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI (224)
5. Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA (176)

Top Large Colleges & Universities

More than 15,000 undergraduates

1. University of Washington (72 currently serving PCVs)
2. University of Wisconsin–Madison (69)
3. University of Florida (66)
4. The Ohio State University (64)
5. University of Minnesota Twin Cities (63)

Top Medium Colleges & Universities

Between 5,000–15,000 undergraduates

1. Western Washington University (47)
2. American University (41)
3. George Washington University (36)
3. University of Virginia (36)
5. Cornell University (33)

Top Small Colleges & Universities

Less than 5,000 undergraduates

1. Gonzaga University (20)
2. Carleton College (17)
3. Middlebury College (16)
3. University of Puget Sound (16)
5. Macalester College (15)



Diverse America Diverse Perspectives

Boons and Barriers: How aspects of racial diversity impact Volunteer service

“Why are you black?” It’s a question Luma Kofele answered more than once during his service in Moldova.

His answer? “It’s natural.”

“People were curious, they wanted to know about me, where I was from, and how can I be Cameroonian and American,” Kofele said. “People will walk up to me and ask if they can touch my hair and ask me to show them my palm.”

Kofele, who emigrated from Cameroon to the U.S. as a teenager, said the experience was positive. “I was the first African, the first black person that these people had come in contact with. My community was very welcoming and a lot of people helped me integrate into the community and treated me as one of them—a son of the soil. Even when I visited other towns and villages, which I did a lot, people were always welcoming and hospitable.”

Volunteers’ Experience

Kofele’s experience is not unique among Peace Corps Volunteers, but neither is it universal. Because Volunteers work in so many different cultures—and come from so many different cultures—experiences can vary greatly depending on the Volunteer’s race and ethnicity and where a Volunteer is placed: African-Americans and Asian-Americans will have different experiences in South America vs. Africa vs. Asia vs. Europe—and from each other.

Hispanic-Americans and European-Americans will have different experiences in Africa vs. Asia vs. Europe vs. the Pacific—and from each other. Because each country has its own individual history of relations with peoples of other countries and cultures, Volunteers can bear the brunt of attitudes and beliefs about others that have nothing to do with who an individual Volunteer is personally or culturally.

Many times, Volunteers of color, who make up about 25 percent of the field, face complex attitudes of host country nationals, ranging from hurtful and insensitive (e.g., equating black with ugly) to the celebratory (hip-hop music has fans around the globe). But white Volunteers aren’t immune to the effects of positive and negative attitudes, even when they often find their skin color gives them privileges others don’t always have (e.g., having counterparts immediately trust them as experts). For some Volunteers, this is the first time they have confronted racism or even considered issues of diversity, as they previously felt that it didn’t affect them because they were white, aka not “diverse.” And diversity is more than skin tone, as many find out in service. It can incorporate race, ethnicity, education, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, and marital status, and more.

Barriers

The challenges Volunteers face around diversity issues are myriad. While Volunteers are tasked with sharing the culture of the U.S. with peoples of other countries, that can take many forms and can be confounded when host country nationals don’t see you as “American” or “American enough”—or

the flipside, expect you to represent all Americans.

For Ryan Rodriguez (2012–14), whose grandparents were born in Mexico, serving in Ecuador posed distinct challenges.

“Since I am and look Latino, I blend in with the people in Ecuador, so I do not stand out as much as lighter-skinned Volunteers. Two issues I struggle with are proving that I am American—from the U.S.—and I am Latino. I feel I am not Latino enough because I am not fluent in Spanish and I am not American enough because I do not fit the stereotype of an American—blond, blue eyes, and white skin.”

Rodriguez often felt judged on his language skills because of his skin color.

“Ecuadorians are more forgiving when a white Volunteer speaks Spanish than when I speak Spanish. People generally realize I am not from Ecuador, but because I speak enough, people here generally just think I am slow or dumb, rather than Spanish being my second language.”

To combat this, Rodriguez had to balance wanting to tell

everybody he's American—and that Spanish is his second language—and not wanting to stand out too much.

Beyond language skills, market haggling is one of the places that lighter-skinned Volunteers can see different treatment by host country nationals.

For Emily Aiken (2013–15), who is white, this manifests in several ways, mostly with prices.

“They look at me, and think, ‘Oh, you’ve got a lot of money. I’m going to raise the price.’”

But when she’s with her husband, Eric, who is African-American, Aiken said she’ll get better prices at Ecuadorian markets, even if he’s just standing behind her.

“I’ll ask for the tag and I’ll get a good price.”

Another challenge is that people don’t perceive the couple’s relationship.

“Being an interracial couple, people never assume we’re together and that we’re married,” she said. “If Eric was white like me and we were both walking around, people would assume we were boyfriend and girlfriend, married or something. Now, people don’t ever assume that. They just think that we work together.”

“At times, it that can be frustrating if Emily gets invited to go on a ladies’ night and look for guys, or I get invited to look for girls,” Eric Aiken said. “Then we have to have this conversation of, ‘Do you know Emily?’ ‘Yes, I do.’ ‘Well, that’s my wife.’”

Regina Lam, who served in Tonga from 2010–12, found the host country nationals unfamiliar with Vietnam, her family’s national origin. Instead, people assumed she was Chinese, which carried a negative connotation due to local mistrust of Chinese shopkeepers.

“I was taunted in the streets, mostly in the capital, for being ‘China,’” Lam said. “Children and youth were the worst: They would throw things at me as I rode my bike down the street. In the village, it was a bit easier.”

Adam Malinowski, who served in Georgia from 2011–14, found that the three ethnic groups in his host country—Georgians, Azeri, and Armenians—valued their ethnic identity over their nationality and would often ask Malinowski where he was “really” from. Malinowski, who is Korean-American, had to work hard to overcome stereotypes about



Asians locally, as host country nationals assumed he was Chinese.

“Outwardly when dealing with Georgians, Azeri, and Armenians, my ethnic background was always a major contributing factor in first impressions,” he said. “Within Georgia, there is a commonly held belief that individuals of Asian descent have a negative connotation associated their ethnicity of being weak in all general purposes within a culture of excessive masculinity. Dealing with this attitude at times seemed to be a constant battle when implementing projects, working, or attending meetings.”

To deal with these challenges, Malinowski sharpened his language skills.

“I discovered the easiest way to overcome this barrier was to learn the language to interact in Georgian showing my ability to work and show sensitivity to their issues and concerns in their language. After a few months, my perception of this negative attitude seemed to vanish or became less apparent because of an increased strategy to dealing with this issue.”

But he said one of the hardest issues was seeing the disparate treatment of white Volunteers, particularly with host country nationals with whom he had a relationship.

“It was difficult to see my fellow Volunteers automatically receive a different level of treatment when compared to me when interacting with people I have known for an extended time,” he said. “Some Volunteers were automatically treated differently because they were ‘white’ American and I was not. It



Diversity in action

[from top]

Ryan Rodriguez at a local youth center in Ecuador

Emily and Eric Aiken at a local market in Ecuador

Regina Lam with a girl in her community in Tonga



was always more difficult when being in mixed groups of Georgians and Americans because at those times the distinction of how Americans of color were treated was quite apparent.”

DeShantell Singleton, a black Volunteer serving in Ethiopia from 2013–15, has also faced taunting in-country.

“Sometimes, strangers will yell, ‘African,’ ‘Kenya,’ ‘Jamaica,’ or ‘Nigeria’ at me. After people hear me speaking English, they will question or comment on my race by saying ‘black American,’” Singleton said. “And I usually reply back, ‘I am American.’”

Beyond the taunting, Singleton said she has to work harder to build trust with counterparts.

“It is difficult to receive the same degree of respect from host country nationals in regards to my work when I collaborate with other Volunteers who are not black because they view the input or involvement of white Volunteers as more valuable.”

Kyrie Graves, a black Volunteer serving in Ethiopia from 2013–15, said that while it is easier for her to “blend in,” this means that she is often treated like Ethiopian women, for good or for worse: “My community embraces me and sees me as their ‘sister.’ Or it could go the other way, where someone is making ‘sex noises’ at me, undressing me with their eyes, trying to grab/

touch me inappropriately, mock my English or Amharic, and treat me awfully when I’m with white American Volunteers.”

Mia Sprenke, a white Volunteer who served in Botswana from 2011–13, said that, beyond the numerous marriage proposals from strangers, she also felt the pressure of constantly representing the U.S. in the best light possible.

“I got a lot of attention, which was a little exhausting because I felt pressure to always be a good ambassador for the U.S. I knew that people had limited exposure to Americans, so I wanted their experience with an American to be a positive one. However, that took a bit of a toll on me because I was walking a fine line of being my genuine self and the person I was expected to be in order to be liked and accepted by my community. Being closeted added to this distance because I had to constantly explain that I was single, had no children and no boyfriend.”

Raquel Suescun (2012–14), who is Latina, found that Botswana host country nationals considered her white because she wasn’t black, and assumed that she was rich and had money.

“One negative was trying to teach Batswana or Motswana that my skin is brown and showing

them geographically where my parents are from, but they couldn’t comprehend at all,” she said. “They would say I am white, not Latina or part Mexican/part Colombian. The most difficult thing was constantly always being asked for money, even though I repeatedly wore the same outfits for two years.”

Jazzmine Oshitoye, an African-American/Filipina who also served in Ecuador from 2013–15, said she hadn’t experienced such racism before her service.

“Being placed in a host family with a woman who, unbeknownst to me, did not like and was/is in fact scared of black people has been a journey with its own painful turns,” Oshitoye said. “When she talks about black people, the word *negro* (black man) or *negra* (black woman) is always paired with *feisimo* (really ugly).”

Octavius Jones, an African-American who served in Botswana from 2011–14, recounted having someone question his heritage and skin color.

He was told by a host country national that he was “colored”—someone of mixed race—and that she could tell by his skin complexion that he was “mixed with white.”

“This was a new revelation to me,” he said, “since I have always been considered the darker member of my family and have never been called ‘light-skinned’ in the U.S. It was also interesting because when we put our arms together, we were about the same color, with me being a little darker than her.”

Boons, Sometimes With A Price

Despite the difficulties, sometimes a Volunteer’s racial or ethnic diversity can have benefits.

For Oshitoye, it has depended on whether she is with light-skinned Volunteers, or not.

“Walking down the street with my more noticeably gringa friends (light-skinned or Caucasian female friends), I notice how much more attention is on us. There are more eyes following us, more cat-calling and whistles thrown at us, and more ‘Hello, how are you’s in thick Spanish accents. Without my light-skinned friends, I blend in more. In this aspect, my ethnicity has been a huge bonus for me.”

Jones too noted being able to “blend” more easily.

“One of the positives of being black in Africa was that there were many days where I could blend in, and other days where I was welcomed into a community, a space, where I didn’t have to necessarily stand out and feel awkward. I was part of the majority and, with my language skills, I could let go of the weight of racial identity that so many of all ethnic backgrounds carry in America,” Jones said.

Another positive for Jones was that he didn’t feel he had to prove his masculinity in Botswana.

“Almost daily, I have my masculinity challenged or mocked throughout my life in the U.S. by both men and women,” he said. “I could let a lot of that go, and not have to be so cognizant of how I presented to others so that they would respect me. During my service, I did not have to beg and fight for respect like I do in America. It was a stark and saddening realization that I had spent so much time, energy, and mental faculties trying to fight against other people’s perceptions of me. It was such a relief to

let that all go, and it helped me to see myself more clearly and freely.”

For Rodriguez, the similarities of his background allowed him to adapt to his host country.

“Being brown, Latino, and being raised with Mexican culture has at times been advantageous,” he said. “I have easily adapted to a lot of customs in Ecuador because they are similar to the customs that I have grown up with. It also helps when buying things at the market: People are less likely to rip me off since I look Ecuatorian to them.”

Daniel Hinkle, a white American who served in El Salvador from 2010–12, said it was the first time he’d really recognized being treated differently.

“It was incredibly eye-opening, humbling, and even a little unnerving,” he said. “Serving as a white male American—brown hair, blue eyes—which was my community’s idea of a ‘true’ or ‘real’ U.S. American Volunteer, was the first time I experienced both my white and male privilege in an obvious and overt manner.”

Sprenke said that her skin color, while it set her apart, also protected her in some ways.

“Because I was a white American, I felt like I was treated with a lot of publicly displayed respect. If I was attending a wedding or a meeting as a community member, I would be acknowledged and called out by the officials, which has its perks because people give up their seat or give you food first; however, it made it more challenging to integrate because community members assumed you were special or of a higher class. It may have been a barrier to building relationships with people in the community who were often stereotyped by outside communities as being from a lower class.”

But what stood out for Sprenke were the underlying causes of her treatment.

“What I was most troubled by was how deep the internalized racism seemed to be,” she said. “It was communicated to me on a few different occasions by educated adults in government positions that white people were smarter than black people. I’m not sure if this was a bad translation or isolated incidents, but it was very upsetting that people in positions of power have these beliefs, which seem to be reflected in other ways, e.g., a white girlfriend being a status symbol, special treatment, etc.”

Diversity in action

[clockwise from top left]

Adam Malinowski at a summer camp in Georgia

Jazzmine Oshitoye with her elementary school students in Ecuador

Mia Sprenke with local community members in Botswana

Daniel Hinkle with local children in his El Salvadoran community

DeShantell Singleton with students in Ethiopia

Volunteers' Response

Volunteers handle situations around diversity in myriad ways depending on the situation itself, but also how much resilience the Volunteer has that day. Some, like Kofele, use the interactions as positive teaching experiences; others struggle to not internalize racism and be defensive.

In Ethiopia, Singleton often tries to use interactions to initiate a conversation.

"The difficult part is trying to explain that it is inappropriate and unnecessary to respond to a person's direct explanation of their racial identity with 'but where is your family from' as if white people are the only true Americans and everyone else originated from some other place," she said. "Talking about racial diversity requires a lesson in U.S. history, which is definitely a challenge."

Hinkle said he broached the topic of racial diversity in his El Salvadoran community when host country nationals would display negative stereotypes.

"When people in the community would say racist things about African-Americans—they are all in gangs, dangerous, bad, violent—based on stereotypes from movies, I'd often say that some U.S. Americans had the same stereotypes about Latino immigrants or Salvadorans," he said. "I'd explain that stereotypes, as perpetuated in movies, only tell a very limited and narrow story about a group of people, but once you actually get to meet people from that group, you'll see they have a wide array of experiences, backgrounds, educations, and professions."

Hinkle added, "Having host country nationals explore times in their lives when they had been the subject of a stereotype, racism, or classism helped them to develop empathy for the experience of the other. This may have been an easier conversation to have, given my white and Volunteer privilege, and I wasn't as successful wading into inter-Salvadoran stereotypes or prejudices."

In Tonga, Lam said she made extra effort to assimilate, be respectful, and be friendly.

"I tried to show unwavering respect for Tongan culture, and always wore traditional Tongan (semi-formal) attire to this end—even when other Volunteers were wearing jeans," she said. "This was also to distinguish me from Chinese shopkeepers, who did not assimilate to the culture at all. I also made it a point to greet everyone in Tongan on the street, especially if



they stared or taunted. This demonstrated that I knew the language and served to bridge the gap between our cultures."

Lam also said she took time to talk to host country nationals about diversity.

"I also saw my presence as a good opportunity to teach people about diversity and about the fact that Americans don't all look the same," she said. "Obama's first election occurred while my group was in training, and I was very thankful that I had him as an example of a prominent American person of color—although it would have been easier for me if he were Asian."

Though many Volunteers turn to their fellow Volunteers for support through peer support networks and diversity working groups, not all Volunteers are comfortable discussing this sometimes-challenging topic.

"I think one of the expectations that I had was that fellow Volunteers knew a lot about diversity and that's not necessarily true because Volunteers come from all different types of backgrounds," Eric Aiken said. "Also, I expected people's definitions of diversity to be broad, not just including race and ethnicity, but also sexuality, disability, and ability. My definition of diversity is broad, so I have very high expectation of what people need to know and a lot of people, especially in-country, focus on one aspect."

Jones had a similar experience of expecting fellow Volunteers to be knowledgeable and interested in diversity, but instead found that some Volunteers had limited awareness.

"I was expecting the other Volunteers were all globally minded and had the diverse background of interactions and relationships with peoples of

color," Jones said. "What I found were some individuals who had no experience or desire to interact with and learn about others outside their racial and socio-economic backgrounds."

Beyond disinterest, Jones also found that some Volunteers critiqued him and his perceived level of "blackness."

"For other Volunteers, I found that my 'blackness' was up for debate, and that my mannerisms, speech, and general presentation did not fall into their definition of what a black male should be," he said. "Whenever there were attempts to address the issue of race amongst Volunteers, many individuals became defensive and stayed within their own enclaves."

The challenge of discussing race, with both Americans and host country nationals, was one of the reasons that Graves and Singleton staged a sit-in January 20 at the Peace Corps/Ethiopia office in Addis Ababa, to bring awareness to the Black Lives Matter campaign that emerged after several police shootings of unarmed black American men.

"My goal is to make this conversation—of race, discrimination, class, etc.—

more prevalent and recurring, so host country nationals have a better understanding of America and hopefully make our American Volunteer community more aware of the injustices that occur Stateside,” Graves said. “People usually only experience America from their own viewpoint/lens, and rarely get the opportunity to learn from someone from a different background.”

Singleton said the sit-in was a way for her to support the Black Lives Matter movement from abroad, as she would have been demonstrating had she been in the U.S.

“I want the idea of blind justice to actually exist; and I want us, Americans, to stand in solidarity against discrimination by actively fighting for social equality,” she said. “Promoting peace abroad is admirable, but very hypocritical of us as Volunteers if we do nothing to promote peace at home.”

Graves said a third Volunteer joined the sit-in, and they informed 50 Volunteers and staff on the topic.

“Because we were silent during the sit-in,” Graves said, “anyone who came up and received information from us immediately discussed the information they received. The demonstration brought the conversation to the table.”

After the demonstration, Graves and Singleton sent a letter to Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet about the sit-in, and began planning a “Day of Dialogue” in May to foster discussion with other Volunteers around issues of race.

Graves and Singleton said the day is an opportunity for Volunteers to “engage in constructive dialogues about one another, asking specifically about background—race, ethnicity, diversity, class, etc.” to help Volunteers understand each other so they can promote a better understanding of all Americans to host country nationals.

Agency Actions

The protests around police violence against black men also prompted discussions at Peace Corps headquarters. In December, the employee resource groups hosted an event for staff to talk about their experiences around race, during which several employees shared personal stories of facing racism on a daily basis. The event, “Opening Space for Healing,” was led by Peace Corps Intercultural and Diversity Specialist Cristina Cruz-Hubbard and attended by about 200 people, including Hessler-Radelet. In addition to screening a TEDTalk called “You Can Help Stop the Violence

Against Young Black Men” by Verna Myers, Cruz-Hubbard led a discussion on unconscious bias.

At the end of January, Director Hessler-Radelet sent a message to all Peace Corps staff committing to greater intercultural competence, diversity, and inclusion, and noted that this is reflected in two of the agency’s strategic goals: No. 4, Cross-Cultural Understanding and No. 6, Diversity and Inclusion. Specifically, her letter said the agency would pursue four actions to “further build our culture of inclusion and diversity.” Her plan is to articulate a comprehensive strategy and approach, review critical processes and communications, develop accountability measures at all levels, and build capacity through training, awareness, and organizational development.

For the last piece, the agency recently began the process of expanding the intercultural and diversity team in the Office of Programming and Training Support, from two to six, with a goal of providing diversity trainings at posts worldwide. The new staff, who should be hired by summer, will have diversity portfolios and, potentially, geographic specialties, and will present weeklong diversity and intercultural workshops to post staff.

Though there are several diversity modules available for staff and Volunteers to facilitate during pre- and in-service training, there isn’t a set minimum requirement for posts, staff, or Volunteers. In fiscal year 2013, just three out of 304 training hours were dedicated to diversity (not including country-specific cross-cultural training) in pre-service training (global average). Preliminary reports for 2014 indicate that number more than doubled to 6.76 hours.

And while all posts have a gender or diversity committee to support Volunteers, not all have both, resulting in uneven support for Volunteers on this issue. In fiscal year 2013, 37 posts reported having a peer support network, 18 posts reported having a diversity committee, 10 reported have an LGBT committee, two reported having a cross-culture committee, and seven reported having a joint peer support network and diversity committee.

For staff, the agency has supported the creation of 10 employee resource groups in the past two years, focused on diversity issues, including race, religion, and sexual orientation, as well as other characteristics, including veterans and mindfulness.

Making a statement

DeShantell Singleton (sitting, center) and Kyrie Graves (sitting, right) hold a silent sit-in January 20 at the Peace Corps/Ethiopia Addis Ababa office to raise awareness of the unarmed black men who have been killed by police in the United States.



Reading the Signs

It's been 25 years since the Americans with Disabilities Act opened up a new world of accessibility, prohibiting discrimination in accommodations, employment, and public entities and requiring reasonable accommodations.

Among those now protected under ADA, deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals gained the right to request an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter at work, ensured access to movies and television shows with closed captions, and ushered in the establishment of teletype relay services—now being replaced by video—in all 50 states.

The same cannot be said for the approximately 47 million deaf people living in developing countries, who often face high illiteracy rates and widespread social prejudice. Though deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals may not be denied access to education, government services, or equal citizenship based on deafness, the lack of recognition of sign language or bilingual education, limited availability of interpreting services, and general lack of awareness about the deaf community results in lack of access to society.

"The struggle is real for deaf men and women who face oppression in all aspects of life," said Volunteer Rachel Rose (Kenya, 2011–13, Guyana, 2014–present), who grew up in a deaf family but is hearing herself.

"Many of the hearing, able-bodied teachers I worked with in Kenya did not think it was possible for a deaf teacher to become the principal of a school. When I shared that my mother is a deaf principal, I was met with disbelief. 'Well, that's different. That's the United States,' people would often say to me."

Reaching Deaf Communities in the U.S. & Abroad



Norma Moran, a deaf RPCV who taught in Kenya (2000–03) also witnessed host country nationals' attitudes toward deaf individuals during her service.

"There was one deaf adult [teacher] who was officially certified by the government," she said. "Everyone else—and there were about six deaf adults—was not a teacher, but I was. It was a barrier for me to handle the other teachers' attitudes; it was hard to work with the hearing teachers who thought that I was a waste of time and it was a waste of time to teach the deaf children appropriately. There were a lot of cultural and attitude barriers and society bias against the deaf."

Since the 1960s, the Peace Corps has worked with deaf communities in Benin, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Korea,

Macedonia, Malawi, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Swaziland, and Togo, and has sent both deaf and hearing Volunteers abroad to work in deaf communities.

Though solid numbers are difficult to obtain, some 60 deaf Volunteers have served in the Peace Corps to date. Since 2001, at least 15 deaf Volunteers have served; currently two deaf Volunteers are serving. There have been 138 additional Volunteers who served with some degree of hearing loss in that time frame. (Historical Volunteer data is difficult to collect as deafness and hearing

loss is not considered a medical accommodation, per se, and isn't tracked in a standardized way. Moreover, hearing loss can range from minor to severe or profound. Those with minor hearing loss might not use ASL or identify with the deaf community.)

Most programs that accommodate both deaf Volunteers and residents are in deaf education, such as in Ghana and Kenya. The deaf education program in Kenya first started in 1992; the post was suspended in July 2014 for security reasons. At present, the agency doesn't have an active deaf education program, though Ghana is slated to restart in 2016. However, Peace Corps Response places Volunteers for shorter periods in deaf education projects, such as Rose's site in Guyana.

In these programs, Volunteers teach a variety of topics, from social studies to life skills, to deaf students ranging from age 3–21.

Volunteers have also hosted leadership camps for the deaf community and worked on projects such as building a school for blind and deaf students.

During his service, deaf RPCV Allen Neece (Kenya, 2007–10, Guyana, 2011) taught his students about HIV/AIDS issues and gave sign language lessons to his fellow educators.

In their host countries, many deaf Volunteers saw how the deaf residents strived for equal opportunities, despite limited resources, cultural barriers, and stigma.

"Members of the deaf community strive for the same things that anyone would," deaf RPCV Joshua Josa (Kenya, 2010–12), said. "For instance, employment and housing. However, [in Kenya] there are some barriers—the largest being education—as many teachers either do not sign or are not fluent signers."

During his service, Josa taught educators sign language and emphasized the need to be fluent to help the deaf community flourish: Without fluent teachers, deaf students won't get a comparable education to their hearing counterparts, and will have limited opportunity to engage in active learning with their teachers.

PCV Rose also noticed the inconsistency in teachers' signing fluency while serving in Kenya, which prompted her to act.

Rose, who attended Gallaudet University—a university for deaf and hard-of-hearing students—worked with a deaf Volunteer, Kelly Rogel

(2011–13), and another hearing Volunteer, Peter Hess (2011–14), to develop the first glossary for Kenyan Sign Language (online at pck-lugha.glossary.com). This groundbreaking project collected visual data on KSL signs for math and science, enabling Volunteers and local teachers to use the correct local signs with their deaf students.

"The reality is that there are many hearing Volunteers who arrive in Kenya with little signing background and start learning the language in-country," Rose said. "When they walk into a classroom with three months of language training, teaching highly technical components of the sciences can lead teachers to want to either borrow signs from ASL or invent signs in KSL to teach their lessons. This compromises the integrity of language learning for their pupils and can often lead to confusion in the classroom. The KSL Glossary was designed to try to prevent that from happening by providing a reference for Volunteers to signs that have already been established in several deaf schools by deaf Kenyans."

Moran also noted that, as well as negative attitudes toward deaf Kenyans, girls faced additional barriers.

"There was also a culture of silence regarding the girls' physical, mental, and emotional development that I did not experience in the U.S.," she said. "I was met with resistances when I tried to form a girls' rap session on taboos. Fortunately, after intercultural communication with the school administration, I was able to move forward on that."

Another challenge deaf Volunteers noted is that accessibility is often a privilege rather than a right in developing countries.

"One thing that I lost when in Kenya was access to information," deaf RPCV Erikson Young (2005–07) said. "When I watched the news, there weren't any closed captions so I had to either rely on the headlines or ask somebody else to explain the newscast. As a last resort, I'd have to buy a newspaper."

Rose echoed this sentiment, having witnessed how lack of information impacted deaf host country nationals.

"I think that many times in my service, I felt frustrated at the lack of access deaf people have to their government, school systems, and support services," she said.



Language learning

[facing page from top]

Rachel Rose with students in Kenya

Joshua Josa with students in Kenya

[this page from top]

Norma Moran with girls from her school in Kenya

Allen Neece at the Peace Corps/Kenya office

Though the lack of accessibility to information and language in their host country was an additional obstacle for deaf Volunteers to overcome, several said they thought they overcame it more easily than their hearing cohorts because of the intuitive skills that many deaf individuals develop to access a world where information isn't always available to them.

"I would say that, on average, and speaking generally, deaf Volunteers indeed have better coping mechanisms adjusting to new environs than hearing Volunteers," Neece said. "Regardless of whether we're in the States or Kenya, deaf Volunteers still have to deal with the vagaries of life in a hearing world. The fact that a deaf American is living and working as a PCV in a foreign country is a strong indicator that this individual has enormous reservoirs of patience. If there is one quality that is a critically important coping mechanism, it would be patience."

Young said he was able to more quickly acquire the host country's sign language not because sign language is universal—it isn't—but because as an ASL user, he is "trained" to continually learn new signs and was able to quickly decipher the nuances of Kenyan Sign Language.

The often close-knit nature of the deaf community also contributed to deaf Volunteers' eagerness to socialize with deaf community members in their host country. "It really improved my [Kenyan Sign Language] skills, especially with picking up some slang in KSL," Young said of meeting up with deaf Kenyans.

And Young said the similarities of the communities overshadowed the differences: "The deaf community in Kenya shares many cultural norms, from just coming together to use sign language for sharing stories and jokes."

Young, like Neece, taught in the Peace Corps/Kenya deaf education program at a local elementary school. Despite the school's limited resources—schools for deaf and hard-of-hearing students often have less resources than those for the hearing students—he encouraged his students to explore their creativity, making educational posters as part of his program.

Many deaf Volunteers such as Neece look back on their experiences with fond memories of learning more about their host countries' deaf communities and how they regularly overcame obstacles in their host countries.

"If we deaf Volunteers can handle living independently overseas, without all the accoutrements of modern digital technology that we enjoy and benefit from in America, then we can handle anything thrown at us," Neece said. "I particularly admire the deaf RPCVs from decades past: They certainly got by with far less than today's hyper-accelerated society."

Planning For the Future

Despite these successes, the agency still faces challenges with regard to deaf education programs and placing deaf Volunteers. One of the biggest obstacles is the lack of accommodating placement options, which can lead to an excessively long application process—and can lead to deaf applicants dropping out of the process or not being placed.

Director of Assessment and Placement Lateefah Burgess noted the difficulties the agency faces in creating opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing Volunteers in countries where providing U.S.-style support is challenging.

"The Placement Office has been in contact with staff in-country and found that they are not equipped to support Volunteers who have the same needs as the local communities they serve," she said. "Ideally, we should develop accommodating sites within these programs but we must also develop sites in all sectors in which Peace Corps Volunteers work."

Moran, who is now the university coordinator of assessment and planning at Gallaudet, firmly agrees with the latter point.

"Deaf Volunteers have a wide range of skills and interests, so do not restrict them to the deaf education sector," she said. "In dealing with governments all over the world, the Peace Corps should take the initiative of informing them that we have talented deaf Americans with various skills, then engage them in discussions. Most of the governments have only a superficial awareness or understanding of the deaf population in their own country."

Rose also said opportunities for deaf Volunteers should be expanded.

"Deaf people have so much to offer across the globe, and it's not just limited to deaf education," she said. "There are deaf architects, lawyers, scientists, engineers, chemists, botanists, and the list goes on. Let's start breaking into fields that are

typically not considered for deaf applicants."

Both deaf and hearing returned Volunteers think that the Kenyan deaf education model could be readily implemented in other Peace Corps countries.

"I don't see why deaf education couldn't become a new program in Kenya's neighboring countries, such as Uganda and Rwanda where there are Education sectors," Neece said. "It would be nice to see deaf Volunteers directly involved with top-down efforts, particularly within relevant ministries of education."

"Deaf schools around the world would benefit from learning about U.S. best practices," Rose said, "and deaf schools in the U.S. would also improve by learning and engaging with deaf schools across the globe."

In February, Chief of Staff Laura Chambers visited Gallaudet University's exhibition on deaf Peace Corps Volunteers with several returned Volunteers and engaged in a discussion with Gallaudet President Alan Hurwitz.

Chambers said her team would work on identifying international programs established through Gallaudet University and determining where those programs overlap with Peace Corps posts. Where there is overlap, Chambers said they would look at what types of programs the students are working in and if they are for deaf and/or hard-of-hearing individuals.

"Ideally, it would be wonderful to use this information to identify community-based programs to explore for Peace Corps posts regarding deaf education," she said.



Peace Corps Lesson: Uncertainty & Making Things Happen



Getting wild

Betsy Howell dances during her service in Argentina (top) and holding a fisher that was collared and released on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state as part of a fisher reintroduction project.

The first and only class of Peace Corps Volunteers served in Argentina from 1992–94. Thirty-eight Volunteers focused on business development and environment projects. Betsy Howell was in that class, and worked on a puma depredation study in wildlife and natural resources management. Twenty years later, she's a wildlife biologist for the Forest Service at the Olympic National Forest.

While in Argentina, Howell mapped puma activity (through location of tracks and scats), monitored the goat and sheep herds of several families, and determined the causes of domestic animal losses such as disease, automobiles, other accidents, etc.

Though she already had her degree in wildlife management and was working in her field before she entered service, Howell said the Peace Corps helped her gain technical experience.

"Practically speaking, I gained a lot of good technical experience working in the field on a cat project, for example, learning skills such as tracking," she said.

Perhaps even more useful was the resourcefulness Howell developed.

"I also learned how to figure things out with very little guidance and to make things happen even when it seemed impossible to do so," she said. "For example, no one at the research station where I was assigned had any experience working with cats, so I found a researcher in Argentina who was doing work on pumas and jaguars in the northern part of the country and called him up to see if I could come for a few weeks and learn from him. These trips turned into fabulous adventures, as well as great learning experiences."

She also gained a great deal of independence during her service, both because it was a new program in a large country and because of the lack of technology at the time.

"The Peace Corps staff in Argentina was very responsive and supportive, however this is a big country and there was a lot of learning and

adjusting around how to cope with uncertainty," Howell said. "It's hard to believe now ... the technology chasm between now and then is huge: no cellphones, no Internet, no instant communication. I'm very glad it was that way, but it made you have to deal with daily things on your own a lot, of course, which is a great skill to learn. Uncertainty and having to make things happen on your own are great skills no matter what kind of work you do."

Beyond learning about other people and countries, Howell found her Peace Corps service also enabled her to learn more about herself.

"Learning more about yourself is going on all the time (if we are paying attention!)," Howell said. "But it seems much more obvious when you're surrounded by people with very different backgrounds and who speak another language and have completely different cultural references than you do. It's kind of like there's no place to hide anymore."

Her ability to deal with uncertainty served Howell well when she launched her second career as a writer. Though she quit the Forest Service in 1998 to focus on writing, she eventually returned in 2004 and now balances both.

"It can be a challenge to work full time for the government and also find enough time to write and, when I first began with the Forest Service, I'm not sure I expected that I'd be trying to have two careers at the same time. But it's good to be flexible, and I don't want to give up either one."

In addition to writing natural history essays and historical books and essays, Howell currently works on wildlife inventory projects, such as remote camera surveys for carnivores and wetlands inventories for many different species, including amphibians and reptiles.

"We also do a lot of habitat enhancement," she said, "and that can be quite gratifying, especially when wildlife species actually use something we create."

American Sign Language (ASL)

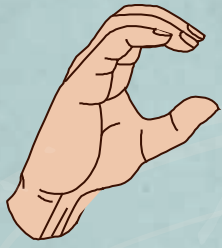
American Sign Language is the most commonly used language for deaf/hard-of-hearing people and comes with its own set of grammar rules. A common misconception is that sign language is universal throughout the world: In fact, most countries have their own sign language.



A



B



C



D



E



F



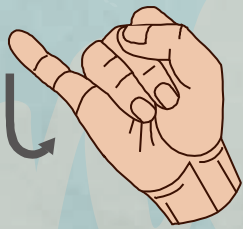
G



H



I



J



K



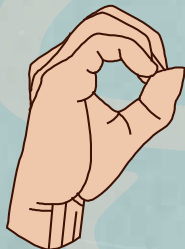
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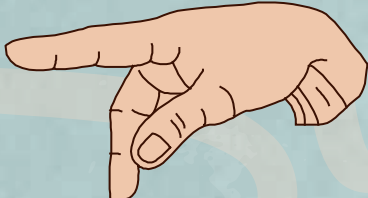
M



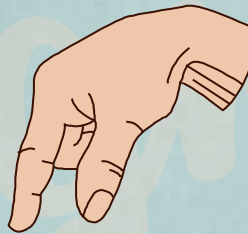
N



O



P



Q



R



S



T



U



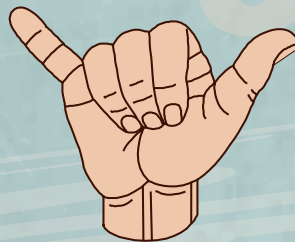
V



W



X



Y



Z



"Please"



"Thank You"



0



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9





BOOK SHELF Diversity in Print

Five thought-provoking and unique stories are told by authors from different walks of life.



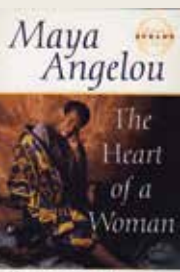
Christopher and His Kind by Christopher Isherwood

In this memoir, Isherwood reminisces about his time in Berlin as a gay man during the 1930s, after he left England. But Hitler's rise to power and subsequent persecution of gays forced Isherwood and his boyfriend to flee. After they were separated by the Gestapo, Isherwood—who wrote the book that the musical “Cabaret” was based on—came to the U.S.



The Book of Unknown Americans by Cristina Henríquez

Arturo and Alma Rivera lived comfortably in Mexico with their teenage daughter, Maribel, until she's injured in an accident. Desperate to help her, the family moves to Delaware looking for opportunities they wouldn't have in their home country. Eloquently told from the perspective of the Rivera family and their neighbors, Henríquez shines a light on immigrants—the “unknown Americans”—in search of the American Dream.



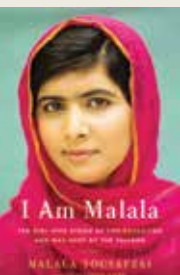
The Heart of a Woman by Maya Angelou

Renowned author Angelou continues writing about her astonishing life in “The Heart of a Woman,” where she undergoes a renaissance as a writer in New York City. With unmistakable candor, Angelou recounts meeting legendary black artists and participating in the Civil Rights Movement. Even as a busy writer and formative activist, Angelou finds time to fall in love and brings the reader along on her poignant journey.



Hands of My Father by Myron Uhlberg

Many Americans during the Great Depression faced countless challenges but for Myron Uhlberg, his deaf parents looked at everything as a learning experience and taught him the importance of enduring optimism. In this memoir, Uhlberg recounts the questions his father would ask him about sound and how, even as a kid, he was a bridge to the hearing world for his parents.



I am Malala by Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb

After being shot in the head at 15, it looked as though Yousafzai wouldn't survive. Remarkably, she recovered and has become a vocal advocate for girls' education. In this harrowing memoir, Yousafzai writes about her childhood in Pakistan and how important her family's support has been. Even as the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner, Yousafzai remains a humble, but determined young woman fighting for her human rights.

PUZZLE PEACES ANSWERS

Games on page 28

Crossword Answers

Across

2. NPCA
4. Vermont
6. Friendship
7. Seven
10. Latin America
15. University of Washington
17. December First
21. Three
22. Salam
24. Ninety Four
25. Joseph

Down

1. Hurricane Katrina
3. Phnom Penh
5. One Hundred Forty
8. Education
9. Zambia
11. Western Samoa
12. Malagasy
13. September
14. Michigan
16. Shriver
18. China
19. South Africa
20. Brightest
23. Kosovo

Sudoku Answers

Easy

8	2	7	6	4	5	1	9	3
9	1	6	7	3	2	4	5	8
3	4	5	9	1	8	2	7	6
1	8	3	5	2	4	7	6	9
2	5	9	1	7	6	8	3	4
7	6	4	3	8	9	5	2	1
4	3	8	2	6	7	9	1	5
6	9	2	8	5	1	3	4	7
5	7	1	4	9	3	6	8	2

Medium

1	9	7	6	8	5	3	2	4
6	3	4	1	9	2	5	7	8
5	2	8	4	7	3	9	6	1
9	7	3	8	1	4	6	5	2
2	1	5	3	6	7	8	4	9
8	4	6	2	5	9	1	3	7
3	6	2	9	4	1	7	8	5
7	8	1	5	2	6	4	9	3
4	5	9	7	3	8	2	1	6

Hard

9	4	7	8	2	5	6	3	1
6	1	5	3	9	7	2	4	8
8	3	2	6	4	1	9	7	5
3	6	8	2	5	4	7	1	9
2	7	9	1	6	8	4	5	3
1	5	4	7	3	9	8	2	6
4	8	1	9	7	3	5	6	2
7	9	6	5	1	2	3	8	4
5	2	3	4	8	6	1	9	7



Moldova Clean Water App Wins Global Girls' Tech Competition

Peace Corps Volunteer Chip Moreland had two goals when he pitched the idea for Technovation, a mobile app competition for girls, at the Moldovan high school where he taught: more opportunities to practice English outside of the classroom and economic opportunity for his students. What he didn't bank on was that their idea—tracking safe well water in their community—and the app they developed would take the top prize out of more than 800 teams at the global competition.

Safe drinking water is a huge problem in Moreland's village: 80 percent of the people don't have access to potable water. Last year, 67 students at the high school contracted hepatitis A from the water (22 percent), and the village has one of the highest rates of hepatitis A in Moldova.

Last spring, Moreland issued a call and assembled a team of four girls to work on the app competition. For three months last summer, they defined their problem, determined what the app would do, and developed the app itself. The app, aquamea, shows the location of the wells in the village, and allows users to rate the water according to appearance, taste, and smell. The team also tested the wells for chemicals, microorganisms, and heavy metals, and posted the results. In addition to helping villagers find safe water, the app has an education component

that helps them understand the effects of water contaminants and how to treat the water to mitigate future problems.

The girls won the European division of Technovation, and were one of 10 teams who went to San Francisco for the World Pitch 2014 last August. There, they took the top prize for the high school division.

Moreland said the competition was life-changing for the girls, and the youth in his village, who hadn't previously considered technology an accessible career—and who live in a post-Soviet country where entrepreneurship is still a new concept.

"Most of the kids I asked, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' had never been asked that question," he said. "And those who have been asked often don't shoot higher than bus driver or farmer. Basically, even for the brighter kids in the village, many of them feel limited as to what they can do professionally."

For those who have broader career aspirations, Moreland

said they often have to leave their village or country to follow them.

"For those who are motivated to improve their quality of life, most of them choose to emigrate to another country and send money back, which is difficult for a culture that values family so much, and bad in general for the country since the talented and motivated working population are not there to develop the country and create jobs," he said.

Compounding this, strict gender roles in Moldova pressure women and girls to stay close to home, limiting their career options.

"While Moldova is much better than some countries about women in the workforce," Moreland said, "strong cultural traditions with gender roles keep many of the women close to home since they are expected to do just about everything around the house."

The Technovation Challenge, Moreland said, enabled the girls and those in the community who saw their success to

Water quest

Girls in PCV Chip Moreland's Moldovan community test wells to check drinking water last summer. The girls developed an app that tracked water quality, and subsequently won a global app competition.

A well-earned honor

The Moldovan team, aquamea, took the top prize at the Technovation World Pitch 2014, out of 800+ teams of girls. Before heading to San Francisco last August, the girls determined what their village needed, decided what the app would do, brainstormed the interface, and tested local wells to compile data.



reassess their hopes and aspirations. “It was like a window that showed them a world where there is economic opportunity and hope to improve their quality of life without having to leave the country to do so,” he said. “The IT industry in Moldova is growing rapidly and they can make dollars or euros without having to leave their families and their village. It was really a big wake-up call and an opportunity to re-create their vision of reality and what they could become.”

Moreland said one of the girls, Maria, commented after they won the global competition: “I can’t believe it: We won. We are just four girls from Moldova—nobody even knows where that is—and we won!” Another participant, Tatiana, had an epiphany after the win: “In a tone of voice that was between disbelief and joy she said, in English, ‘Mr. Moreland, I am a businesswoman!’”

Once they returned from San Francisco, the girls were treated like local celebrities: They were whisked immediately from the airport to a talk show to discuss their project. Moreland noted that the competition improved the girls’ optimism and sense of self-worth and spread the idea that enough hard work and good ideas can result in success.

The end results of the competition were twofold: first was the direct impact on the girls’ lives, their career aspirations, and those of the youth in the village. Second was the impact of the app itself, and the focus it brought to water quality in the village. Some villagers have begun filtering their water. For the mayor of the town, the project reinforced his efforts to raise money for an aqueduct to bring the village good water, which he had about 85 percent funded.

For the girls, participating in the competition empowered them to conceive of new futures for themselves: Maria would like to go into the IT industry. Tatiana plans to go to business school. Mihaela has expressed interest in being a teacher. Corina will be putting this experience on her résumé.

For the app, three host country nationals—a software developer, a designer, and a business expert—are continuing work on the project, as Moreland has closed service. Next steps include getting a cleaner prototype of the app, creating a marketing campaign, and determining how to use the \$10,000 prize money the team received.

For Peace Corps/Moldova, at least one Volunteer planned to put together a team to compete in this year’s Technovation competition.



COS Trip: Thailand

More than 5,200 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in the beautiful tropical Kingdom of Thailand since 1962. More recently, Thailand has become one of the most travel-friendly countries in the world. The Southeast Asian nation, nestled in the center of the Indochina Peninsula, boasts beautiful beaches, excellent diving, efficient and safe transport, unending temples for cultural and spiritual exploration, and an inexpensive smorgasbord of food. What are you waiting for?

Getting There

The capital Bangkok is served by two airports: Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang. Suvarnabhumi Airport opened in 2006 and quickly became the hub for almost all international and domestic flights to and from Bangkok. Its mammoth size allowed it to grow into the busiest airport in Southeast Asia. Don Mueang International Airport, or the “Old” Bangkok International Airport, is now primarily sought out by travelers flying Air Asia. The budget airline has fantastic deals to other countries in the region and exclusively flies in and out of Don Mueang. If you are flying into Suvarnabhumi and want to transfer to an Air Asia flight, be sure to leave adequate time. Generally it takes about one hour (with no traffic or stops) to transfer airports. Look for the free shuttles that transfer passengers between airports from 5 a.m. to midnight daily.

Thailand has incredible infrastructure and connectivity. Almost all major destinations and sightseeing locales are reachable by air, and for very affordable prices if you plan ahead. All sights described here have major airports: Chiang Mai International Airport, Phuket International Airport, and Samui Airport (touted as the world’s most beautiful).

If you are looking for an interesting experience and a chance to see lesser-known areas of the country, there are myriad buses and trains heading to all key destinations. Hua Lamphong Station (Bangkok Railway Station) and Bangkok’s four principle bus stations are easily accessible by taxi and have departures at all hours. In fact, there are so many buses and trains going to and from primary destinations that you can purchase tickets the day of your intended travel without worry. Bottom line: If you are trying to save time, go for the flight. If you are trying to save money, go for the train or bus.

Visas and Vaccinations

U.S. citizens carrying a tourist passport and in possession of an onward or return airline ticket do not require a visa to enter Thailand. However, your passport must have at least six months’ validity remaining to be granted entry. Upon entry, officials will place an immigration stamp in the passport permitting a 30-day stay in Thailand. For more information or Thai Immigration Bureau locations, visit the Thai Immigration Bureau website.

In terms of vaccinations, ensure that you are up-to-date on routine vaccines before the trip, including measles-mumps-rubella, tetanus, and polio. Additionally, ask your doctor for typhoid and hepatitis A vaccinations. If you plan to stay in Thailand long-term and/or to travel in resource-restricted areas, ask your doctor about other precautions such as malaria medication.

Thailand



Chiang Mai

Nestled in the mountains of Pui National Park, Chiang Mai is the largest and most culturally significant city in northern Thailand. Chiang Mai has plenty to offer every visitor, whether you are interested in hiking (look for orchid farm tours), interacting with wildlife (there are many tiger and elephant sanctuaries), searching for crafts at the massive Night Bazaar, or exploring the glittering temple of Doi Suthep.

Best time to visit: November–March



Grand Palace (Bangkok)

While there are many exquisite temples to visit throughout Thailand, the one that cannot be missed is the Grand Palace. The ambiance of the palace is just as the name states, grand: Temples are built upon temples, covered in gold. It is a wonderful place to start your adventure, providing historical and cultural perspective for the rest of the journey. It is also home to the magnificent emerald Buddha. Be sure to invest in a guided tour (offered in almost every language) as it is difficult to fully understand the significance of certain spaces without one.

Best time to visit: November–March



Ko Samui

The island of Ko Samui is easily accessible and has a balance of nature and convenience—ideal for first-time visitors to Thailand. The seemingly endless white-sand beaches are beautiful and diving and kayaking companies are abundant. Catch a group taxi to Nathon Pier and sign up for an all-inclusive day-long diving excursion to Ang Thong National Marine Park. Take a break from the sun with relaxing spa treatments. Nearly every other storefront on the island is a spa and the prices can't be beat. Go for massages that use the island's healing plants. Finally, check out the nightlife on the main street of Chaweng, a dizzying array of sights and sounds and a great place to see live musical performances and people watch.

Best time to visit: June–September and December–February



Ayutthaya

Ayutthaya was founded in 1350 as the capital of the Siamese Kingdom. By 1700, it was the largest city in the world with over 1 million inhabitants. Sadly, it was destroyed during conflict with the Burmese in 1767 and abandoned, never to be rebuilt. Today it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that is an hour from Bangkok, and makes a great day trip. The area has many historical sites to visit and it is perfect for a leisurely day of walking and photography.

Best time to visit: November–March



PEACE OF MIND

Self-Compassion



Imagine for a moment an instance when you did not meet a personal or professional goal. How did you feel when things did not go as planned? What did you say to yourself? How did you behave?

It's common for us to be upset when we do not meet a goal. Since childhood, many of us have been taught to define ourselves by our achievements. We see the praise that comes to individuals who earn the highest grade and win the top awards. They look so happy! We want that praise for ourselves. So we set high performance goals in contests of intelligence, athleticism, and creativity. We perform before audiences of family, peers, and mentors to spur us to our personal best. We do everything humanly possible to outdo ourselves and others. So when we fall short of a goal, it hurts. Not only do we feel the pain of missing our shot at greatness, but we fear we have let others down too.

There are lots of strategies for goal attainment. Pairing high performance goals and competition can motivate us to work hard. This strategy increases the likelihood of meeting our goals, which can enhance esteem. Esteem relates to the respect and admiration others hold for us, and self-esteem, that which we hold for ourselves. High self-esteem is present when we succeed, filling us with optimism, happiness, and satisfaction. Low self-esteem, however, can manifest when we do not meet a goal. We may feel negative emotions, become sensitive to feedback, and judge our self-worth on this setback ("I'm a failure.") This strategy is a double-edged sword, either increasing motivation ("I will never make the same mistake") or decreasing motivation ("Why bother even trying?"). Overall, this strategy makes us more vulnerable to depression. So what can we do?

Self-compassion is a strategy to use when we do not meet a goal. Compassion is the emotion we feel for the suffering of others. Remember a time when someone close to you expressed distress about missing a goal. You may have reached out to offer kind words or a hug. In this way, your support said, "You're not alone. You're not a failure. I care about you." Thus, self-compassion is the act of self-kindness. Individuals who practice self-compassion set high performance standards, yet do not base their self-worth on the outcome of their activities and comparisons with others. Since their motivation is the act of learning, they are not afraid of taking on new challenges and do not judge themselves harshly when they face setbacks. Individuals who use this strategy are more likely to recover quickly and initiate new goals. Further, they are more likely to make healthier choices such as sticking with a nutrition plan, engaging in safe sex, and being more supportive toward a partner. In all these ways, self-compassion is linked with well-being and high self-esteem.

So how do we learn to practice self-compassion? According to marriage and family therapist Linda Graham, one way is to write ourselves a Self-Compassion Letter. Here's how it works. First, think of an issue that makes you feel bad about yourself. Then imagine a friend who is kind, supportive, and aware of your strengths and weaknesses and write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this friend, focusing on your perceived weakness (What would your friend say to you from a compassionate perspective?). Finally, put the letter away and, later, read it slowly. Feel the compassion pour into you. Do this as often as needed and remember the words of Les Brown: "Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss it, you will land among the stars."

For mental health support, contact the Counseling and Outreach Unit at 202.692.1470.



CORPS INNOVATION

Let Data Drive Your Projects

Simple Mapping Tools Add Value and Accuracy to Project Planning and Evaluation



Mapping Details

A hand-drawn map of the village where the malaria campaign was conducted (top) is helpful, but lacks detail. The same village on OpenStreetMap (bottom) is much more useful.

Peace Corps Volunteers have been drawing maps with their communities by hand for decades. But where are these maps now? Most are long gone, filed away in the dusty corner of a rural school or used to bundle delicious street food. What if we had access to online maps that were geographically accurate, dynamic, and easy to edit and share?

Two Volunteers and their community in Botswana are using innovative mapping tools

to enhance current map-drawing and make data-driven decisions to improve their programs.

Theresa Govert, a public health Volunteer in Botswana, first learned about OpenStreetMap and MapBox, two online mapping tools, while attending a Stomping Out Malaria Boot Camp in Senegal. OpenStreetMap is a digital wiki map of the world that anyone, anywhere can edit and use; MapBox allows users to create private map layers—similar to overhead projector transparencies—on top of OpenStreetMap.

Govert later attended Botswana's National Malaria Conference where she was inspired to use online mapping tools to plan and evaluate an indoor residual spraying (IRS) malaria prevention campaign in her region. She rallied support within her community and created a video to appeal for help from family and friends back home. Her family and friends quickly learned how to edit OpenStreetMap—the editing process essentially consists of tracing lines and squares over satellite imagery—and used their Internet connections to build a base map of the targeted town. Govert then trained her counterparts and other community members on OpenStreetMap, and together they added local knowledge to the map by labeling schools, the health clinic, government offices, and other points of public interest.

Govert, her fellow PCV Mike Banfield, and their counterparts knew that the indoor residual

spraying teams needed to spray at least 80 percent of the homes in the community to break the cycle of malaria transmission. During the campaign, IRS teams went door-to-door and sprayed the interior walls of homes with mosquito-killing residual insecticide. Mosquitoes naturally gravitate to these walls to digest and rest after biting a human. After the campaign, Govert teamed up with Banfield and volunteers from the local health clinic to conduct a simple survey. Using GPS devices borrowed from the National Malaria Program, they determined exactly which houses had been sprayed and which had not—and the reason why. They used the online mapping tool QGIS to create a private layer of a map that demonstrated the results of their survey.

The team found that the majority of houses had not been sprayed simply because no one was home when the team arrived, and that the campaign could reach the 80 percent goal with a simple follow-up to specific homes. Banfield presented these results to the lead entomologist of Botswana's National Malaria Program, and the team worked to scale up the project and train IRS teams to conduct the survey as they spray. If the team had not first collected data and then analyzed it, Botswana's National Malaria Program would not have been able to identify exactly how many and which houses should be targeted in the follow-up campaign.

At first glance, this project might seem difficult and out of reach for many Volunteers in the field. However, the appeal of online mapping tools lies in their ease of use and ability to help Volunteers and communities both collect and make sense of complex data. Anyone who can use a mouse and a keyboard can quickly learn to edit OpenStreetMap and create private map layers in MapBox. More Volunteers than ever have access to the Internet and smartphones at their sites. Using these technologies enables Volunteers to infuse their projects with hard data and rigorous analysis.

OpenStreetMap.org

- Digital wiki map of the world
- Anyone can access and use data
- Public points of interest are labeled (e.g., roads, parks, etc.)

Mappive.state.gov

- Tips for using OpenStreetMap.org for international development

MapBox.com

- Uses OpenStreetMap as a base
- Allows users to create private accounts and share maps
- Any point of interest can be labeled and include notes, depending on the objective of the map (e.g., malaria counterparts with telephone numbers, a specific agricultural cooperative's rainy season fields, etc.)

The Office of Innovation works to enable more efficient operations and implement "smarter" government initiatives.



Distance Career Planning

Dear Peace Corps Career Development Specialist:

I'm not planning on living in the Washington, D.C. metro area when I get back to the States; what job search resources do you have for RPCVs outside the D.C. area?

Regardless of where you want to live or what you want to do post-Peace Corps, the Office of Returned Volunteer Services has resources to help. In addition to the East Coast Career Center in Washington, D.C., and the West Coast Career Center in San Francisco (Oakland) that provide in-person assistance, including career counseling, résumé reviews, and mock interviews, we offer personalized attention to RPCVs worldwide through Google Hangouts and phone calls. To schedule an appointment, email rpcvcareercenter@peacecorps.gov when you finish service.

Online, the Virtual Career Center (peacecorps.gov/rpcv) features job search tips, sample résumés, and webinars with detailed information on successful job searching. Whether you are looking for help translating your Peace Corps service on your résumé, suggestions for answering difficult interview questions, or advice on negotiating a better salary once you get the job offer, it's available in the Virtual Career Center anytime.

Returned Volunteer Services also conducts RPCV Career Conferences U.S.-wide. These two- to four-day events include hands-on workshops and career fairs with employers eager to hire RPCVs. By the end of September, we'll host two-day conferences in Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, New York City, and San Francisco, and three four-day career conferences on the East and West coasts. For details, visit peacecorps.gov/rpcv/events.

If you are unsure of what you want to do post-Peace Corps, you can access Focus Career, an online program designed to spotlight potential jobs and sectors of interest based on responses to a series of targeted questions. For access, email rpcv@peacecorps.gov.

Regardless of where you are, the Peace Corps Career Center can help you transition to a great post-Peace Corps position. Best wishes and we look forward to serving you.

Dear Peace Corps Career Development Specialist:

Upon completing my service, I'll return home to my parents' house in Iowa and plan to stay with them while conducting my job search. I am targeting jobs in Washington, D.C. How important is it to be physically present in my target location during my job search?

Thanks to the Internet, you can conduct a job search from virtually anywhere there's an Internet connection. In fact, it's a good idea to begin researching and applying for jobs during your final months of service, as the hiring process can move slowly. You might even be able to interview via Skype before you close service.

But having a local presence can absolutely help your job search. Many companies prefer to hire local applicants—not because they will be any better for the job but because hiring someone familiar with the area can be a safer bet than a non-local who may end up disliking it. If the new hire doesn't like the area and leaves, the employer has to start the hiring process over, costing time and money. Hiring officials may also assume non-local candidates expect relocation expenses and they may not have a budget for it.

Unfortunately, sometimes non-local candidates' résumés land in the "circular" file, aka trash, as opposed to the "to be considered further" file because of this. Employers can receive hundreds of applications for each job, so they're looking for easy ways to cull people out to get their stacks down to a digestible amount for interviewing.

Moving to a new city without a job may not be economically feasible, but consider staying with a friend, family member, or fellow RPCV temporarily who lives in your target area. If they are kind enough to let you to crash for a few weeks or a month, it can be hugely helpful in establishing a local presence.

If you can't physically come to the area, ask if you can use that friend or family member's address as a "temporary" or "local" one on your résumé, which will serve the same purpose—getting you considered among the "locals." Once you get a call for an interview, explain that you are in the process of relocating and are currently out of the area but would be happy to interview via Skype or in person next week. If you can't list a local temporary address on your résumé, consider leaving it off entirely. Outside of federal résumés, street addresses are rarely required and leaving it off will save you valuable space. And don't worry about getting a local phone number: Very few people change their cellphone numbers now, so an out-of-area number will not be a dead giveaway. Good luck!

If you have a question about post-Peace Corps employment, email career development specialist Jodi Hammer at rpcvcareercenter@peacecorps.gov.



Notes from the Field



Men help raise awareness of gender-based violence in Botswana.

Botswana **Mission to End Violence Against Women**

PCV Peggy Flynn (2013–15), along with 30 fellow Volunteers and numerous community leaders, held multiple events that raised awareness of gender-based violence in 36 villages throughout the country. Flynn and other PCVs distributed 20,000 ribbons to community members that read “End Gender-Based Violence”; held training sessions on the importance of gender equality; and led a gender-based violence awareness march, where local male leaders dressed as women to draw attention to the cause.

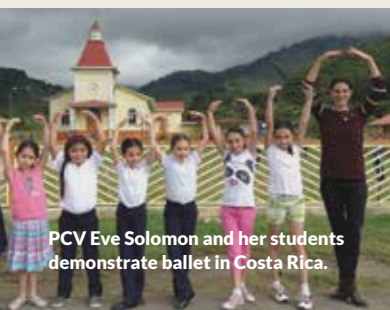
“Anything that can highlight this problem and help educate and eradicate gender-based violence—like men literally taking a walk in women’s shoes—is worthwhile,” Flynn said.



In Cambodia, a young woman works on her Frisbee game.

Cambodia **Young Women Learn Ultimate Frisbee**

PCV Vicki Chan (2012–14) arranged a Frisbee tournament and workshop at the teacher training college where she worked after noticing a lack of women playing sports at the school. A former member of the Ann Arbor Ultimate Frisbee Association, Chan introduced the unfamiliar sport at her Cambodian school, then helped her students master the basics and gain confidence through sports.



PCV Eve Solomon and her students demonstrate ballet in Costa Rica.

Costa Rica **Students Achieve Their Dreams through Ballet**

PCV Eve Solomon (2013–15) used her 13 years of dance experience to bring ballet to her local community. Solomon taught local girls ballet after school and eight of her students were eventually selected to perform “The Nutcracker” with a ballet company in San Jose, Costa Rica. Through community support and donations from the Peace Corps Partnership Program, the girls were able to make the weekly trips to the capital to practice and their families were able to join them for the final performance.

“These young girls have gained so many skills and learned that through perseverance and dedication, they can achieve their dreams,” Solomon said.

Lesotho **Health Club Promotes HIV Education**

PCV Evan Brown (2013–15) worked with his community to build a holistic health club as a tool to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. The health club is a safe place to discuss sex and health issues with medical professionals and a way to address stigma that can be associated with HIV. Brown hopes to prompt a snowball effect of knowledge sharing by making community members health ambassadors.

Madagascar **Creating a Safe Space for Children**

PCV Jenie Farinas (2013–15) helped build the first playground and school garden in her community, giving children a safe place to play. Called “Project Healthy Kids,” the initiative will help teach children the importance of staying active and healthy.

Morocco **Engaging Youth through Outdoors Program**

PCV Caroline Ayes (2014–16) encouraged Moroccan youth to develop environmental and leadership skills by holding an outdoors after-school program.

Called Creating Leadership in the Mountains and Beyond, or CLIMB, the program enabled students to embrace nature through outdoor trips and team building and culminated with a climb to the top of Mt. Toubkal, the highest peak in North Africa. Beyond encouraging environmental consciousness, Ayes said the program enables youth in Morocco to increase their network for future personal and professional opportunities.

Peru **Eradicating Hunger and Increasing Food Security**

PCV Michael Mazotti (2012–14) has improved upon an organic waste management system in his community by using worms to turn organic waste into fertilizer for crops, gardens, and trees. Mazotti noted that the high tourist traffic in Peru contributes to the large amounts of waste in his community. Once the program begins to produce more natural fertilizer than the community can use, Mazotti said the government will begin to sell it.

Tanzania **Promoting Sustainable Livestock Practices**

PCVs Luke and Samantha Temple (2012–15) worked with their community in Tanzania to improve chicken care in order to boost local income and improve nutrition. Community members were trained in poultry care and tasked with sharing their knowledge with other community members. The households that successfully employed those practices were given seven young chickens; over 250 chickens were distributed overall.

“I’m optimistic that the enthusiasm for this project in my community will lead to the continuation of the project’s goals of reducing poverty, increasing financial independence, and improving health,” Luke Temple said.



In Lesotho, PCV Evan Brown hosts a health club to combat HIV stigma.

China **Promoting English Literacy**

PCV Kolter Kiess (2013–15) created an English library in his school where students and community members can learn and practice English skills. “The Reading Bridge Project” is preparing students for standardized tests, a determining factor for college and career choice. Over 100 community members will benefit from the library, which will be completed this year.

“I’m very fortunate that my school is and has always been amazingly supportive,” Kiess said.



Malagasy children enjoy a new playground and school garden.



VOLUNTEER LIFE

Navigating the Intersection of Death & Disability

PCV Serena Olsen, Kyrgyz Republic, 2014–16

Empower Blind People is Central Asia’s first training center for the blind, based on the model of the National Federation of the Blind, and I have the honor of being a part of its early development as both a Peace Corps Volunteer and a federationist.

We graduated our first 10 students from a five-month, full-time training program last year and three of them returned in January for continued training and mentoring along with seven new trainees.



Right here in Kyrgyzstan, we are changing what it means to be blind.

I find it delightfully poetic that both in my training village of Kraznaya Rechka and my permanent site in Bishkek, I have lived on the Silk Road. Jibek Jolu is a major artery that runs east-west through the northern part of Bishkek, out of town to the east toward the Pearl of Kyrgyzstan, Lake Issyk-Kul. Kraznaya Rechka lies along the same highway about 45 minutes east of Bishkek. These days, the road is not dominated by caravans of traders, their camels and carts laden with spices, silks, and other finery. Like so many places around the world moving toward developed status, this highway is a steady stream of vehicles, large and fast, with little or nothing in the way of controlled intersections or designated crossing zones. I very quickly dubbed this road the “Highway of Death.” I disliked having to cross it, but for the first seven weeks of pre-service training, my house was on the opposite side of the highway from everything I needed—my language classes, the hub site where all trainees convened, shopping, the community center and athletic field, lunchtime guesting sites, and eight of the 10 Volunteers in this village. I had to cross the “Highway of Death” at least twice a day, morning and evening.

Of course, lots of people were really freaked out by this—Peace Corps staff, my host family—insisting on escorting me beyond the extent to which other Volunteers were escorted. Most Volunteers received an escort from a host family member the first time they went to and from their language classes and the hub site, then they were left to their own devices. As much as a week or two into training, despite my protestations, I found myself with a family or Peace Corps escort.

I realized that just because I had finally fought my way through a long, difficult application process, secured an assignment, and made the long journey to begin that assignment, my work at winning hearts and minds was not over within the Peace Corps universe in tandem with my new task of changing what it means to be blind in Kyrgyzstan. I doubt it was a coincidence that I was placed in the hub village (other Volunteers commuted up to an hour from surrounding villages for Peace Corps training), nor that my language group numbered only four, while others were five or six. Expectations were low.

I leveraged opportunities to demonstrate my capacity for competent, independent travel and actually had some good conversation with my Kyrgyz language instructor all those times she insisted on escorting me home, allowing me to explain my process, methodology, and philosophy about crossing the “Highway of Death” and beyond. I was smugly satisfied one afternoon, after waiting patiently for a safe opening in traffic—and thankfully staying off the radar of concerned neighbors—to cross the highway and immediately encounter my 10-year-old host sister, who had been sent out to retrieve me. She had seen me cross the highway independently—a witness! As the days and weeks passed, the shadows and over-custodial queries dropped off and my comfort and confidence in crossing the highway increased. It was definitely a new environment to adjust to and not one to fool around with. Let’s be clear: I don’t like it, but I can and will do it, because it is an expected part of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. My language teacher was perhaps the last to be truly convinced, but about a month into pre-service training, our language group was treated to an evening at the philharmonic in Bishkek. It was



Blind baking
Olsen (center) teaches blind and visually impaired students in the Kyrgyz Republic to have more self-sufficiency, including cooking and baking for themselves.

dark when we returned to Kraznaya Rechka and the marshrutka (local bus transportation) would drop me on the side of the highway across from my home. Concerned, my language teacher offered to call ahead and have my host mother meet me to help me across the dark highway. I politely declined, but heard her make the phone call anyway. “You know,” I offered, “the cars sound the same at night as they do during the day.” Of course, if you are blind or a trained travel instructor, this is debatable, but my point was made, and other than concerned strangers on the street, I was thereafter left to my own devices to get around, just like my peers. Yes, the “Highway of Death” is dangerous; my expectation is that it is no more or less dangerous for me than for my sighted peers, and the message finally got through.

Winning hearts and minds within the Peace Corps or elsewhere was not at the forefront of my consciousness those first few weeks. “Highway of Death” or no, this was a new environment I was adjusting to and all the same skills I learned at the Louisiana Center for the Blind were being applied in new ways. I adjusted my cane technique to better track the dirt, gravel, rocks, debris, and potholes that are sidewalks and most streets in this village of about 8,000 people. Houses are set back from the “Highway of Death,” and a walking path of sorts hugs the length of tall gates that seclude each home. Knowing that I will need to cross the highway, I head straight for the strip of dirt alongside it to better monitor traffic and be ready to cross when an adequate opening presents itself. Standing alongside the highway, it stretches far ahead and behind me into the distance. There are no tall buildings, the cars are traveling fast, and the space is huge and wide open, so cars can

be heard at a great distance and I spent a lot of time evaluating the new characteristics of this environment to refine my sense of how big of an opening I truly needed to cross safely. Getting to the house where I had my language lessons I followed a small irrigation canal and it was easy enough to take a left at the first paved road and find the only paved driveway on the right side of the street. Precisely locating the abundant cow poop lurking like little land mines is another matter altogether.

Then came learning to navigate the decaying Soviet infrastructure of the capital and my permanent site, Bishkek, which continued to evolve and present new and different challenges as the seasons changed. First was learning where sidewalks are more and less walkable (and I use the term “sidewalk” loosely), or where they do and don’t exist, and where traffic is more and less controlled. Next was building the mental map of my new city and all of the places I come and go from—home and office, of course, the house where our trainees live, shopping, cafes, Peace Corps office, the bazaar, and so on. As the sweltering summer turned to a cool, rainy fall, I began to rediscover those same environments in terms of where puddles were smaller and larger and more and less abundant and began familiarizing myself more with the trolleybus system to get around a little more efficiently and stay a little drier. Fall gave way to crisper temperatures and snow began to fall and my navigation skills continued to serve me as I adjusted to the changes in textures, acoustics, edges, and other information around me and this native Californian has survived her first snowy winter!

The need for self-advocacy hasn’t stopped either: Confidence and problem-solving skills get me through myriad awkward moments that can arise in public spaces. How I am treated as a blind person here in Kyrgyzstan is not unlike experiences back in America, though they tend to be a bit more extreme here. Like when, not once, but twice, at the same intersection, a man got out of his car, parked in traffic waiting for the light to change, because he thought I needed help crossing the street.

These interactions became a great opportunity to practice my emerging language skills and, as my language has developed, it has become much more interesting to the people I meet in public than my blindness, making it just another characteristic of who I am, and just maybe changing perceptions.

pad grapow



Ingredients

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0.5 kg protein (minced/
thinly sliced chicken, beef,
pork, or extra-firm tofu) | 20–25 Thai holy basil
leaves (OK to substitute
regular basil, but not
sweet basil) |
| 5–8 garlic cloves | Optional: |
| 1–10 Thai chilies (or
comparable hot pepper);
less = mild; more = spicy! | 4–6 mushrooms |
| 3–4 T vegetable oil | 1 Anaheim chili (or
equivalent) thinly sliced
diagonally |
| 3 T fish sauce | 1/4 cup water |
| 2 T soy sauce | |
| 1 T sugar | |

Instructions

1. Finely mince the garlic and chilies together until paste-like. (Don't get any chilies in your eyes!) In a large wok, heat the oil over very high heat until it's screaming hot (toss in a small amount of the chili/garlic mixture, if it immediately starts sizzling loudly, the oil is ready).
2. Once the oil is ready, add the garlic/chili mixture (beware, it may cause you to cough and/or sneeze; this is how to tell if the oil is hot enough).
3. Quickly stir-fry the garlic/chili mixture for 1–2 minutes until the garlic starts to brown (do not let it burn).
4. Add in protein and basil and stir continuously for about 4 minutes over high heat.
5. Add in optional ingredients, fish sauce, soy sauce, and sugar and continue to stir. If you like extra sauce, add in the 1/4 cup of water. Taste. When you're satisfied with the taste and spice level, remove from heat and serve immediately over rice.

Vegetarian Fish Sauce

Ingredients

- 2 cups shredded dried seaweed
- 4 cups water
- 3 garlic cloves (smashed)
- 1 & 1/2 T whole black peppercorns
- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 2 t lime juice
- 2 t lemon juice
- 2 T vinegar
- 3 t sugar
- 1 t ground ginger
- 1 t ground garlic
- 1/4 t chili powder

Instructions

1. In a large pan, bring seaweed and water to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes.
2. Add garlic, peppercorns, soy sauce, lime juice, lemon juice, vinegar, sugar, ground ginger, ground garlic, and chili powder.
3. Return to a boil, then turn heat down to medium and cook for 30 minutes.
4. Taste. Adjust the salt level by adding water.
5. Allow to cool, then strain into a container.



Household Cleaning Hacks

#1 Use Vinegar as a Universal Cleaner

- Soak rusty tools in undiluted vinegar overnight to clean them.
- Freshen wilted vegetables by soaking them in a mix of 2 cups of water and a tablespoon of vinegar. This will also help remove bacteria and pesticides.
- Relieve bug bite itches with it. Take a cotton ball lightly soaked in vinegar and dab the spot for relief.

#2 Clothes

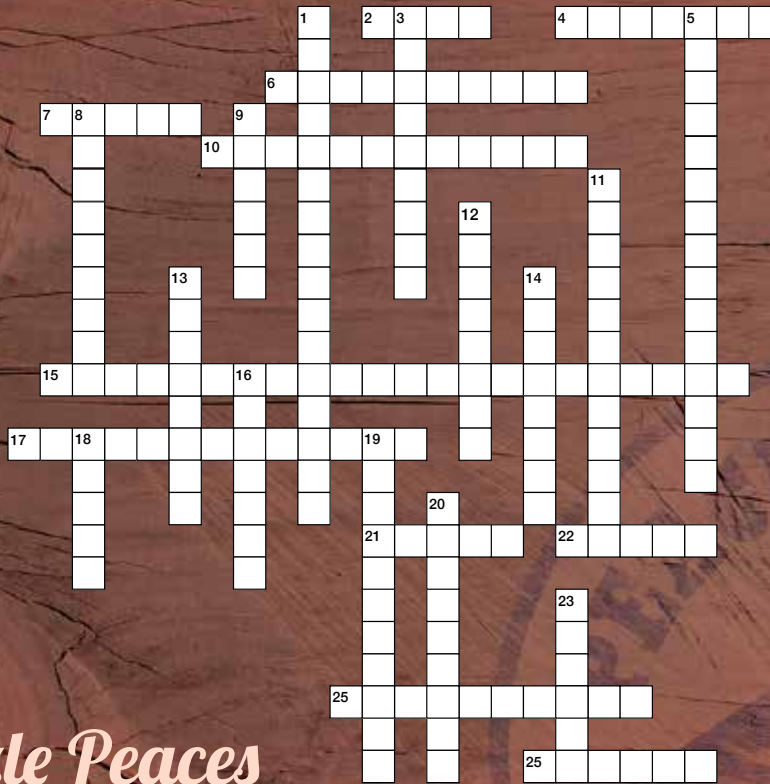
- Fill rain-sodden shoes with crumpled newspaper to soak up the water.
- Use a razor to remove dried paint from clothes.
- Use chalk to remove grease stains on clothes.

#3 Pots & Pans

- To clean a cast iron pan, scrub the pan with a paste made from coarse salt and a bit of water.
- Remove stains from an aluminum pot by filling it with water and apple peels and simmer for an hour.



Puzzle Peaces



Crossword

See page 16 for answers.

How far will you go?

Across

2. Nonprofit organization for RPCVs (abbr.)
4. State that sent most Volunteers per capita
6. U.S.-China ___ Volunteers
7. Percent of PCVs over 50
10. 23 percent of PCVs currently serve here
15. 2015 top Volunteer-producing school
17. World AIDS Day
21. Number of goals in the Peace Corps mission
22. "Peace" in Arabic
24. Percent of PCVs who hold at least a bachelor's degree
25. Kennedy who served in the Peace Corps and is now in the U.S. House of Representatives

Down

1. PCRVs assist FEMA in 2005 after this natural disaster
3. Capital of Cambodia
5. Total number of host countries served
8. Most PCVs work in this sector
9. Its flag is green, red, black, and orange
10. Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet served here
12. An official language of Madagascar
13. The 15th of ___ starts National Hispanic Heritage Month
14. Then-Sen. Kennedy's early-morning speech launching the Peace Corps concept was in this state
16. First Peace Corps Director
18. PCVs started serving here in 1993
19. PCVs started serving here in 1997
20. The Peace Corps sends the best and the ___ abroad on behalf of the U.S.
23. Most recent Peace Corps program to open and 140th country

Sudoku

Easy

8	2							9
9		6		3	2			5
	4			1				6
	8	3						
2		9				8		4
						5	2	
4				6			1	
	9		8	5		3		7
	7						8	2

Medium

		7			5			4
	3		1		2	5		
	2				3		6	
			8	1				2
		5	3		7	8		
8				5	9			
	6		9				8	
		1	5		6		9	
4			7			2		

Hard

9		7	8		5	6		
6			3			2		
	3				1	9		
			2					
2	7	9				4	5	3
					9			
		1	9				6	
		6			2			4
		3	4		6	1		7

DIY Knots

For boating, building, camping, climbing
Slightly more difficult than tying your shoes

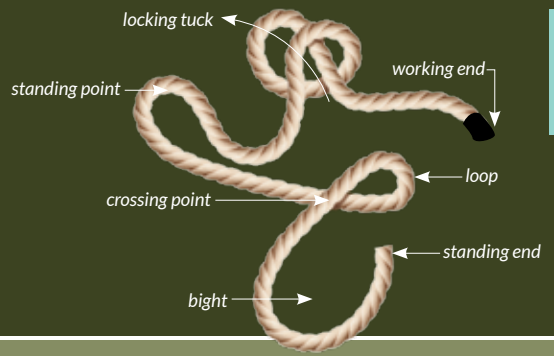


Figure-of-Eight Stopper Knot



Step 1 Make a bight in the working end of the line and twist it around to create a loop



Step 2 Tuck the working end over then under the initial loop

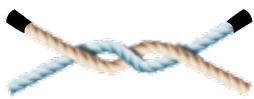


Step 3 Pull the working end through the initial loop



Step 4 Tighten it by pulling down on the standing piece of the line while holding the body of the knot stationary until the bend is almost at a right angle

Reef or Square Knot



Step 1 Cross the two lines, feeding one line under and over the other twice



Step 2 Cross the top right line over the top left line



Step 3 Then bring it through for a simple knot (right-over-left)

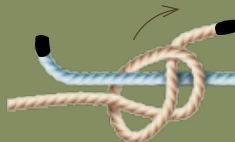


Step 4 Pull firmly on all four ends at once to tighten the knot

Fisherman's Knot



Step 1 Lay the two lines together, parallel, with the working ends opposed



Step 2 With one end, tie an overhand knot around the other standing part (so it resembles a pretzel)

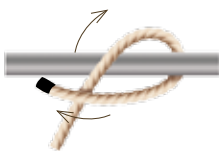


Step 3 Repeat the process with the other end, making sure that both knots are of identical handedness (i.e., they both must spiral the same way)



Step 4 Tighten the two knots then pull on the standing lines to slide them together

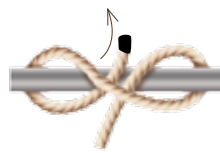
Clove Hitch Tied with an End



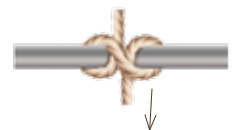
Step 1 Make a loop with the working end around the rail



Step 2 Lay it diagonally over its own standing part)



Step 3 Pass the end around the rail again, and tuck the working end beneath the left loop



Step 4 Pull on both ends to tighten the knot



Justin Bibee | Morocco



Mary Screen | Cameroon



Shou Yuan | Zambia



Andrew Self | Kyrgyz Republic



Elizabeth Tomal | Tonga

The View from Here: The Front Door

Next Issue: View from the Market
Send photos from your local market to
pctimes@peacecorps.gov. Include your name,
country, and service dates. Make sure your photo is
300 dpi and at least 3 inches wide.



Jorge Garza | Guatemala



Sandra Douglas | Philippines



Laura Aldrich | Botswana



Jonathan Ford | Ecuador