



Peace Corps
Belize

Annual Report 2018

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From The Country Director

This annual report presents a golden opportunity to look at what has been accomplished over the last 12 months – thanks to Volunteers, Belizean counterparts, host families, and Peace Corps staff members. In an age of rapid change, Peace Corps and the work it does in partnership with Belizeans is a testament to the impact of dedicated service, development, and cultural exchange. As a result of requests received from the Ministry of Health and from local communities, Volunteers were placed throughout Belize's six districts to work in the area of rural family health. This year, highly trained and specialized Peace Corps Response Volunteer were placed within District Education Centers and worked closely with local teachers to improve literacy among primary school students.

Whether serving for two years or nine months, Volunteers worked with a variety of host country nationals, friends, families and communities members to implement the three overarching goals of Peace Corps focused on skills transfer, cultural exchange, and mutual respect. Each Volunteer focused on achieving the Agency's core mission of world peace and friendship through their work, relationships and experiences.

Throughout 2018, Peace Corps Belize consulted with its national partners, local counterparts and Volunteers to discuss the mission, achievements, and potential opportunities. These interactions reaffirmed the commitment, mutual respect, and successes that characterize the partnership Peace Corps shares with Belize. This 56 year long relationship is a testament to Peace Corps' devotion to the people of Belize and to working toward its development on the country's own terms. This alliance is also evidence of Belizeans' comradery with and dedication to Volunteers. Belizean communities welcomed these American citizens, worked efficiently with them, kept them safe, and taught them the Belizean way of life with openness and patience. Thanks to this year of learning, growth, and progress, Peace Corps Belize is poised for continued success.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone who made this endeavour possible – communities, host families, ministry counterparts, local leaders, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers. I am confident that together, we will continue to advance Belize's development goals and Peace Corps' mission of world peace and friendship.

TRACEY HEBERT-SECK,
COUNTRY DIRECTOR, PEACE CORPS BELIZE



History of Peace Corps In Belize

In 1961, Senator John F. Kennedy challenged a group of idealistic students at the University of Michigan to consider serving their country by living and working in developing countries. From that inspiration grew the Peace Corps, an organization whose purpose is to promote world peace and friendship.

While much has changed since the first group of Volunteers served, the three goals of Peace Corps have remained the same. These goals are as relevant today as they were 57 years ago:

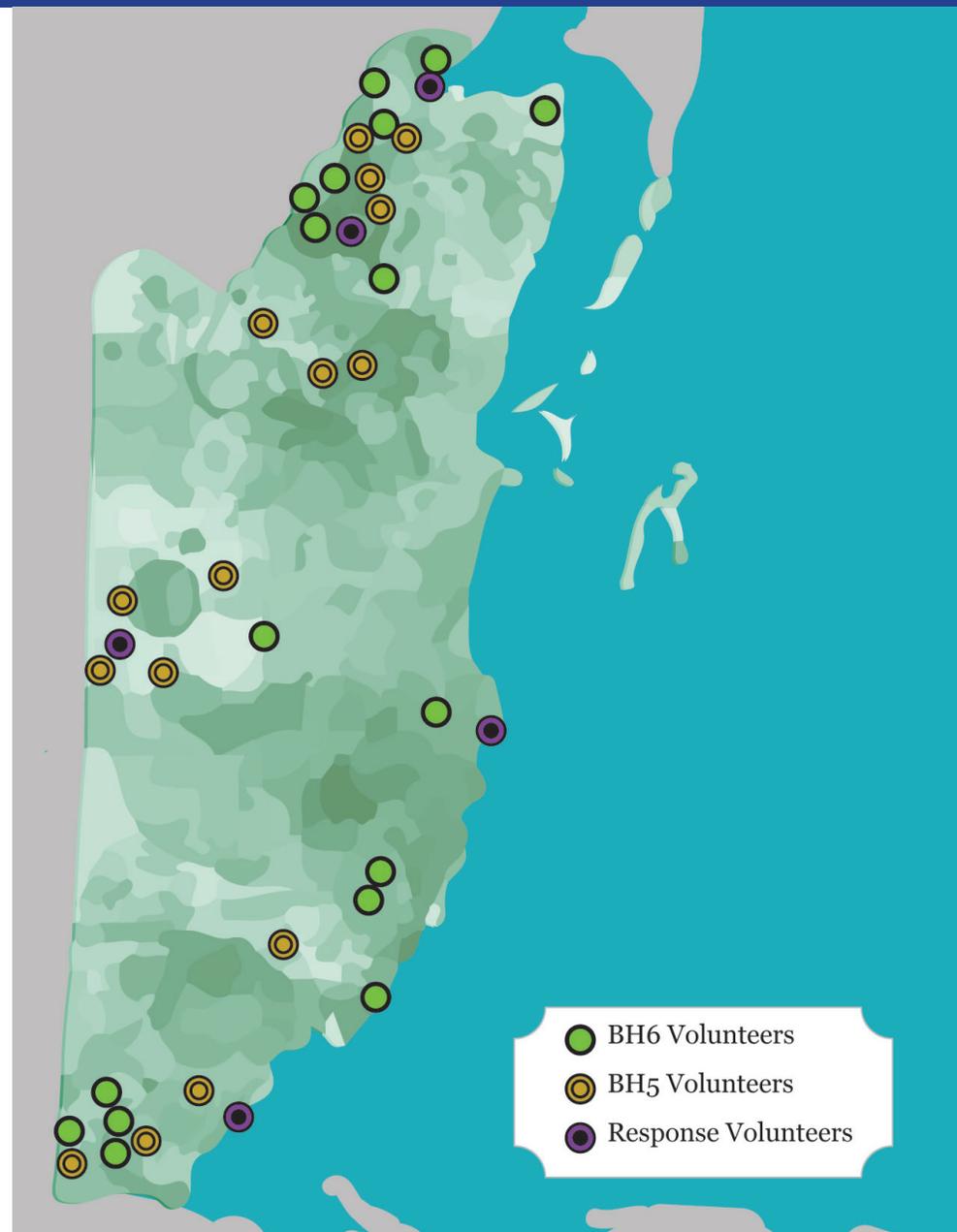
1. Help people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. Help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the people served.
3. Help promote a better understanding of other people on the part of Americans.

Over the past 57 years, nearly 220,000 Volunteers have served in more than 140 countries, providing training in the areas of health, education, business, information technology, environment, agriculture, and youth development.

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

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

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



Living and Working In Belize



In 2018, Volunteers lived and worked in 46 Belizean villages with predominant Q'eqchi, Kriol or Mestizo culture. Since 2013, over 80 rural communities in all six districts have benefitted from the RFHP.

Volunteers in Belize are placed in rural communities with populations ranging from about 250 to 4,000 people. These communities often lack paved roads, have limited transportation services and may be without electricity or running water. Because Belize is a small country, Volunteers rarely live and work farther than three hours (by public bus) from a larger town where services may be more accessible.

In collaboration with Belize's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health, Peace Corps Belize undertakes a rigorous process every year to identify and select rural communities to host new Volunteers. This process involves a series of meetings between Peace Corps staff and Ministry officials, village leaders, prospective counterparts, other community members and currently-serving Volunteers to gauge buy-in, discuss needs, select and cultivate host families, and develop plans for working with the incoming Volunteers. Peace Corps selection process for interested communities who will receive Volunteers based on factors such as safety and security, language, community needs, host family availability and counterpart interest.

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

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

While each Belizean household is different, all Volunteer accommodations with host families are modest. Volunteers share common living areas with host families but each Volunteer has a private room, a bed, a chair and a table to work on. By coming to live in rural villages, Volunteers leave behind the familiar and must choose to be open minded, culturally sensitive, patient and flexible if they are to be successful.

Working with the Ministry of Health -



Peace Corps Goal 1 – Help people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.



In 2012, Peace Corps Belize initiated the Rural Family Health Project (RFHP) in close collaboration with Belize's Ministry of Health (MOH), focusing on health education and promotion in rural communities. Since the RFHP was launched, a total of 113 Volunteers have served in over 60 rural communities in all districts of Belize.

The Rural Family Health Project (RFHP) is implemented in close collaboration with the Belizean Ministry of Health to address the country's priority areas of maternal, neonatal and child health and chronic, non-communicable diseases. The purpose of the RFHP is to support Belizean rural families in adopting positive behaviors to improve and maintain their health. The project emphasizes behavior change and individual empowerment through carefully designed activities that target the following objectives:

- Engage communities in participatory health education and promotion activities.
- Enhance the technical capacity of community health providers and partners.
- Empower mothers and caregivers to make positive maternal and child health choices.
- Foster positive individual lifestyle changes to prevent non-communicable diseases.

September 2018 completed five years since the inception of the RFHP. During this time period, the RFHP served 14,545 Belizeans in rural communities countrywide. Village members benefitted from health education and health promotion activities on the goals of the RFHP: maternal and child health and non-communicable diseases.

In 2018, the Ministry of Health launched a Community Health Platform in 50 rural communities. The platform is a mechanism in which various community members/leaders, in addition to the Community Health Workers (CHWs) work together to address health concerns in their village. Our Peace Corps Volunteers who serve in the pilot communities have had the opportunities to be a part of this initiative.

Peace Corps Belize is currently undergoing a program review of the RFHP. This process includes a thorough evaluation of the program. All stakeholders at the grassroots and national levels, Volunteers and community partners participate in this process which will conclude in June 2019 with a revised health project.

Rural Family Health Project (RFHP)



“Our village received a new nurse in the middle of August. Our new health provider is energetic, compassionate and is full of ideas. One of first things she noticed was the high number of diabetics and hypertensives in my community. To help with this problem we decided to create a Diabetic/Hypertensive Support Club. We started inviting people during home visits and posting on social media incentivizing people to join.

By the end of the month, the clinic hosted its first Diabetic/Hypertensive Support Group meeting. Our goals for this group are to increase villagers’ knowledge of their diseases, ways to control them, check their sugar and blood pressure and answer all the questions they have. We had a total of 6 participants. We first checked their BMI and blood pressure then we explained the purpose and goals of a support group. We asked for their input and what they wish to obtain from this group. Lastly, I gave a PowerPoint presentation on diabetes and hypertension. The nurse further explained the importance of taking their medication, checking their sugar and blood pressure. I believe we have created a safe place for the attendees as they are able to express their opinions and some even confessed the reasons why they don’t go to the doctor or why they are not consistent with their medication.

The following month we held our second meeting. Following up with our previous meeting during which the participants suggested bringing a doctor, the clinic staff and I planned an event in which we invited health providers from town, a doctor, District Health Educator (DHE), a nurse and an assistant. The doctor did a check up on diabetics and hypertensives. While he saw patients, the DHE, nurse and I gave a health talk about the diabetic/ hypertensive diet to 20 patients.

We are seeing more cooperation as more people come to check their sugar levels and blood pressure at the clinic. The interest in this support group is present, and we hope to continue bringing knowledge to the villagers.”

– CLAUDIA B.

“Like many other rural villages in southern Belize, my village suffers from high rates of diarrhea and other gastrointestinal diseases. This largely stems from lack of proper waste management and poor hygiene. Open defecation and poorly maintained, overflowing pit latrines has resulted in widespread contamination of two major community water sources—the village water system and the nearby river—every rainy season. Due to the inextricable link between sanitation and hygiene, education, and health, my Community Health Worker, Marcos, and I devised a way to promote education on this issue that will assist our compost latrine construction project.

Marcos and I collaborated with the teachers at the local primary school to co-plan and -teach health lessons with Infant 1 through Standard 6. Each class was taught a lesson pertaining to prevention/ care of diarrheal diseases and proper sanitation that coincided with the revised Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) curriculum for their grade level. Topics covered included hand washing, filtering and storing food and water, the importance of latrines, proper location and maintenance of latrines, care for diarrhea, and how to make ORS. After the lessons were delivered in each class, I worked with the teachers to film students presenting on the material. Students were encouraged to use props and be creative in how they delivered the information. After filming, I compiled the footage into one comprehensive video on sanitation and diarrhea prevention and care.

It is common knowledge nowadays that students learn best by doing. Our students not only were thrilled to express themselves artistically, but they demonstrated great comprehension and recollection of the material. I noticed several very shy students gain confidence public speaking after rehearsing a few times in front of the class and camera. Watching themselves on screen in front of the whole school also boosted self-esteem among students while disseminating vital public health information. I look forward to utilizing this invaluable resource during our training for the recipients of our compost latrine project.”

– GRACE S.



Accomplishments from the



Goal 1:

Improving Maternal and Child Health

1,632



Individuals educated on the prevention of common childhood illnesses

341



Individuals educated on nutritional needs of children under 5 years of age

279



Individuals educated on essential maternal care services

221



Pregnant women trained on the importance of fruits or vegetables and proteins

181



Individuals educated on exclusively breastfeeding

Rural Family Health Project

Goal 2:

Reducing the Risk of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases

5,450



Individuals educated on Non-Communicable Diseases

1,905



Individuals demonstrated increased knowledge of Non-Communicable Diseases

4,729



Individuals educated on the importance of daily physical activity

2,904



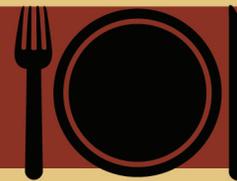
Individuals able to identify ways to incorporate physical activity into their daily lives

1,252



Individuals able to identify five out of seven food groups of the Belizean food basket

1,376



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

1,702



Individuals demonstrated how to properly wash hands

1,065



Individuals educated on the harmful effects of alcohol and other substances

Numbers represent data from October 1st, 2017 - September 30th, 2018

Working with the Ministry of Education -



Pace Corps Goal 1 – Help people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.

Established approximately 20 years ago, Peace Corps Response (PCR) is a lesser known Peace Corps program that sends experienced professionals to undertake short-term (3 to 12 months), high-impact assignments in communities around the world.

In 2017, Peace Corps Belize worked with Belize's Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture (MOE) to incorporate four PCR Literacy Intervention Specialists into the MOE's important work on increasing literacy in Belize.

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

A June 2nd, 2017 Memorandum of Understanding between Peace Corps and the MOE to develop projects and activities in the early childhood literacy sector through the assignment of Peace Corps Response Volunteers ensures the collaboration will continue and this year, Peace Corps welcomed a second group of 6 Volunteers to work with teachers from 49 schools on raising the literacy levels of their students.

- Early Childhood Literacy Intervention Program

"Warm sunshine and high humidity welcomed me as I walked down the gangway at Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport in Ladyville, Belize. It was Sunday, July 8th, about two and one-half hours since leaving Atlanta, Georgia behind for a new chapter in my life's journey.

The teachers I work with had been advised that they would be part of a Literacy Intervention project and assisted by a Peace Corps Volunteer. My cohort is the second group of volunteers to work in this sector. Together with the teachers, we identify the students' needs and determine the intervention strategies which best meets those needs. Our introduction was solidified through a series of Continued Professional Development (CPD) workshops held prior to the start of the school year. PCRVs conducted the CPD, providing teachers and principals the opportunity to get to know us and we them. This helped create a sense of familiarity and trust prior to the start of school. The teachers were aware that they need assistance and are grateful that they will now have the support needed to improve literacy in their country.

Literacy day was celebrated on September 6th with a carnival-like atmosphere in the park across the street from The District Education Center. Schools were let out to celebrate all things Literacy. There were games and booths displaying each schools' interpretation of what a print-rich classroom should look like as well as reading competitions. I was pleased to represent Peace Corps education sector with literacy activities designed for cooperative and small groups.

My assignment takes me to nine school and across as many terrains, from beach to mountain slope, valley and back to the coast. The people I work with are as varied as the landscape. My counterparts are surprised that I travel by public transportation to my work sites rather than having a personal driver take me around. I found this misconception hilarious. They had assumed that because I am an American, I would not travel or live as they do. Another thing they find surprising is that I live with a host family and not on my own.

Every time I see something that I think I have seen or experienced before I am surprised by its newness; this excites me. The past five months have created areas of growth and appreciation in my life. One of my favorite books advises "You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go..." I'm glad I chose Peace Corps Belize and it chose me!"

– JOAN M.



"A few miles into my run in Corozal the other day, a student from one of my town schools was collecting beer bottles to turn in for money; when he saw me he promptly put one bottle in each pocket of his shorts and proceeded to run probably half a mile with me in his flip flops.

As a Peace Corps Response Volunteer, I often pause to think about my experience here in Belize and wonder what kind of impact my time here will have. I am a Literacy Specialist working with eleven Standard One (Second Grade) teachers, coaching them through the process of pulling small groups of struggling readers. A goal of our project is for these students to receive 15 minutes of targeted Literacy interventions every day. This task is not without challenges. In some classrooms, over half of the students would benefit from intervention. Some of my teachers have never pulled small groups before, some classes have 30+ students, and other classes are multi-grade and the teacher is constantly switching back and forth between the two grades in their one classroom. Needless to say, some days I feel as though my "coaching" is less than adequate! More often than not though, I leave my schools feeling incredibly energized and hopeful. The teachers I work with are excited. And I can't help but get very excited too, because when we see student progress, it makes everyone want to work even harder. I am seeing students who did not know their letter sounds at the beginning of the year now reading sentences. I am hearing about students who did not used to like coming to school, now loving this school year and the "games" they get to play during intervention time. I have students wanting to show me what they can read during their breaks and after school - they are so proud of what they can now do thanks to their teacher's dedication.

And yes, a student has joined me on a run to ask if I can work extra with him on reading. So although the final results of the project are still unknown, I do know that I must be making some kind of impact. My hope is that it will be one that is lasting and rewarding for the teachers and students in Belize."

– ALLIE K.



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

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

The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with village leaders, identifies and trains Community Health Workers who are volunteers themselves and who work closely with Rural Health Nurses, District Health Educators, Peace Corps Volunteers and other community members. Together they plan and carry out various activities promoting healthy living with emphasis on maternal and child health (MCH) and non-communicable diseases (NCD), as per the goals of the RFHP. Some of these activities include: community health fairs, promoting school or backyard gardens, home visits, NCD open houses and educational sessions, physical fitness programs, lessons on maintaining healthy pregnancies and promoting exclusive breastfeeding, sessions addressing childhood illnesses and malnutrition, hygiene education and sanitation projects.

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

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

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

Belizean Counterparts



"As Peace Corps Volunteers the best thing we can hope to achieve during our service is a relationship with the people of our host country. When we arrive we are not sure what individuals we will meet and work with along the way. I was blessed with a wonderful host family to live with in my village, but I would have never guessed that my relationship with my host family would prove so instrumental and impactful to my service. I refer to them as my host parents, Romel and Ruby. They consider me their son.

The progression of my host mom's involvement with me blossomed almost immediately. As a diabetic, she was interested in my knowledge about nutrition and exercise. It wasn't long after I arrived at their home that she started asking what I would like to eat and I would respond with, "what do you have in mind?" From my suggestions she figured out that I liked to cook too. We started working together to develop healthier ways to prepare and cook our favorite foods from Belize and around the world. She started helping me with nutrition presentations in and outside the village and was instrumental in my integration into the fitness club. During my first few months with her she lost 20 pounds and she was able to stop taking her diabetes medication.

I brought home a notebook one day and said "Ruby, this is your cookbook. Every time we make a new recipe I think you should place it in here and then you can have access to them any time you want." She perked up and her eyes got real big! After a year passed the little book was overflowing with recipes and I came to her and said, "Ruby, I think others could benefit from everything that you have learned. Why don't we make a cookbook for the village?!" In agreement together we created a full guide to healthier cooking and eating. We now have shared it with numerous friends and family, as well as teachers and co-workers. We hold regular cooking challenges in the village to continue to promote healthy cooking and village unity."

– JOSH F.

"I started a Girls Leading Our World (GLOW) club in my village in August 2017. We have been meeting roughly once a week every Saturday, or every Saturday that I am in the village and able to lead the meetings. I have been working with a wonderful counterpart, Deborah since January.

From the end of May to the beginning of June I had planned to take annual leave. At the GLOW meeting prior to my departure I informed the girls that I would be gone for approximately three weeks, as such I would not be around to lead any meetings. The girls were sad, but then asked why Deborah couldn't lead the meetings while I was gone. Deborah said she would be willing and able to lead the meetings. I left Deborah enough of the GLOW funds to purchase supplies for a few bake sales.

Upon returning from my trip, I discovered that Deborah did indeed held several bake sales while I was gone, and had raise \$100! Even though there were some issues with girls' attendance, this was a great start and gives me hope that Deborah is completely capable of leading the GLOW club even after I'm gone."

– TRINITY S.



The Belizean Experience

“The more you like the Peace Corps the more you are going to be pleased because they are very good ambassadors. People think of an army as agents of destruction and death and so on, Peace Corps is the opposite. They are agents of friendship, of help, of cooperation and they do not look down their noses at the people. They try to learn about the people and from the people and what more can you ask of an army? If all armies were like that, it would be a much better world, I think.”

– SIR COLVILLE YOUNG, GOVERNOR GENERAL OF BELIZE

“At St. Hilda’s College in September 1974, I met my new Biology teacher Mrs. Carol Mortenson, an American Peace Corps Volunteer. Meeting her was one of the best things that ever happened to me. Mrs. Mortenson was a teacher I admired and she became my role model. From a very tender age, I believe teaching was my calling and when I met Carol Mortenson I knew I wanted to be a teacher like her. She was one of the teachers that left an indelible mark on my life. As a professional she displayed the qualities of an effective teacher. She possessed the 3Fs. She was fair, friendly and firm with her students. She was always prepared for her lessons and had her work set out for the day. She was extremely organized, patient and willing to help us understand any concept. She was one of those teachers who gave immediate feedback on tests and we would always receive our graded papers at the next class. She would point out our errors and review concepts we did not grasped.

I also admired that she was always professionally dressed and never missed classes but was always on time to greet us when we entered her classroom. In my mind, she had the most beautiful penmanship I had ever seen. I remembered practicing to write like her because I admired her so much. I practiced until I was able to write like her and today many people still compliment me for my handwriting.

My Peace Corps Volunteer is still in my life today as a good mentor, she did not only adopt my older sister, Linda and me but our entire family. I recalled she would always keep in touch and would send magazines for my dad. When I became a teacher, she would send story books for the children I taught as she knew the value of literacy. To date, she has never forgotten my birthday and has kept in touch with my sister and me through the years.

Finally, I have a lot of respect and admiration for Peace Corps who give so much of themselves and I wish that there will be many more Belizean children who will be as lucky as I am to find a Peace Corps Volunteer who will mentor them throughout their lives.”

- DR. CAROL BABB, CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, BELIZE



With Peace Corps



"Throughout the years Peace Corps has helped me with many projects including the creation of a preschool in the village and the expansion of that preschool, through a grant, to include proper bathrooms, a kitchen and a water tank. This past year the volunteer in our village has been a big help in the preschool with teaching the children the right way to wash their hands, day-to-day activities and even with the implementation of a healthy snack program at the school. Each week the children are served a variety of snacks that are largely prepared in the preschool kitchen, along with the help of the moms. Some of the snacks served are oatmeal, beans and tortilla, and fresh fruits. The program was created to ensure that each child is able to get a healthy nutritious snack, no matter what their situation might be like at home. I feel thankful to have been able to work with Peace Corps. The volunteers are always willing to help and full of new ideas to improve the school. I'm grateful to have partnered with Peace Corps and hope to continue this partnership for years to come."

- CARMEN TERRELONGE, PRE-SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND HEAD TEACHER

"The first time I was told by Nurse Veronica, our village nurse, that our village needed a Peace Corps Volunteer we sat down to brainstorm ideas on how we could make this request possible. The process was very interactive from our side as we started touching base with different leaders within our community, recruiting information on how interested our village was going to be in hosting a Volunteer to help us meet the needs of the community as well as making sure that the Volunteer would feel comfortable being part of our community. Weeks passed and I was notified that we had a community meeting with Peace Corps officials at the school campus. I was all excited and I tried my best to get in contact with the various stakeholders for the meeting. At that time, my colleague Community Health Worker, Elsie, and I were convinced of the importance of having a Peace Corps Volunteer because we had identified many social and health problems in our community. We knew it was going to be a challenge to initiate change in the community, nonetheless we kept confident that all the changes were going to be achieved with the help of the Peace Corps Volunteer.

Fortunately, the day arrived and we met our Peace Corps Volunteer Emily, who now calls our village her second home and who we now consider a member of the community and not really a Peace Corps Volunteer. It wasn't easy to hold the responsibility and commitment of ensuring that she felt safe, motivated, willing to stay and share our culture, religion, people, and our life style - becoming one of our own. Committed to our new task, Elsie and I, as Community Health Workers, went on introducing her to the different leaders and furthermore to the community where, as expected, she was embraced in every household waiting to hear from her. The days passed and Emily's motivation and authenticity were maintained as we started working. Motivation is never a reason to stop her but always a reason to integrate her more with the community. We started working on health education at the health center which was also often engaging at the school as a staff member. Children showed their affection for her and started building trust in her and families started being more conscious of their responsibilities for health issues.

Today the presence of Peace Corps in our community is not just seen as Volunteer Emily but as a role model to move a community forward. We have learnt that where challenges start not to see them as real challenges but as motivation to do better. Health wise, people are starting to see the importance of incorporating a healthy balance diet, children are eating more fruits and ladies have started exercising. We are seeing the youth being more involved in constructive activities and leaders bringing more sports to the community. As a community we reflect more on a healthy environment keeping public spaces more welcoming. More males are recognizing that females should be given the same opportunities as them. Changes have started but it only takes true leaders to motivate change and humbleness with community members. We feel grateful to Peace Corps for giving us that opportunity to be part of the team working hand in hand to build a better community."

- IMER PATT, COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER





Peace Corps Goal 2 – Help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the people served.

"As I prepared to leave on my Peace Corps journey, I knew my dearly beloved New Mexican cuisine would be one of most significantly missed aspects of my life back. I knew I had to leave behind the enchiladas, breakfast burritos and huevos rancheros but more importantly I had to say so long to green chili. Back home in Albuquerque, we eat green chili on everything, we put it on our eggs, our pasta, burgers, pizza, we even have green chili beer and ice cream. It is the staple of our food culture. For me there is nothing more satisfying to the senses than when I walk outside on a crisp fall morning and see rainbow colored hot air balloons floating weightlessly in sky with the sun brightly shining and the smokey smell of freshly roasted green chilis tickling my nose. Ahhhhh! I thought about bringing some with me to Belize, but I was unsure as to how or where I would be able to preserve them. For us New Mexican's there's nothing better than breaking a sweat and cleansing the sinuses while enjoying our meals.

Soon after moving to my village I came to realize that eating "peppa" is also very much an important part of culture here. Specifically, habanero peppers pickled with onion, cilantro, lime and carrots. A little different from my green chili but I was elated nonetheless to find that my fellow community members also knew how to "bring the heat while they eat". My Belizean friends and family were impressed that "la Gringa le gusta pica!" I made sure to take the opportunity to explain to them that where I am from there is a heavy influence of Mexican culture and "comida picante" is central to enjoying our meals. One day I received a care package from back home and to my happiest surprise I found a gigantic jar of NM green chili inside! For dinner that night I excitedly presented the jar to my family and made sure every person got a spoonful. They loved it! Soon my family members were putting the green chili on all their food too. I spent the next month traveling around the village to my different friends' houses carrying my jar of green chili, eager to share in its fiery deliciousness. Much to their surprise, my chili proved a little spicier than theirs at times. Their silent yet wide eyed, sweaty browed reactions as the flavors of my green chili registered with their taste buds symbolized for both parties a mutual respect and cross-cultural connection. One that only true chili lovers can understand. Searching for common ground across cultures can be difficult and almost impossible at times. The ability to relate to someone through a shared passion has always symbolized for me the first step in building a strong relationship. Knowing that I can bond with my loved ones here over something that I consider to be foundational to my New Mexican heritage, gives me a deep sense of gratitude for my roots. My own culture has opened doors for me to walk into another culture and create important, lifelong connections here in Belize."

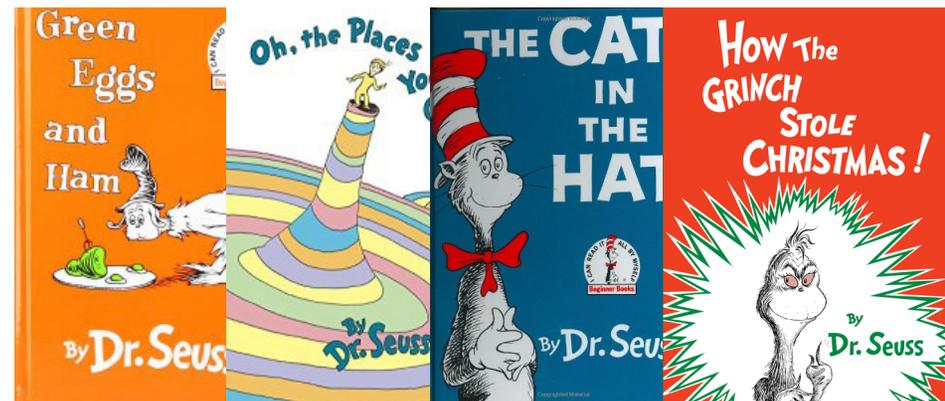
- ALEX R.

"Over the past year, I have been helping my host brother learn how to read. He has continued to struggle with the reading materials available in Standard 1, in part because he did not find them fun to read.

When my father came to visit me in March, he brought several Dr. Seuss books for my host brother. Dr. Seuss books are books that most every child in the US has read, both because of their fun illustrations and their unique stories. I explained to my host parents that these books and stories are a part of American culture that still resonate today. I told them about all of the stories, from The Cat in the Hat, How The Grinch Stole Christmas, Green Eggs and Ham, and many others.

These classics quickly became my host brother's favorite books to read. At first I had to help him read some of the words like could and should in Green Eggs and Ham or the names of people and places in How the Grinch Stole Christmas. After a while he had no problem reading these words."

- AARON H.

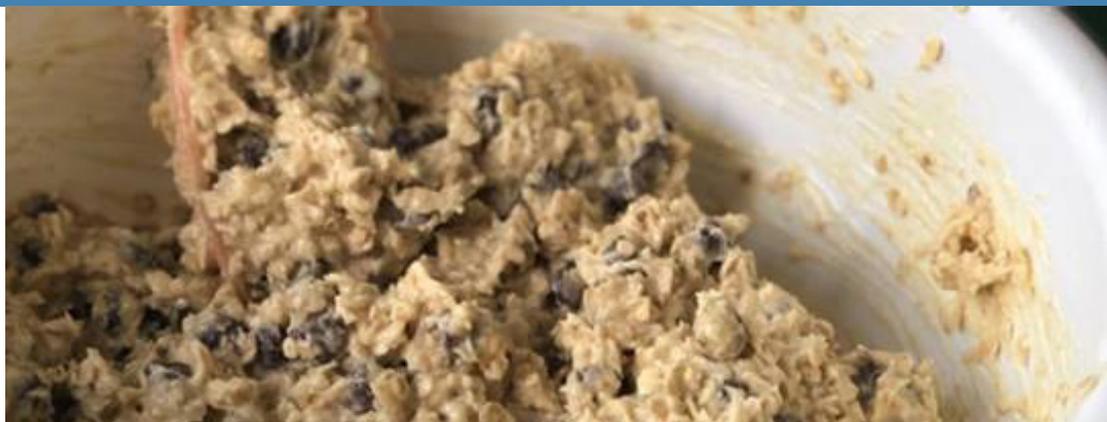


Cultures

"In my village, people celebrate Christmas, which is one of my favorite holidays at home. However, even when people celebrate the same holiday, their traditions can be very different. One of my favorite Christmas traditions is baking cookies with my mom. We bake all different kinds of cookies at this time of year. I told my host mom all about my cookie-baking tradition, determined to share it with her. I waited all week to go into town so I could get the ingredients for my favorite recipe - chocolate chip oatmeal cookies.

The day finally came, and I started to bake. Normally, whenever I cook, my host mom will give me space and let me do my thing. However as soon as I started baking she said "Quiero aprender" (I want to learn) and started to help me mix everything together. So, that afternoon, I got to share this very special tradition with her as we shared all kinds of holiday stories together."

– **CAROLINE K.**



Pease Corps Goal 3 – Help promote a better understanding of other people on the part of Americans

"It was 6 am on a rainy October morning in southern Belize, and a dozen women had been preparing a meal for three hours already. About 15 men were on their way to the bush to plant five acres of corn for one family, and all they had with them was a sharpened stick and a sack full of seeds. Lucky for me, I was invited to take part in this cultural practice for the first time even though I had been living in the village for less than a month. It soon became apparent, though, that I had not done this before. I couldn't help but trip over myself as we trudged through the muddy rain forest for an hour on the way to the farm, then, when we got there, I had no idea how to sharpen a stick with a machete. With a few minutes and helping hands, I had a bag of seeds over my shoulder and a sharpened stick in my hand. I was ready to plant. To do this, the men line up on a short side of the rectangular shaped farm and plunged their sticks into the ground to create a four inch deep hole, then they throw five seeds into the hole from a standing position. I could not be more amazed at how they executed this skill with such ease, and they could not be more amazed at how slow I was, bending down to place the seeds in the hole one by one. I was, understandably, the butt of all the jokes spoken in Q'eqchi, which I couldn't quite understand, for the next three hours until we finished planting and started the walk back. The men who planted and women who cooked then share a wonderfully tasty and filling meal of chicken or pig in a vegetable-filled broth. When I returned to my hammock, exhausted and covered in mud, I knew I had a goal for integration into this community. To practice their culture by learning to plant.

I came to realize learning to plant would provide me with more than just a new skill, it would help me build relationships with the families, help to earn everyone's respect, show them that I am not all that different than they are, and work towards the Peace Corps' goal of cultural exchange. This half day of events occurs two or three times a week over the course of two months during planting season, so I got plenty of opportunities to work towards my goal, ten total to be exact. Every invitation I received, I would accept whole heartedly, because how can I be an effective volunteer if I first don't adapt to their culture, earn their respect, and build relationships. Subsequently, every time I planted, I would learn something new in Q'eqchi, practice my seed throwing skills, and bond with the villagers. By my tenth time planting, I was able to keep up with everyone planting and I even told jokes in the language.

I built relationships, earned respect, practiced Q'eqchi, and learned a new skill important to the culture of this village. I made sure to share this in my blog, to continue the cultural exchange that is so important in Peace Corps' mission."

– **BILLY B.**

Frequently Asked Questions



Who are the Peace Corps Volunteers and why do they choose to do this work?

Each year thousands of Americans ages 18 and over who are interested in public service abroad apply to become Peace Corps Volunteers. One of the goals of the Peace Corps is to help the people of other countries gain a better understanding of Americans and our multicultural society. Peace Corps actively recruits people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences to share with the communities they will serve around the globe. Americans who apply to the Peace Corps undergo a competitive and extensive year-long application process. Peace Corps attracts idealistic individuals who are willing to share their technical experience with others and are eager to learn about other cultures.

What do Volunteers do in Belize?

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

Can Volunteers help secure funding for projects?

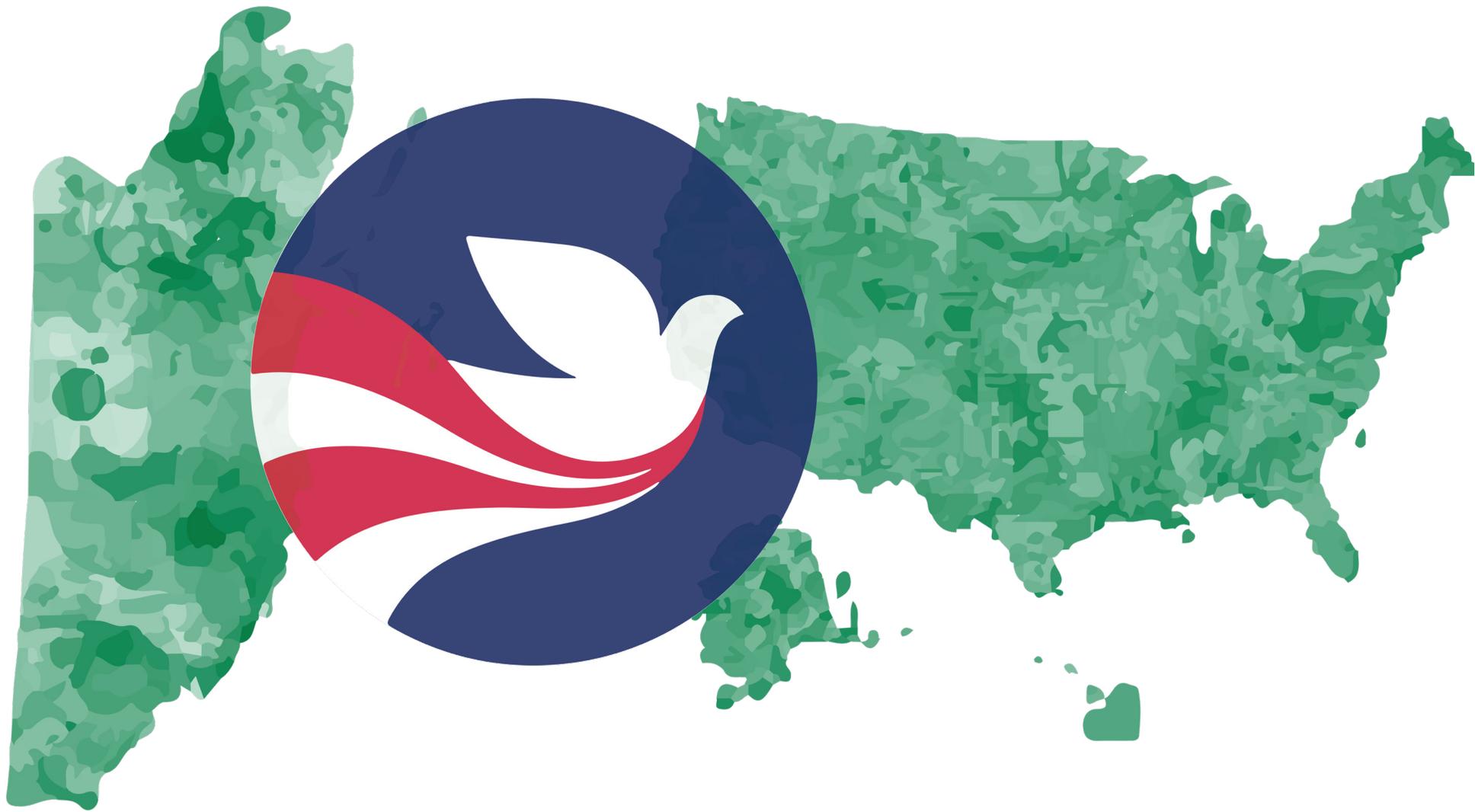
Peace Corps differs from aid groups in that it has a unique development philosophy focused on building human capacity for long-term sustainability. Volunteers can help train others in the area of fundraising and grant writing, but the emphasis must be on equipping others with these skills to ensure that when the Volunteer leaves, community members are able to carry out these activities independently.

How can I apply for a Volunteer to serve in my community?

Peace Corps will consider applications from involved and active community groups interested in working alongside a Volunteer who can provide training and technical support for a period of two years. Only communities with a willing Community Health Worker and school partner that meet the criteria set by Peace Corps will qualify. Volunteers do not provide financial support and they do not take the place of others to fill a job placement slot. If your community is interested in hosting a Volunteer, call Peace Corps Belize at 822-0276.







**Peace Corps
Belize**



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