



NEWSLETTER OF THE COLOMBIA RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends of Colombia,

This fall FOC was presented with the opportunity to participate in the opening celebration of the magnificent new addition to the Kennedy Center named The Reach. Peace Corps was highlighted on the last day of the multi-day celebration. Our day featured the premiere of the documentary “A Towering Task”, a video history of the Peace Corps directed by RPCV Alana DeJoseph. A large exhibition space was dedicated to displays of Peace Corps activities in various countries, including Colombia. FOC board member Pat Wand had the monumental task of coordinating all of the exhibits. The Colombia exhibit featured a children’s hands-on activity based featuring the biodiversity of Colombia.

In addition, FOC made a one- hour presentation in the Justice Forum auditorium entitled “Once a Volunteer.....Always a Volunteer”. RPCV speakers related the history of Peace Corps in Colombia, tracing our first 20 years of work and our return to the country 30 years later. We discussed how the Cartagena Conference in 20008, organized by Friends of Colombia (FOC), was instrumental in making that return possible. Finally, we presented an update of Peace Corps in Colombia today, featuring the various projects FOC members have initiated and FOC has supported. I wish to thank Jeremy Booth and Carmen Galvis for designing and producing the children’s activity, and Darrel Young, Michael Band, Maureen Orth and Helene Dudley for presenting at the Justice Forum. This newsletter features excerpts from their presentations as well as profiles of our exhibit and the video. In addition, I would like to thank the many volunteers who assisted with the programming.

Finally, the annual Peace Corps Connect conference was held in Austin, Texas in August. Thank you to Terry Adcock and Cutter Ullhorn for organizing a gathering of Colombia RPCVs and a nostalgic dinner at Casa Colombia.

Matthew Carlson, Country Director for Colombia, is eager to work with FOC to establish a connection to current PCVs in the field. We expect to be able to enhance our Colombia II membership and their participation in FOC as they return to the States. You can help reach out to RPCVs who might not be members at this time and suggest they go to our website, friendsofcolombia.org and join. In addition, anyone with an interest in Colombia and especially Colombian nationals are encouraged to join. Through our projects we are able to continue to assist in areas of need and maintain our connection to the people of Colombia.

Watch for a letter from FOC which will recap our projects and present a future direction for Friends of Colombia.

Wishing all of you warmth and joy as we move into the holiday season.

Arleen Stewart Cheston
President, Friends of Colombia

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Once a Volunteer...

By Darrel Young, Colombia I

Once upon a time we were Peace Corps Volunteers in Colombia! Ours is a story in two parts: the first part, from the beginning of Peace Corps in 1961—until 1981 when concerns for Volunteer safety caused Peace Corps to leave Colombia—and the second part, from 2010 until present day.

Colombia was the first country to offer to receive Volunteers. In that summer of 1961—at a time when President Kennedy, transcendent charmer that he was, was challenging America to share herself with the world in ways reflecting our shared humanity—Peace Corps Volunteers were warmly welcomed in Colombia. During the '61-'81 period, more than 5,000 of us served, in 80 different groups, living in sites big and small throughout the country. Over these years, Peace Corps made significant contributions in a wide array of field of endeavor.

How is it then, after an almost 30-year hiatus, Peace Corps returned to Colombia in 2010? Fast forward to February 2008 in Cartagena, to an all-group reunion of some 200 euphoric Colombia RPCVs. For many, it's their first time back, but for all, there is no place they'd rather be than right there, right then. Then comes a surprise visit from Colombia President Alvaro Uribe, who is highly complementary of Peace Corps' years in Colombia. When an RPCV expresses the hope that Peace Corps might return to Colombia, President Uribe turns to *Carolina Barco*, Colombia's Ambassador to the U.S., and asks that she look into bringing back Peace Corps and report back to him. Ambassador Barco, who has been instrumental in making the Cartagena reunion happen, works her wonders and by 2010, Peace Corps Volunteer are once again working in Colombia. Thus the 2008 all-group reunion in Cartagena is the tie that binds the two parts of our Peace Corps story in Colombia. Michael Band, Colombia Generation Next, will complete the story!



Volunteers Jack Howard and Bill Johnson in the Educational Television program set up an antenna as they install a television set in a rural school.

Peace Corps Colombia

Projects

1961 – 1981

- 1. Agriculture*
- 2. Architecture and Engineering*
- 3. Art and Crafts*
- 4. Community Development*
- 5. Conservation*
- 6. Cooperatives*
- 7. Primary/Secondary Education*
- 8. English as a Second Language*
- 9. University Education*
- 10. Educational TV*
- 11. Health Care*
- 12. Home Economics*
- 13. Physical Education, Sports and Recreation*
- 14. Small Business*
- 15. Social Work*
- 16. Special Education*
- 17. Youth Development*

Volunteers worked in many different fields, often more than one of the above.

...Always a Volunteer

By Michael Band, Colombia II-3

I was a Teaching English for Livelihoods Volunteer in La Boquilla, Bolivar from 2011 to 2014. I got the call when I was walking back from an undergraduate class in the spring of 2011. I reached into my pocket, picked up my Blackberry and was ecstatic to hear I had been accepted into the Peace Corps and would be headed to a country in the Middle East after I graduated. But it turns out that wasn't the call that changed my life; that call came a week later when the Peace Corps called me back and said they had overlooked a new program in a country that was bringing back Volunteers after a long hiatus. The recruiter asked, "How would you like to be part of the first group of two-year Peace Corps Volunteers to return to a Latin American country after 30 years?" That was the call that changed my life.

Peace Corps started its reentry into Colombia in December 2010 with nine Response, or short-term Volunteers assigned to specific tasks. It is with our arrival in Barranquilla that the Teaching English for Livelihoods project was born. This project called for PCVs to train, co-plan, and co-teach English at public technical, elementary, middle, and high schools in three departments along the Caribbean coast (Atlantico, Bolivar, and Magdalena). Peace Corps Colombia saw its first cohort of traditional Volunteers join in October 2011. With 22 Volunteers swearing in, this group marked the first cohort since reentry to serve 27 months.

Fast forward to 2015, and Peace Corps Colombia expanded its operations by welcoming its first group of Community Economic Development (CED) Volunteers. Currently, Colombia has 71 Community Economic Development Volunteers, 20 English Education Volunteers, and three Peace Corps leaders working throughout five departments along the Caribbean coast (Guajira, Magdalena, Atlántico, Bolivar, Sucre, and Cesar).

And on September 23, 31 Peace Corps trainees arrived in Colombia to begin their three-month training. After this group swears in, some of them will be selected to live and work in the interior of the country, which will be the first time Colombia PCVs are stationed outside of the Caribbean coast since 1981.



In 2018 PCVs helped expand GLOW (Girls Leading Our World) from a five-day summer camp to a year-round immersive program by introducing Club GLOW. This is one of many projects being carried out by current Volunteers in Colombia.

[Continued on the next page]

...Always a Volunteer [Continued]

At this very moment there are 94 Peace Corps Volunteers in Colombia utilizing their knowledge, skills, and abilities to work with host country nationals on primary and secondary projects that fulfill their respective community's needs.

With the geographic expansion under way, along with the continuation of successful projects and the creation of new ones, the future of Peace Corps Colombia is just as bright as the sun where many of the Volunteers serve. This sentiment was reiterated this past July when I had the opportunity to sit down with Matthew Carlson, the current Country Director, and chat about his ambitions for Peace Corps Colombia in the coming years.

Matthew foresees the total number of PCVs in Colombia reaching between 150-200 within the next few years, dwarfing the 22 I swore in with. He wants Volunteers to continue to focus on the quality of work they do, Increase their partnerships with traditionally marginalized Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and continue to champion gender and inclusion-based work. Larger goals also include introducing another sector, such as agriculture, and potentially bringing short-term Response Volunteers to work on projects assisting with the Venezuelan tefugee crisis. I will always be grateful for my time in the Peace Corps and now, as a RPCV and member of FOC, I look forward to providing continued support to nuestra querida Colombia.



Two high school girls paint a World Map in Barranquilla, Atlántico.

Current Projects:

--Alex and Elyse are two CED Volunteers working with cacao association as part of the Cacao for Peace program. Their work with these farmers has consisted of financial literacy trainings for their farms, chocolate dessert businesses, and cacao tourism.

--Nancy is a Volunteer who has partnered with the organization Outside the Lens to provide photography workshops and cameras for youth interested in cultivating a culture of peace and spreading environmental awareness through photography in her pueblo. She has created a photo club that helps youth share their photos and messages of peace and environmental activism through social media.

--Kaleb and Kenney have been working on the Construye tus Suenos project which builds upon the entrepreneurship curriculum that Colombia students learn in high school and culminates in an annual entrepreneurship fair attended by select high school students that complete the curriculum.

After Colombia, Returned Volunteers at Home

By Arleen Cheston, President, Friends of Colombia

Peace Corps left Colombia in 1981 and returned in 2011. During this 30-year absence, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers worked to maintain a connection with their Colombian communities and to begin social service projects that continued their volunteer work. In 1990, a group of RPCVs formed a member organization, Friends of Colombia (FOC), and began to identify and fund projects in the areas of education, technology, business, health and disaster relief. Some members, like Helene Dudley and Maureen Orth, created foundations to support their projects. Their comments follow.



Magdalena Foundation/Paso a Paso girls folk musicians, breaking tradition of a male dominated music culture.

I will note just two of these FOC-funded projects, both located in Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. One, the Magdalena Foundation, provides scholarships to young people for higher education, college or technical degrees. Currently the foundation supports 15 scholars and has provided over 162 scholarship to date, graduating 147 with higher degrees. Among their graduates are medical doctors, nurses, elementary and high school teachers, engineers, lawyers, and forestry specialists, resulting in a 90 percent successful job placement.

A second program, Paso a Paso or Step by Step, provides tuition, books, school supplies, uniforms and shoes to elementary and high school

students. The children are tutored and their families are taught how to support their student's learning and activities. When they graduate from high school they are eligible to apply for a Magdalena higher education scholarship. Currently there are 35 students in the Paso a Paso program.

Both of these projects serve the poorest of the poor. The children come from families displaced by the radical military/narco trafficking group known as the FARC. They prove that potential lies hidden under the most down-trodden lives and the past can be overcome to produce contributing members of society. Education and support are the keys to success.

The interaction between these two projects is unique and has received positive recognition from the education community for producing excellent students and active members of their communities.

Beyond Peace Corps: Educating for the Future

Maureen Orth founded the Marina Orth Foundation after her Peace Corps service. She describes her work as a Volunteer in the early 1960s and explains how it led to her foundation, which has created the growth and expansion of educational opportunities for Colombian students.

The Marina Orth Foundation supports One Laptop per Child schools in and around Medellin (see students at right with their laptops). The program is expanding into the Nuqui, Choco region of Colombia. The Foundation will be initiating their computer program, English training, and robotics into the Nuqui School in the Choco. Considering the fact that Nuqui is one of the most biodiverse places on the planet the goal is to begin to prepare the students for ecotourism. YOU can help by contributing toward the purchase of computers and educational materials. See the latest at <http://www.fundaorth.org>.



As an example of the success of the robotics program, the Marina Orth Foundation Robotics Champs have been invited to compete at an international contest in Estonia November 26. Maureen writes, “Carlos, Daniela and Oscar will bundle up in their new parkas, ready for their first long distance flight all the way to Tallinn, Estonia, for the international Robotex competition. Win, lose or draw, this will be an unforgettable experience for these talented and deserving kids from a Marina Orth Foundation rural public school.”

To learn more about the Marina Orth Foundation, watch a [video](#) about Maureen’s story or visit <http://www.fundaorth.org/>.

The robotics team had an interview to promote their fundraising campaign to participate in one of the most important robotics competitions in Tallinn-Estonia. (Both photos from the Marina Orth Foundations Instagram page)

The Role of Microfinance

By Helene Dudley

Peace Corps taught me to be comfortable in a diverse and interesting world. It taught me not to just tolerate differences but to embrace them. Peace Corps also taught me to care what happens in other countries, so when Colombia led the planet in murders, kidnapping and internal displacement 20 years ago, I joined Colombia RPCVs to seek a way to help – to really help – not just prayers and good wishes and a check, but to actually DO something.

At an April 2000 meeting of displaced people, lawyers and social workers in Bogota, we learned the best thing we could do from the safety of afar was provide resources to help people rebuild their lives. The Colombia Project (TCP) initially funded micro-loans for displaced families, but soon included any marginalized population. For the first seven years we perfected our model, then replicated it for seven more before evolving as TCP Global and expanding to Guatemala, Niger and Peru in 2015. Today we have 21 sites in 8 countries and are looking for more.

TCP Global loans are for entrepreneurs with no collateral and no credit history, on the bottom rung of the economic ladder. Loans range from \$27 in Niger and Senegal to \$670 in Peru with the average being \$230. After a borrower repays several loans, we urge partners to help open the door to traditional banking services. Colombian banks have a mandate to reach underserved communities. Good track records of our borrowers help banks safely comply with that mandate.

Our mission has always been twofold – obviously to help small entrepreneurs with affordable loans, but also to empower change-maker or-

ganizations in poor communities. The TCP Global team currently supports over 600 loans

per year. In order to reach 6,000, we look to the Peace Corps network to connect us to change-makers in the small and rural communities where volunteers often serve.

RPCVs introduced us to loan partners in Guatemala, Peru, Niger, Senegal, Kenya and Nigeria. We have six sites supported

by currently serving Peace Corps Volunteers. Working through the Peace Corps community is our path forward. The pro bono TCP Global team will help current and former Volunteers build sustainable loan programs in their sites.

Micro-loans will not solve the world's problems but they are an important part of the solution. By empowering change makers in the developing world, we enlist many more hands to address the towering tasks facing the planet -- from migration to food security. To learn more, please visit the TCP Global FACEBOOK Page and the NPCA affiliate group website for TCP Global.



Marelvis, an artist/borrower in Suao who decorates gourds

“Micro-loans will not solve the world’s problems but they are an important part of the solution.”

Film Review: "A Towering Task"

By Patricia A. Wand, RPCV Colombia VIII, 1963-1965

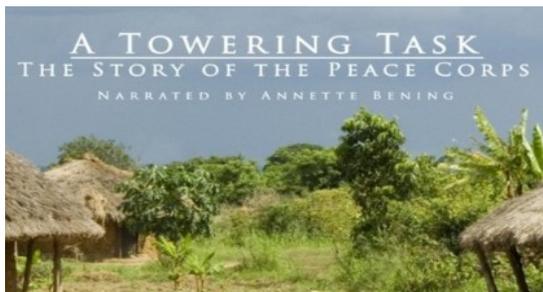
With a vision almost as audacious as Peace Corps itself and with no known revenue stream, film director Alana DeJoseph (RPCV Mali) set about to produce a documentary on the history of Peace Corps. She began floating the idea six years ago, gradually convincing people - mostly one-at-a-time and with patient persistence - that this story needed to be uncovered, recorded and told. She convinced us; hundreds stepped up to the plate and contributed.

A Towering Task is the film that brings DeJoseph's dream to fruition. Its premiere on September 22, 2019 at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC attracted hundreds to an invitation-only screening. People waited in line for hours and later packed three subsequent screenings in the Nation's capital. The premiere coincided with the final day celebrating the opening of REACH, the Kennedy Center's new community space for the arts. In the REACH, over a hundred returned Peace Corps Volunteers, coordinated by National Peace Corps Association, created a glimpse of Peace Corps life, offering panel discussions, project videos, stories and 17 interactive exhibits to the general public.

In the documentary, DeJoseph successfully sets the context and helps viewers understand Peace Corps for the innovative initiative it was in 1960. Candidate - then President - John F. Kennedy took great risk in embracing the program despite advice from many aides and political allies. Kennedy brother-in-law Sargent Shriver, colleagues, and a handful of professionals pulled it together. In early 1961, they visited potential host country leaders and solicited invitations on the basis of an untested vision. They recruited, selected, trained, and sent Peace Corps Volunteers into the field even before the legislation was authorized by Congress and signed by President Kennedy on September 22, 1961. The concept of voluntary service immediately caught the fancy of thousands of Americans. Over the years, despite varying degrees of political support from presidents, to whom the agency reports, positive responses by Peace Corps advocates shore up its budget in each cycle. Limited allocations from the beginning have required financial commitments from host countries and creative partnerships with universities, governmental programs and not-for-profits.

From beginning to end the film held me spell bound. DeJoseph conducted dozens of interviews and amassed news broadcasts and video clips from early years that I had never before seen. Then she convinced renown actress Annette Benning that this was a film worthy of her narration.

Who were the first volunteers? Tanganyika 1, Colombia I, Ghana I all have a claim. Tanganyika 1 says the first volunteer to apply joined their group. Colombia 1 began training on the East Coast the same day Tanganyika 1 began training two hours later in Texas. Ghana 1 sent the first volunteers overseas. The beat goes on...



The documentary had its world premiere September 22.

The documentary skillfully covers this and much more. With narratives and cameos of nearly 100 people, the film brings us right to the present, exploring successes and some tragic challenges faced by the agency throughout its 58 years.

A Towering Task, directors cut, runs 1hr, 45 min. For information about hosting a screening, check out <https://www.peacecorpsdocumentary.com/>



Peace Corps Connect Conference: A Report

Austin, Texas, June 21-23, 20019

FOC Editorial Note: Peace Corps Connect is an event intended to unite RPCVs. It offers a space to think critically about the weight of the Third Goal, the duty we have to tell the story of our host nations and its peoples to the American public. The following Report was drawn from notes taken by RPCV (2017-19) Cutter Ullhorn at the Conference, in which he contrasted his experiences against those of Volunteers in the 1960s

RPCVs are an odd bunch. They go against the grain: they care and continue to care, not just because they are required to care, but because this experience has left so indelible an impact on them that they can't help but share. Are we Peace Corps or Posh Corps? It's a question we asked ourselves many times during service, often when we found ourselves in AC or WiFi, looking out at the glistening waters of the Caribbean. The fear was that, our lives were not as hard as we imagined they were, and our concrete brick, tin roofed class room ovens were the all expenses paid resort to someone else's 27 months in hell.

Peace Corps entered Colombia in 1961, without cell phones, internet, or any of the modern technology that increasingly seem like necessities for a successful service. Compared to them, were we even Volunteers! It's true that the Colombian pueblo of the 1960s had only one phone (if that), unpaved streets, lacked running water, and maybe electricity. But as Volunteers shared more about their challenges, it seemed our experiences weren't so dissimilar—despite a difference of decades, we served in many ways in the same service.

At no point during my experiences in Colombia was it lost on me what a privilege it was to be there. While my friends in the States were sitting in traffic, there I was, living large on the Caribbean coast. Never did Colombia feel like anything less than a blessing, but when Volunteers get together, we didn't always focus on the bright parts. We spent so much time looking at the differences, those places of friction, that we missed how slowly, how easily this country had entered and become a part of us in the most charming and enduring ways. In fielding questions about Colombia to conference goers who had never been there, I was surprised by just how much Colombia had become "mine". Though I'm not a citizen, and my experience with that country will only be a brief window in 2017-2019, the Colombia then and now, what it will be, are just as much a part of me as Texas is—and coming from Texas, you can believe those are fighting words!

Perhaps the most important thing that I took away from this Conference was a sense of community with a group of people much wiser (and grayer) than me. While America is a divided country, the chance to sit and share life with people 40 to fifty years my senior is a rare event. To sit and learn, and strangely, to share this bond, well ... something durable and vibrant has persisted inexplicably, year after year, through presidencies, evacuations, re-entries, crisis, downturns, upturns, marriages, births and deaths. It was a potent reminder that imperfect and broken people from imperfect and broken nations can meet and change one another in ways they couldn't have possibly imagined.

[Edited by Jerry Norris]

Membership Form

FRIENDS OF COLOMBIA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please complete one form for each member!

Date: _____

Name: _____

Name in Peace Corps (if different): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Years of Peace Corps Service (if applicable): _____

Group/Cohort Number: _____

Sector: _____

Site (include city/village and department): _____

Additional Information: _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

New Renewal

Annual Individual \$ 25.00 \$ _____

Annual Couple \$ 40.00 \$ _____

Lifetime Individual \$ 500.00 \$ _____
(payable over a two-year period)

Donation to FOC for projects in Colombia \$ _____

Donation specifically for *Paso a Paso* \$ _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$ _____

RETURN TO: FRIENDS OF COLOMBIA
PO Box 15292
Chevy Chase, MD 20825

NOTE: FOC is a registered 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.
Consult your tax accountant regarding personal tax deductions.