

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER PROFILE

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USM ALUMNUS

PANAMA

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ENVIRONMENT VOLUNTEER



Describe your Peace Corps experience.

My village is a town in the mountains of about 800 people. Two beautiful rivers flow on either side of the village and there is a huge waterfall and hundreds of areas perfect for swimming and fishing. During the summer everyone goes to the river daily to wash clothes, eat oranges, and swim. The area is heavily deforested and it can be a bit depressing to hear the chainsaws starting up in the morning. Soil erosion is a problem and there is a lot of trash, mostly small chip bags and candy wrappers. There are 6 small shops and a health post. The school has 135 students, K-7th grade. Most families are large; men work in agriculture or doing contract work in the city while women stay at home or work in the city as housekeepers. Covered pick-up trucks are the main transport in and out of town, and they run about every thirty minutes, sometimes longer. There is no electricity or consistent cell phone service. My primary project is teaching Environmental Education in the school and raising funds for the installation of a solar panel system to give the school light on rainy days and at night. I also teach English, work with women's groups and cooperatives in the community, give computer classes, and promote organic gardening within the community.

What one particular experience/moment highlights your Peace Corps service?

Service for me is still highlighted by a moment I had during my site visit, I hiked up to the cross overlooking the town with a group of six or so kids and we chatted as they threw paper airplanes down the hill. My Spanish was horrible, but they were understanding. It was my first view of the community, as a whole, where I was going to live out my service. Now, after two years in the community I feel so privileged to have watched those same kids grow up into young adults as I taught them not only environmental ethics but life skills that I hope they will use throughout their lives.

Have you made local friends? Share a 'friendship' moment.

I have a great picture of me with one of my host mom's, her aunt, her daughter and granddaughter (below left). It makes me so happy to see, because they are some of the most incredible women I never imagined meeting.

Did attending USM influence your decision to apply to the Peace Corps?

I had already decided that I wanted to apply before entering USM. I attended one recruitment event on campus and it was definitely a push to continue with the application process. My degree in Anthropology somewhat prepared me for service, but I would have loved to be able to utilize it more during service.

What advice would you give USM students to help prepare them for Peace Corps service?

Yea! You're from Mississippi and thinking about the Peace Corps, you're already in select company. Stick it out, through the application process and training- it's worth it. Don't waste money or time worrying about packing that doesn't really matter. Understand that the U.S. has a strong world influence and you probably won't be completely isolated from it. The experience can be everything you want it to be.

