



Peace Corps – Protecting and Supporting Volunteers

The health, safety, and security of Peace Corps Volunteers are the agency's highest priorities. The Peace Corps devotes significant resources to providing Volunteers with the training, guidance, and support they need to remain healthy, safe, and productive throughout their service.

PROTECTING VOLUNTEERS AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Under Director Aaron Williams' leadership, the Peace Corps has made a number of improvements to better protect Volunteers from rape and sexual assault, and to better support Volunteers who are victims of those terrible crimes. Since 2009, the Peace Corps has:

- Issued Peace Corps' Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims, a set of core principles to ensure the agency provides timely and compassionate support to sexual assault victims. It has been emphasized to staff members worldwide that the Peace Corps will treat all Volunteers with dignity and respect, and that no one deserves to be a victim of sexual assault.
- Developed new Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Sexual Assault that outline a victim-centered approach to supporting Volunteers. The Guidelines set forth the procedures staff must follow to respond promptly and effectively to an incident and provide support to a victim. The agency has conducted staff training on the Guidelines at all posts.
- Hired a nationally recognized leader in victims' rights to serve as the agency's first victim advocate and director of the Office of Victim Advocacy. Victims of crime, including sexual assault and stalking, can now turn to the Office of Victim Advocacy, led by a skilled and experienced Peace Corps staff member dedicated to ensuring they receive the emotional, medical, legal, and other support they need both during and after their service.
- Prepared new standardized and comprehensive training for Volunteers on sexual assault awareness, risk reduction strategies, Peace Corps reporting and response protocols, and bystander intervention.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, to collaborate and share resources on sexual assault prevention and response.
- Created the Peace Corps Volunteer Sexual Assault Panel, comprised of outside experts and former Volunteers who were victims of sexual assault. Individual members of this panel provide advice and input on Peace Corps' sexual assault risk reduction and response strategies.
- Provided Peace Corps overseas medical professionals with training on enhanced sexual assault forensic examination procedures, and revised the agency's medical guidelines for the clinical management of sexual assault to comply with the National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations.

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH, SAFETY, AND SECURITY TRAINING AND POLICIES

Since August 2009, the Peace Corps has taken other steps to better protect and support Volunteers. The agency has:

- Trained overseas staff in how to respond appropriately when Volunteers bring allegations of wrongdoing to their attention. Peace Corps staff members must take appropriate measures to ensure the Volunteers' safety and confidentiality, and ensure the allegation is given serious consideration, including referral to the Inspector General, as appropriate.
- Prepared training for Volunteers on policies and procedures for bringing confidential communications and allegations to the attention of appropriate staff members.
- Improved the medical care provided to Volunteers by giving medical professionals at headquarters overall responsibility for hiring, credentialing, and managing Peace Corps medical officers (PCMOs) at each post, by providing those PCMOs enhanced guidance on how to handle serious medical issues, and by establishing the Health Care Quality Assurance Council to monitor and report on ongoing health care issues.
- Provided overseas staff with guidance on the specific procedures to follow when Volunteers express concerns about their safety, or in any other situation that may threaten the well-being of Volunteers.
- Provided the Office of Safety and Security at headquarters with greater authority to oversee Peace Corps' global safety and security programs.
- Developed standard operating procedures for overseas safety and security coordinators (SSCs), who are responsible for coordinating the safety and security programs that support Volunteers at each post.
- Revised notification procedures for serious incidents to ensure key staff members are rapidly informed of major crimes against Volunteers.

COMPASSIONATE SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF FALLEN VOLUNTEERS

The Peace Corps has also put in place new policies to better reflect its commitment to the families of fallen Volunteers. The agency has:

- Formalized the agency's existing practice of sending a Peace Corps staff member to be with the family of a fallen Volunteer within 24 hours of the notification of the death of the Volunteer, unless the family requests otherwise. That staff member serves as the agency's primary liaison with the family.
- Standardized procedures for returning fallen Volunteers' possessions to their families by requiring that all personal effects of a fallen Volunteer be personally delivered to the family, unless requested otherwise.
- Partnered with the Federal Employee Education and Assistance (FEEA) Fund to establish the Peace Corps Emergency Relief Fund, which provides assistance to Peace Corps Volunteers and their families in the event of natural or man-made disasters, as well as uninsured personal crises.