

KHOTSO

June 2014

United States Peace Corps
PO Box 554
5 Bowker Road
Maseru 100, Lesotho
Southern Africa
Phone: +266 22313871
Fax: +266 22310287

In this issue:

- Birthdays
- Holidays
- Events & staff travel
- Duty Officers Schedule
- Staff Corners
- Volunteer Voices
- Peer Support Network (PSN)
- Diversity
- VRF Report
- Tech News
- News around the globe
- PCVs' Life in Pictures

Message from the Acting Country Director

Dear Peace Corps Lesotho Volunteers,

This note is written to you in my capacity as Acting Country Director, as well as the DPT. Above all, though, it is written by me personally as someone who is among your most ardent fans.

I would like to talk a little about Volunteer well-being. Volunteer support, from my perspective, is the most important thing we as staff do and it is also among the most important things that Volunteers themselves do. It includes safety and security, and medical care, but is more than that. Should someone make the good point that our positive affect on the communities and people we serve is the top priority, I would respond by saying that positively influencing those we serve would not happen if you, the Volunteers, are not feeling good about yourself, are not growing personally, and are not receiving the overall support you need and deserve to function effectively.

The Volunteer experience is a balance between the work you are doing and your personal growth. My focus for this message is your personal growth and well-being. You bring to this experience extraordinary strengths and skills. Many are unique to you, and many are shared to some extent. These include idealism, compassion, courage, adventurism, creativity, a world view, responsibility, commitment, perseverance, generosity, integrity, and many, many more. Your strengths not only can help you through tough times - along with the support from fellow-PCVs and staff - they also can define you during times in which you are feeling just fine, as well as lead you to where you want to go.

So as you navigate your way through your life as a Peace Corps Volunteer, this unique experience that will stay with you forever in ways few other experiences can match, I thought I'd throw out a few questions for you to ponder and reflect on. Perhaps one or two might resonate and be helpful

How do you want people here to remember you?

What is the legacy you want to leave?

Is there anything different you can do to reach the personal goals you have?

Think of someone who is a role model to you? Could these thoughts guide and assist you in any way about what you do— at work and outside of work?

What is your dream? Are your actions - at work and outside of work - taking you there? When you are being challenged - by the job, by other people, by boredom - who do you have to become to face this challenge? How do you have to behave to face challenges in a way that would make you proud of yourself?

Onward we go. Together. My personal challenges are often eased when I listen to Volunteers and learn from you. And as I grow from who you are and what you aspire to be, so you too will grow by staying aware of who you are and what you aspire to be.

All the best,

Eric

Editorial Staff

Managing Editor – Eric Goldman/
Acting CD

Editor – Lebohang Ranooe

Contributors:

Dr. Clement Lephoto

Malitaba Hlabana

Selloane Pitikoe

Mamakhetha Moranye

Joseph Downes

Laura Johnson

Beth Pagan

Karly Ho

Morgan Nees Van Baalen

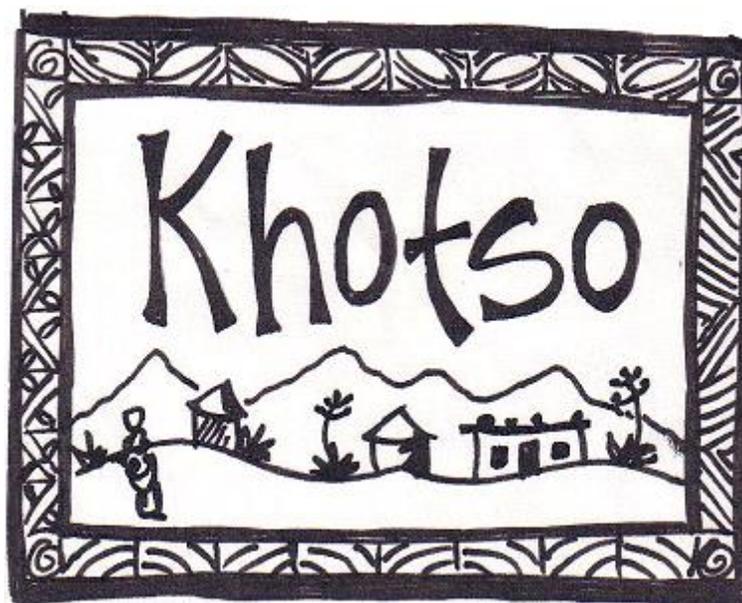
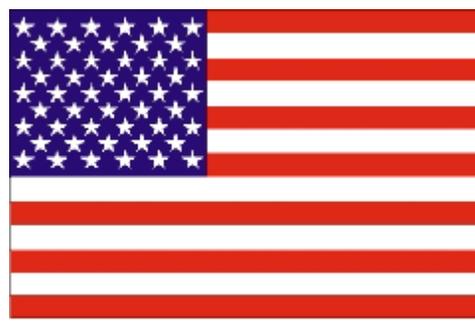
From the Editor

Articles must be received by the 4th Monday of the month to be included in the following month's edition of the Khotso. When submitting articles, please provide the name of the person making the submission and a contact person for follow-up questions. The Newsletter will be e-mailed and a hardcopy made available in the office on or about the 1st of each month. Please make sure that your correct email address is on file with Peace Corps. Remember that it is your responsibility to read the Khotso Newsletter for updates from Peace Corps Lesotho.

The editorial staff would like feedback from PCVs regarding the content. It is our desire to provide you with information that is useful, helpful, and encouraging. We would appreciate receiving constructive feedback from you.

By submitting articles, you are providing Peace Corps Lesotho with the right to reprint your article in full or part in any publication.

Distribution – Lebohang Ranooe



PCV & STAFF BIRTHDAYS

June

6	Malitaba Hlabana/PTS Ed
8	Shawn Joshi
13	Mamokola Matlanyane/ LCHC
15	Lereko Mofokeng/GSM
20	Arti Patel
21	Alyssa Abruzzo
21	Rachel Edmonds
23	Karly Ho
26	Zoe Schroeder
30	Devin Hawkins

July

2	Jesse Lofland
3	Evan Brown
4	Jennifer Jiggetts
8	Michael Yoon
21	Jacqueline Muhammad
26	Shana Thoreson
27	Malisema Makhele/PEPFAR Admin Assistant
28	Jaime Rae Burnside
31	Victoria Letsie/Financial Assistant

PEACE CORPS LESOTHO HOLIDAYS (No holidays for the month of June)

CALENDAR OF EVENTS AND STAFF TRAVEL

June	5	HY 14 trainees arrive (PST starts)
June	15 - 19	ED 14 HIV/AIDS CPB Workshop & PDM -South
June	22 - 26	ED 14 HIV/AIDS CPB Workshop & PDM -North
June 2-6 & June 30-July 3 'M'e 'Malitaba on vacation.		

DUTY OFFICERS

June	6 - 12, 2014	DPT
June	13 -19, 2014	HIV-COORD
June	20 - 26, 2014	APCD-HY
June	27 - July 3, 2014	PTS-HY

ED CORNER by Ntate Clement and 'M'e 'Malitaba

With the first session of the year complete, we wish you all a pleasant well deserved winter break. For those planning to travel, do have safe travels, and for those who remain behind we encourage you to use this opportunity to reach out more to your communities, learn about the community living and potential areas where you could lend a hand whether working with the local youth groups, sporting groups and so on. We are made to believe winter will be a little cold, so you might as well prepare yourselves well in this regard too!

Site visits:

Thanks again for receiving us during the recent site visits. As always we were impressed with the manner in which against all odds you have applied yourselves in order to provide the much needed assistance to the communities you serve. We invite you once more to look at some of the pictures from recent visits in the north!

As you are aware at the time of going to print, we were still going through VRF import issues, however **Matt Brunton's** VRF had already been reviewed and we wish to share with you this success story, particularly with those who attended the GRS workshop earlier this year. Many of you are aware that Matt's school is one of the least resourced schools, and is also located in a very remote area of Lesotho.

Here is Matt's story in his own words:



I began the school year teaching life skills to the students by myself. It was slow work, and the students rarely seemed to grasp some of the concepts. Although, each topic needed to be emphasized and repeated thoroughly during the 40 minute period I was given to teach. I had heard about Grassroots Soccer during pre-

service training, and I was hoping to implement that into my life skills class eventually. Then the opportunity arose to attend PC Skillz/Grassroots Soccer training in Maseru. A fellow science teacher and coach, Ntate Katleho (Success) Mafereka, agreed to be my counterpart in training and teaching life skills with Grassroots Soccer. He is a very busy teacher, and it was really amazing for him to be able to help me in this endeavor. It was a seed planted by the previous Volunteer, Caitlin Vincent, that allowed me to develop a relationship with this enthusiastic and dedicated counterpart so quickly.

We attended training, and Success offered a lot of great insights and enthusiasm during the course. In the following week, he began to help me with leading the practices with the Form B and Form C classes. We have been practicing every Monday and Wednesday, and we intend to finish with this first intervention before the winter break. The topics of each practice along with their associated games have been presented clearly to the students. They understand and they appreciate the ability to discourse about each topic in Sesotho. Ntate Mafereka manages a great deal of enthusiasm at each practice so far. I have learned a lot from him in the methods he uses to maintain the students' attention to the topic.

In the fall, we plan to host two more interventions. One will be held with the Form A class participation and the other will be a class from the nearby primary school. We have been practicing outside in full view of the community, and there are people who stop by to listen. The students are also encouraged to go home and tell parents and friends about what they learned in each practice. Recently, other teachers have been joining us for practice and helping to facilitate the conversation about HIV/AIDS awareness. This valley is rapidly changing with the recent re-opening of the clinic and the erection of a new Vodacom tower. The result of these Grassroots Soccer practices will be a more informed and hopefully more healthy community.

Matt Brunton ED 14
Mabuleng Secondary School
Mokhotlong

June – August vacations:

June 2-6 and June 30-July 3: 'M'e 'Malitaba on vacation.
July 7-August 1: Clement on vacation.

CHED and HY CORNER by M'e Selloane & M'e 'Mamakhetha

Likhomo tseo le manemane a tsona Baithaopi!

CHED 12 COS Conference:

Congratulations to the CHED 12s for successfully reaching their Close of Service Conference. As we transition into the Healthy Youth, your skills, high level of maturity and resilience will be greatly missed by all of us. Your willingness to adapt to the life in Lesotho has not gone unnoticed. As you make your preparations, mentally, physically and otherwise, we are still pleased that you will be here to tell your stories to the HY 14 to motivate them to hang in there despite the challenges that development work presents to Volunteers. Bon Voyage and we wish you all the best of luck in your future endeavors!

For the entire period of your service, while you were able to grow and be different personalities, you also missed,

- Families and friends
- Financial stability
- Mexican food
- Washer and drier
- Slow cooked pork
- Macaroni and cheese
- Going to the movies...

The list can go on and on. Remember to be vigilant and plan accordingly for those good byes with your community/ies and the Host Organizations and Peace Corps staff!

HY 14 PST:

It is that year again where we look forward to welcoming a "brand new" group of HY trainees in Lesotho. Those of us, who are already serving, are tasked with a great responsibility of managing the trainees' expectations for their service. I have a great feeling that they will be a great group, judging by the tolerant winter conditions up to today! As they come to Lesotho, we will teach them how to wrap themselves with Basotho blankets to keep warm during the PST!

Thank you also for your expressed interest to participate in the PST both as Resource Volunteers as well as during the Host Volunteer Visit. Remember that your attitudes, experiences, professionalism and teamwork will be the great building blocks of the HY 14s' decisions to serve in Lesotho and in making this PST a success.

VRFs:

It is evident that we have really done a good job on emphasizing the completeness of the VRFs as well as timely submission! Thank you to everyone for making their submission. We will do our level best to juggle between the PST and providing as close to timely VRF feedback as possible. Remember that the data that you present is not only for the consumption of Peace Corps Lesotho but globally and by the United States Congress! For those who are yet to submit, please let us make it a prime priority.

MEDICAL CORNER



Let us Welcome 'M'e 'Mamotebang Manyanye Registered Nurse – to the Peace Corps Lesotho Family.

VOLUNTEER VOICES

The Long and Winding BROad: PCL holds first ever Camp BRO

By Joseph Downes HY 13

The story all began in mid-November when I was contacted by PCVs Arti Patel and Amanda Frye about heading up an effort to hold a camp for local area boys concerning life skills, gender issues, leadership and men's health. Having met with



the legendary headmistress, Sister Alice, and I decided the basic logistics of the camp, we went on holiday, agreeing to meet again in January and resolve the final details of the camp before the tentatively set date of mid-February. However, as so often happens, things did not go exactly as planned: Sister Alice was in a terrible, near-death car accident during the holiday break that has left her hospitalized to this day. A couple of weeks later, the day I was due to meet her replacement, the formidable 'Me Makabelo, I broke my hand in a sporting accident and had to seek emergency treatment in Bloemfontein. Consequently, these set-backs caused us to push back the date of the camp by several months, in turn causing scheduling conflicts with many of the PCVs who had agreed to help with the camp. Two months after the beginning of our planning for the camp, therefore, we had to start again, almost from scratch.

However, despite these initial problems, Camp BRO was very fortunate to be blessed from this point on with a set of dedicated, capable PCVs and a generous host organization in the form of Pitseng High School. 'Me Makabelo was very kind in accommodating us with assistance and opening the resources of the school to us. Similarly, a new group of interested Volunteers stepped forward and resurrected the project as we began to make it our own; whereas Camp GLOW had been an all-girls affair, we made Camp BRO open to female Volunteers in order to further lessons of gender equality and respect of women in positions of leadership. At the second meeting of the GEL committee in Mhale's Hoek, the name was changed from Camp TOBE (Teaching Our Boys Excellence) to Camp BRO (Boys Respecting Others)... A far superior



Joe Downes with Camp BRO participants

moniker if I do say so myself. Also, around this time, the schedule of Camp BRO began to form: Each PCV picked one activity concerning life skills, leadership, health or gender issues to lead facilitate at the camp. Then, when not lead-facilitating, the PCVs would co-facilitate other PCVs' activities in small groups so as to encourage quality participation and discussion.

Finally, the day of the camp, April 25th, was upon us and we all met at the Mountain View Hotel in Hlotse to finalize our preparations and enjoy a last minute pizza before heading off to hinterlands of Leribe. Having arrived and settled into our quarters in the staffroom, we began the camp by dividing the boys (around 150) into equal teams each led by a PCV and, when possible, a counterpart. Each team came up with a team name and a special team cheer. Some of my favorites include Brendan's "Good Shepherd of Strugglers", Evan's "Naughty Boys" and James' "Mr. Bones' Team." The cheers were also a joy to watch; as you could see the boys get excited and take pride in their new teams. After that, Evan Brown and Tyrel Dixon led some sessions on leadership and teamwork to round out the first day. The next day, however, brought some challenges as fewer boys attended and our start time had to be pushed back due to weekly chores. Nevertheless, while we started the day with about 50 participants, we slowly gained another 25 or so during the course of the day. The second day started off with "BRO-ocracy", a mock election lead-facilitated by your humble writer. After that, Morgan and Keegan led a kind of scavenger hunt/relay-race that encouraged leadership and teamwork. During the afternoon, we were treated to sessions on gender relations led by James, in which gender roles were dis-



Camp BRO participants showing off their certificates

cussed, and Narin, in which the boys were instructed to act out and then discuss their understanding of these gender roles. These sessions were then followed by Brendan, who led a session on volunteerism and community improvement. That night we had campfire with the boys who boarded at the school where we roasted marshmallows and were treated to traditional song and dance. The dance was thoroughly amazing and the songs, despite mostly being odes to the invincible character of PCV James, were also great.

The final day consisted mainly of Grassroot Soccer (GRS) sessions. First, PCV Jake led a session about VMMC and abstinence and I followed that with a session concerning communication called “Team Handball.” After congratulations and some wrap-up, we handed out certificates (designed masterfully by Evan and featuring the “BROgo”) and concluded the camp. Of course, with this being the pilot program of Camp BRO, there certainly are some things that we can improve upon: While the school had promised us 10 or so teacher counterparts to help us with facilitation, only about three or four made themselves available and assisted more with logistical issues than facilitation. In this sense, not enough was done to foster the development of the host organization to independently facilitate these lessons without the aid of Peace Corps and, from a sustainability perspective, the camp was lacking. However, I could not be prouder and more thankful concerning all the work the PCVs put in toward making this happen and truly believe that the some of the lessons we discussed with the boys will make them better leaders, citizens and men in the future. A special thank you to each of my BROs and BROdettes is definitely in order: Camp BRO wouldn’t have been possible without each of you and I could never have asked for

a better group of friends to implement an event with. Narin, James, Brendan, Ty, Evan, Mishelle, Morgan, Keegan, Kim and Jake, you guys are the best. Furthermore, I cannot express my gratitude to Pitseng HS for accommodating us so well. Their kindness and cooperation has been one of the most moving things I’ve professionally encountered here in Lesotho.

The Safe Schools Project in Lesotho

By Laura Johnson ED 13

Seated with my coworkers in the Grade 1 classroom, I asked bo’me le bo ntate to split into separate groups, handed each group a flip-chart paper and a marker, and asked them to tell me—“What does it mean to ‘Act like a woman’ (for bo’me) or ‘Act Like a Man’ (for bo’ntate)?”



What commenced was Motete Primary School’s first session of the Safe Schools Training Program, aimed at ending gender-based violence within schools. The idea behind the program is that by making teachers more aware of gender issues—stereotypes, roles, discrimination etc., they will be more willing and able to tackle gender-based violence when it occurs.

At first, people had some difficulty getting started, but once they did they were quickly on a roll—yelling out examples before the scribe had a chance to finish the example before. All of us in the Peace Corps community are pretty familiar with traditional gender roles: women cook, clean, care for children, fetch water, wood, etc. Men care for

animals, make important decisions, make the money, etc... As per usual during these kind of trainings, some of my coworkers opined more progressive examples of what defines a man versus a woman. (Perhaps I’m starting to wear off on them?) When one colleague offered, “A woman is expected to cook,” another would say, “But men can cook too!” And so it went, until I finally had to cut them off.

Next we shared these with the entire group, and we discussed them. When we finally came to what defines “sex”



PCVs with Camp BRO participants

versus “gender,” it was some of my older colleagues who said that they’ve actually witnessed changes in gender roles within their lifetime, even out here in the remote mountains of Lesotho. They accredited this to the influence of radio and people from town. The change is slow, they admitted, but it is happening.

As teachers, my coworkers have been quite enthusiastic about being newly mindful and aware of gender-based violence that occurs in their classrooms. As one of my coworkers said after the first session, “It’s so interesting and refreshing to talk about new ideas.”

In my opinion, this program is designed to encourage host country nations to think through new ideas and then make them their own.

The Interview

Each month, we invite PCVs to interview someone who has a Peace Corps experience or story to share. This month PCV Beth Pagan shares her interview with RPCV Janelle Leza



1. What are you doing now in America?



Janelle Leza
PC Lesotho, Education
2011-2013

I am currently working in the Emergency Preparedness Office with the Ventura County Public Health Emergency Medical Services Agency. We recently hosted Operation Medical Base

2014, a three day event that consisted of capacity building classes for healthcare professionals, team building exercises for our Medical Reserve Corps, and a staged Mass Casualty Incident in which various entities of healthcare and emergency responders were able to practice their collaborated response to a 9.0 earthquake. Currently, we are writing up our work plans for our three state-funded grants. In the near future, I will be assigned with the project of revamping the Healthcare Coalition in which I will be tasked with integrating 140 plus health and medi-

cal agencies to ensure that all parties are aligned with a consistent process for which to follow in the event of a disaster/provoked chaos.

2. What is the best thing about being back in America?

I must admit that I do enjoy the convenience of things in America. From laundry machines/dryers to travel to food, things are easy in the good ole U.S. of A.

3. What do you miss most about Lesotho?

Oh boy, there are so many things that I miss! The simplicity of life and the gratitude that the general population holds for things both materialistic and spiritual is something I often find myself reminiscing about. I miss speaking Sesotho on a regular basis. I also miss the sense of community and traditional greetings; call me crazy but I thrived on striking up conversation with strangers...kane! I am entirely grateful to be living in my hometown again as it is such a beautiful place here in California; empa part of me misses my lithaba li lintle.

4. Do you have any advice for current PCVs in Lesotho?

This is difficult to say because everyone's PC experience and transition home is different. I suppose the most beneficial thing to do would be to share my own experience. I think the best thing I did in my last few months was to try to enjoy the present. The minute I ceased stressing about the future and leaving Lesotho, I began feeling much more content; I am definitely able to now look back at this with no regrets.

5. How do you plan to stay connected to Peace Corps (RPCV groups, reunions, Peace Corps Response, etc.)?

Prior to leaving Lesotho I was in contact with a RPCV group from my hometown of Ventura. I continued to stay in contact with this group upon my arrival to the states and attended their social gathering. Although the majority of participants were RPCVs from the 60's-70's, this was a very enjoyable experience in which I instantly felt the Peace Corps family atmosphere. I would most certainly recommend finding a RPCV group to any returning PCV. In addition, I would recommend staying in contact with PCVs with whom you served with; even though my Qacha's girls and I are geographically distant, technology has allowed us to stay close on a relational aspect. Having regular contact with my Peace Corps friends and my Basotho friends/family has been my saving grace (but be careful to keep a healthy balance between your contact with people in Lesotho and people in America).

I would be more than happy to keep things on a positive

note but I also need to be realistic with y'all as you are lelapa la ka. In my experience, the reintegration process was quite difficult; so much had changed since I had last been home and I had also undergone some changes over my 27 month absence. One of the things I was most looking forward to upon my return was FOOD. However, food quickly became one of the things that most deeply saddened me as I was forced to watch tremendous amounts of food go to waste and all efforts to eat everyone's leftovers to avoid such waste were futile. On the note of food, be careful with how soon you enter a grocery store as they can be quite intimidating...I'm talking about an entire isle of potato chips kapa bohobe! Once this sense of intimidation wears off, grocery stores here are quite awesome.

I have been pleasantly surprised and delighted with the interest that most people have in hearing about my experience and learning about Lesotho. Don't be afraid to reach out to other RPCVs!

Ke le hopotse, bakhotsi ba ka! sala (kapa tsamaea for you CHED 12's) hamonate.

Peer Support Network (PSN)

PSN Bios Ed' 14 Volunteers

The Peer Support Network (PSN) Committee warmly welcomes its newest members from the Ed 14 group! Just a reminder, the PSN Committee members are always here to be a listening ear to your ups and downs, smiles and frowns, and all that jazz. Always feel free to reach out to any of us. Without further ado...

Federico Poitier

(Quthing)

Phone; 5630 0068

Email; nico8831@yahoo.com



There's always moments in your life that create an energy in you and stick with you forever, making a piece of the person you are now and will be. One of these moments happened to me during my family's habitual rain runs (long story haha), where suddenly I had this feeling of freedom and happiness. In that moment I thought to myself "be young, run," and this quote has become a favorite for my life.

This simple idea has led me to meeting great people, living in interesting places and given me a general sense of happiness with my life. I don't associate youth with age but rather a feeling of freedom of being, not worrying about who thinks about your decisions but yourself. Basically, be young and run for what you want in life and keep running for it. Cue track: "forever young" haha

Kate Zimmer

(Qacha's Nek)

Phone; 6725 1349

Email; zimmerk89@gmail.com



"I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul"

Excerpt from "Invictus" by William

Ernest Henley The last two stanzas of my favorite poem is part of what inspired me, a small town girl from Virginia, to reach so far outside of my comfort zone and move to another country. You are the master of your fate, and your life. It was hard work getting into the Peace Corps, and it's harder work now that we are here. Every day, you make your life, your happiness, and your success. Here in Lesotho we have to be proactive and make our service what we want it to be.

Michaela Puryear

(Quacha's Nek)

Phone; 56300078.

Email; michaelapuryear@yahoo.com



"I am only one, but I am one. And I cannot do everything but I can do something. I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can."

After graduating from Prairie View A&M and leaving my home town of Kansas City Missouri, some would joke and say I'm setting out to change the world. Well I'm not, but if I can change just one child's life, that would be sufficient. When I'm not doing that I enjoy reading, cooking fine delicacies and belting out slow jams in my spare time. I'm a glass half full kind of person so if your glass is feeling a little empty just give me a call!

Brady Hart

(Thaba Tseka)

Phone; 5671 6838

Email; hart2bm@gmail.com



Hey Folks! Brandy here. I'm an Ed'14 Volunteer working as a primary school English teacher in Thaba-Tseka. Happy to be on PSN and have my ears open to you all. Among many, there is one quote in particular that has stuck with me. "I find out what the world needs, then I seek to invent" -Thomas Edison. This quote speaks to my personal definition of what it means to help others and to a lot of the work we do here at Peace Corps.

Mike Yoon

(Mokhotlong)

Phone; 56301096

Email; myoon7891@gmail.com



"If you're automatically sure that you know what reality is and who and

what is really important... Then you, like me, probably will not consider possibilities that aren't pointless and annoying. But if you've really learned how to think, how to pay attention, then you will know you have other options. It will actually be within your power to experience a crowded, hot, slow, consumer-hell-type situation as not only meaningful, but sacred, on fire with the same force that lit the stars - compassion, move, the subsurface unity of all things... You get to consciously decide what has meaning and doesn't."

Being a Peace Corps volunteer, I find that it's easy to filter all my experiences through a lens of self-importance, of how all these things directly affect (more regularly, annoy and aggravate) me. This quote (and the rest of his speech, "This Is Water") serves as a reminder that I can choose to deny my default programming and consider the possibility that other people I interact with have their own, equally important, meaningful lives, and that the day to day mundane experiences of living can be filled to the brim with purpose.

Diversity

"The One Experience that has Helped Me the Most as a PCV: Being a Woman".

By Karly Ho ED 14

Since before I can even remember, I was exposed to people of different religions, ethnicities, cultures, sexual orientations and so forth; I never really understood what the big deal with diversity was. But when I chose my career as a civil engineer, being different meant feeling confused and alone. As a Peace Corps volunteer, I can imagine how those feelings may happen to any one of us regardless of our diverse (or seemingly un-diverse) backgrounds, but what I learned throughout my career has helped me throughout the challenges we face in Lesotho.



When growing up, differences such as gender and race and sexual preference were important, but just a matter of fact. I was aware of prejudices and even witnessed some instances of discrimination, but nothing substantial was directed towards me and so I continued to be happily naive. When applying to colleges, I understood that being "diverse" could work for or against me and I had the guidance to know that I needed to be smart about how I presented myself. I wasn't the best student, but being a female applying to the school of engineering would help me a lot - I was accepted to the University of California, Irvine with a high school GPA in the lowest 3% of incoming freshmen. And I opened a Pandora's box of insecurities that I never could have anticipated.

I don't regret any of these choices that I made and I don't mean to say that college was a negative experience, but my classes and academic experience put me through an internal struggle that still lingers with me to this day.

There were several women in my class of a little over 100 students, but I definitely stood out. I have a bubbly personality, I love to wear skirts and dress in a feminine way and I like to joke around and be carefree. But the idea of a civil engineer like me was not an idea that my peers could overlook; I've tried to rationalize my experience of being singled out, but I have to continually remind myself that there's really no excuse. It's not funny when someone talks about me in a sexual term found on Urban Dictionary. It's not funny when someone whispers your name in class and when you turn to look, his laptop is showing graphic pornography. And it's not funny when someone makes a joke that puts me down. But being the girl who wanted to network and make friends, I would usually laugh in agreement. If I ever spoke up against the crowd, that would give them a reason to say that I'm being moody, too sensitive or a bitch. It actually took me years to realize that by trying to fit in, I had transformed into another person - confused and unhappy. I did have a couple of real friends in my classes, but most of my civil engineering friends were in different years than me. My sorority became my college home and haven where I could hide from the atmosphere that put me so on edge. And between my sorority and my family and friends from home, I continued to be involved and be a leader in the civil engineering community despite feeling out of place and resentful.

Graduating in four years and getting a full time job right out of college in a poor economy was definitely an achievement, but being the youngest, smallest and one of the few women gave me the urgency to prove myself. The company that I worked for would be considered female-friendly, with 25% women, especially compared to the clients, consultants and contractors, etc. with whom I worked with on projects - 10% women would be an exaggerated overestimate. After working for almost 4 years, my supervisor was able to trust me with several large responsibilities, which I both appreciated and was proud of. I still never felt like I truly fit in, but because of my accomplishments, I felt respected. I realized I should be recognized for my achievements rather than my appearance and I finally allowed myself to be proud of who I am rather than uncomfortable.

Becoming an education volunteer in Lesotho, the gender dynamics of my workplace are not a lot different from my career in a male dominated field. At my school, it is evenly split between female and male teachers, but gender stereotypes seem even more pronounced. Even in the workplace, women are considered shallow and lazy, while the men are the ones who put in the extra hours and who take the initiative to get work done. The women teachers often give notes and exercises in the book for the students to do in class while they sit in the classroom to talk or sleep or look at their smart phones. They also try to leave at lunch time when the taxi comes so they can get out of school a couple hours early and avoid walking a couple kilometers to the main road. The male teachers go to all of their classes, they coach all of the sports that occur after school, and they are assigned the most classes to teach. And of course, this isn't always the case, but

all of the teachers at my school have acknowledged these norms, so I am still working to break the idea of “normal”. Once when discussing gender with one of my male teachers, he told me that he forgets that I’m a female - I am going to take that comment as a positive step towards expanding his idea of what women are capable of.

Overall, my college experience has earned me the resiliency that has helped me adjust to life here in Lesotho. I am the only Asian American person in my community at school and in village - especially at first, but even now, I will draw stares. Most places in Lesotho, someone tries to touch my hair. Some people mock a Chinese or American accent at me. And many people yell Machina (Chinese person in Sesotho) or Lekhooa (white person) at me. On a bad day, I’ll get annoyed, but being one of the only women in my college classes, I’ve already had experience in dealing with negative attention. I am able to ignore rude comments and not let them affect my mood. I’ve even engaged some of those people in thoughtful conversations regarding what “American” means. I know that the staring and hollering comes from insecurity or ignorance of the person committing the action; and I have the power to not only stop those feelings from being reflected onto me, but to also initiate a productive result.

Staying calm, collected and confident in myself has not only helped me to cope, but I believe that staying positive has also encouraged other people to accept just a little bit more diversity than what they’re used to. Similar to my career, I know that I will never be a Masotho, but I am happy to be able to acknowledge that my community has accepted me for who I am. Basotho in my community have learned that Americans can look very different and can come from Asian descent; they now know me as Ausi (sister) Palesa; and they appreciate my efforts in being here. And while I still have moments of insecurity, I know my integrity, how I treat people, and my own choices are the things that liberate me of the ever changing stereotypes that will always be there.

VRF Report

By Jiggetts ED 13



Every three months or so, Peace Corps Volunteers have to file what’s called a Volunteer Report Form.

VRF for short.

In this report, we must detail things such as work we’ve done with our schools and organizations, challenges and successes we may have had, and list any issues we may be dealing with.

This information goes to our bosses in Lesotho for feedback, and then ultimately, Congress. Taxpayers have a right to know exactly what we’re doing with their taxpayer money.

Truth be told, though, the VRF is a volunteer’s worst nightmare. We hate filling it out. It takes too long to complete and it’s just a burden, like a chore you hate to do.

But the bottom line is that the VRF stands for what the volunteer does. It also stands for other things, like these silly phrases I’ve decided to create:

- Volunteers foster rigor.
- Volunteers' resiliency: forever!
- Volunteers reflect fruitlessly.
- Volunteers rarely flop.
- Volunteers r flawless!
- Volunteers read frequently.
- Volunteers run forever.
- Volunteers' rides: feet.
- Volunteers reject fear.
- Volunteers' frugality: real.
- Volunteers reserve finances.
- Volunteers rescind foolery?
- Volunteers respond fancifully.
- Volunteers report fluff.
- Volunteers report frighteningly.
- Volunteers roam freely.

OK, think I have to go now. I'm procrastinating from filling out my very own VRF.

But I'm having way too much fun here.

VRF: rarely fun!!

Tech Corner

By Morgan Nees Van Baalen ED 13

This month the ICT committee started a PCV Lesotho Facebook page. The goal of this page is to promote goal 3 and to act like a digital Khotso or communal blog to share our experiences and photos with each other, our families, and our friends. We encourage everyone to introduce their friends and family members to the page. (<http://facebook.com/lesothopcvs>). If you put on an event or completed an exciting project let us know at lesothoict@gmail.com. Also every Friday we will be posting photos taken in Lesotho by PCVs so please send us your photos!



NEWS FROM HEADQUARTERS

Recognizing Peace Corps' Top Third Goal Bloggers

Hello PCVs,

Is your blog good enough to win a September trip to Washington, D.C.? Submit it to the 2014 *Blog It Home* competition and find out! Last year, the Peace Corps' Office of Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services held the first ever *Blog it Home* competition to recognize Volunteers who use their blogs to support Peace Corps' Third Goal of sharing other cultures with Americans. We can't wait to see what Third Goal superheroes we find this year!

If you think you have a great Third Goal blog, [submit it for consideration by July 15](#). Similarly, if you know a fellow PCV who you think is an excellent blogger, make sure to encourage them to enter.

In order to participate, Volunteers must:

- Be a currently serving volunteer with an expected COS date on or after 11/01/2014.
- Have a blog that was established before 5/1/ 2014-we will be looking at all posts since you arrived in country.
- Be available for travel to Washington, D.C. from September 14th to 20th, 2014.
- Participate fully in a Third Goal/blogging-related event at Peace Corps Headquarters.
- Be able to develop and deliver a presentation about their Peace Corps host country and service to youth in the D.C. area (arranged by the Office of Third Goal).
- Commit to sharing Third Goal takeaways with other Volunteers upon return to post.
- Sign a Material Submission Authorization and Agreement form, if selected as a finalist.

Our office will select the finalist blogs using the following criteria: demonstrated commitment to increasing cross-cultural understanding; cultural richness of blog; quality of writing; and quality of media content. Blogs that make it to the final round will be shared with the public for online voting, and the winning Volunteers will get a trip to Washington, D.C.

Please contact thirdgoal@peacecorps.gov with any questions about 2014 *Blog it Home*.

We look forward to seeing your blogs!

Office of Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services Team

Thirdgoal@peacecorps.gov
202.692.1961

PCV LIFE IN PICTURES



Jacqueline Muhammad—Trust for Africa OVC in new winter jackets



Mishelle Eysallenne with the little angels at Makopo ECCD Cen-



Victoria Raymond's group engaged in sport



Keegan Mackin and a team of Science teachers from Likila High School



Mother and son– Mike Solano with his host mother!



James Kruger's Key hole garden



Kyle Oney— Form A class



Std 6 class at one of Zoe Schroeder 's Schools