

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

THE GAMBIA



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



June 2005



A WELCOME LETTER

Greetings from Peace Corps/The Gambia and congratulations on your invitation to pre-service training. We would like you to join a group of fluent, tempered, resourceful Volunteers working hard and living lean in The Gambia, West Africa.

Should you accept this invitation, you will be challenged far more than you may anticipate. Your success will depend on your resilience, openness, sense of humor, and acceptance of a culture very different from your own.

Training will prepare you to stay healthy, safe and secure. You will develop fluency in a language and learn how to work, live and learn in another culture and share your American values and spirit.

Training will prepare Volunteers to make a difference in the public health of the nation through HIV/AIDS education, reduction in the incidence of malaria, promotion of maternal and child health, and the improvement of nutrition and sanitation.

Education trainees will be prepared to improve the nation's literacy rate and technical skills by training teachers, developing teaching materials, launching libraries, promoting girls' education, and showing others how to establish and maintain computer laboratories.

Environment Volunteers will help the nation in its reforestation efforts and help lead villagers in beekeeping enterprises and in launching and protecting profitable, nutritionally rich community gardens and orchards.

Do as much as possible before you arrive to learn about The Gambia and about what it takes to be a successful Peace

Corps Volunteer. Several websites and books are listed in this booklet to get you started. The knowledge you gain before you arrive and the perspective you bring with you will give you a head start on your 10-week training period and will enhance your Volunteer experience.

Please join us in meeting the challenges and sharing the rewards of Peace Corps service. Peace Corps/The Gambia Volunteers, staff and I look forward to your arrival.

Sincerely,

Diana Sloane
Country Director

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PEACE CORPS/THE GAMBIA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



History of the Peace Corps in the Gambia

The first Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in The Gambia at the invitation of the Gambian government in September 1967. They worked in skilled trades as mechanics, engineers, and carpenters, and they organized village cooperatives.

Two years later, another group of Volunteers arrived to work in education. Since that time, education has been a principal focus of Peace Corps activities in The Gambia. Education Volunteers have organized resource centers for primary schools; planned and launched libraries; developed teaching curricula and materials for classes in math, science, English, and environmental and forestry conservation; provided training for teachers in these subjects; and set up computer laboratories and taught information technology (IT) skills. Environment Volunteers have helped improve vegetable and fruit tree production in school gardens and orchards; helped control freshwater runoff and saltwater intrusion; constructed handmade dams that have doubled rice production; and assisted in managing seven Department of Forestry divisional nurseries. Health Volunteers work to prevent common diseases including malaria, respiratory infections, diarrhea, and HIV/AIDS. They also promote maternal and child health through education and community development.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in The Gambia

Peace Corps/The Gambia currently works in three development sectors: education, the environment, and health.

Regardless of their sector-specific assignments, Volunteers working in The Gambia work with colleagues in other sectors and in secondary activities such as HIV/AIDS education, youth and gender development, and girls' education. Volunteers become an integral part of their local communities and have the opportunity to explain U.S. culture to their host families, villages, counterparts, and supervisors. This cross-cultural understanding is as essential to the Peace Corps' mission as the technical assistance Volunteers provide.

The Peace Corps has been involved in The Gambia's education sector since 1969. A significant reason for the project's success has been its ability to respond to the changing needs of the sector. In addition to teaching students, education Volunteers have assisted in the development of curricula at all educational levels. They have worked in areas ranging from vocational education to teacher training in primary school education and secondary school math and science to computer operation and troubleshooting. In 1992, Peace Corps/The Gambia restructured its relationship with the Department of State for Education to more closely align with The Gambia's education master plan. This plan aims to improve access to quality education for all Gambian students, especially girls.

About 30 Volunteers work in the education project. They conduct training for teachers at the regional and primary school levels. They also help build the capacity of their Gambian counterparts to produce and promote the use of teaching aids and student-centered learning activities, and they help set up and manage resource centers and libraries. The rapid expansion in the number of new secondary schools, the shortage of qualified secondary school teachers (especially in math and science), the high rate of computer illiteracy, and limited IT facilities continue to be barriers to achievement of The Gambia's development goals. To help

meet these challenges, some Volunteers are providing pre-service training for teachers at The Gambia College, and some are teaching math and science at the university.

The Gambia is one of Africa's smallest and least developed countries. Over the past 40 years, rapid population growth, low rainfall, unsustainable agricultural practices, exploitation of the natural resource base, and a lack of environmental awareness have caused a dramatic decline in agricultural productivity and biodiversity along with increased environmental degradation.

The project plan for the environment sector was developed in 1994 with the merger of the agriculture and forestry projects into a new agroforestry extension project plan. In 1997, that project plan was revised to add community forestry and environmental education. The project improves the quality of life of local communities by promoting protection of the environment and adoption of sustainable practices for managing natural resources. The goals are to implement practices that enable community members to manage their natural resource base (fields and forests) sustainably; to train educators working with students to increase environmental awareness and implement activities to protect the environment; and to increase the income and improve the nutrition of rural women by educating them about horticultural techniques and nutritional practices. Volunteers use formal and nonformal education tools to promote community forestry and improved horticultural and agricultural techniques in rural communities. Environment Volunteers are also engaged in poultry production, other community-based initiatives, such as beekeeping, and income generation projects for women.

About 35 Volunteers currently serve in the environment project, working in small rural communities in

environmentally threatened and economically deprived areas of the country. Volunteers are attached to the Department of Forestry and work with community members such as government extensionists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), teachers (for formal environmental education and school gardening), local farmers, and youth and women's groups.

About 30 Volunteers are currently serving in the health project. They help develop primary health care, which The Gambia has adopted as its strategy for national health development. Volunteer assignments include helping Gambians plan and deliver health education, organizing in-service training for health workers, and designing teaching aids for health education. Volunteers are also involved in community development activities that promote health and they help implement activities that address identified health needs. Most health Volunteers are assigned to rural areas. Volunteers also work in the capital with the National Nutrition Agency, the National AIDS Secretariat, and The Gambia Family Planning Association. The rest work with divisional health offices, health centers and dispensaries, and village health services.

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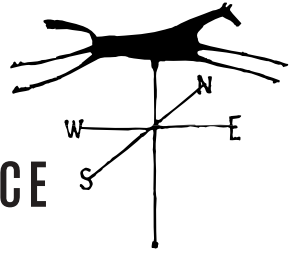


SENEGAL

SENEGAL

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- 2. Saint-Louis 150,000
- 3. Ndiass 100,000
- 4. Ziguinchor 100,000
- 5. Kaolack 100,000
- 6. Fatick 100,000
- 7. Touba 100,000
- 8. Diourbel 100,000
- 9. Matamoras 100,000
- 10. Saint-Pierre 100,000

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: THE GAMBIA AT A GLANCE



History

While The Gambia is continental Africa's smallest nation, its history and heritage encompass some of the continent's most significant and influential events and people. The history of The Gambia is inevitably linked to outside influences. As early as the 13th century, the area became part of the Empire of Mali, with Muslim Mandinka traders from Mali spreading into the area.

The Gambia later became a battleground between the French and the British for control of the slave trade. The country's odd shape and boundaries are said to stem from the resolution of this conflict, when cannonballs fired by a British ship sailing along the Gambia River demarcated the country's borders. The Gambia is now a narrow strip of land on either side of the lower Gambia River, which also winds through the heart of modern Senegal.

The country gained independence from Britain in 1965 and became a republic of the Commonwealth in 1970, with former Prime Minister Dawda Jawara becoming the nation's first president.

Government

The almost 30-year reign of Dawda Jawara ended on July 22, 1994, in a coup d'état. The coup's leader was Colonel Yahya Jammeh, the former chairman of the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council. The military government originally set a four-year timetable for a return to civilian rule, but on

the recommendation of a National Consultative Committee formed by Jammeh, this timetable was reduced to two years. Jammeh was elected president in September 1996. Jammeh's new party, the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction, won the parliamentary elections held in January 1997, completing the country's return to democratic rule.

President Jammeh was returned to office in the October 2001 presidential elections, in which he received nearly 53 percent of the votes and won all but five of the 48 open constituencies.

The legislative branch is made up of six elected rural councils (Basse, Brikama, Georgetown, Kerewan, Kuntaur, and Mansakonko), plus the Kanifing Urban Council and the Banjul City Council. Certain prerogatives are retained by the traditional chiefs in rural areas, who continue to play an active, though declining, role in local administration and policies.

The judicial system is a combination of British common law, Islamic law, and traditional law. Most civil and criminal proceedings are under the jurisdiction of civil courts, topped by a Supreme Court. However, cases that involve traditional or religious matters such as marriage or land rights are handled first by traditional or Islamic courts.

Economy

The Gambia is one of the least developed countries in the world, with a per capita gross domestic product estimated at \$1,770 (2001). Between 1993 and 1999, the average growth in GDP at constant market prices, otherwise known as deflated GDP, was 3 percent.

The service sector (i.e., distributive trade, hotels and restaurants, transport, and communications) continues to

contribute significantly to GDP, rising from 67.9 percent in 1991 to 70.6 percent in 1998.

The agricultural sector, which employs about 75 percent of the labor force, provides seasonal employment and contributes about 22 percent to GDP. One factor that constrains development in this area is an overdependence on traditional practices and tools. To achieve its hopes for development, it is crucial for The Gambia to address the issue of low technology in the agricultural sector and its implications for productivity.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the tourism sector has emerged as a potential source of rapid economic growth. The Gambia's mild climate, long stretches of sandy beaches, and close proximity to Europe make it an attractive destination for European tourists. Providing both employment and foreign exchange earnings, the tourism sector accounts for between 10 percent and 12 percent of GDP.

The industrial sector, made up of manufacturing, construction, and utilities, is rather small and accounts for about 11 percent of GDP. The Gambia has yet to fully exploit the potential of manufacturing. Items currently manufactured include soap, plastics, steel, and metal fabrication. Groundnut (peanut) processing also plays a major role. The growth of the sector is constrained by a number of factors, notably the lack of skilled personnel. Continuing shortages of utilities like electricity and water and lack of basic infrastructure also hamper growth. Finally, the sector lacks meaningful links with other sectors of the economy.

People and Culture

The Gambia's population is made up of five major ethnic groups, several minor ones, and a large number of foreigners.

The Mandinka make up approximately 40 percent of the people, the Fula 19 percent, the Wolof 15 percent, the Jola 10 percent, and the Serahule 9 percent. Although these groups are represented in each of the country's six administrative divisions, they are concentrated in particular areas.

Mandinkas are the majority in the western half of the country, particularly in the North Bank. Wolofs predominate in the capital, Banjul, and in some areas of the North Bank. Fulas and Serahules are largely concentrated in the east around McCarthy Island and the Upper River Division, with Jolas in the Western Division. The rest of the country's population is composed of the minor ethnic groups, Serer, Aku, and Manjago, and people from other African countries and non-Africans. The country's official language is English.

Population density is slightly more than 366 people per square mile, making The Gambia the fourth most densely populated country in Africa. (By comparison, neighboring Senegal has a density of 139 people per square mile.) Forty percent of the population lives in urban areas. The annual population growth rate is estimated at 4.1 percent, which is attributed mainly to high adolescent fertility. The Gambia has a youthful population, with approximately 45 percent under age 15. The Gambia is still one of the poorest countries in Africa, ranking 160 out of 173 countries worldwide in the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index.

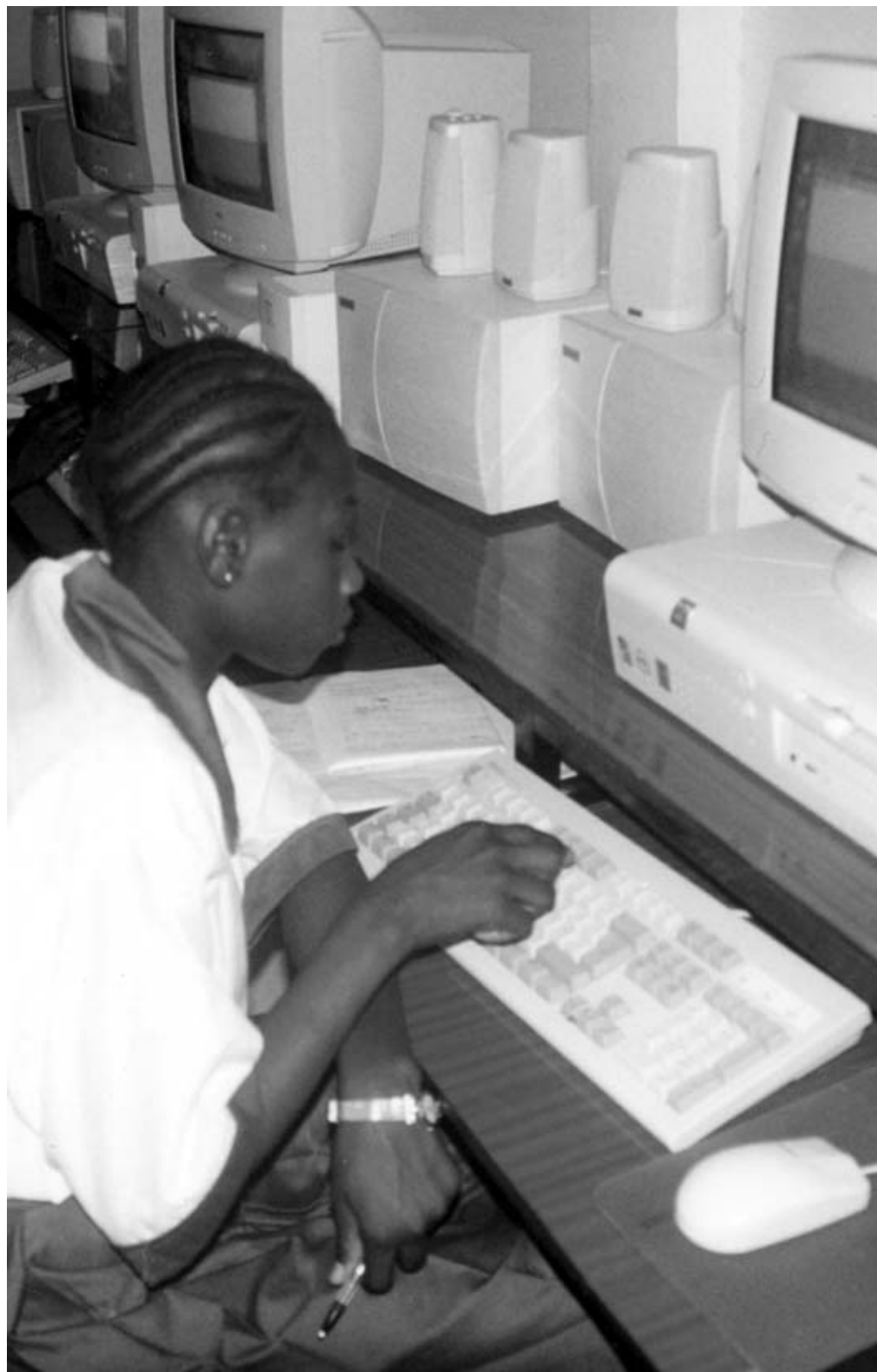
The Gambia's major indigenous groups have a highly stratified society in which status is determined by birth. At the top of the social ladder are traditional noble and warrior families, followed by farmers, traders, and persons of low caste (i.e., blacksmiths, leather workers, woodworkers, weavers, and griots). Although griots make up the lowest caste, they are highly respected for being in charge of passing on oral

traditions. Slavery is long gone, but many descendants of former slaves still work as tenant farmers for old slave-owning families.

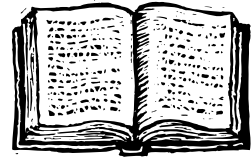
People in The Gambia place great importance on greetings. Wolofs and Mandinkas, for example, greet one another with a lengthy ritual that starts with the traditional Muslim greetings, *Salaamu aleikum and Aleikum asalaam* (“Peace be with you” and “And peace be with you”) and continues with questions about each other’s families, home lives, villages, and health. The answers usually indicate that everything is fine and are often followed with the expression, *Al hamdulillah* (Thanks be to Allah).

Environment

More than 20 years of drought in the Sahel (a region south of the Sahara) has severely impacted natural resources in the area, reducing forested areas, biological diversity, and land productivity. Despite the river flowing through its center, The Gambia is no exception to the regional decrease in forested land. Tree-planting efforts in the region are estimated to be only about 10 percent to 15 percent of the level required to balance losses of woody vegetation due to land clearing, charcoal production, fuel collection, and brush fires. If the pattern of below-normal precipitation persists, a permanent reduction in the carrying capacity of the affected lands is probably inevitable.



RESOURCE LIST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and The Gambia and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although we try to make sure all these links are active and current, we cannot guarantee it. If you do not have access to the Internet, visit your local library. Libraries offer free Internet usage and often let you print information to take home.

A note of caution: As you surf these sites, be aware that you will find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to give opinions and advice based on their own experiences. The opinions expressed are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government. You may find opinions of people who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. As you read these comments, we hope you will keep in mind that the Peace Corps is not for everyone, and no two people experience their service in the same way.

General Information About The Gambia

www.countrywatch.com

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in Banjul to how to convert from the dollar to the dalasi. Just click on The Gambia and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

Visit this site for general travel advice about almost any country in the world.

www.state.gov

The U.S. State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find The Gambia and learn more about its social and political history.

www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm

This site includes links to all the official sites for governments worldwide.

www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm

This online world atlas includes maps and geographical information, and each country page contains links to other sites, such as the Library of Congress, that contain comprehensive historical, social, and political background.

www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp

This United Nations site allows you to search for statistical information for member states of the U.N.

www.worldinformation.com

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about 228 countries.

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/peacecorps2>

This Yahoo site hosts a bulletin board where prospective Volunteers and returned Volunteers can come together.

www.rpcv.org

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the Web pages of the "friends of" groups for most countries of service, made up of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups who frequently get together for social events and local Volunteer activities.

<http://rpcvwebring.org>

This site is known as the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Web Ring. Browse the Web ring and see what former Volunteers are saying about their service.

www.peacecorpswriters.org

This site is hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers. It is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts from countries around the world.

Current News About The Gambia

www.gambianet.com

A Gambian Web portal

International Development Sites About The Gambia

www.un.gm

Information about United Nations programs in The Gambia

www.worldbank.org

Demographic profiles of the countries in which the World Bank has programs

http://www.catholicrelief.org/where_we_work/africa/the_gambia/

Information about the Catholic Relief Services' work in The Gambia

Recommended Books

1. Burke, Andrew, and David Else. *The Gambia and Senegal* (2nd ed.). London: Lonely Planet, 2002. This introduction to the cultural richness of West Africa is full of practical tips.

2. Hughes, Arnold, and Harry A. Gailey. *Historical Dictionary of The Gambia* (3rd ed.). Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1999. This revised edition updates a story that goes back many centuries.
3. Tomkinson, Michael. *Tomkinson's Gambia* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Tomkinson Publishing, 1995. This book, which contains 300 color illustrations, was commended for "its wit, erudition, and flair."

Books About the Peace Corps

1. Banerjee, Dillon. *So You Want to Join the Peace Corps: What to Know Before You Go*. Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 2000 (paperback).
2. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Henry Holt & Company, LLC, 2003 (paperback).
3. Herrera, Susana. *Mango Elephants in the Sun: How Life in an African Village Let Me Be in My Skin*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999.
4. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2001.
5. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. *All You Need Is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000 (paperback).
6. Thomsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969, 1997 (paperback).
7. Tidwell, Mike. *The Ponds of Kalambayi: An African Sojourn*. Guilford, Conn.: Lyons Press, 1990, 1996 (paperback).

NOTES



LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



Communications

The main Peace Corps office is in the Fajara area of Banjul. Plans are underway for one transit house to be opened in Soma, a major transportation hub. A transit house for Volunteers is already available in Basse at the eastern end of the country.

Mail

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered normal in the United States. If you expect U.S. standards for mail service, you will be in for some frustration. Mail from the United States takes a minimum of two weeks to arrive in The Gambia. Advise your family and friends to number their letters for tracking reasons and to include “Airmail” and “Par Avion” on their envelopes.

Despite the delays, we encourage you to write to your family regularly and to number your letters. Family members typically become worried when they do not hear from you, so it is a good idea to advise them that mail service is sporadic and that they should not worry if they do not receive your letters regularly. If a serious problem were to occur, Peace Corps/The Gambia would notify the Office of Special Services at the Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., which would then contact your family.

Your address for your entire stay in The Gambia will be:

“Your Name,” PCV
U.S. Peace Corps
PO Box 582
Banjul, The Gambia
West Africa

Mail is distributed to Volunteers at their sites or to regional towns on a regular basis monthly.

Telephones

International phone service to and from The Gambia is fairly good, but it can be expensive. The public telephone company, Gamtel, provides service in larger towns and villages throughout the country. There are also public phone booths in smaller villages that you can use to reach an AT&T or MCI operator for international calls. There are also many private "telecenters" around the country, which may charge a bit more than Gamtel. Some Volunteers may have phones where they live, but these can generally be used only for receiving international calls, not for making them.

Volunteers are not permitted to use the telephones at the Peace Corps office in Banjul to call family or friends unless the call pertains to an emergency and is approved in advance by the country director.

Computer, Internet, and E-mail Access

Volunteers have access to e-mail and the Internet at the main Peace Corps office. However, access at the main office is limited during regular office hours because there are only four computers for Volunteer use. Volunteers generally are able to check their e-mail at the Peace Corps offices about once every three months. Some Volunteers may have e-mail at the schools where they teach. (The e-mail address for Volunteers

at the main office is pcv@qanet.gm, with your name in the subject line.) Many Volunteers also have Hotmail or Yahoo accounts that they access at private Internet cafes.

Housing and Site Location

Once you become a Volunteer, you will be provided with safe and adequate housing by the Gambian agency or organization you work with in accordance with the Peace Corps' site selection criteria (see the Health Care and Safety chapter for further information). The Peace Corps will provide you with items such as an all-terrain bicycle, a helmet, a mosquito net, medical kit and a water filter for use during your service.

Most Volunteers live in family compounds with one or two private rooms at their disposal. You will need to be very flexible in your housing expectations, as you probably will not have running water or electricity and may have to collect water from a well or borehole and spend your evenings reading by candlelight or lantern. Most Volunteers will have latrines.

Peace Corps staff will visit your site periodically to provide personal, medical, and technical support.

Living Allowance and Money Management

Upon being sworn in, you will receive a settling-in allowance to purchase household necessities such as dishes, a lantern, candles, and furniture. Once you are at your site, you will receive a monthly living allowance, deposited in local currency into a local bank account, to pay for daily necessities. You should be able to live adequately, albeit simply, on this allowance, which is based on an annual survey of Volunteer living costs and varies from site to site. In addition, a vacation

allowance of \$24 per month of service will be deposited into your account in local currency at the beginning of every month. You will also receive per diem allowances to cover your food, lodging, and transportation when visiting Banjul on official business.

If you bring your own money with you, U.S. dollars and traveler's checks are recommended because credit cards are not widely accepted (though they are useful for travel outside the country and cash advances). Personal checks can be cashed, and if you think you will be doing any banking with U.S. banks, you might want to bring your checkbook. You can also have money wired from home by international bank transfer.

Food and Diet

Some Volunteers do all or some of their own cooking, but you will probably find it less expensive and more convenient to have meals with your host family. Gambians eat three meals a day, with lunch as the main meal.

Breakfast might include a porridge made of rice, sugar, and sour milk (and sometimes pounded peanuts, a favorite among Volunteers); little balls of millet boiled in a clear, sweet, viscous liquid, which tastes better than it looks; and steamed millet meal eaten with sweetened sour milk (*coos*), which may remind you of wheat germ with plain yogurt. Lunch might consist of rice topped with a tangy green sauce made of sorrel leaves, red peppers, dried fish, and onions or rice mixed with peppers, onions, and dried fish. Typical dinner dishes are rice with a sauce of tomatoes, peppers, onions, oil, and fish, chicken, or beef; a spicy soup made of tomatoes, tomato paste, beef, potatoes, and okra and eaten over rice or coos; and a one-pot dish of rice, tomato paste, oil, meat, and

vegetables called *benachin*. Although most Volunteers enjoy the local food, you can get pizza, cheeseburgers, and the like when visiting Banjul.

Some foods are characteristic of certain ethnic groups or regions. If you live in a Fula community, for example, there may be a greater variety of dairy products, as their traditional occupation is cattle herding. If you live in a Wolof community, you are likely to eat more coos. And if you live near the coast, you may find a lot of fresh fish and a wider selection of fruits and vegetables.

Transportation

The Peace Corps issues bicycles and helmets to all trainees and Volunteers for use in their work assignments. Volunteers must have a medical clearance for bicycle use signed by the Peace Corps medical officer. For longer trips, Volunteers often use the widely available taxi service, whose fares depend on the distance and duration of the ride.

Geography and Climate

The Gambia is located in West Africa and borders the North Atlantic Ocean and Senegal. It consists of two narrow strips of land on the north and south banks of the Gambia River that extend more than 200 miles into the African continent. At its widest point, The Gambia is less than 25 miles wide.

The land is almost entirely composed of the flood plain of the Gambia River, the country's most outstanding physical feature. In the west, the river's banks are thickly lined with mangrove swamps, behind which are river flats that are submerged for most of the rainy season (July to October). Sandy hills and rolling plateaus lie farther back from the river. In the east, the

swamps give way to gradually ascending riverbanks backed by rolling plains, and low hills punctuate the far eastern quarter of the country. Gambia's highest point is about 170 feet above sea level. The soil quality is generally poor and subject to the damaging effects of erosion, overcultivation, and large-scale burning.

The predominant vegetation is Sudan savanna woodland with grass and scrub understory. There are forested areas in the west, where rainfall is the greatest. Vegetative cover has been severely affected by deforestation, fire, and cultivation, exacerbated by high population densities on arable land and traditional farming practices. While increasingly subject to exploitation, the mangrove swamps along the western half of the Gambia River have been less affected by the people's intrusion on the natural ecology.

The Gambia is a tropical country with two distinct seasons. The summer (June to September) is generally warm and humid, with an average temperature of 90 degrees Fahrenheit. The winter is dominated by dry harmattan winds from the Sahara, which give The Gambia uniquely pleasant weather, with daily sunshine and no rain. From October to May, the temperature varies between 70 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit, with a relative humidity between 30 and 60 percent. In the early and mid-1970s, The Gambia was affected by the rainfall shortages that brought the Sahel area international headlines. While total rainfall has approached previous levels in recent years, its distribution has been erratic, causing continuing problems for the nation's rain-fed agriculture.

Social Activities

Although some Volunteers beg to differ, there will be more to do for entertainment in your village than watching your candles melt in the afternoon heat. A major part of the Peace Corps experience is socializing with the people in your community, which might include chatting while drinking tea under the shade of a large tree, attending an all-night party, or helping the children in your host family's compound with homework. Some families may have a TV set or a radio. You will also have plenty of time to bike, run, walk, plant a garden, or learn to play a musical instrument.

Many Volunteers take advantage of their spare time to read or write. There is a library at the Peace Corps office in Banjul with limited but interesting collections of books donated by past and present Volunteers. People who like to write find time to keep up with correspondence, write in their journals, or write short stories or poetry. Be sure to bring your favorite music tapes, CDs, or MP3s, which you can swap back and forth with other Volunteers. The Gambia is also well-suited for those who enjoy bird-watching and stargazing (with no light pollution from large cities, it is easy to spot constellations and falling stars).

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

Gambians attach great importance to neatness and proper dress, and Volunteers must show respect for Gambian attitudes by dressing suitably both on and off the job. When conducting official business in government or Peace Corps offices, trainees and Volunteers are expected to wear a collared shirt or an African-style shirt, dresses, skirts, or long pants, and professional-looking shoes (i.e., no flip-flops). T-shirts are acceptable only for fieldwork.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the Health Care and Safety chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the *Volunteer Handbook*, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Volunteers complete their two years of service without personal security incidents. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in The Gambia. At the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

Rewards and Frustrations

Peace Corps service is not for everyone. Requiring greater dedication and commitment than most jobs, it is for confident, self-starting, and concerned individuals who are interested in assisting other countries and increasing human understanding across cultural barriers.

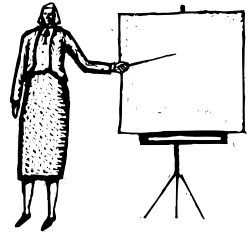
The key to satisfying work as a Peace Corps Volunteer is the ability to establish successful human relations at all levels, which requires patience, sensitivity, and a positive professional attitude. It is essential that you work with Gambian counterparts to ensure that tasks begun during your

service will continue after your departure. It is also important to realize that while you may have a lot of energy and motivation, you will be in The Gambia for only two years. Your colleagues will probably continue to work in the same job after you leave—for little money—and may not possess quite the same level of motivation. Often you will find yourself in situations that require the ability to motivate both yourself and your colleagues and to take action with little guidance from supervisors. You may work for months without seeing any visible impact from, and without receiving feedback on, your work. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results. Nevertheless, you will have a sense of accomplishment when small projects are made effective because of your efforts. Acceptance into a foreign culture and the acquisition of a second or even a third language are also significant rewards.

Even with the many economic, social, and environmental problems confronting The Gambia today, there is an atmosphere of excitement and hope about the positive changes occurring in the country. Joining the Gambian people in their efforts at this pivotal time in their history will be both fascinating and satisfying to Volunteers who are willing to work hard, be tolerant of ambiguity, and give generously of their time. Your willingness to serve in smaller towns and villages and to give up U.S. standards of space and privacy in your living accommodations will be greatly appreciated by Gambians. Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave The Gambia feeling that they have gained much more than they gave during their service.



PEACE CORPS TRAINING



Overview of Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training will probably be the most intense period of your Peace Corps service, as you will need to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to successfully serve as a Volunteer in just 10 weeks. While the training period will be extremely busy, it should also be a time of excitement, discovery, and self-fulfillment. The effort and challenges of adapting to a new culture will draw on your reserves of patience and humor but will be handsomely rewarded with a sense of belonging among new friends. The long hours of study and the accomplishment of difficult tasks will pay off in your ability to work effectively in a challenging job that will directly benefit a great number of people.

The training approach is best described as discovery-oriented and self-directed. Based on adult learning methods, it emphasizes individual responsibility for developing the competencies to function independently as a Volunteer.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in The Gambia by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. Technical training will include sessions on the environment, economics, and politics in The Gambia and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your project's goals and will meet with the agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

By the end of training, health trainees will be able to contribute to the improvement of The Gambia's primary health care through the planning and implementation of educational activities that promote maternal and child health. Education trainees will be ready to teach computer literacy, math and science, social and environmental studies, and English, as well as to implement in-service teacher-training programs. Environment trainees will be prepared to teach agroforestry and improved agricultural and horticultural techniques to rural farmers, as well as to promote community forestry projects and environmental education in schools and communities.

Language Training

You will find that language skills are the key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is the heart of the training program, and you must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Experienced Gambian language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups of four to five trainees.

Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is to get you to a point of basic social communication skills so that you can practice and continue to learn the language once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your two years of service.

Cross-Cultural Training

One of the most important aspects of the training program is the experience of living with a Gambian host family. There is no other way to learn as much about Gambian attitudes, customs, and day-to-day life. Your host family can be invaluable in helping you learn the language and in introducing you to other members of the community. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. You will be exposed to topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, nonformal and adult education strategies, and political structures.

Health Training

During pre-service training, you will be given basic medical training and information. You will be expected to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. The topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues that you might encounter while in The Gambia. Nutrition, mental health, safety and security, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also covered.

Safety Training

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service.

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During your service, a variety of training events may be conducted. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- *Reconnect in-service training*: Provides Volunteers with an opportunity to assess their first six to nine months of service and make plans for the following year. Volunteers work with associate Peace Corps Directors to develop training to increase their technical, language, and project development skills.
- *Life Skills Manual training of trainers*: Provides interested Volunteers and counterparts with training to assist youth in building their self-esteem, making responsible decisions, fighting HIV/AIDS, and acquiring skills to enhance their upward mobility.
- *Gender and development and information technology in-service training*: Provides interested first-year health and environment Volunteers and counterparts with the skills and information necessary to teach gender issues in their schools and communities and to incorporate information technology in everyday life.
- *Nursery management and fruit tree grafting in-service training*: Provides first-year environment Volunteers and counterparts with information on these topics and strengthens the skills Volunteers acquired during pre-service training.
- *Gardening in-service training*: Equips Volunteers with the skills and information to grow and maintain

vegetables and to encourage their communities in gardening for greater income and improved nutrition.

- *Beekeeping in-service training*: Provides first-year environment Volunteers with information on and skills in beekeeping, including honey harvesting, wax production, income generation, and nutrition.
- *Close of service conference*: Prepares Volunteers for their future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-departure orientation (staging) through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the Peace Corps staff, the training staff, and Volunteers.



YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN THE GAMBIA



The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. Peace Corps/The Gambia maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer who takes care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in The Gambia at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to an American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

Health Issues in The Gambia

Major health problems among Volunteers in The Gambia are rare and are often the result of a Volunteer's not taking preventive measures to stay healthy. The most common minor health problems are ones that also exist in the United States, that is, colds, diarrhea, hemorrhoids, constipation, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, STDs, adjustment disorders, emotional problems, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in The Gambia because certain environmental factors here raise the risk of or exacerbate the severity of certain illnesses and injuries.

The most common major health concerns in The Gambia are malaria, giardiasis, amoebic dysentery, and hepatitis. Because malaria is endemic in The Gambia, you are required to take antimalarial pills. In addition, you will be vaccinated to protect

you against hepatitis A and B, meningitis A and C, tetanus, diphtheria, typhoid, and rabies.

Helping You Stay Healthy

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in The Gambia, you will receive a medical handbook. At the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first-aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this chapter.

During training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as we will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have physicals at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in The Gambia will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in The Gambia, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

Maintaining Your Health

As a Volunteer, you must accept a certain amount of responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The old adage “An ounce of prevention ...” becomes extremely

important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in The Gambia is to take preventive measures.

The most important step in preventing malaria, and many other tropical diseases, is to avoid mosquito and other insect bites by sleeping under a mosquito net, wearing long-sleeved tops and long pants whenever possible, using insect repellent, and making sure your windows and doors have screens.

Rabies is prevalent throughout the region, so you will receive a series of immunizations against it when you arrive in The Gambia. If you are exposed to an animal that is either known to have or suspected of having rabies, you must inform the Peace Corps medical officer at once so that you can receive post-exposure booster shots.

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, tapeworms, and typhoid fever. Thoroughly washing fruits and vegetables and either boiling your drinking water or using a water filter and disinfectants (such as household bleach) can help prevent these illnesses. The medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in The Gambia during pre-service training.

AIDS is less common in The Gambia than in other parts of Africa, but is far more common than in the United States. Abstinence is the only certain choice for prevention of HIV/AIDS and other STDs. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risk, use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person

is free of HIV/AIDS or other STDs. You will receive more information from the medical officer about this important issue.

Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent an unplanned pregnancy. Your medical officer can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical officer. Generic formulations may be substituted for brand names. You may be asked to switch to a pill routinely stocked by the health unit.

It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the medical office for scheduled immunizations, and that you let the medical officer know immediately of significant illnesses and injuries.

Women's Health Information

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions requiring medical attention but also has programmatic ramifications. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer remains in-country. Given the medical circumstances that exist in The Gambia, any Volunteer who becomes pregnant is medically separated.

Few feminine hygiene products are available for you to purchase in The Gambia. If you require a specific feminine hygiene product, please bring a six-month supply with you.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps medical officer provides Volunteers with a kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be

periodically restocked at the medical office.

Medical Kit Contents

Ace bandages

Acetaminophen 325 mg (Tylenol)

American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook

Antacid tablets (Di-Gel)

Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)

Antifungal cream (clotrimazole)

Antimicrobial skin cleanser (Hibiclens)

Baby powder (Johnson's)

Band-Aids

Butterfly closures

Cepacol lozenges

Ciprofloxacin 500 mg

Condoms

Dental floss (waxed and unwaxed)

Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)

Erythromycin 25 mg

Hydrocortisone cream

Ibuprofen 400 mg

Insect repellent

Latex gloves (one pair)

Lip balm (Aloe Vera)

Multivitamins

Oral rehydration salts

Pepto-Bismol chewable tablets

Pseudoephedrine HCL 60 mg (Sudafed)

Scissors

Soap (Dial)

Sterile gauze pads

Sucrets lozenges

Sunscreen (SPF 30)

Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops (Visine)

Thermometer

Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Medical Services. Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

If your dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact the Office of Medical Services to find out whether you need to update your records. If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Medical Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and bring it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, either at your pre-departure orientation or shortly after you arrive in The Gambia. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, we will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or

nonprescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements.

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, but they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you—a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace it, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. We discourage you from using contact lenses during your Peace Corps service to reduce your risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease. Most Peace Corps countries do not have appropriate water and sanitation to support eye care with the use of contact lenses. The Peace Corps will not supply or replace contact lenses or associated solutions unless an ophthalmologist has recommended their use for a specific medical condition and the Peace Corps' Office of Medical Services has given approval.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health-care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health-care benefits described in the Peace Corps *Volunteer Handbook*. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or preexisting conditions might prevent you from reenrolling in your current plan when you return home.

Safety and Security—Our Partnership

Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems. In addition, more than 83 percent of Volunteers surveyed say they would join the Peace Corps again.

The Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you. This *Welcome Book* contains sections on: Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle; Peace Corps Training; and Your Health Care and Safety. All of these sections include important safety information.

The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the tools they need to function in the safest and most secure way possible, because working to maximize the safety and security of Volunteers is our highest priority. Not only do we provide you with training and tools to prepare for the unexpected, but we teach you to identify and manage the risks you may encounter.

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

There are several factors that can heighten a Volunteer's risk, many of which are in the Volunteer's control. Based on information gathered from incident reports worldwide in 2003, the following factors stand out as risk characteristics for assaults. Assaults consist of personal crimes committed against Volunteers, and do not include property crimes (such as vandalism or theft).

- Location: Most crimes occurred when Volunteers were in public areas (e.g., street, park, beach, public buildings). Specifically, 47 percent of assaults took place when Volunteers were away from their sites.
- Time of day: Assaults usually took place on the weekend during the late evening between 10:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m.—most often occurring around 1:00 a.m.
- Absence of others: More than 75 percent of crime incidents occurred when a Volunteer was unaccompanied.
- Relationship to assailant: In most assaults, the Volunteer did not know the assailant.
- Consumption of alcohol: Almost a third of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by Volunteers and/or assailants.

Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk

Before and during service, your training will address these areas of concern so that you can reduce the risks you face. For example, here are some strategies Volunteers employ:

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of theft:

- Know the environment and choose safe routes/times for travel
- Avoid high-crime areas per Peace Corps guidance
- Know the vocabulary to get help in an emergency
- Carry valuables in different pockets/places
- Carry a “dummy” wallet as a decoy

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of burglary:

- Live with a local family or on a family compound
- Put strong locks on doors and keep valuables in a lock box or trunk
- Leave irreplaceable objects at home in the U.S.

- Follow Peace Corps guidelines on maintaining home security

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of assault:

- Make local friends
- Make sure your appearance is respectful of local customs; don't draw negative attention to yourself by wearing inappropriate clothing
- Get to know local officials, police, and neighbors
- Travel with someone whenever possible
- Avoid known high crime areas
- Limit alcohol consumption

Support from Staff

In March 2003, the Peace Corps created the Office of Safety and Security with its mission to “foster improved communication, coordination, oversight, and accountability of all Peace Corps’ safety and security efforts.” The new office is led by an Associate Director for Safety and Security who reports to the Peace Corps Director and includes the following divisions: Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security; Information and Personnel Security; and Emergency Preparedness, Plans, Training and Exercise. The safety and security team also tracks crime statistics, identifies trends in criminal activity, and highlights potential safety risks to Volunteers.

The major responsibilities of the Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security Division are to coordinate the office’s overseas operations and direct the Peace Corps’ safety and security officers who are located in various regions around the world that have Peace Corps programs. The safety and security officers conduct security assessments; review safety trainings; train trainers and managers; train Volunteer safety

wardens, local guards, and staff; develop security incident response procedures; and provide crisis management support.

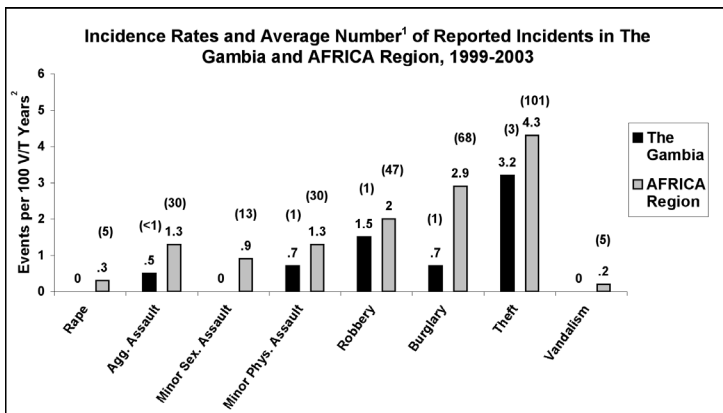
If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure that the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff provides support by reassessing the Volunteer's work site and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also assist Volunteers with preserving their rights to pursue legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that Volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

The country-specific data chart below shows the incidence rates and the average number of incidents of the major types of safety incidents reported by Peace Corps Volunteers/trainees in The Gambia as compared to all other Africa region programs as a whole, from 1999-2003. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

To fully appreciate the collected data below, an explanation of the graph is provided as follows:

The incidence rate for each type of crime is the number of

crime events relative to the Volunteer/trainee population. It is expressed on the chart as a ratio of crime to Volunteer and trainee years (or V/T-Years, which is a measure of 12 full months of V/T service) to allow for a statistically valid way to compare crime data across countries. An “incident” is a specific offense, per Peace Corps’ classification of offenses, and may involve one or more Volunteer/trainee victims. For example, if two Volunteers are robbed at the same time and place, this is classified as one robbery incident.



¹The average numbers of incidents are in parentheses and equal the average reported assaults for each year between 1999-2003.

²Incident rates equal the number of assaults per 100 Volunteers and trainees per year (V/T Years). Since most sexual assaults occur against females, only female V/Ts are calculated in rapes and minor sexual assaults. Numbers of incidents are approximate due to rounding.

Source data on incidents are drawn from Assault Notification Surveillance System (ANSS) and Epidemiologic Surveillance System (ESS) as of 7/29/04.

The chart is separated into the eight most commonly occurring assault types. These include vandalism (malicious defacement or damage of property); theft (taking without force or illegal entry); burglary (forcible entry of a residence); robbery (taking something by force); minor physical assault (attacking without a weapon with minor injuries); minor

sexual assault (fondling, groping, etc.); aggravated assault (attacking with a weapon, and/or without a weapon when serious injury results); and rape (sexual intercourse without consent).

When anticipating Peace Corps Volunteer service, you should review all of the safety and security information provided to you, including the strategies to reduce risk. Throughout your training and Volunteer service, you will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas including safety and security. Once in-country, use the tools and information shared with you to remain as safe and secure as possible.

Security Issues in The Gambia

When it comes to your safety and security in the Peace Corps, you have to be willing to adapt your behavior and lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target of crime. While The Gambia is considered one of the safest countries in West Africa, Volunteers have experienced petty theft, pickpocketing, and home break-ins. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally will not steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions, especially in large towns, are favorite work sites for pickpockets. The following are safety concerns in The Gambia of which you should be aware.

Perhaps the single greatest risk to your safety in The Gambia is public transportation. While public buses, taxis, and private vehicles are generally safe, many accidents occur in “bush taxis.” Bush taxis are the main mode of transport for Gambians and may be the only type of local transportation

available to and from your community. Because of bad roads, poor auto maintenance, and overloading, bush taxis are prone to breakdowns. During the rainy season, road conditions deteriorate and accidents are even more frequent.

Pickpocketing and bag snatching most frequently occur in congested areas such as marketplaces, bus terminals, ferry crossings, and while traveling on public transportation. Being aware of your surroundings and projecting a confident attitude can reduce your chances of becoming a victim of petty theft. Volunteers are safest in their host communities, where people know them and value their contributions, but house break-ins sometimes occur when Volunteers are away from their residence. Remember to always lock your doors and windows, even if you are leaving for just a short time.

Male colleagues, supervisors, and acquaintances may occasionally make inappropriate advances toward female Volunteers, but once the Volunteers become well-known in their communities, such harassment usually ends. Strategies to deal with this issue will be discussed during training, and command of one or more local languages will help you manage potential problems.

Cases of physical and sexual assault are rare, and are often associated with cross-cultural differences regarding intimate relationships. The five most common risk factors in assaults are visiting the capital, going out on the weekend, being out at night, walking alone, and being intoxicated. (Although alcohol is readily available in urban areas, drinking in your community or public drunkenness anywhere is inappropriate and socially unacceptable.) Volunteers who exhibit responsible personal behavior can minimize their risk. Volunteers are urged to report all assaults and threats of assault to the Peace Corps medical officer or security officer so that staff can respond with appropriate support.

The ongoing civil war in the Casamance region of southern Senegal (which began in the early 1980s) has not directly affected Volunteers serving in The Gambia. Although the region is off-limits to Volunteers, heightened awareness near the southwestern Gambia-Senegal border is warranted.

In the coastal areas, where tourists congregate, Volunteers are often mistaken for Europeans on vacation, and this assumption can bring with it preconceived notions about personal wealth or sexual mores. Volunteers, as well as tourists and other expatriates, are often referred to as *toubab*, which is not a derogatory term but merely means “stranger,” “outsider,” or, sometimes, “white person.” Young men, referred to as “bumsters,” may offer to help you or “be your friend.” These men are usually harmless, but they are annoying and can sometimes be aggressive. Once again, command of the local language, visiting the beach in a group, and being aware of your environment are key in decreasing your risk.

Any nonmedical issues involving personal security, such as those related to housing and transportation, should be directed to the security officer.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

You must be prepared to take on a large responsibility for your own safety. Only you can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your house is secure, and develop relations in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. In coming to The Gambia, do what you would do if you moved to a large city in the United States: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by

integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in The Gambia may require you to accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Volunteers attract a lot of attention in large cities and at their sites, but receive far more negative attention in highly populated centers, where they are anonymous, than in smaller towns, where “family,” friends, and colleagues look out for them. While whistles and exclamations are fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, avoid eye contact, and do not respond to unwanted attention. Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. You should always walk with a companion at night.

Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in The Gambia

During pre-service training, you will be briefed on safety and security measures that should be taken while living and traveling in The Gambia. The Peace Corps’ safety program is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your two-year service and includes the following: information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents. The Gambia’s in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/The Gambia office will keep Volunteers informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or

emergency, Volunteers will be contacted through the emergency communication network.

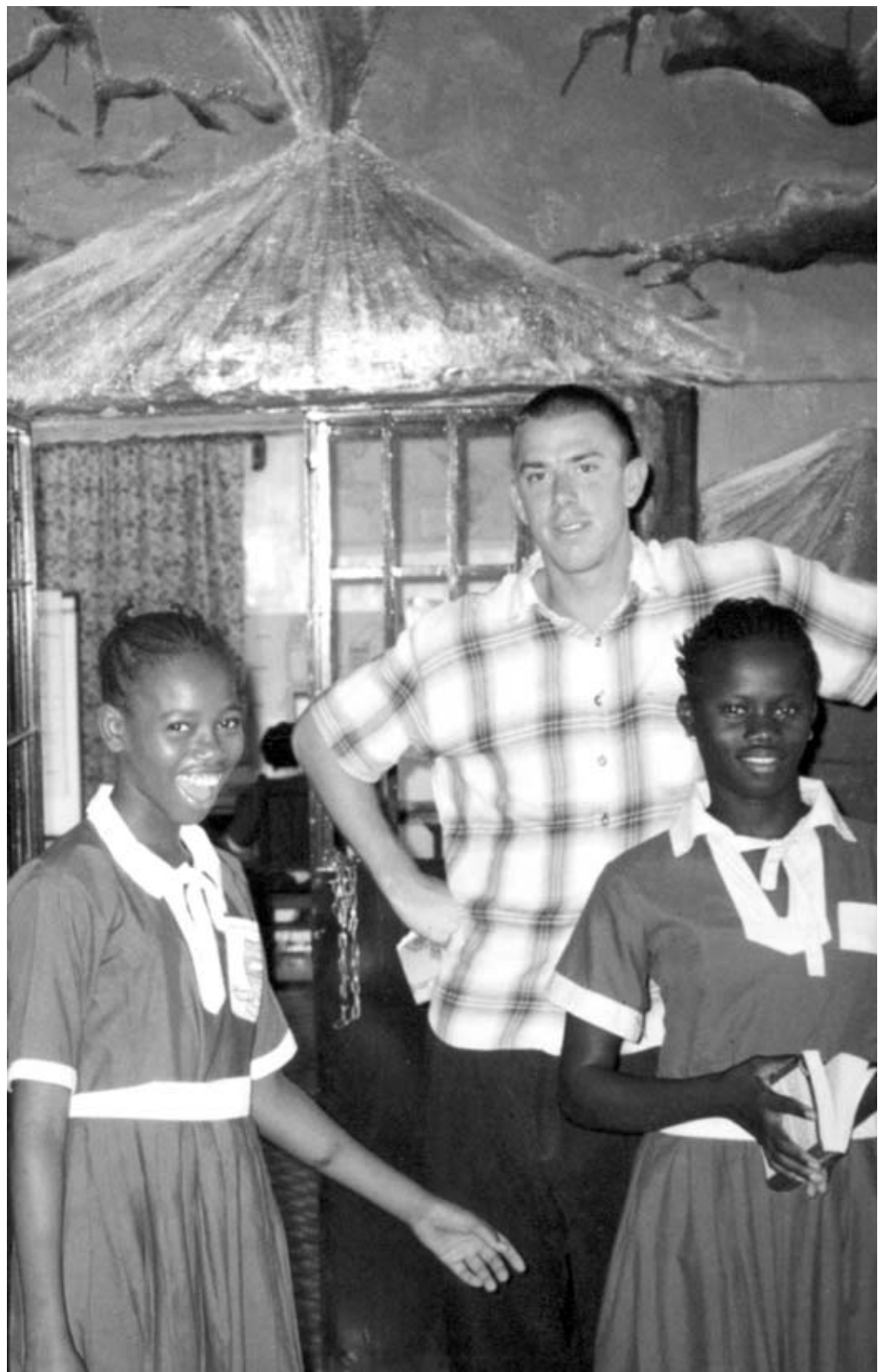
Volunteer training will include sessions to prepare you for specific safety and security issues in The Gambia. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout your two-year service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural, health, and other components of training.

Site selection criteria are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and work sites. Site selection is based in part on any relevant site history; access to medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; different housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/The Gambia's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, Volunteers in The Gambia will gather at predetermined locations until the situation resolves itself or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers **immediately report** any security incident to the Peace Corps medical officer or security officer. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.

NOTES



DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



In fulfilling the Peace Corps' mandate to share the face of America with our host countries, we are making special efforts to see that all of America's richness is reflected in the Volunteer corps. More Americans of color are serving in today's Peace Corps than at any time in recent years. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among our Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps' mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other despite our many differences.

Our diversity helps us accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, it poses challenges. In The Gambia, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyle, background, and beliefs are judged in a cultural context very different from their own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in The Gambia.

Outside of Banjul, residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical American behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of The Gambia are justly known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community in which you live may display a range of reactions to the cultural differences that you present.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in The Gambia, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during your pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

Overview of Diversity in The Gambia

The Peace Corps staff in The Gambia recognizes adjustment issues that come with diversity and will endeavor to provide support and guidance. During pre-service training, several sessions will be held to discuss diversity and coping mechanisms. We look forward to having male and female Volunteers from a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, and sexual orientations, and hope that you will become part of a diverse group of Americans who take pride in supporting one another and demonstrating the richness of American culture.

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Gambian women, especially in rural areas, have very traditional roles. As a result, North American women may not be able to exercise the freedoms to which they are accustomed. In addition, it is common for women to receive

stares, comments, and requests for dates or sex. Female Volunteers develop a variety of creative strategies to handle these situations (as do male Volunteers who do not conform to the machismo image expected of them).

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Gambians may expect African-American Volunteers to learn languages and adapt to the culture quicker than other Volunteers. African Americans may also sometimes be mistaken for Africans and may experience impatience on the part of Gambians when they do not demonstrate expected behavior. Asian, Arab, and Hispanic Americans may also be associated with their ancestral origins rather than their American nationality. It is helpful to remember that these reactions come from a simple lack of understanding and that they afford an opportunity to tell Gambians more about the diversity of America.

Volunteers of color may feel some isolation within the Volunteer community because other Volunteers lack knowledge of diversity issues in the United States.

Volunteer Comment

“Overall, my work-related and social experiences as an African-American Volunteer in The Gambia have been very positive. At work, I’ve been judged by my personality, my level of professionalism, and my skills, not by my color. This is quite different from what I encountered back at home for most of my life.

There are days when I’m hardly recognized as a non-Gambian. There are other days—when I do not have my natural dreadlocks covered or when I’m not wearing traditional Gambian clothes—when I stick out like a sore thumb. Those are my most challenging days. I’ve found that

when people cannot really label me as being entirely African or entirely American, they may interact with me with mixed emotions. On the one hand, because you are black you may be considered and respected as part of the family but from another ethnic group (or from the same ethnic group but from another country). On the other hand, because you are black and come from America, you may be expected to give more (like money or favors). Some people may be highly offended when you put up personal boundaries, believing that you think you are 'better than they' or that you are a 'useless *toubab*' (non-Gambian person)."

The people you grow really close to, however, are those who have come to know who you are as an individual person, thereby respecting and valuing your differences."

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

Older individuals are highly respected in The Gambia, which is certainly a plus. But with this respect comes the expectation that senior Volunteers will have relatively more knowledge and experience. Because acquisition of a new language is often more difficult for seniors, they may become frustrated with difficulties in communicating ideas important to them and may need to be assertive in developing an effective individual approach to language learning. In addition, some older Volunteers find pre-service training to be physically challenging.

Because the vast majority of Volunteers in The Gambia are young, older Volunteers sometimes feel isolated within the Volunteer community. Peace Corps/The Gambia is sensitive to this issue and takes it into consideration when placing senior Volunteers. Seniors sometimes are sought out by younger members of the Volunteer community for advice, and while

some enjoy the role of mentor, others would rather not fulfill this role.

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

The Gambia is conservative by U.S. standards, and many Gambians disapprove of homosexuality. Because of these beliefs, gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers have not been able to be open about their sexual orientation. However, Peace Corps/The Gambia provides an open and supportive atmosphere for gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers.

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

The Gambia is overwhelmingly Muslim, with a small Christian minority. Although most Gambians have little knowledge of other religions, there is a high degree of religious tolerance in the country. Occasionally, a Gambian friend may encourage you to explore or convert to Islam.

Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities

The accommodations that make life more manageable for those with disabilities in the United States are absent in The Gambia, so certain aspects of everyday life can be extremely difficult. Nevertheless, Gambians are very accepting of people with disabilities.

However, as part of the medical clearance process, the Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodation, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in The Gambia without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of your service. The Peace Corps/The Gambia staff will work with any disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in training, housing, job sites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



How much luggage am I allowed to bring to the Gambia?

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds this allowance. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The authorized baggage allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 80 pounds total with a maximum weight allowance of 70 pounds for any one bag.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution.

What is the electric current in The Gambia?

The electric current is 220 volts, but electricity is extremely irregular outside Banjul and in rural areas.

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. They are given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover their expenses. If you bring extra money, U.S. dollars and traveler's checks are recommended because credit cards are not widely accepted (though they are useful for travel outside the country and cash advances). Personal checks can be cashed, and if you think you will be doing any banking with U.S. banks, bring a checkbook.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

Volunteers accrue two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training and the first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work.

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase such insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in The Gambia do not need to get an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most local travel is by bush taxi.

What should I bring as gifts for Gambian friends and my host family?

This is not a requirement. Small tokens of friendship are sufficient.

Where will my site assignment be when I finish training and how isolated will I be?

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until

after they have begun pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's skills and needs in order to make a placement that will be mutually beneficial to the Volunteer and the assigned community.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, you should instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580; select option 2, then extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at 202.638.2574. For nonemergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580, extension 2317 or 2318.

Can I call home from The Gambia?

You will need an international phone card to call the United States. The Gambia's public telephone company, Gamtel, provides phone service in larger towns and villages throughout The Gambia. In smaller villages, there are coin-operated public phone booths that you can use to reach an AT&T or MCI operator for international calls. There are also many "telecenters" around the country, which may charge a bit more than Gamtel.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

Differences in technology make most U.S. cellular phones incompatible with the cellular service in The Gambia. Local communication methods are reliable enough and are more compatible with the Peace Corps' belief that Volunteers

should live modestly at the level of their local colleagues.

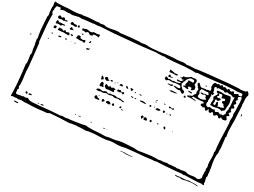
Will there be e-mail and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?

Because the availability of electricity is so sporadic in the rural areas where most Volunteers live, it is inadvisable to bring your own computer. Volunteers have access to e-mail and the Internet at the main Peace Corps office and some Volunteers also have access to e-mail at the schools where they teach.

NOTES



WELCOME LETTERS FROM THE GAMBIA VOLUNTEERS



Salaam Malekum! Congratulations on your invitation to serve in Peace Corps/The Gambia. You have the chance to come to a place most people have never heard of, but serving in The Gambia is a great opportunity. You will be living among some of the kindest, most generous people in the world.

If you are a health Volunteer, you could be working in many capacities. Because health relates to almost all aspects of life, health Volunteers find themselves working with official health organizations like hospitals and clinics, but also involved with schools and community groups. The best and most challenging part of being a health Volunteer is the opportunity to discover what your community needs and what you want to do.

I am posted in a large village in the middle of the country, working with a family-planning NGO. Most of my time has been focused on sexual and reproductive health issues. I have also been involved in nutrition, girls empowerment and math and science projects. I have been very fortunate to work with people of all ages from all over the country.

Work is only one part of your life as a Volunteer. Soon, you will be able to speak at least one local language and be living with a family. We all become part of our communities and live lives full of new cultural experiences. In addition, the Volunteer community is a close-knit family of unique and incredible individuals. Your time here will change your life and you will leave having given only a fraction of what you will have gained. We all look forward to you joining us.

—Greta Klinger

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Congratulations on your invitation to Peace Corps/The Gambia and welcome to the Primary Teacher Trainer group. You are about to embark upon one of the most fulfilling and challenging times in your life. I am happy to share my

experiences with you as well as those of my fellow Volunteers.

Now is an exciting time to be a primary teacher trainer in The Gambia. During my service, I worked on various projects, most notably the renovation of a primary school library. Also, I have organized and conducted the following workshops with my Gambian counterparts: Library management, teaching and learning aids, teaching arts and crafts, and teaching physical education. This is one of the most rewarding jobs there is. At the end of the day, you can feel that “good tired”, knowing you’ve accomplished something—even if it was just reading to one child.

If there was just one word I had to use to describe the primary teacher trainer program, I’d have to say “potential.” What I have worked on is only a sampling of possible projects. There is so much work to be done. Your experience of simply growing up in an American classroom equips you far more than you realize. You will immediately become a role model to those around you because of that experience. Whatever skills or interests you have, I can assure you, it can be used in your job as a primary teacher trainer. The teachers and staff I have worked with are eager to hear my thoughts and I accept guidance. They have gone out of their way to accept me into their community, and they will do that for you also. The Gambia is fortunate to be a green, lush country (during the rainy season at least!). The beaches are beautiful, and the sun sets right over the ocean. Many delicious foods are available here. You will never eat a mango again without thinking of The Gambia!

Soon you will join a group of like-minded Volunteers at staging. Take pictures! These are people that you will quickly bond with, and become lifelong friends. Good luck!

—Annamarie Behring

.....

Hi! Greetings from West Africa and welcome to Peace Corps/The Gambia! Everybody has something different to say and a different experience to share. I am sure you are anxious and at the same time nervous, but if you free yourself to the

experience and the beauty and tranquility of this beautiful seaside country, you will be completely satisfied and blessed by your time here in The Gambia.

For starters, if you will be working within the education system in The Gambia you will be doing wonderful and much needed work facilitating teacher empowerment, as you help teachers to come in touch with the roots of education and knowledge as you give them a means of educating their own people. As we know, it is the children who have to take the lead and we as teachers and parents have to be the guiders and mentors.

Your work will vary. Maybe you will be teaching in a secondary school, maybe you will be organizing and facilitating workshops for teachers. The field is wide open and it will be left up to your own creativity as you struggle to leave your mark with very few resources.

I am a primary teacher trainer, but for my first five months I taught grade seven and eight English classes 25 hours a week. I also conducted teacher observations, started a library program, and worked with many different school clubs—even Boy Scouts! Through my teaching experience, I saw the serious need for in-service training for the teachers that I work with and also in the surrounding villages. They all lacked basic teaching methodologies, so I began to organize and facilitate workshops covering these strategies that I had learned at university: classroom management, teacher as a professional, phonics cooperative learning, record-keeping, teaching aids, etc. Now I conduct workshops three times a week, run the library, and teach home economics. I work hand-in-hand with a local woman who will be teaching the newly organized preschool class, and also a variety of other small activities and programs within my village.

Life is hard, EVERYTHING involves work, but it is all very rewarding. Life in West Africa is *sooo* beautiful, constant drumming, dancing, and singing. Big markets packed with beautiful people, colorful fabrics, animals, fruits and vegetables and much more. As you may know, The Gambia is

an Islamic country, so it is a culture of constant prayer, which in return is so peaceful and comforting for me. The ocean side is breathtaking and the country side offers the same tranquility; beaches are beautiful and traveling up the river or crossing the River Gambia to reach your neighboring village to attend the weekly *lumo* (market) is so much fun. So all I can tell you now is to free your spirit, free your mind, and free your heart and prepare for the enchanting drum beat of West Africa.

—Rebecca Walters

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Dear Future Volunteer,

The time has finally arrived! You have been selected and invited to begin your training for Peace Corps service in The Gambia. Congratulations! In front of you is an exciting and challenging time of service full of discovery and growth. You are welcome and all the best to you.

To give you an idea of what your two-year commitment could look like, I'll summarize my education sector experience. I was posted to Gambia College to provide information communications and technology (ICT) support. At the beginning of my service, I sat with the head of the school of education to discuss their needs. I provided hardware and software support for the faculty and staff along with Microsoft Office training. This included Internet use to help the lecturers enhance their classroom materials, resources and record-keeping. I created an information management system particularly for storing grades and keeping track of students on teaching practice out in the fields. I've been working with two individuals to enable them to maintain the database after I leave.

I've had the opportunity to delve even more into the Gambian education system as I work also at the Department of State for Education (DOSE) on their education management information system (EMIS). Both databases run

on Microsoft Access. I came into this experience with some Access knowledge, and I will be leaving with a lot more, in addition to Visual Basic. I am also leaving staff at DOSE with Access skills to maintain the database.

Outside of ICT, I've also had the opportunity to give motivational speeches to various groups: one was to second-year college students on "How to be a Better Student"; another was to a women's group on leadership.

As American-educated Volunteers, though we may not have a strong background in the area we've been selected to serve, we have what it takes to help in the development needed here. We teach, we learn, and it's a rewarding experience.

—Mirlene Andre

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Salaamalekum! Greetings from Africa and welcome to Peace Corps life in The Gambia ... an experience that promises to be different for everybody. I came into the country not really knowing what to expect, and determined that everybody makes their own experience as eventful or as stressful as they want it to be. As an agroforestry Volunteer, I've helped plant trees in school nurseries, taught women in surrounding villages the nutritional benefits of a certain tree, taught local farmers tips on beekeeping and the profits of beeswax processing, assisted a carpenter in creating his own woodlot, and many other random small jobs that I often don't realize make an impact until they are completed. Some of these things I had previous knowledge in, but most I learned during pre-service training.

Things happen at a different pace here, but everything manages to get done eventually. However, the work is only a portion of life here and the things that you'll experience just being submerged in a culture and language so different than life back in the States is rewarding enough. You'll get to experience parts of life that are often overlooked in our own culture ... the coming of the rains, the birth next door, the dancing celebration that accompanies a surviving infant's first week, the tying of a marriage ceremony, the death of the

grandpa next door, the mourning calls that accompany his death, the passing of each new moon, a good harvest, the bad rainy season, an afternoon of relaxing, or a morning of farming in the hot sun, just to name a few. All in all, it is an experience like nothing we have in the States and one that will be with each of us for the rest of our lives. Make the most of your time here, don't be afraid to try new things. Believe me, time will go fast once you've figured out the daily routine ... I wish you the best with your service and welcome to the country.

Jaama rek! (Wolof for "Peace only!")

—M'Linda Stansbery

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Baboons are barking, donkeys are braying, and bats are fluttering around my head, I can't believe that I am in Africa. I sit outside my hut talking to my host mother under the African stars with six children in my lap. They treat me like one of the family. They help me with the language, cultural differences, and finding my place in the village. My days are filled as an agroforestry Volunteer planting trees, teaching women how to make soap, teaching environmental issues to 6th graders, working with honey bees, helping harvest crops, planting gardens, and so much more.

Training is stressful and sometimes things are difficult but the hard work pays off once you are settled in your village. You know, if it were easy, everybody would be doing it. I'm just an ole' country boy from Georgia, I have never experienced anything like Africa, but I think it is the best thing I have ever done. I am having the time of my life and you will too.

—Micah Wood

.....

Salaamalekum! Life in an African village presents many challenges every day just in itself and that does not include your actual work. The first few months in your village can prove to be the most difficult. Your language skills are very average at best and trying to integrate into the community

can be difficult at times. But at the same time, they are very rewarding as you begin to form very important relationships with your host family and community. After the first few months, you feel very settled and integrated into village life and it only gets better, so they say.

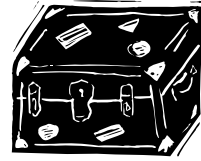
It can be difficult, but rewarding, to balance your time, whether it be working on your project's school garden or just sitting and talking with your host family drinking *attaya*, the sweet tea they make. You will need a lot of self motivation. There is always someone who wants to better their community by utilizing the skills of a Volunteer; it is your challenge to find that person.

But no matter if you are working or soaking in the culture there will always be attaya waiting for you.

—Jenna Thompson



PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in The Gambia and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have an 80-pound weight limit on baggage.

General Clothing

- Lightweight, waterproof jacket
- T-shirts
- Sweatshirt or sweater
- One or two bathing suits
- Bandannas or handkerchiefs
- Baseball cap or hat
- Jeans
- Lightweight cotton pants
- Lightweight long shorts
- At least one dressy outfit for official Peace Corps functions and outings in the capital (“Western” styles are fine to wear in the capital)

For Women

- Several good bras, including sports bras (quick-drying, cotton material is best, and dark colors are easier to keep clean-looking)
- Plenty of sturdy cotton underwear (again, dark colors are recommended)

- A variety of casual and dressier dresses—long, loose, and lightweight (rayon and cotton are best)
- Capri pants

Shoes

- Durable shoes for work
- Sturdy sandals (Teva, Birkenstock, and Chaco brands are recommended by Volunteers)
- All-purpose shoes for walking, hiking, and biking

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- A three-month supply of any prescription drugs you take, to last you until the post can order refills
- Good scissors
- Skin lotion
- Two pairs of eyeglasses, if you wear them; also consider bringing a repair kit
- Lip balm (provided in the Peace Corps medical kit, but you may prefer your own brand)
- A small initial supply of tampons or pads, if you require a particular brand (a limited variety is available in The Gambia)
- Any favorite brands of shampoo, shaving cream, toothpaste, deodorant, etc., which may not be available locally
- Makeup (the quality of local items is okay, but if you are picky, pack your own)
- Towels (good-quality ones are not available in-country)
- Sheets

Kitchen

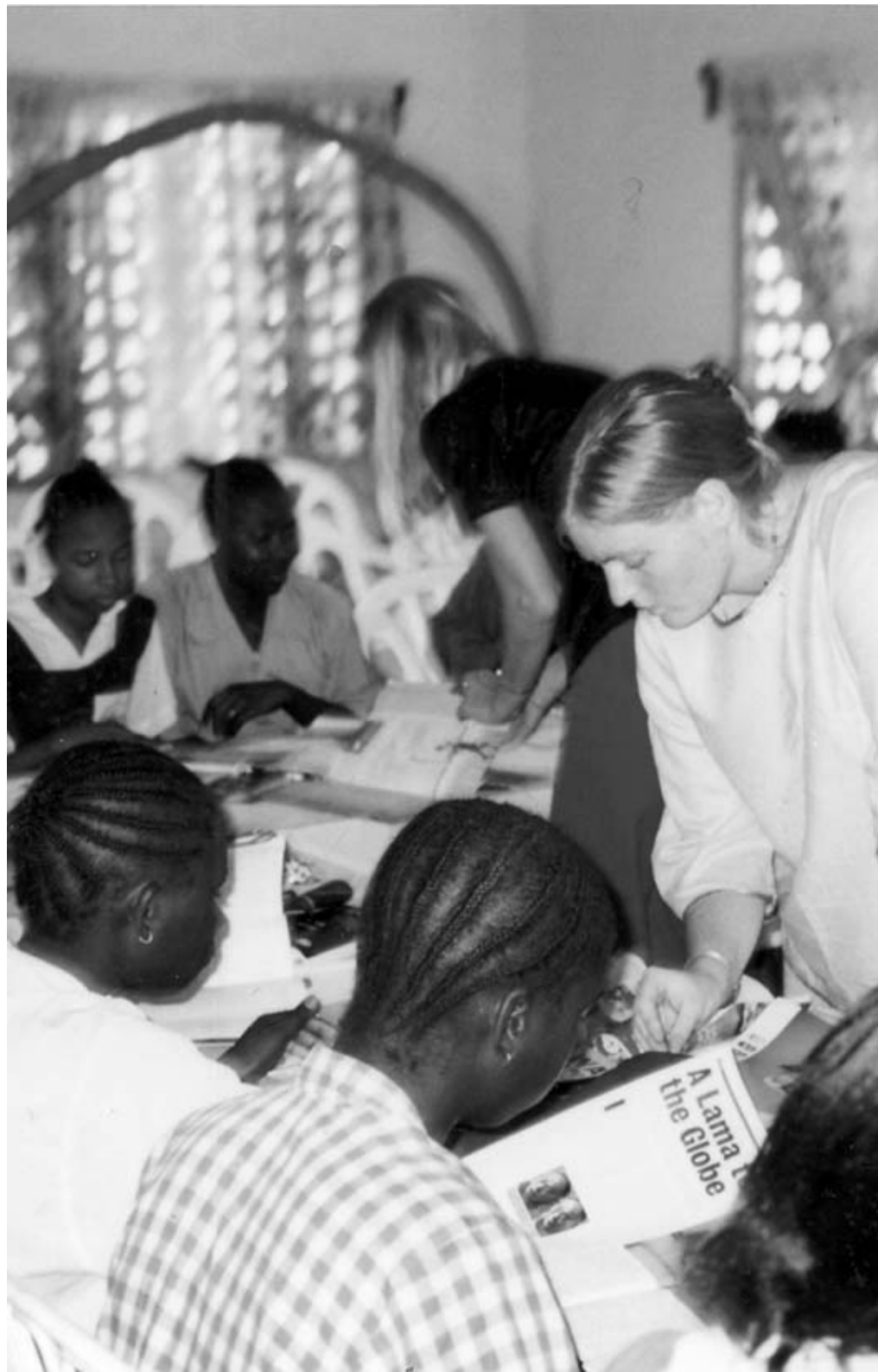
- Packaged mixes, e.g., sauces, salad dressings, soups, soft drinks (some of these are available at local supermarkets)
- Good can opener
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Rubber spatula
- Plastic freezer bags
- Small plastic food containers

Miscellaneous

- Shortwave radio for listening to BBC, VOA, and other news stations
- Inexpensive, durable, water-resistant watch with extra batteries
- Swiss army knife or Leatherman tool
- Reliable alarm clock and extra batteries
- Biking gear such as padded shorts, gloves, toe clips, water bottle, and cage (helmets and repair tools are provided by the Peace Corps)
- Small or medium-size daypack without frame
- Camera (35 mm compacts are best for travel)
- Film and extra batteries (although these are available in The Gambia, they are expensive and are not always of the best quality)
- Pictures of your home, family, and friends
- Magazines and catalogs with pictures of clothing you might want to have copied by tailors in The Gambia
- World maps and travel guides
- A supply of good pens (also available in-country)
- Journals or diaries

- Tape, CD, or MP3 player and music (do not skimp, as you will be listening to whatever you bring for the next two years, and Volunteers usually are open to swapping), along with small speakers
- Plastic sturdy water bottles for travel (e.g., Nalgene)
- U.S. stamps (you can often have letters mailed in the United States by people traveling home)
- Games (e.g., Scrabble, chess, Frisbee, hacky sack)
- Art supplies
- Softball glove (Peace Corps/Senegal has an annual tournament with other West African countries)
- Combination padlocks (good-quality key locks are available in-country, but padlocks are more useful)
- Duct tape (a Volunteer “must-have”)
- Good flashlight or headlamp
- Phone card for international calls

NOTES



PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST



The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the United States for two years. Not all items will be relevant to everyone, and the list does not include everything you should make arrangements for.

Family

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Office of Special Services at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470; after-hours duty officer: 202.638.2574).
- Give the Peace Corps' *On the Home Front* handbook to family and friends.

Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for the Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that luggage meets the size and weight limits for international travel.
- Obtain a personal passport if you plan to travel after your service ends. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire three months after you finish your service, so if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

Medical/Health

- Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to bring a six-month supply of all medications (including birth control pills) you are currently taking.

Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have preexisting conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in coverage, it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated.)
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

Personal Papers

- Bring a copy of your certificate of marriage or divorce.

Voting

- Register to vote in the state of your home of record. (Many state universities consider voting and payment of state taxes as evidence of residence in that state.)
- Obtain a voter registration card and take it with you overseas.
- Arrange to have an absentee ballot forwarded to you overseas.

Personal Effects

- Purchase personal property insurance to extend from the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the United States.

Financial Management

- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 800.424.8580, extension 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.



CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



The following list of numbers will help you contact the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters with various questions. You may use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the Peace Corps toll-free number and extensions with your family so they have them in the event of an emergency during your service overseas.

Peace Corps Headquarters

Toll-free Number: 800.424.8580, Press 2, then
Ext. # (see below)

Peace Corps' Mailing Address: Peace Corps
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters
1111 20th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20526

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/Local Number
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Africa Region	Ext. 1850	202.692.1850
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: thegambia@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2318	202.692.2318
	Desk Assistant E-mail: thegambia@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2317	202.692.2317

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (Sato Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse	Ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor		800.818.8772
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Volunteer Financial Operations	Ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions <i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services	Ext. 1470	202.692.1470 9-5 EST 202.638.2574 (after-hours answering service)

PEACE CORPS

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