

PEACE CORPS || french-speaking volunteers

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Peace Corps Volunteer Shares Her Experience in Cameroon

Kate Nolan always knew she wanted to be a Peace Corps Volunteer. "When I was about ten, I met a friend of my parents who had just returned from Peace Corps service in Africa. I was captivated by the stories he told and I decided right then and there that I would do Peace Corps after college," says Kate.

She began working toward this goal and after graduating from Georgetown University with an English degree and French minor, Kate left for Cameroon to serve as an English teacher Peace Corps Volunteer.

Kate's background in French helped prepare her for service in Francophone Africa.

"French was absolutely essential for my Peace Corps work. I was sent to a small town where the only other English speaker was the English teacher. And due to a teacher shortage, most of the students had not had English teachers throughout their schooling," says Kate.

For the first two years of Kate's service, she taught English at a government high school and also tutored students in reading and grammar after school. Large class sizes were a challenge, however, having knowledge of the French language before arriving in Cameroon made teaching English as a foreign language much easier.

"Though my ability to speak French was good when I arrived in-country, having to speak only French all the time really developed my language abilities," says Kate. "I no longer had to pause to think before I spoke, and having conversations on a wide range of topics became easy. I wasn't worried about conjugating verbs and vocabulary, so I was able to immerse myself in the language and the way people in

Cameroon spoke it. I was able to move beyond the classroom very quickly and speak more like a native."

Kate extended her Peace Corps service, and during her third year as a Volunteer, she taught at a government technical college. She also organized a project for



Cameroon's East Province, where more assistance was needed. Kate and other volunteers traveled to a remote village to conduct training sessions with the local community. Kate worked with primary school teachers from eight different schools on integrating life skills into lesson plans and introducing new techniques for teaching English to students. Due to the successful outcome, Kate's team was asked to repeat the project in other parts of the province.

Looking back on her service, Kate says, "people have this view of Africa as being a place of hardship and deprivation and, materially, it can be. But living and working there was never a hardship. The Cameroonian people are warm and welcoming."

Teaching for more than two years in Cameroon as a Peace Corps Volunteer helped Kate realize her future career path. She plans to attend graduate school after Peace Corps to continue a career in education, with a focus on guidance counseling.

Opportunities for French Speakers

In today's world, fluency in foreign languages, international experience and cross cultural understanding are important tools for success in the global marketplace. Serving in the Peace Corps is an ideal way to improve your French skills and enhance your career prospects, while making a difference in the lives of others.

Peace Corps is in real need of French speakers with skills or volunteer experience in areas such as education and tutoring, agriculture and environment, health and HIV/AIDS work, and business and information technology.

Approximately 20 percent of all Peace Corps Volunteers and trainees currently serve in French-speaking countries. Volunteers with French language skills are placed worldwide, from Senegal to Cameroon to Morocco to Vanuatu; however, the majority of positions are in West Africa.

Peace Corps programs with French language requirements ask for the equivalent of one or two years of college-level or three to four years of high school-level French study. Individuals who have studied French or other romance languages will be given preference for those programs with language requirements.

French-speaking Volunteers may work in any of the Peace Corps program areas, depending on their additional experience and skills. In addition to their primary Peace Corps projects, all Volunteers serving in Africa also participate in HIV/AIDS prevention and education.

During training, Volunteers are taught the local language to supplement their French, in order to communicate further within their villages. Having a French-speaking background allows Volunteers to focus more on learning their local language or dialect during training.

SINCE 1961, NEARLY 200,000 AMERICANS HAVE SERVED IN PEACE CORPS



Learn More About Peace Corps and How to Apply

The idea of promoting peace and friendship throughout the world is what inspired President John F. Kennedy to form the Peace Corps in 1961. Since then, nearly 200,000 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in 139 countries around the world. Countries request Volunteers with specific skill sets and Peace Corps then matches qualified applicants to those country programs. Peace Corps service is a 27-month commitment.

Peace Corps has a variety of volunteer opportunities for individuals skilled in the areas of: Agriculture and Forestry; Environment; Engineering and Water Resource; Education and English Teaching; Math and Science Teaching; Youth and Community Development; Health and HIV/AIDS Education; Business Consulting; and Information Technology. Proficiency in French or Spanish language is helpful for some program areas; however, Peace Corps teaches the local language to all Volunteers.

Safety and security of Volunteers is top priority. The Peace Corps goes to great lengths to educate Volunteers, and provide training and support to keep them safe and healthy. Each country post has a staff security and medical unit. Upon arrival in country, Volunteers undergo three months of training, including safety & security, cross-cultural, language and program assignment, and live with a host family during that time. After training, Volunteers arrive to their program sites with a place to live and a monthly stipend for the next two years that covers housing, food, transportation, and incidentals.

To learn more about Peace Corps, attend an in-person or online information session. Apply online to be considered for an interview. Visit www.peacecorps.gov or call 800.424.8580. Learn more about French-speaking Volunteer programs at www.peacecorps.gov/assignments.

Basic Qualifications

In order to qualify for a French-speaking country, Volunteers need to be competitive within a Peace Corps assignment area and meet one of the following criteria:

- Completed 4 years of high school French within the past 8 years
- Completed 2 semesters of college level French coursework within the past 6 years
- Completed 3 years of high school French AND either a minimum of 5 on high school International Baccalaureat Assessment or a 4 on the Advance Placement exam
- Scored 50 on the College Level Exam Program
- Scored novice-high on ACTFL OPI within the last 6 years
- Native/fluent speaker of French

Benefits of Service

There are many benefits to Peace Corps service, with the opportunity for cultural exchange and the ability to help where help is truly needed being foremost. In doing this, you show the world a side of America that promotes service, cooperation and peace. You'll gain valuable experience, acquire global perspective and form lasting international friendships. Peace Corps also comes with tangible benefits that go beyond overseas service. It's an experience to draw on for the rest of your life. As is often said, the Peace Corps isn't simply something great. It's the beginning of something great.

Peace Corps partners with multiple colleges and universities across the country to offer graduate programs. Through Peace Corps' Master's International program, academic credit can be granted for Peace Corps service, or to satisfy field work or practicum requirements. Institutions offering the Peace Corps Fellows/USA program provide Volunteers who have completed service with financial assistance in advanced degree programs. Visit www.peacecorps.gov/gradschool.

There are other financial benefits while volunteering in the Peace Corps, including paid living expenses, vacation days, full medical and dental coverage in service, and deferment or partial cancellation of some student loans. For example, those with Perkins loans are eligible for a partial cancellation. After completing 27 months of service, Volunteers receive \$7,425 toward their transition to life back home. Peace Corps provides job placement support and enhanced hiring status for federal jobs for one year following service. Additionally, Volunteers can obtain affordable health insurance for up to 18 months following service. Volunteers also take advantage of an extensive network of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers living and working in the U.S. and around the globe; visit www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv.

Regional Peace Corps Campus Representatives

The Chicago Regional Peace Corps Office has on-campus recruiters for some of the region's largest universities. These representatives are Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and are available to assist their university community and local residents. To find Peace Corps events on campus, visit www.peacecorps.gov/events.

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Mission of the Peace Corps

Since its inception in 1961, Peace Corps has aimed to promote world peace and friendship by:

Helping people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.

Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.

Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Peace Corps celebrates a 50-year legacy in 2011.