

# Global Volunteers build foundations of peace



by Heidi Branstator  
Feature Editor

Are you looking for an alternative to your usual summer vacation? Global Volunteers, an international non-profit organization, is seeking student groups and individuals to volunteer for up to three weeks during the summer.

Project sites include Russia, Poland, Tanzania, Indonesia, Tonga, Jamaica, Guatemala, Mexico, Costa Rica and the Mississippi River Delta in the U.S.

The goal of Global Volunteers is to help establish a foundation for peace through mutual international understanding. Volunteer teams live and work alongside local people, staying in homestays or in community buildings, gaining a genuine, first-hand understanding of how the vast majority of the world's people live day-to-day.

"We have to open up our eyes and see each other as people ... just people with the same hopes, desires and dreams for our children," said Bobbie Walker, mayor of Jonestown, Miss.

The volunteers work under the direction of the local leadership and assist with projects such as helping build and repair community buildings, digging latrines and wells, tutoring children, teaching English and assisting in health care.

**Who are the volunteers?**

To date, Global Volunteers' oldest volunteer has been 80 and the youngest, 12. Volunteers have come from every walk of life, including mechanics, lawyers, engineers, writers, actresses, students and homemakers. Global Volunteers was established in 1984 to allow "average" people to share their skills and talents with people who appreciate them.

"We shared everything we had with each other, we searched for answers to questions we'd never before been asked, (and) we became part of a community where we were called pioneers," said Jane Kocmoud, Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica.

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**--Bobbie Walker  
Mayor, Jonestown, Miss.**

**What do the volunteers do?**

Projects vary from site to site, and from one season to the next, but most volunteers work in one of three areas. They are: **education**, such as teaching English, providing training in business math or basic sciences in the class-



room, or tutoring small children. **Community Infrastructure**, such as constructing community centers and health clinics, establishing portable water systems, re-

pairing classrooms and roads and building houses. **Professional Services**, such as dentistry, assisting rural health-care providers, identifying crop diseases and assisting in establishing small businesses. Assistance in painting, planting and other beautification projects, which require no specialized skills, is sometimes

necessary.

**Trip design**

The standard application process requires 60 days for processing visas, references and securing ground transportation and lodging. All applicants decide when and where they would like to volunteer. The volunteer's application is finalized after character references and health forms are checked. Volunteers receive orientation materials which include health care precautions, information on local culture and language and travel tips. Skill and project interest information on each volunteer goes to the host agency for consideration in planning work assignments. When the volunteer teams arrive, they decide with the community leaders how they can best meet the community's current needs. All volunteers have scheduled personal days, usually

weekends, where they can see more of the country and visit nearby attractions.

Some options are available for anyone wishing for a longer stay on site.

After the trip, each volunteer is asked to complete an evaluation, and some may be invited to join with other returned volunteers who provide on-going support to the development of the host community.

**What's Included?**

**Lodging:** Upon arrival of the host community, accommo-



dations are arranged for the team. The only time volunteers are responsible for their own lodging is if they leave the project site on days off.

**Food:** Meals and non-alcoholic beverages are prepared in the host community. All reasonable precautions are taken to protect the volunteer's health.

**Ground Transportation:** Vehicles are generally provided by the host organization, and are driven by either their staff or the team leader. In some countries, rental cars and public transportation are also used.

**Team Leader:** Each team is led by a trained North American, often bilingual, who will meet the team at the port city upon arrival.

**Team Coordination:** This includes logistics of assembling a team, orientation materials, volunteer communications, host relations, visa processing and in-country coordination.

**Administration:** Standard overhead expenses.

The three most popular sites for college students are Jamaica, Mexico and the Mississippi Delta. Global Volunteers is currently working in three communities in Jamaica. They are Woburn Lawn, Hagley Gap and Mount Vernon, which are approximately 40 to 45 miles northeast of the capital city of Kingston. They are situated in the northwestern extreme area of St. Thomas Parish on the Blue Mountains.

In Mexico, they work with the state of Guanajuato, which is located in the geographical center of Mexico, north of Mexico City. It is considered one of Mexico's finest cultural and historical enchantments, built in 1559 in an old riverbed.

The group has been invited into two small, rural communities in the Mississippi Delta region. They are Coahoma, the third poorest county in the country, and Arcola, where the situation is only slightly better.

Volunteers must be in good health and have the mental and physical capability to function as a team member. Minors must travel with an adult family member or guardian. Volunteers must pay their own way, but all trip-related costs, including air fare, are tax deductible and discounts for groups substantially reduce the cost of the trips.

Anyone interested in a free catalog and group information packet may contact Krista Twesme at Global Volunteers: 1-800-487-1074 or 375 E. Little Canada Road, St. Paul, Minn., 55117.