



June 4, 2009

Greetings from Ghana. My name is Mike Koffman and it is my privilege and honor to serve as the Peace Corps Ghana Country Director. My number one goal and a responsibility that I take very seriously is to lead the Peace Corps Ghana program in a manner that allows all of our Volunteers to have safe, enjoyable and productive service experiences during their time in Ghana.

I am sure that many of you have sent sons, daughters, mothers and fathers off to West Africa with mixed emotions. It is only natural. As I recently mentioned to one Volunteer: "If your family was too happy about you going far away for a long time I would be more than a bit suspicious!" I hope that, after the initial shock of your loved one's decision, you have been able to strike that balance where your feelings of pride and excitement are equal to or greater than your initial reservations and worries.

Let me assure you that the Peace Corps staff here in the Ghana works very hard to support each of our 140 Volunteers in many areas. We have administrative systems in place to ensure that living allowances arrive on time. We have two excellent medical officers, one MD and one PA, who are available 24 hours a day to provide emergency and routine medical attention. Our programming staff works closely with Ghanaian project partners and communities to find safe and productive sites for each of our Volunteers.

The safety and security of each of our Volunteers is the number one priority for our entire staff. For that reason, we have a Safety & Security Coordinator, whose sole mission is to address any issues that may impact the safety or security of any of our Volunteers. While nobody can eliminate the risk of every day life activities, we do all that we can to make our Volunteers aware of cultural norms and differences and aware of risks specific to Ghana so that they can make good decisions and avoid trouble. I am happy to report that we have had great success in this area.

A Peace Corps staff member "officially" visits each Volunteer at his/her site at least 3 times over the course of service. Additionally, we host in-service trainings and medical check-ups at various points during service. So, at a minimum, staff has face-to-face visits with each of our Volunteers approximately eight times over the course of a two year service.

We tell each Volunteer it is Peace Corps' responsibility to provide each of them with safe and healthy sites, work to do and the support to do it. Each Volunteer must assess his or her own professional commitment and personal behavior to ensure that he or she is productive and maintains a safe and healthy lifestyle.

The Peace Corps experience is a very personal one. We encourage Volunteers to keep family and friends informed of their activities through letters, internet and telephone calls. However, we encourage Volunteers to test their independence, creativity and resourcefulness during this rare opportunity to walk in someone else's shoes. We discourage visitors from home during the first three months of service so as to encourage each Volunteer to engage totally with his or her new community.

If you need to contact your loved one in an emergency situation, please call the Office of Special Services at Peace Corps. The Office of Special Services will then contact me immediately and we will notify our Volunteer and either pass a message or notify the Volunteer to contact you, as appropriate:

During work hours: 800-424-8580 (ext 1470)

After hours, weekend, and holidays: 202-638-2574

In closing, let me thank you for “loaning” your loved one to the people of Ghana for the next two years. Having been a Peace Corps Volunteer myself, I feel confident in telling you that your sons, daughters, mothers and fathers have embarked on a journey that will provide them with incredible opportunities for personal growth, job satisfaction and an enhanced perspective unavailable to many.

If you have any questions for me please do not hesitate to send them along. I will do my best to respond to you in a timely fashion (mkoffman@gh.peacecorps.gov).

Most sincerely,

Michael Koffman
Country Director
Peace Corps Ghana