

# Increasing Impact: A Community-Informed Volunteer Cultural Training Program in Cofradía, Cortes, Honduras

by  
**Sondra Cooper**

Master of Arts, Northwest University, 2017

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of  
International Community Development

in the  
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

©Sondra Cooper 2017  
NORTHWEST UNIVERSITY  
Spring 2017

Copyright in this work rests with the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is  
done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

## Table of Contents

I. Introduction .....	2
II. The Need for International Volunteers to Become Global Advocates.....	3
A. Great Global Need.....	4
B. Power Inequality and the Responsibility of the Global North .....	5
C. Reasons for the Present Lack of Advocates .....	9
D. The Positioning of International Volunteers to Make a Difference .....	12
III. Research Ideation.....	13
IV. Four Characteristics of Organizations that Nurture Impactful Volunteers.....	15
A. Fostering Intentional, Reciprocal Community Relationships .....	15
B. Working Together with the Greater Nonprofit Community.....	17
C. Nurturing an Active Alumni Community.....	19
D. Instilling Cultural, Social, and Political Values in Volunteers through a Comprehensive Cultural Training Program .....	20
V. The Project.....	22
A. Ideation .....	22
B. Challenges and Limitations .....	22
C. Planning .....	23
D. Implementation and Adjustments.....	24
E. Results and Future Plans.....	25
VI. Conclusion .....	26
VII. Works Cited.....	27

## **I. Introduction**

According to the Gallup World Poll, 16% of adults worldwide – about 140 million people – volunteer each year (Leigh 19). Among those 140 million volunteers are thousands of well-intentioned people who give months or years of their life to serve in a country not their own. Some serve as medical assistants in refugee camps in Europe; some build wells in remote villages on the Amazon; some work to keep youth off the streets of London; and some, like me, teach English at a bilingual school in a small town in Honduras. After their contracted time comes to an end, volunteers return home with stories of their experiences and oftentimes claim that their time abroad profoundly affected them. They then continue with their normal lives, and the memories of their time abroad grow more distant with each passing day. Their interaction with the communities they served in is minimal, and their impact on that community is neatly packaged into the 6 or 12 months they spent on-the-ground.

Volunteer impact does not have to end like this. In fact, volunteer alumni can have profound impacts on communities long after their time on-the-ground comes to an end – and some do. But what makes the difference? What causes some volunteers to become lifelong advocates of communities while others disengage from communities shortly after they return home?

An individual volunteer's long-term involvement cannot be achieved without the influence of the organization they served with. Through field- and text-based research, I found that in order to maximize global and local impact, international nonprofits organizations (INGOs) must (A) engage in authentic relationships with community members, (B) establish partnerships with a network of similarly-minded NGOs, (C) maintain strong volunteer alumni relations, and (D) invest in their volunteers through targeted, community-informed cultural

training programs. International volunteers can accomplish important work during their time in a host country, but nonprofits and communities could multiply and extend their impact by prioritizing these four aspects of their programs. Creating opportunities for volunteers to develop big-picture perspectives of culture, global politics, and social justice through a cultural training program is particularly essential for ensuring continued volunteer support. Therefore, together with the staff and board of Bilingual Education for Central America (BECA) and with guidance from the community in Cofradía, Cortes, Honduras, I created a cultural training curriculum for the organization. Based on literary research, ethnographic research, and input from the community, the curriculum provides a framework to help volunteers discover better ways to engage with the community, to learn about the complex global systems that contribute to poverty, corruption, and violence, and to explore how they fit into the picture.

## **II. The Need for International Volunteers to Become Global Advocates**

The term *global advocacy*, as used in this thesis, refers to actions taken to alleviate poverty, injustice, and inequality in the global context, motivated by a sense of responsibility toward suffering and oppressed people worldwide. This motivating sense of responsibility is often called *global citizenship*. In their book *Global Citizenship and the University*, Robert Rhoads and Katalin Szelenyi describe global citizenship as a contract. They write that the global citizenship contract “will give you a sense of belonging...but you have also to pay homage to this contract and you have some duties to meet and respect and carry out” (Rhoads 122). In this thesis, I use the term *global social responsibility* to highlight this sense of responsibility required by global citizenship.

The underlying belief statement of this thesis is that the world needs international volunteers motivated by a strong sense of social responsibility to step into positions of global

advocacy. Without a convincing argument to support this belief statement, the four factors contributing to increased volunteer impact and the entire curriculum project would render useless. Therefore, in the following pages, I will explain that the world needs volunteers to step into roles of global advocacy due to (A) great global need, (B) global inequality of power, (C) the current lack of advocates, and (D) the positioning of international volunteers to make a difference.

### **A. Great Global Need**

The world needs advocates for justice and equality because preventable evil, pain, and suffering exist in every corner of the globe. Children starve, governments steal land from the poor, the wealthy hoard resources, corporations dump toxins in water supplies, education systems discriminate against minorities, and people commit hate crimes against others of different religions. Big problems exist in the world, and these problems are constantly evolving. Some issues are unique to certain groups and countries, but the roots of these issues are native to the human race – children starve in every country, and racism manifests itself all over the globe. Our local problems, therefore, are actually not all that different from global issues. We all suffer the same afflictions, though the degree certainly varies.

While the enormity of human suffering can seem overwhelming, it is important to remember that the enormity of the task at hand requires a lot of help. The great global need requires a great number of global justice advocates to answer the call. Though it may be easy to question whether or not people can make a meaningful difference in such large and pressing issues, one thing is certain: doing nothing will certainly result in no progress, while doing some small thing offers at least the hope of change. Justice advocates and development workers are

necessary because they can make an important difference in some of the world's biggest problems.

## **B. Power Inequality and the Responsibility of the Global North**

This project focuses on international volunteers becoming global advocates. But why? Why focus on empowering international volunteers to advocate for justice for people in the Global South instead of focusing on encouraging locals to fight for their own justice? In this section, we will discuss how both the poor's lack of power and the wealthy's excess of power demand those in the Global North to get involved in global advocacy.

### ***Relative Powerlessness of the Poor***

Before we begin, it is important to note that empowering local people to advocate for their own justice is, in fact, the best pathway to authentic, sustainable change in a community. For this reason, community partnership is an essential characteristic of effective nonprofit organizations (see section IV:A). Outsiders must never assume that they know what is best nor that it is their job to be the "saviors" or "development Santa Clauses" to the poor (Myers 122). Authentic and sustainable development happens in partnership, with the community taking the lead – not foreigners.

That said, leaving communities to fight their own battles completely on their own ignores the fact that many communities that INGOs seek to help do not have the economic, social, or political means to safely and effectively advocate for themselves. In many places in the Global South, the poor do not have economic resources to invest in creating change in their communities, much less the political voice to incite structural change. Therefore, expecting the poor and oppressed to fix their own problems when they have no means of doing so reveals a broken perspective of poverty and development.

When powerful people do nothing to advocate for those in need because they hold the distorted perspective that the poor need to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” structural violence results. Structural violence “refers to the physical, psychological, and spiritual harm that certain groups of people experience as a result of unequal distribution of power and privilege” (Moe-Lobeda 72). Because the majority of power is reserved for the wealthy, poor and oppressed communities suffer the inability to improve their situations. The “goodness” or “badness” of those in power is largely irrelevant to the existence of structural violence, because the term refers specifically to the poor’s *absence of power* to change their circumstances.

Consider that a well-meaning president is elected in an oppressive government system and, out of compassion, decides to build a park and clinic in the country’s poorest community. The community did not ask him to do so. In fact, the people never ask the government to do anything because they have no local representatives who listen. Even if they did, representatives often have little say in where government money and resources are allocated, due in large part to corruption within the government. However, the people in the small, rural community are very grateful for the development of their community and take advantage of the services offered.

Is this community suffering from structural violence even though their leader did something positive for them? Yes, for two reasons. First, the powerful president decided what would be built – not the people. While good things may happen, the community remains voiceless in petitioning for its own change. Maybe what the people really wanted was justice for families who had lost loved ones in uninvestigated murders or funding for after-school programs to keep their kids from getting caught up in gang violence. Instead, they are forced to accept and be grateful for whatever those in power deem most important. So while they may have a park with shiny new benches, the more oppressive issue of a broken justice system remains

unchanged. Second, while a good leader can make improvements, a bad one can undo them just as quickly. If a community does not have a political voice, there is nothing it can do to sustain the positive changes that were made under the good leader. Therefore, people who suffer from structural violence become accustomed to accepting gifts with an open hand, knowing that if they are snatched back there is nothing they can do about it. Structural violence is the invisible force that keeps the poor in poverty and the oppressed in the margins, because it robs them of the power to influence their circumstances.

### ***Responsibility of the Wealthy***

A common mistake that those with power make is to assume that because structural violence is largely invisible, no one is to blame. However, Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, author and Diversity and Ethics professor at Seattle University, contends that “the complicity or silent acquiescence of those who fail to take responsibility for it and challenge it” makes those with power and privilege guilty of contributing to structural violence (72). The wealthy and powerful – including every white, middle-class American family – are therefore contributors to structural violence by nature of our silence and indifference. Since we are perpetrators, it is then also our responsibility to fight against the unjust systems that we have sustained.

How have we sustained such unjust systems so unwittingly? First, as mentioned, by doing nothing in the face of injustice. We sustain injustice when we let abuse continue without intervention.

We also support injustice every day in the small, seemingly insignificant choices we make. For example, in her book *Everyday Justice*, Julie Clawson explains the myriad of injustices that take place every time we buy a simple cotton T-shirt (Clawson 123). First, most small, family-owned farms in the Global South survive from “harvest to harvest” (124).



Therefore, farmers do not get much of a say in how much they sell their cotton for. They will sell it to whoever is willing to buy it – even if the cost is unfair – because they need the money to survive. This unbalanced dependency of farmers on the unfair prices that corporations pay for raw material contributes to the poverty of many farmers in the Global South. Second, the extraordinary consumption patterns of the Global North demand farmers to grow more cotton, and to grow it faster. This leads farmers to use pesticides on their crops. While pesticides and safety measures are highly regulated in the United States and some other countries, many governments in the South have much looser regulations. Excessive use of dangerous pesticides to increase harvest outputs not only endangers the workers who harvest it, but also nearby communities, leading to sickness and in some cases death (125). Third, to cater to the insatiable thirst of Global Northerners for more clothes at cheaper prices, low-cost outfitters outsource the production of their clothing to factories that sometimes underpay and abuse their employees (127). While we may not be the ones making the corporate decisions to engage in such acts, we become complicit in all this injustice when we make the choice to give our money to companies that do. Almost no one “consciously supports slavery [or] exploitation...but we vote with our money...and we make the ethical decision to support those very things whether we intend to or not” (26). The large effects that our lifestyles and choices have on people all over the world demand that we take responsibility to change the unjust systems of which we are a part.

Another reason that Global Northerners must take responsibility for advocating for justice for communities in the Global South is because we have the ability to do so. The majority of people in the Global North experience greater economic opportunities, political voice, educational opportunities, and social mobility than many people in the Global South. We have the power to speak our minds, the freedom to organize, the hope that we can change problems

that we experience in our communities, and many role models from our communities who have gone before us and accomplished such things. Many people in the South do not have these privileges due to power imbalances caused by structural violence. Therefore, because we are equipped to make a difference, it is our responsibility to do so on behalf of those who are unable to.

Finally, responsibility for global advocacy lies with Global Northerners because human morality requires it. Interestingly, the concept of increased responsibility for the wealthy and powerful is already widely accepted – in theory more than practice – in American culture. For example, the Biblical narrative instructs readers that “to whom much is given, much is expected” (McLaren 20). Popular culture also claims this ideology. In the Spider-Man films, children are taught that “with great power comes great responsibility” (Spider-Man). We must begin to apply this concept to the global power scale. Because the Global North holds greater power, it must also accept greater responsibility to advocate for justice for those in the Global South.

### **C. Reasons for the Present Lack of Advocates**

Though a large portion of responsibility for fighting for global justice lies with those in the Global North, not many people choose to act on this responsibility. Most of us concern ourselves with our own daily lives and struggles, detached from the harsh realities that our southern neighbors live out every day. We struggle to take our responsibility for others seriously for a few reasons.

*Culture.* Western culture plays a big part in our apathy. Cultural researcher Geert Hofstede created a cultural evaluation system to compare and contrast cultures of the world based on six different indices, one of which is individualism versus collectivism. According to his Cultural Indices, the United States has the most individualistic culture in the world (Hofstede

90). People in individualist cultures tend to view themselves primarily as individuals, where “everyone is expected to look after him- or herself” (92). This cultural attitude contributes to the United States’ isolationist policies that do not take interest in international affairs unless the immediate effect on United States citizens is clear. This also explains why the United States can, at the same time, be both extremely active militarily in the world while being much less aggressive in its efforts to alleviate global poverty.

*Us versus Them.* Another characteristic of individualistic cultures is that they maintain strong ideological lines that divide those within the culture and those outside it – a clear distinction between “us” and “them.” In his book *Unclean*, Richard Beck explains that creating this distinction between ourselves and others is part of being human. In order to form our identities, we must construct boundaries around ourselves in order to distinguish between “self” and “other” (Beck). However, this ideology makes it especially easy for those in individualist cultures to feel detached from the injustices of those who they view as “other.” We remain content living in our own communities and consent to leaving those outside to fend for themselves.

Sometimes, however, we do not stop at passivity. This separated “us” and “them” mentality quickly devolves into “us” *versus* “them” when crisis strikes. The current political climate in the United States is a great example. Over the past year, anti-immigration politics have continued to gain momentum at an alarming rate. Talks of detention centers, deportations, and border walls are key topics of debate, deepening the divide between immigrants and natural-born citizens and decreasing our ability to empathize with each other. In the United States, we have come to believe that the two cultures and people groups are extremely different from each other, and our country’s policies and media suggest that Latin American immigrants are responsible for

our country's high unemployment rate, excessive tax burdens, and violent crime. Research has confirmed that these assumptions are simply not true (Hayduk 34). However, many continue to believe them, because it is easier to blame "the other" than to accept the complexity of these very real issues.

Furthermore, when we in the Global North blame "the other" for problems in our own countries and communities, it is not surprising that we do not feel strong motivation to help our neighbors to the south. Oftentimes, we blame them for their own poverty as well. The "us" versus "them" perspective thus contributes to structural violence by causing the powerful to blame the poor and voiceless for the world's problems.

*Elected Apathy.* Finally, the Global North remains largely inactive in advocating for justice for those in the Global South because we *choose* to do nothing. While some argue that ignorance is the primary reason that people in the United States do not do more to help the world's poor, our extensive access to education and information due to technology and globalization leaves us unable to claim ignorance. Christian Theologian Miroslav Volf claims that "Evil as ignorance presupposes too much false innocence and generates too many vain hopes" (Volf 76). While information on the harsh realities of the world surrounds us, we choose to turn away. Artist John Berger poetically noted that "We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice" (Berger 8).

In the Global North, we choose to turn our backs on suffering, remaining content with our complacency. We say that we ignore the suffering of others because we do not believe we can make a difference, because we do not know how, or because we are afraid of what it might cost us. Each of those reasons is correct. However, due to our privilege, our power, and our knowledge, in the end it comes down to whether or not we choose to act. The Global North is not

engaged in fighting poverty and injustice to the extent that the world's suffering demands because we choose not to accept responsibility for those we view as different from ourselves.

#### **D. The Positioning of International Volunteers to Make a Difference**

While everyone in the Global North is responsible for advocating for those in the Global South, international volunteers are perfectly positioned to step into roles of global advocacy. The primary reason for this is because individuals who commit months or years of their lives to serve abroad have already taken a step toward gaining a greater sense of global social responsibility. They have left the comforts of home behind to join a group that is unlike their own. In their book *Being White*, authors Paula Harris and Doug Schaupp analyze how white people can take steps toward reconciliation with people of other cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds. The first step, they contend, is called *displacement*:

“[When] the white person chooses to put herself in a context where people of color are dominant in number and culture and whites are in the minority, we call this *displacement*... The key word in displacement is learning to submit and becoming a student of nonwhite cultures. The white person learns the other culture—celebrations, conflict-resolution styles and so on—and begins having productive, healthy conflict...”  
(Harris 20).

International volunteers have already taken the first step of displacement by joining a new cultural community. While moving abroad is not enough on its own to increase global responsibility (see section IV:D), it is an important step. In joining another cultural community, volunteers “come to understand [their] deepest identity not as independent individuals but in [their] relationships with others” who are different from them (Groody 221). “It’s impossible to change the world and remain comfortable,” and volunteers have already rejected the comforts of

home in search of making a difference (Angone). Therefore, volunteers are ideally situated to step into roles of global advocacy because they have already taken the first step of becoming students of another cultural community. In section IV:A we will discuss why community relationships lead to a greater sense of global social responsibility and to greater volunteer impact.

### **III. Research Ideation**

With these convictions in mind, I arrived in Cofradía, Cortes, Honduras in July of 2016 to conduct fieldwork and to begin my year as a volunteer teacher with Bilingual Education for Central America (BECA). After spending a month researching various aspects of culture, justice, and poverty in Honduras, I realized that with each new story I heard, I wanted to learn more. I felt that I needed to gain deeper understanding of each of the issues and the complex connections between them so that I could do something about the injustices I encountered. I also found myself frustrated with the assumption that many volunteers made: that our impact on the community was limited to our time on-the-ground. I decided that there must be a way to extend the impact of the volunteer beyond the confines of a year-long contract and beyond the geographical boundaries of the community. From this perspective, I developed my research questions: (1) how can foreign volunteers become engaged and committed to the development of the community *beyond* their time as volunteers in the host country, and (2) what can I do about it.

I started by researching what factors contribute to volunteer retention rates. Though volunteer retention was not my intended focus, the information I found helped me understand the factors that make people feel particularly invested in a community. Volunteer retention is also important because in a healthy, community-oriented organization, longer volunteer commitments

create stability within the organization and the community and a larger impact on that community.

Another question I asked was “What causes some alumni to stay involved and to regularly return to the community for years after their time teaching in-country?” Again, though the focus of my research was on extended impact on the community in general, extended involvement in the organization is the most obvious measure of that. The reasons that alumni continue their involvement in the organizations often correlate with their reasons for giving back in other ways as well.

Since BECA volunteers and alumni already have a strong presence in the community that continues far beyond a single-year commitment, I decided to take an appreciative inquiry stance in my research. By identifying a consistent pattern, I extrapolated the characteristics of volunteer organizations that tend to develop life-long advocates. Likewise, my qualitative research revealed gaps in the patterns that helped me develop ways that the organization can improve long-term volunteer engagement.

Using participatory observations, interviews, and literary research, I found that volunteer impact is expanded through (A) intentional community relationships, (B) support and guidance from the greater nonprofit community, (C) a strong alumni network, and (D) comprehensive cultural, social, and political training. BECA champions each of these characteristics but one: it lacks a cultural training curriculum. Therefore, in conjunction with BECA’s Board of Directors, I wrote a cultural training curriculum for volunteers called *Culture in Context*. The goal of this curriculum is to prepare volunteers to engage in more meaningful ways in the community; to foster a greater understanding of the global context in which violence, poverty, and inequality

thrive; to increase their sense of global social responsibility; and to guide them in discovering their place in supporting the community's development.

#### **IV. Four Characteristics of Organizations that Nurture Impactful Volunteers**

##### **A. Fostering Intentional, Reciprocal Community Relationships**

The cornerstone value of BECA is that the organization does not seek its own predetermined goal. Rather, it partners with families and leaders in the Cofradía community to provide a high-quality education for children. The mission of the organization is two-pronged: to provide a high-quality, bilingual education that is accessible to all families in the community, and to promote meaningful cultural exchange (BECA). As such, community relationships are essential to the identity of the organization. BECA believes that without reciprocal partnerships rooted in equality and mutuality, the work that a foreign volunteer can accomplish is minimal or even damaging.

This belief is consistent with much of modern development literature. In his book *Walking With the Poor*, Bryant Myers contends that transformational development “must begin with people, not abstractions, research analysis, or technique” (Myers 185). Building relationships with those we seek to help changes how we see the world and each other. No longer can we look at the poor with pity or judgement, but with friendship and care. We must not serve with a mindset to do things *for* poor people but *with* them.

This partnership and commitment to relationship is not just what makes BECA different from other organizations. The organization's Board of Directors, its volunteers, and the Cofradía community agree that it is also the key to the organization's success. While other bilingual schools exist throughout the Cofradía area, none have the reputation that BECA does for putting the community first. The effects of community partnership extend beyond following accepted



development wisdom and making friends in the community. Developing relationships is what creates lasting change. This is true for two reasons.

First, reciprocal learning through cultural exchange allows volunteers to help a community while also allowing the community to teach volunteers about culture, language, local skills, and community values. This allows for free-flowing exchange of information, where both parties benefit and neither are seen as greater than the other. Forming this type of authentic relationship leads to opportunities to serve communities at a deeper level.

Second, humans find meaning and purpose in relationships. By developing personal connections with local families in the community, volunteers *become* part of the community and find greater meaning in their work. In their study on volunteer retention factors, Denise Sevick Bortree and Richard D. Waters found that one of the primary factors for volunteer satisfaction in an organization is the relationships built within the local community (Bortree). This is certainly true for international volunteers who often do not have existing support systems in the communities in which they work.

While volunteer satisfaction need not necessarily be part of an organization's mission or vision, it must be recognized as a high priority in order to foster long-term social impact. When volunteers become part of a community, their sense of responsibility toward that community increases, resulting in longer-term commitments to serve that community. If an organization desires volunteers to extend their commitment with the organization or find alternative ways to serve the community after their time on-the-ground is complete, they must ensure that their volunteers are satisfied and find meaning in their community. Stable relationships with locals outside the volunteer group are a large part of this. A volunteer with deep relational roots in a community is an advocate of that community for life.

Because of the meaningful community relationships that they established, many BECA volunteers return 2, 3, and even 6 years after their time volunteering in Cofradía to visit friends that they made during their time serving there (Tackett-Koppel). These trips are not planned by BECA; they are driven by the alumni's own desire to spend time with the people they became close with in the community. People do not care about a community or region to this extent unless they have deep relationships with the people there. In this way, developing authentic community partnerships and relationships is essential to extending the impact of volunteers beyond their time of service and to creating lasting social change.

### **B. Working Together with the Greater Nonprofit Community**

The second key principle I discovered through my research was that volunteer impact is extended when organizational connections are extensive. Sometimes small organizations keep themselves insulated, focusing on the task at hand and on convincing volunteers to stay with the organization for as long as possible. Nonprofits create opportunities for longer impact by expanding the volunteer's scope of other social justice endeavors in-country that they can be a part of once they have finished their contract with their current organization. In fact, volunteers who feel that their organizations want what is best for them in the long term, even if it means working for another organization, report that they feel more satisfied with their organization (Newton 515).

BECA's founder, Jamie Tackett-Koppel, confirmed that inter-organizational relationships are greatly valued within BECA. "Some people come to BECA and do not want to be teachers for their whole lives," she admitted. "So introducing them to different opportunities within the country could be really valuable to them" (Tackett-Koppel). Additionally, forming relationships

with other nonprofits both in-country and abroad can create a two-way flow of information that can benefit both groups and the work they seek to accomplish.

While in recent years, BECA has been fairly inactive in the greater nonprofit network in-country, this is beginning to change. For example, this year, BECA laid the groundwork for a partnership with *The Leadership Center (TLC)*, a nonprofit leadership and business school for girls located in the mountains outside of Tegucigalpa. Two graduates from the school came to live and work with the international volunteers in BECA schools this year, and they have contributed greatly to the mission and success of the organization. As a result, TLC formalized a partnership with BECA for the coming year, so that more graduates from the school can integrate into BECA as part of their studies at TLC. The TLC-BECA partnership is a perfect example of how partnerships can be mutually beneficial for two organizations.

Additionally, I sought out nonprofit connections myself as I traveled and met business owners, local community activists, and other local and international volunteers. I also participated in an emergency shelter construction trip in a rural village in southern Honduras with an organization called *Un Techo para mi Pais (TECHO)*. Each of my experiences expanded my own NGO network this year and gave me new ideas, insights, and relationships that greatly affected my work and desire to stay in Honduras.

### **C. Nurturing an Active Alumni Community**

While the BECA Board of Directors is currently working to create a more formal alumni association, the involvement of alumni in the organization is impossible to miss after spending any amount of time on-the-ground with BECA. Previous volunteers are constantly in-and-out of the community, spending time with families, visiting the classes they taught during their time as volunteers, and leading trainings for volunteers based on the various expertise and experiences

they hold. For example, this year alone, four previous volunteers planned, managed, and taught the four-week teacher training course over the summer; an ex-volunteer came in March for a week to cover a current volunteer's position while he was out on paternity leave; and one former volunteer took a week off from his graduate studies to come and teach BECA volunteers about violence against women in Central American gangs. BECA alumni are notorious for showing up in Cofradía all throughout the year.

Alumni involvement is essential for long-term impact in the community for a few reasons. First, by definition, a group of active alumni is a group that is still involved in the organization and thus has the potential to positively impact that community. Second, an alumni network that is well established provides a way for the organization to communicate how alumni can help the organization. BECA alumni currently support the organization by providing specialized trainings, helping with recruitment, running the interview process for applicants, organizing fundraisers, and donating directly to the organization (Kiken). Third, when alumni have a platform by which they can communicate with each other, they can find out about projects and initiatives that other alumni are working on to benefit the community in which they volunteered. For example, BECA alumni have extended their impact in Honduran communities by: becoming long-term teachers in other schools in Honduras; sharing their experiences to help change the negative perception of Honduras; working as legal representatives for Central American immigrants with organizations such as "Kids in Need of Defense"; developing Latin American focused social services programs including The Center for Reproductive Rights' Latin American project; etc. (Tackett-Koppel). The BECA Board is currently working to strengthen the alumni community by providing more outlets for alumni to communicate with each other and

share the projects they are working on for the betterment of Honduras and for Latin Americans as a whole.

#### **D. Instilling Cultural, Social, and Political Values in Volunteers through a Comprehensive Training Program**

The final factor in expanding volunteer impact is the most practically applicable. It was also the one factor that BECA was missing, and consequently where I found the opportunity to make a difference. Comprehensive volunteer training is essential in sustaining impact.

Volunteers must engage in critical thinking about culture, politics, justice issues, historical factors of poverty, and social norms in order to become contributing, informed members of the community both during and after their time of service in the host-country.

Research strongly supports the idea that proper volunteer training in these areas is essential for the effectiveness, sustainability, and sense of global social responsibility of individual volunteers and organizations. A study conducted at the University of Hong Kong suggests that volunteering abroad does not, by itself, increase volunteers' sense of social responsibility (Cheung). Students in this study showed no change in their levels of social responsibility before and after their time spent abroad (Cheung). Since volunteering abroad is not enough to motivate a person to engage in working for more social change, organizations must do more to instill this value in their volunteers.

Likewise, in a study conducted of adult students in a Master's study abroad program in the United Kingdom, researchers recognized that time abroad is not enough to change student's perspective. These researchers then sought to determine "what kind of experiences and teaching tactics can best prepare adults for global citizenship and social responsibility" (Coryell). They found that the combination of living in a foreign context and engaging in intentional cultural

conversations positively affects students' sense of social responsibility after their time abroad ends (Coryell). Volunteer work does not explicitly affect social responsibility. However, a cultural curriculum that helps volunteers connect their experience with the "bigger picture" helps volunteers consider how they can be part of creating change even after they return home.

Volunteers who can make connections between their experiences and the larger global-social-political scene are volunteers who are prepared to challenge oppressive systems in unique ways.

Cultural training also helps volunteers manage different forms of culture shock.

Expatriates all experience culture shock differently. However, one study found that comprehensive cultural training positively correlates with: (1) reduced cultural adjustment periods; (2) better cultural proficiency; and (3) a reduction in the time that it takes expatriates to become "efficient and productive" in their positions abroad (Eschbach 284). Another study of expatriates working for nonprofit organizations in Western and Central Africa reported that volunteers who feel more satisfied with their work and more comfortable in their context will be more likely to continue their service and to do so successfully (Ritchie 325). Cultural training to curb the effects of culture shock is, therefore, not a superfluous service solely for the benefit of the volunteers, but a tactic to extend impact and create meaningful change.

Furthermore, studies have shown that investing in volunteers can itself be a powerful tool for social change. One group of researchers believed that investment in individual volunteers is not only an investment into the organization, but also into society at large, creating positive "social returns" (Manetti 2106). Their study at a nonprofit family camp confirmed their theory. They found that volunteers who were trained well and felt that they were invested into through professional development courses reported higher satisfaction and a higher sense of purpose than volunteers who did not receive this training (Manetti 2108). Therefore, if an organization wants

its volunteers to continue supporting and investing in the community or in society at large, investing into volunteers through targeted, intentional cultural, political, and social training is essential.

## **V. The Project: Development**

### **A. Ideation**

After discovering that community relationships, other NGO connections, a strong alumni network, and a comprehensive cultural training program increase positive impact, I considered what I could do to support BECA's efforts in developing committed volunteers. I quickly realized that out of those four factors, the piece that was missing from the BECA program was a comprehensive cultural, social, political training program. Therefore, with guidance from BECA's Board of Directors and In-Country Director, and I began the process of creating a curriculum for a volunteer cultural training course titled *Culture in Context*.

### **B. Challenges and Limitations**

Before I began, I recognized that I had two large challenges ahead of me. The first was that the program must not focus entirely on Honduran culture; it must also encompass the cultures represented by every volunteer. Mirian Paz, a Honduran BECA volunteer, freely spoke about how cultural adjustment had been extremely difficult for her while working with BECA. "[Americans] have a way different culture than mine. We do things differently... [For example] you say something and you actually mean something else... it's been challenging" (Paz). Therefore, my challenge was not just to inform Americans about Honduran culture, but to foster greater cultural exchange within the group.

The second limitation I would face became most apparent to me during an interview I had with Rosa Hernandez, another of the bilingual Hondurans on the BECA team. When I asked

her if she felt cultural training was important, she responded: “There is value in it – a lot of value in it. But it depends on the information you’re getting. Someone who doesn’t have experience being here sharing about things – the information [they present] isn’t really what’s going on. Even though [volunteers] live here you don’t talk to many Hondurans. We should share about those [Honduran] things” (Hernandez). As an American volunteer who had only been in the country a short time, I realized that I could not and *should* not play the role of Honduran cultural expert. However, refusing to take on the role of cultural educator complicated the task of creating a cultural curriculum. I moved forward with the curriculum cautiously. Acknowledging my limitations, I created lessons that allow for cultural exchange and knowledge sharing, encourage volunteers to draw their own conclusions, and focus on how global issues relate to Honduras rather than on purely Honduran issues.

### **C. Planning**

Once I set those ground rules, I developed curriculum goals. BECA’s In-Country Director Hannah Bryant and I asked ourselves, *What do volunteers need to know in order to develop (1) an in-depth understanding of the context in which they live, and (2) empathy toward those who live in this context?* We recognized the necessity to include space for self-reflection in each lesson, since transferring information is not an effective teaching strategy for the complex topics we would discuss. We want volunteers to figure out their place in it all – to understand how their actions, assumptions, and political convictions are deeply interwoven with the realities that their Honduran coworkers, students, and neighbors experience.

We then consulted the Board of Directors and the current volunteer cohort to brainstorm ideas that they had for what volunteers should learn more about. Bryant and I combined these lists with our own and narrowed them down to a list of 15 topics that are specific to the context



of Cofradía yet general enough to be used for years to come. We then organized them according to the volunteer calendar. BECA volunteers arrive in July and leave in June of the following year. We considered the different stages of culture shock and cultural adjustment in planning the timing of the discussions, recognizing that some of the heavier topics might overwhelm volunteers early on while they are still adjusting. The suggested schedule can be found in the leader's manual of the curriculum.

After finalizing the list, I developed a set of learning objectives for each topic. These objectives guided the development of each text, activity, and discussion. Unlike most learning objectives, these objectives are in question form. This is because we want each volunteer to arrive at his/her own unique conclusions based on the information presented. Our goal is that each volunteer will process each of the questions by the end of the session and interpret them based on his/her own experiences and convictions. We included the lesson objectives in the leader's manual as well.

#### **D. Implementation and Adjustment**

After completing our list of lesson goals, I began researching articles, videos, journals, and books for resources that would address each learning objective. I began implementing the content immediately after creating the first topic in December of 2016. I learned something new every time I led a session, and I continuously adjusted the curriculum accordingly. For example, I realized that some of the volunteers in the group quickly grew weary of reading and discussing articles every week. Because of this, I drew upon my experience as a teacher to differentiate the lessons to make them more engaging for all volunteers. These activities include variations such as creating mind-maps, analyzing case studies, watching short documentaries, making presentations, and inviting guest speakers.

At the suggestion of Bryant, who simultaneously began implementing the curriculum at another BECA site, I began to add a leader's guide to each lesson. The guide includes step-by-step suggestions for how to give the lesson, at least one recommended activity, and a list of resources and materials needed to give the lesson as suggested. The simple layout of the guide is intended to make application of the lesson as easy as possible, so that whoever leads the lesson can pick it up and implement it with little to no preparation.

After implementing a handful of lessons, I also began adding an introduction section to each topic. I realized that it was not always initially clear how the resource fit the topic, or what the connection between the topic and our current context was. I wanted volunteers to have a better idea about where the discussion was headed. In some of the topics—the immigration lesson, for example—I also included numbers and statistics in the introduction to provide context for the lesson.

### **E. Results and Future Plans**

At the time of this writing, I have led five *Culture in Context* sessions using this curriculum (Environmental Issues: Water, Immigration, Poverty: Global and Local Solutions, Religion, and Poverty: Roots, Systems, and Cycles). Each session has inspired meaningful reflection, and two sessions derailed from the curriculum due to lively discussions. In our view, the derailed sessions are our biggest successes, because it shows us that volunteers are engaging with the material, drawing connections, and asking tough questions. This is the result we were aiming for.

Now that the curriculum is complete, we are ready to implement it full-scale for the arrival of the next group of volunteers in July. BECA has allocated a small budget for the project, with which we will print course manuals for each volunteer. I will lead *Culture in*

*Context* again next year, and I intend to continue evaluating and improving the curriculum as we discover what works, what does not work, and what is missing.

## **V. Conclusion**

Sustainable organizations that make the greatest impact on communities are those that cultivate their volunteers into global advocates by valuing relationships with community members, making meaningful connections with other like-minded organizations, fostering a strong alumni community, and expanding their volunteers' perspectives through a cultural training course. These four components target the needs of the organization, the volunteers, and the community alike, because they encourage volunteers to remain engaged in the host-community for the long-term. While volunteers often have the perspective that their impact expires with their contract, their experience with an organization that equips them for impact in the above ways gives them the opportunity to have deeper, more extensive effects on the community both during and after their time on the ground. I look forward to observing this impact unfold next year as the Cofradía community benefits from a volunteer cohort that is engaged and committed to the development of the community.

## Works Cited

- Beck, Richard Allan. *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Morality*. Eugene, Or.: Cascade, 2011. Print.
- Angone, Paul. *All Groan Up: Searching for Self, Faith, and a Freaking Job*. Zondervan, 2015. Print.
- Berger, John, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb, and Richard Hollis. *Ways of Seeing*, 1973. Print.
- Bortree, Denise Sevick, and Richard D. Waters. "Race and Inclusion in Volunteerism: Using Communication Theory to Improve Volunteer Retention." *Journal of Public Relations Research* 26.3 (2014): 215-234. Print.
- Cheung, Chau-kiu, T. Lo, and Suk-ching Liu. "Relationships Between Volunteerism And Social Responsibility In Young Volunteers." *Voluntas: International Journal Of Voluntary & Nonprofit Organizations* 26.3 (2015): 872-889. Academic Search Premier. Web. 20 Oct. 2016.
- Clawson, Julie. *Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of our Daily Choices*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009
- Coryell, J. E., B. J. Spencer, and O. Sehin. "Cosmopolitan Adult Education and Global Citizenship: Perceptions from a European Itinerant Graduate Professional Study Abroad Program." *Adult Education Quarterly* 64.2 (2014): 145-164. Print.
- Eschbach, Doris, Gerald Parker, and Philipp Stoeberl. "American Repatriate Employees' Retrospective Assessments of the Effects of Cross-Cultural Training on Their Adaptation to International Assignments." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 12.2 (2001): 270-287. Print.

- Groody, Daniel. *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace*. New York: Orbis Books, 2015.
- Hayduk, Ron. "Immigration, Race and Community Revitalization." *The Aspen Institute*. 2015.
- Harris, Paula and Doug Schaupp. "Being White: Finding Our Place in a Multiethnic World." InterVarsity Press. September 2004.
- Hernandez, Rosa. Personal Interview. 25 October 2016.
- Hofstede, G., G. Hofstede, and Michael Minkov. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.
- Kiken, Yael. Personal Interview. 22 March 2016.
- Leigh, Robert and Volunteers United Nations. *State of the World's Volunteerism Report, 2011 : Universal Values for Global Well-Being*. United Nations Publications, 2011.
- Manetti, G., et al. "Investing in Volunteering: Measuring Social Returns of Volunteer Recruitment, Training and Management." *VOLUNTAS* 26.5 (2015): 2104-2129. Print.
- McLaren, Brian D., Elisa Padilla, and Ashley Bunting. Seeber. *The Justice Project*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009. Print.
- Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia. *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as an Ecological-Economic Vocation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.
- Myers, Bryant L. *Walking with the poor: principles and practices of transformational development*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis , 1999. Print.
- Newton, Cameron, Karen Becker, and Sarah Bell. "Learning and Development Opportunities As a Tool for the Retention of Volunteers: A Motivational Perspective." *Human Resource Management Journal* 24.4 (2014): 514-530. Print.
- Paz, Mirian. Personal Interview. 25 October 2016.

- Ritchie, William, et al. "Expatriate Cultural Antecedents And Outcomes." *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 25.3 (2015): 325-342. Business Source Complete. Web. 20 Oct. 2016.
- Rhoads, Robert A. and Katalin Szélényi. *Global Citizenship and the University: Advancing Social Life and Relations in an Interdependent World*. Stanford University Press, 2011.
- Spider-Man*. Dir. Sam Raimi. Marvel Enterprises, 2002. Film.
- Tackett-Koppel, Jamie. "BECA: Culture and Context Development." Personal Interview. 20 Jan. 2017.
- Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996. Print.