

# BLACK AMERICAN PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

== OUR STORY ==

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# Greetings Friends!

Whether you are a current or future Peace Corps Volunteer, a friend or family member of a volunteer or just curious about the everyday life of a volunteer, thank you for checking out this book.

The stories shared here are from courageous men and women who selflessly committed to 27 months of service work in various countries around the world.

Each unique individual's story offers a snapshot of the kinds of challenges and successes faced each day in their host country, how the journey has transformed their lives and why they chose to answer the Peace Corps calling.

Life as a Peace Corps Volunteer is by no means easy and everyone's adjustment to a new environment is different. But we can all agree that taking on this backpack of uncertainty and adventure is completely inspiring.

This interview series is volume 1 of many to come with Black American Peace Corps Volunteers. Hopefully it stirs in the reader a pride and admiration for those that embarked on this journey. And just maybe an inclination that one day you can become a Peace Corps Volunteer too!

-Tamara Buchanan 

**The author is a current Local Government Capacity Building Peace Corps Volunteer in Botswana (2014-2016).**

**She's Jamaican American sprouted in Connecticut and makes residence wherever her backpack lands.**

# Country of Service



Ukraine [Map/Flag](#)



**Sector:** Education

**Assignment Area:** TEFL University Instructor

**Site:** Lviv Polytechnic National University, Lviv

**Sector:** Youth Development

**Assignment Area:** Youth Project Coordinator

**Site:** Selibeng (pronounced Si-dee-BANG) Youth Centre, Mohale's

Lesotho [Map/Flag](#)



# Brian L. Williams

*Ukraine 2011 - 2013*

*Lesotho 2003 - 2005*

## 1. Please introduce yourself.

I'm Byron L. Williams: a father, a husband, a two-time Peace Corps Volunteer. Having lived on two foreign continents, learned three foreign languages in my lifetime based on employment. I believe many people of color should travel abroad, not solely as tourists, so I share as much as I know to make this possible.



## **2. What sparked your interest in joining the Peace Corps?**

Since I was in the 10th grade I had a strong desire to live internationally. Towards the end of college I discovered the professional opportunity with Peace Corps and never considered another option. It all started with a chance conversation at a career fair with a Peace Corps recruiter that stuck with me.

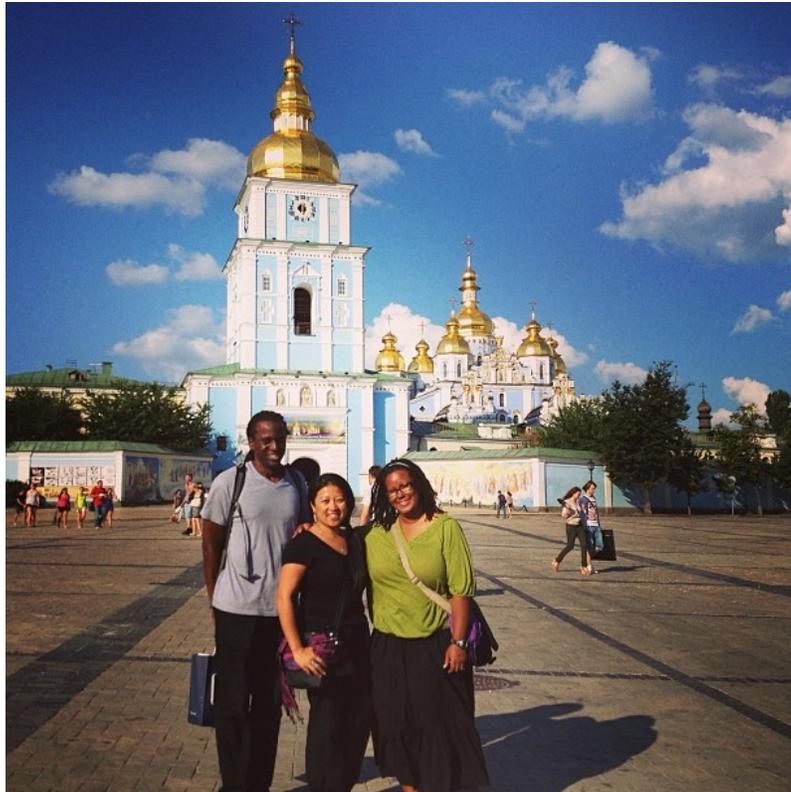
## **3. As black American traveler, what advice would you give to others inspired to join the Peace Corps but afraid to take the first step?**

Before starting your application take the time to converse with at least two people of color (hopefully who identify as Black): a Peace Corps staff member who served in Peace Corps and works for the agency and one who doesn't work for the agency. Take the time to hear what people did in country, why they chose to serve, what their average day was like, what their challenges were and so on. Keep in mind I recommend at least two but depending on your curiosity it can be more. And if your parent is heavily involved in this decision have them with you when you talk with people who have served.

## **4. What is the most interesting experience you've had in the countries you've served?**

In Lesotho it was the fact of being able to blend in since I'm dark-skinned like many of the people of Lesotho. With my language skills it enabled me to hear what other people who didn't speak Sesotho well couldn't hear. My skin tone also was a magnet for conversations revolving around the slave trade and the state of Black Americans in the United States. Never in a million years did I

think I'd have to explain slavery and its effect on Black America while living in Africa but I quickly came to the realization that many Basotho were not aware because it is not taught in school. There was a disconnect between the famous Black Americans they saw in the media and me as an average, everyday Black American.



While in Ukraine some of my more interesting experiences included Ukrainians inquiring about my locs, African students wanting me to teach them to speak like I speak in English to “get rid” of their accent, and many times when Ukrainians were just plain shocked to hear me speak Ukrainian. My Ukrainian wasn't spectacular but with what I knew, just the simple fact I spoke what I knew opened so many doors and gained me much respect with people from all backgrounds. Grandmothers to school children to university faculty to grocery store workers to the guys I played basketball with regularly.

## **5. How did people in Ukraine react when you told them you were a PCV?**

For me to tell them I was a PCV was not surprising. What tended to throw them off was when they found out I was American and not African, African meaning not directly from the continent. They were accustomed to African university students being in their country but not a working professional Black person like myself. Many times I felt like a celebrity due to the photos and such. I was also very aware to initiate conversations around race when I felt the person, American, African, or European could handle it. I was all about having educational conversations with those people who were mature enough to tackle such topics, mindsets, and viewpoints.

## **6. Why did you decide to serve for a second time and was the application process the same?**

I loved my first service in Africa so much that I knew some time in my life I'd serve a second time. Just so happened I met my wife who had developed a strong desire to serve in Peace Corps well before she had met me. After we had been married for a few years and the time was right we discussed and agreed we'd do PC together. The application the second time around was the same as the first but it was more involved in the sense PC had to consider us together, as one, instead of it just being me. With our recruiter, ***Elene Hertweck*** out of the **Northern Calif Regional Recruitment Office**, she made it easier because she was always working hard to make sure we had all of our paperwork in to be considered for programs she thought we'd both be competitive for. We had our reservations about Ukraine when we accepted the assignment but it ended up being the best program for us and our future.

## 7. Where can people get in touch with you if they have any questions?

You can find me on:

**Twitter** @ByronLWilliams

**Instagram** ByronLWilliams.

# Country of Service



Guinea [Map](#)/ [Flag](#)



# Carla Whyte

*Guinea 2012 - 2014*

## 1. Please introduce yourself.

My name is Carla Camille Whyte and I am a Brooklyn native. I studied Sociology during my undergraduate years at Lehman College, one of the senior colleges of the City University of New York and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology in 2010.



## **2. What sparked your interest in joining the Peace Corps?**

Immediately after graduating from Lehman College, I traveled to Liberia in West Africa for a three month internship where I worked on a consulting basis with the Senior Minister of Education. My responsibilities involved working with the Early Childhood Education group to facilitate trainings geared at teaching pedagogy to Early Childhood teachers. In addition I worked with another consultant to identify deficiencies within the Ministry and worked on a strategic plan to address those deficiencies.

While traveling to Liberia's countryside for a four day staff retreat and professional development training, I received my first opportunity to get out of the city of Monrovia and see some of the most beautiful landscapes and nature that I had ever seen in my life. I pretty much decided in those four days that there was significantly more beauty to the African continent and that I wanted to see as much as of it as possible. Enter Peace Corps.

I learned about Peace Corps through a returned volunteer who spoke on a panel organized by the same organization that arranged my trip to Liberia. She had served in Costa Rica as a youth development volunteer and everything about her experience spoke to me. It took me a while to build up the courage to start my Peace Corps application and then finally submit it.

I knew that Peace Corps would be a guaranteed vehicle in terms of bringing me back to the continent of Africa with the support I would need to still function (monthly guaranteed salary, health insurance, housing) daily while getting

grassroots experience working with youth and being exposed to another culture. I also knew that I wanted to go to graduate school but had no idea what program

I would apply for and felt like my Peace Corps experience would help to inform my decision on what graduate program I selected. The benefits that come with the Coverdell Fellows Program were also very enticing.



### **3. As a black American traveler, what advice would you give to others inspired to join the Peace Corps but afraid to take the first step?**

Go. The world is waiting for us. In general, most people I came across were surprised to learn that I was black AND American. From South Korea to the Emirates to Guinea, folks were always surprised and would sometimes ask follow-up questions with regards to where my parents were from or whether I was born elsewhere but raised in the States (a thing that was never done to white foreigners from what I witnessed) because the idea that I could be both was slightly flabbergasting for them.

That's a bigger testament to the fact that once you step outside of America, people's beliefs about black and people and experiences with black people are limited. Often times the images that people see on television are what they associate with black people and even though they know, via television that there are black people in America, they have no idea about the Black experience in America.

As a Peace Corps volunteer (and while working for any other NGO or while simply traveling abroad), whether we like it or not we are ambassadors for our country. People do pay attention to the things you say, do, eat, etc and when you're black, people seem to be a little bit more curious because the amount of black American travelers who are just globe trotting for fun or working with a fancy NGO are few and far between.

In Korea people always thought instinctively that I was Nigerian and that I worked as a hair braider or something like that because there actually was a

community of Nigerians in Seoul, Korea doing things like hair braiding, etc to make a living. But that's not the only narrative for us black people.

And I think the more that black people decide to travel and see the world like many of our white counterparts, for example, we can change that narrative. Why are they the "normal"? Why are we the "deviants"? We have a story to tell too and America is not just "the white people's place". It was built on the backs of Africans for crying out loud. So go ...see the world....do what we were never meant to do even though our ancestors are the ones who created the economy that has enabled America to be the nation that it is....

#### **4. What is the most interesting experience you've had in the countries you've served:**

Trying to explain to a Guinean, the normalcy of this idea of "independence" and "capitalism"; it's hard to explain. So much of the culture is grounded in brotherhood, family, compassion, etc..and it's a pre-dominantly Muslim country ..one of the pillars of Islam is "giving" or "supporting the needy" ...so even when people may not have everything, they will still give to someone who has nothing.

The idea of capitalism is mind-boggling for some as a result: how can you sit by eating shrimp scampi for example while a homeless person is outside cold and hungry and it not bother you? They thought it was **INSANE**.

The family unit is also extremely important in West African culture and marriage is a highly sacred (in theory) ritual as it's the medium through which families and

created – large families equals wealth. So explaining to my Guinean friends that I was a 25 year old woman with no husband, no fiancé, no boyfriend, no children and no prospects was mind boggling.

They thought I was crazy for not wanting a man and wanting to go back to school to further my education with no solid plan for how I would find a husband. “You must not want one” they would say to me because I was not “putting it into my plan”.

I would say “you can not plan to meet the person you’ll fall in love with” ...but the concept of falling madly in love with someone was also difficult for some folks to wrap their heads around. “No one is perfect” my math teacher colleague would say to me constantly. “If you wait all your life for the person who will have you head over heels, you will die alone..that person doesn’t exist”.

### **5. How did people in your Peace Corps country react when you told them you were a PCV?**

**Surprised.** For sure. “But you’re black...” ...yeah it was annoying. I had a rough time with it for a while but eventually just got too tired to explaining myself and thanked God that my darker skin made me less of a target for petty theft.

Hey...whatever works.

## 6. Where can people get in touch with you if they have any questions?

**Email:** [whyte.carlac@gmail.com](mailto:whyte.carlac@gmail.com)

**Instagram:** [@luvslethal\\_bro](https://www.instagram.com/luvslethal_bro)

**Blog:** [carlacou.tumblr.com](http://carlacou.tumblr.com)  
*(for excerpts from my Peace Corps service)*

# Country of Service



Ethiopia [Flag/Map](#)

**Sector:** Food Security/ Agriculture

**Projects:** Gardening Projects for HIV+ women and Business Classes for Rural Women Farmers

**Site:** SNNPR, Ethiopia



# Breanna N. Wright

*Ethiopia*  
*Oct 2011- Dec 2014*

## 1. Please introduce yourself.

How to introduce yourself, without sounding like you are signing up for OKCupid? Here is my attempt. I am a recently Returned Food Security Peace Corps Volunteer; I served in rural Ethiopia and collaborated with key government officials and community members to establish a small-scale garden project with female headed households to improve maternal and child nutritional intake and conducted a five-week training for 73 rural women business owners that focused on basic business concepts, including budgeting, inventory, and competitive pricing.



I extended my service as a third year volunteer with Catholic Relief Services, where we conducted a disability inclusion assessment that analyzed the current living situation and inclusion of people with disabilities across the program, monitored implementation of health, nutrition and gender related activities, and responded to request for proposals for disaster risk reduction, health, and education programs.

Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, I am currently in DC working for the Program Development Coordinator for CNFA's New Business Team by supporting the proposal process by developing expressions of interest and proposals, ensuring compliance with the procurement requirements of donor organizations, overseeing the proposal process from release to submission, and recruiting qualified candidates for program implementation. When I am not typing away at my desk, I'm clinging to the rail attempting to ice-skate, taking salsa lessons, and singing in the mirror with a brush as my mic.

## **2. What sparked your interest in joining the Peace Corps?**

To teach and to learn, that's what I wrote in my application. I knew that some part of my life would involve working in the **community** and I felt like if I could work in a community here I didn't know the culture, language, history and make a difference; then I could take those lessons and apply it to a culture with which I am familiar, know the history, language. I **wanted to live in Africa**, anywhere, and really know that country's history; as a Black American you don't have that linkage.

### 3. As a black American traveler, what advice would you give to others inspired to join the Peace Corps but afraid to take the first step?

Evaluate why you want to do it, write it down, and then **do it!**

### 4. What did you learn about yourself while living in Ethiopia?

PC will make you feel like you conducted a SWOT on yourself, I know my strengths, weakness', opportunities, and threats (triggers). I learned how to fight for strength, positivity, and my happiness, I gained a different perspective about the world, learned I am a feminist, that so many things that seemed that mattered don't, **I learned who I am at my core**, reinforced images of myself I already had, and challenged others that I believed, learned to identify myself for myself without others telling me who they think I am.



## **5. How did people (in Ethiopia) react when you told them you were a Peace Corps Volunteer?**

Very fondly. I would meet people on hot bus rides that had a Peace Corps teacher from 50 years ago, 40 years ago and how Mr or Ms so and so (they always remembered their name) really taught them XYZ. Not everyone know what PC was, simply because we had to leave during war. But, those that did were always extremely excited. More people were surprised that I was not Ethiopian.

## **6. What is life like now for you as a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer?**

I've been back about 4 months. So hard to answer this question and express the various feelings. At times it feels like the two worlds don't exist together. In other ways, I can feel the difference, feel how I've changed.

## **7. Can you share any advice for volunteers to remember on those days when they feel like giving up or *Early Terminating*?**

Talk to your friends, use resources around you. **Don't remain silent, speak to someone.** Think about why you joined, know if you are going through a tough period of time or if it's a consistent feeling, reach out to PC sometimes it's something they can help with. Many people have hard times in their service, and that's ok. But, don't be afraid to make the decision that's best for you. There is

strength in ending your service just as much as, if not more than, the strength in deciding to stay.

**8. Where can people get in touch with you if they have any questions  
(Leave your social media info and blog link if you'd like!)**

**Email:**

[Bnw0404@gmail.com](mailto:Bnw0404@gmail.com)

Don't hesitate to reach out to me!

# Country of Service



Ghana [Map/Flag](#)

**Sector:** Education

**Assignment Area:** SHS BIOLOGY teacher

**Site:** Ghana



# Eboni Hooper

*Ghana*  
*June 2014-August 2016*

## **1. Please introduce yourself.**

Hey yal! My name is Eboni Hooper and I'm currently an Education PCV in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. I'm from St. Louis, MO and a graduate of Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans where I majored in Biology and minored in Sociology. I'm a spunky tall thang, that despite the "horrible fashion sense" reputation PC Ghana has acquired I still dress to a "T".



I may seem shy upon meeting me but don't let my observant nature fool you, once comfortable I'm a lot of fun. I enjoy music, writing poetry, singing and being goofy. Along with teaching Elective and Core Biology to the 1st and 2nd year High school students in my community, I've started a reading club at my school and I am currently working on a community project. I am also a member of PCDS, our in country diversity committee. I've been in country for 9 months now so my family didn't find the, I came to Ghana to hide my pregnancy joke too funny. With that said, that's me in a nut shell.

## **2. What sparked your interest in joining the Peace Corps?**

During my time at Xavier I had an English professor who was ending his teaching career to either join the Peace Corps or attend Law School. All tho he chose the latter, talking to him during his contemplation phase sparked my interest in the organization. Shortly after this some RPCV's came to my campus to do recruitment and from there I decided upon my graduation from college in May 2013 I'd apply.

## **3. As black American traveler, what advice would you give to others inspired to join the Peace Corps but afraid to take the first step?**

Fear is what holds us back from reaching our true potential! Upon arriving in Ghana I met other volunteers some younger than myself (I'm 25) that had already traveled to several countries doing various things. One could argue socioeconomic status but we also can't forget that some of us just don't know of these opportunities to even pursue them. So when you do get the opportunity you can't be afraid to take that step. We matter, if we stay in country it only

allows for the current perceptions of America's demographics and black stereotypes to continue. Its a big beautiful world and we should never let anything hinder us from exploring it when given the opportunity to.



#### **4. What is the most interesting experience you've had in Ghana so far?**

While serving in Ghana one of the most interesting things I have experienced is Black History Month. For the first time in my life i was celebrating outside of my comfort zone. While I've always cherished the history of our people and enjoyed the 28 days of jam packed t.v. documentaries, community speeches, school events etc i realized while in Ghana i had taken for granted having a community of people who shared that enthusiasm.

After having been asked many questions about Black America, slavery, my roots, swag, drug dealers, if i was truly American or why is my hair not permed over the past months, I saw Black History Month 2015 to be a perfect opportunity to have a cross cultural exchange that was different from any thing they had ever experienced. A moment to learn about a hidden aspect of the Great United States of America. And that's what exactly transpired, a month filled of educating my students and staff about African-American achievements along with past and current struggles. Which I believe brought about some unity between two perceived separate people who are really one in the same. The month ended with my school surprising me and singing "One Love" to me which moved my heart in an unimaginable way. I'd finally broken through, I wasn't "white" anymore I was one, we are one.

#### **5. How did your family and friends react when you told them you are applying for Peace Corps?**

My family and friends were initially leery about me joining the Peace Corps. Yet again that fear of the unknown was hindering them from seeing how wonderful this experience would be. As time went on and they realized I was serious they began to do their own research and eventually everyone was just as excited as I was about the next chapter in my life of cross cultural exchange. My mother however didn't truly agree until I was in Ghana for a few months. She didn't agree with my decision to turn down acceptance into various Master's programs in order to pursue the Peace Corps. But in due time she too accepted that school would be there when i returned and while I am young, single, and childless this was the perfect time to embark on this journey.

## **6. What do you hope to do after your service?**

After my service I intend to continue in school and get my Masters In Public Health with a concentration in either Global health or Epidemiology. With this I intend to relocate to Atlanta, GA and help my cousins launch their law firm while I attend school. On a long term basis I plan to open my own public health clinic.

## **7. Where can people get in touch with you if they have any questions?**

Lucky for me I actual have reliable Internet connection at site so yes, email, facebook, Instagram me.....I does it alllllll boo boo lol.

**Facebook:** Eboni Hooper

**Instagram:** @gizmostar

**Email:** [eboninicole4@gmail.com](mailto:eboninicole4@gmail.com)

# Country of Service



Ghana [Map/Flag](#)

**Sector:** Health Sector

**Assignment Area:** Gender Youth Development/ Youth Volunteerism

**Site** - Western Region, Ghana, Nyankrom)



# Alexandria Smith

*Ghana February 2014-May 2016*

## 1. Please introduce yourself.

I am Alexandria Smith, 25 year's old born in Illinois and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. My mother, two brothers and I moved to Atlanta after my mother divorced my father of years of physical and verbal abuse. I live in a predominately urban African-American community.



My mother worked as a sales clerk at Walmart and my stepfather as a laborer pay check to pay check. During my early years of college, my mother was unable to drive; taking public transportation to work double shifts to give all she could to provide. Our family stood grounded in our faith in the Word of God. My mother saw something extraordinary in me that I couldn't see in myself.

In college, my mother sacrificed her savings and retirement funds to fund my schooling while I worked many minimum-wage jobs. I graduated from Georgia Military College, Georgia State University and the University of Cape Town in South Africa. I volunteered at Hosea Feed the Hungry, Hands on Atlanta, Outdoor Nation, Atlanta Community Food Bank, Medshare.

Even as college graduate, I doubted my ability, intelligence, vernacular to be qualified doing any international work. I knew my heart was set on working internationally, but the fears of not being accepted, understood, and competent as an African-American woman working abroad to other races put me at dis-ease. I glimpsed over the brochure for the Peace Corps noticing, "Life's Calling." I didn't know where I was going in life, so I applied for the Peace Corps expecting this job to be the beginning to my new life.

## **2. What sparked your interest in joining the Peace Corps?**

I applied to Peace Corps to understand serving without the incentive of financial strings attached in an undeveloped country. Serving was confidently all I knew well working in the retail and sales industry. I worked from waitressing, retail, and sales serving customers and/or guests in exchange for compensation for my services. In my work settings, I built relationships based on financial obligations and commitments tied for the company benefits. Although, after receiving my compensation, rewards and promotions, the company grew successful, but I grew emptier.

In a developed country, I identified success as financial gain, assets and my promotion of work titles, however, I lingered unsatisfied. A twenty-seven month commitment serving from my free will answered my life calling to understand how life in the Peace Corps would change my perception of success cross-culturally. Peace Corps would give me the opportunity to serve holistically and freely that represents who I am as an African American woman in Ghana.

As a volunteer, you are given the range to build your own work partners in your host country without the concentration of educational criteria's. I wanted to take part in serving with a community from the bottom up together, so we would all equally share the glory and take credit for each of our shared responsibility.

### **3. As a black American traveler, what advice would you give to others inspired to join the Peace Corps but afraid to take the first step?**

You will grow boldly under many trials sharpened to overcome anything in life in the Peace Corps. You will immeasurably discover amazing hidden abilities, skills, and strengths in you. As a Black American, you may likely be the only one standing in your PCV group, or the first Black American face entering your community as I am.

You will represent one of many Black Americans forever in your community and begin small changes the way they understand race in America is not one color. You will never see Black America the same way again after Peace Corps. Peace Corps will give you an overpoweringly confidence and boldness in who you are to radically to stir up change in people.

#### **4. How do you keep in touch with family back home in America while you are in Ghana?**

My family and I regularly communicate every day through writing letters, cellphones, Facebook, and WhatsApp.

Our support system is crucial for praying, sending encouragement and daily reminders that I, an African-American woman am here in Ghana for a purpose to never compare who I am, where I come from to anyone.

#### **5. Is this your first time living abroad?**

No, I studied abroad in Cape Town, South Africa for a semester in college.

#### **6. How will this experience abroad impact your career goals?**

In the beginning, I thought I would change Ghana; however, Ghana has changed me. My Peace Corps service awakened a merciful, forgiving and selfless woman. I give back and love harder to those who even insult and disregard me. I lacked the ability to fully express my frustrations in the local language. I greet even in the most difficult times when it seems least deserving. I could spend two years finding fault in Ghanaians or I could change my perception to develop these times of weaknesses into strengths to better understand Ghanaians.

I am benefiting from the Peace Corps skills and knowledge professionally to understand and consider the value of building relationships, facilitating ideals and not identifying people as assignments. I distinguished new learning skills

from the relationships I built from Peace Corps. I found meaning in building a commitment in each of my relationships than merely as an NGO provider. My service in Ghana taught me success is not necessarily assets alone. The greatest reward I discovered in Ghana is the total sum of people I shared my life to. They acknowledge who I am, respond as a friend not by the association of my work position. I found it necessary including each person of the community implement and exchange ideals together for a common goal.



In a professional setting, active ownership provides each person a personal sense of obligation, commitment and responsibility to learn and build from their skills set. I am driven to stimulate a person's greatest potential from the professional teacher and nurses, and even the illiterate farmers and traders. In my service, I discovered while many teachers and nurses are well educated, there lies an gap between the ways information is understood.

I learned to demonstrate in the lens of an assembly man, farmer, and student. It is important to never undervalue a person lack of intellect. A carpenter in my community lacked understanding of malaria using data and numbers; however, using his workmanship of soak-a-way pits helped him understand a solution in his community. Peace Corps has defined the way I understand success such as prioritizing my initiative to include each community member valuable to contribute from every step of the stage.

Each of us has created some form of negative habits that did not happen overnight, in the same manner, it would not take a day for an entire community to change their behaviors. As a leader, celebrating my community small victories marks a positive impact in their self-esteem and motivation. My service in Ghana exposed all of my weaknesses, to create room for my strengths to become enhanced. I concealed my attributes of teaching, facilitating, and inspiring others, but my service revealed a woman, dormant on inside of me that I never believed could be me.

I am a confident African-American woman now because of Peace Corps. I am no longer inferior to other races because of my darker skin tone, vernacular and background. I am going to motivate, stir up hope to the black youth in my Atlanta community for the future of my career.

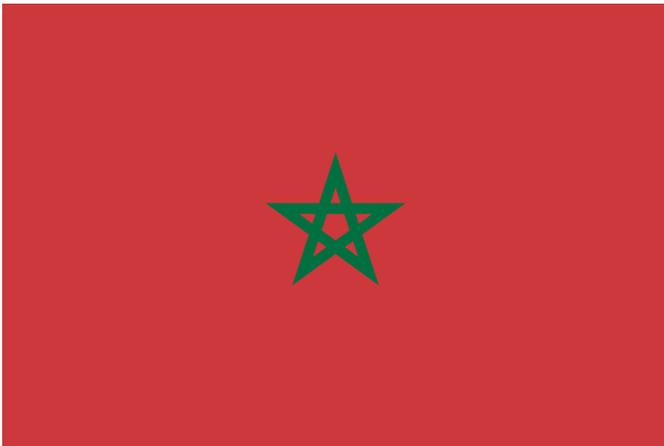
**7. Where can people get in touch with you if they have any questions**

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# Country of Service



Morocco [Map/Flag](#)



# Dominic Cherod McNear

*Morocco April 2014-April 2016*

## 1. Please introduce yourself.

My name is Dominic Cherod McNear. I am a 25 year old Youth Development Volunteer living in Zagora, Morocco in the Sahara Desert. I am originally from Charlotte, NC and an alumni of the University of South Carolina where I obtained my bachelor's degree in Political Science with a concentration in International Relations and Campaigning. I have lived here in Morocco for the past year working with individuals from all ages in health awareness, English language proficiency, coordination assistance in workshops and camps and a number of other voluntary activities around the country.



## **2. What sparked your interest in joining the Peace Corps?**

There are a few things that sparked my interest to join the United States Peace Corps, first being my childhood experience. Growing up in a middle to lower income African-American family, not often had we the chance to travel and see other places. I would watch television shows and movies that would take people places all over the world and it inspired me to one day be able to take that journey to a foreign land. In college, I began cultivating this thought and intertwining it with my passion for helping others.

I dedicated countless hours to better my community and felt so rewarded and accomplished from doing so. Accompanied with my works at university, I studied international politics, international civil and human rights, foreign policy, international political theory and a number of other courses that fed my interest in joining the international political arena. My final push to join Peace Corps came from talking with a friend that suggested I look into it. Soon after this conversation there was a career fair at my university and some recruiters from the US Peace Corps were there. I remembered talking to the recruiter and she inspired me to give it a try and to sign up. That same day I applied and the rest is history.

## **3. As a black American traveler, what advice would you give to others inspired to join the Peace Corps but afraid to take the first step?**

As an African-American traveler it has changed my entire perspective on the world. To be able to bond with individuals who look similar to yourself from a

completely different world is an unexplained feeling. My advice to anyone afraid to take that first step is that you should be. You have to find the passion and the drive within yourself to conquer that fear and face that challenge. This process allows for the ability to grow and achieve goals you never thought possible.

So my advice is be afraid but don't allow that fear to hold you back from living your dreams and growing into that person you want to be. For me, my fear was leaving all my family and friends behind, however, upon my travels back to the States you find that your family and friends are still there. They are still there to support you and comfort you in your expeditions. In my experience, you can always go home but there aren't always opportunities to travel. So take that step, do something different, and find out who you really are outside of your comfort zone.



#### **4. What do you enjoy about living in Morocco?**

I've never lived in any place where community and family value were so important. The Moroccan people are some of the most kind and genuine individuals I have ever met. There are so many people that have welcomed me with open arms here and call me their brother. They really care for one another and have a great respect for their fellow man.

Never in my life, have I been offered to sit and dine with some many different people. I have walked through the countryside where people have never before seen an American and have been offered tea and cookies, a bountiful meal and fruit, just because they wanted to know more about me. Moroccan people have something that I believe we've lost in our American culture and that's the value of togetherness and community. *These people have next to nothing in comparison to American standards but their lives and their hearts are rich in love and care for one another.* And the food is amazing!

*"If there's one thing I will take back with me to America is loving and caring for my fellow man and/or my neighbor because you never know when you may need someone to love or care for you."*

#### **5. Do you have any study tips for learning Moroccan Arabic?**

There aren't any official documents outside of Peace Corp issued material for English to Darija (Moroccan Arabic) learning. I would say if you plan to join Peace Corp Morocco don't worry about learning the language until you're in-

country. The first three months of your service is Community-based Training (CBT) where you develop those language skills in order to sufficiently interact and survive in Morocco.

You go through a rigorous language course 6 days a week during this time where you'll also learn the culture, habits and traditions of the Moroccan people. It can help to have a background in classical Arabic (foos-Ha) but it definitely isn't necessary. I would suggest to come with the willingness to learn and study hard in order to acquire a basic comprehension of the language. Peace Corps will provide the language training so there isn't a need to worry about preparation before.

## **6. After your service is finished, what are your career/life plans?**

There's so much I want to do and so much I want to see after my service has ended. I wouldn't mind volunteering a little in India next, if the right opportunity comes a long. And also there is a distinct Moroccan population in Spain that I wouldn't mind working with in English tutoring or offering any professional advice I can.

My hypothetical course would be to finish service, volunteer and travel until my fall semester Master's program starts. Begin my studies in acquiring a Master's in Conflict and Peace Resolution Management. Finish my degree and join the US Foreign Services as a Public Diplomacy Officer. Work as a foreign service officer for a number of years in hopes to be appointed to an Ambassadorship.

Somewhere in between my career goals I'd like to acquire my Ph.D. in Political Science and retire as a professor of International Relations.

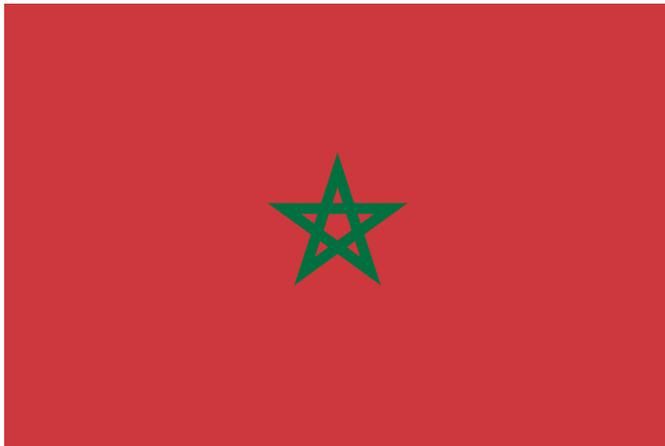
## **7. Where can people get in touch with you if they have any questions**

If you have any questions I 'm always on:

**Facebook:** Dominic C. McNear.

Feel free to inbox me or send me a friend request.

# Country of Service



Morocco [Map/Flag](#)

**Sector:** Youth Development

**Assignment:** Youth Asset Builder

**Site:** Gourrama



Renee

*Morocco Jan 2014-April 2016*

Renee's video diary interview can be found on her [YouTube channel](#)

Living in Morocco

Peace Corps  
Volunteer

Renee's Story

[www.travelingnatural.com](http://www.travelingnatural.com)

# Country of Service

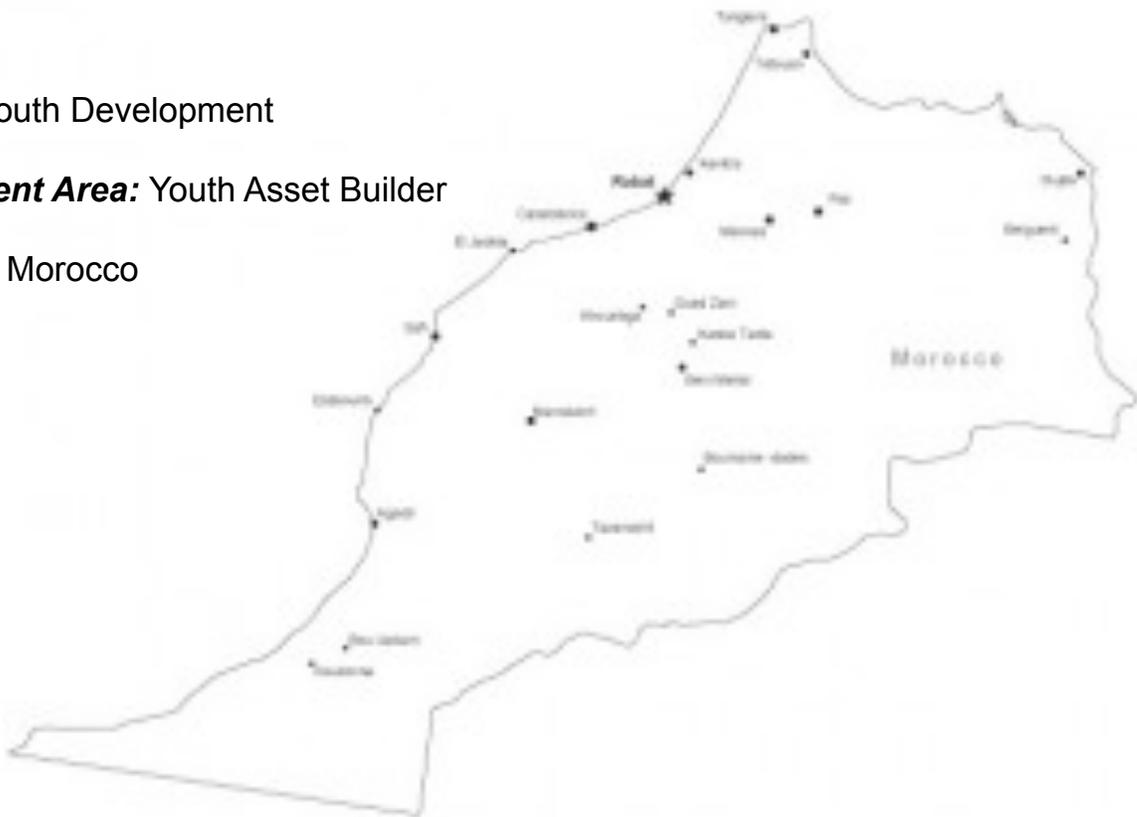


Morocco [Map/Flag](#)

**Sector:** Youth Development

**Assignment Area:** Youth Asset Builder

**Site:** Fes, Morocco



# Daviyion Johnson

*Morocco April 2014-April 2016*

## 1. Please introduce yourself.

My name is Daviyion Johnson and I am a currently serving volunteer in Morocco with Peace Corps. Prior to this I worked at Penn State University in residence life. I have my BA in Interpersonal Communications and MA in Student Affairs and Higher Education.



## **2. What sparked your interest in joining the Peace Corps?**

Honestly it was initially impulse

By that I mean there was not a lot of deep soul searching and thought provoking research before I applied. It just sounded like something fun to do next in life. In the weeks leading to my interview though I begin to reflect on my life and how blessed it had been up to that point (and still is!) and felt a desire to find creative ways to be a blessing/serve others and thus, Morocco

## **3. As a black American traveler, what advice would you give to others inspired to join the Peace Corps but afraid to take the first step?**

I'd say "it's okay to be nervous about taking on new experiences, but just don't let that concern keep you from pursuing your dreams/desires. Peace Corps is going to be challenging for you in a way that others will "get", but only you will understand. Face your fears and just try to enjoy the experience for what it is; A chance to be of service to others." I'd something along those lines.

## **4. What are some interesting cultural exchanges you've had at your site?**

Some of the commons ones at the beginning was just the shock that I spoke the local language. Because of the history of Morocco, French and French-speaking people are common all around and so to have someone come in as an outsider into my sleepy town folks naturally wanted to speak with me in French instead of Moroccan Arabic. It's lead to some awkward funny and awkward sad moments in town. Sometimes people will assume I'm from Senegal, and not an American

because I'm black and that's the only place they've seen someone like me before, but typically I just explain my situation (in Arabic of course) and then the "Obama, Obama" chant began. lol



## **5. How do the people you encounter in country understand the life of black Americans?**

I don't know if they really "understand" the lives of specifically black Americans. My experience is they generally associate all Americans together in that we all know the celebrities of America, have lots of money, and have better lives (though depending on who you are talking to Germans have it better). On occasion, my students have made remarks regarding the stereotypes they see in American TV shows and movies where blacks are misrepresented or in negative portrayals as drug dealers and criminals.

**6. What is one thing you know now, that you wished you were told before becoming a volunteer?**

That Peace Corps is more modernized than you might think. haha. I definitely didn't expect to have access to many of the luxuries that I have during my service. Now that being said, everyone will have very differing experiences so you just need to keep an open mind about your service, site, and experience.

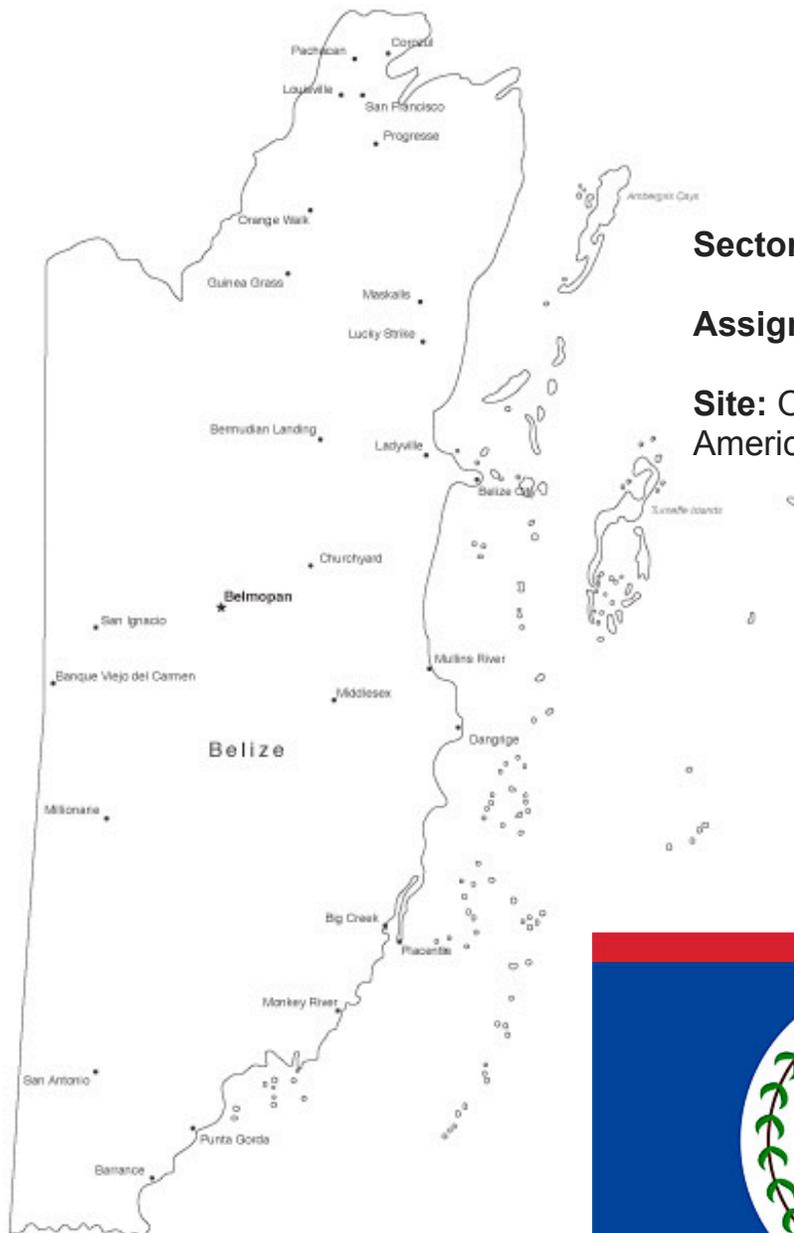
**7. Where can people get in touch with you if they have any questions (Leave your social media info and blog link if you'd like!)**

**Email:** [xavier73129@gmail.com](mailto:xavier73129@gmail.com)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/djbool>

**Blog:** [Escape to Morocco](#)

# Country of Service



**Sector:** Health

**Assignment:** Health Resource Volunteer

**Site:** Orange Walk District, Belize, Central America

**Belize Map /**



# Sameera

*Belize June 2014 - Sept 2016*

## 1. Please introduce yourself.

I'm Sameera, I'm 25 years old and I love travel. I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana to an African American mother and a Somali immigrant father. Since I was very young, my mother heavily believed in experiences abroad for my younger sister and I, so after many trips as a family the passion has stuck with me.



I have a bachelors degree in International Politics & World Affairs from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and plan to pursue a Masters in Public Health (Global Health concentration) after Peace Corps Service.

## **2. What sparked your interest in joining the Peace Corps?**

Peace Corps is one of those things that you do for no other reason than your desire to help others. I had a rough beginning to university life, and found myself ever grateful for the people who pushed me and exposed me to the resources I needed to succeed. As a result, I went on to do internships, study abroad, and a whole array of other opportunities I never thought I would have. I knew that after graduation I wanted to dedicate significant time to being a resource for others in the best capacity I could. That, along with my love for travel and cultural exchange made Peace Corps a no-brainer!

## **3. As black American traveler, what advice would you give to others inspired to join the Peace Corps but afraid to take the first step?**

There are certainly places in the world where Black travelers have a difficult time being accepted. My advice is to stay open-minded. For many countries, the Black Peace Corps Volunteer may be the only black person residents have ever seen. Understand that apprehension doesn't always come from a hateful place. Use your position as a BPCV to show them positivity, giving them the chance to change their mindsets through firsthand experience, and prove wrong what they may have heard through stereotyping/media portrayal.

#### **4. What are some foods you like to cook/eat in Belize?**

The Belizean diet is delicious but not the most healthy. So, when I cook its usually health-conscious and similar to what I would cook back home. I like experimenting with new recipes. I just tried a non-dairy, sugar-free whole-wheat banana pancake recipe that turned out amazing. My favorite Belizean dish is without a doubt rice and beans with stew chicken, the staple dish of Belize.



#### **5. How do people (in Belize) react when you tell them you are a Peace Corps Volunteer.**

They usually nod and say “thats good.” Peace Corps is no stranger in Belize. Volunteers have been sent here since 1962, one year after Peace Corps’

founding, so we've been around this country for a long time. Occasionally there are people who have not heard of Peace Corps, so I explain why I'm here. Overall though, I don't get too many unusual reactions

**6. What was your Pre-Service Training like?...can you sum it up in one sentence?**

One of the most difficult, exhausting and rewarding times of my life that I would never go through a second time.

**7. In your free time, what do you like to do?**

I love to do yoga and exercise on a daily basis. I also like to cook, read, and of course, travel!

**8. Where can people get in touch with you if they have any questions (Leave your social media info and blog link if you'd like!)**

Find me on:

Twitter: @sahassan

Instagram: @sahassan

Email me: [hassan.sameera.pcbz@gmail.com](mailto:hassan.sameera.pcbz@gmail.com)

# Thank you!



I hope you enjoyed reading these stories! Feel free to reach out to the volunteers for more information.

As always you can send me an email if you have any questions to: [tamara@travelingnatural.com](mailto:tamara@travelingnatural.com)

For more information about becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer visit: [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov)

Thanks for reading!

# Notes



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“Not all those who wonder are lost.” -J.R.R .Tolkien

