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Perceived Effects of International Volunteering: Reports from Alumni

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Executive Summary

Background

In an era of rapid globalization, individuals frequently travel overseas to volunteer in distant communities. Despite unprecedented growth, however, little is known about the impacts of international volunteering. This lack of knowledge is amplified by the expansion of diverse types of programs and organizations sending volunteers overseas. Across these different types, the expressed outcomes are often the same. However, it is most likely in practice that the different program types produce different outcomes.

As the field continues to grow, it is important to learn the most effective ways for producing the intended outcomes. This knowledge can contribute to enhancement of program effectiveness as well as efficiency. It is anticipated that differential outcomes may result from differences in volunteer and program attributes.

This report examines how two different models of international volunteering may contribute to certain volunteer outcomes as reported by volunteer alumni. The focus is on self-reported volunteer outcomes only. In future reports, we will address outcomes for the organizations and host communities.

Methods

The survey data reported here are part of a larger research project. Please refer to the Appendix for more information about the project. For this report, we used a cross-sectional design to sample volunteer alumni who served with two different volunteer-sending organizations: Cross Cultural Solutions (CCS), which aims to facilitate cultural exposure through service, and WorldTeach, which aims to increase education in developing countries. CCS volunteers serve an average duration of four weeks and typically volunteer in local social service agencies. WorldTeach volunteers serve for either 11 months (the “year” program) or two months (the summer program) and teach in a variety of educational settings.

The alumni sampling frame includes all volunteers from both organizations that served during 2002 and 2006. Researchers administered an electronic survey to 680 randomly-selected individuals from the two organizations. Due to inaccurate or out-of-date contact information, 582 people received the survey and 291 responded (CCS, N= 97; WorldTeach, N= 194), resulting in an overall response rate of 50 percent. The alumni survey is largely quantitative but also provides space for open-ended responses.

These survey data have a number of limitations that constrain definitive conclusions. They are based on cross-sectional design, lack non-volunteer comparison groups, and have possible response and non-response biases. These limitations are minimized in the larger research project, which is longitudinal and comparative (see notes on future research in the Appendix).

Major Findings

Overall, the two international volunteering models share a range of outcomes. Alumni across both models reported similar outcomes of increased intercultural understanding and civic engagement, and volunteers from both were equally likely to provide resources to individuals and groups they

met while volunteering. They also were just as likely to report that volunteering internationally was a transformational – or life changing – experience, and that they were satisfied overall with the experience.

The two groups of alumni diverged in their motivations, which is not surprising given that the two organizations put emphasis on different goals. The alumni also differed in their perceptions of their effectiveness as international volunteers. As for personal outcomes, they were different in terms of their development of international social networks and their pursuit of particular career paths. The following discusses these findings in more detail.

Volunteer motivations. Alumni from both organizations had the same top five motivations: to have a challenging or meaningful experience; to make a difference by helping others; to gain greater cross-cultural understanding; to travel or live abroad; and to gain international experience and language skills. However, WorldTeach participants were more likely than CCS participants to volunteer because they needed a job; wanted to gain useful skills for school or a job; wanted to help reduce social or economic equality; planned to travel or live abroad; and desired to gain international experience and language skills.

Volunteer activities and perceived effectiveness. The three primary activities implemented by volunteers from both organizations included tutoring or teaching children, youth, or adults; helping community members learn to read, speak, write, or understand the English language; and promoting cross-cultural exchange. In other areas, volunteer activities from the two organizations differed considerably. More WorldTeach volunteers engaged in development-related activities, while more CCS volunteers engaged in social service related activities.

Alumni rated their effectiveness highest in their respective activity areas. Compared with WorldTeach volunteers, CCS volunteers perceived they were more effective at caring for infants, children, and the elderly. WorldTeach volunteers thought they were more effective at helping community members learn to read, speak, write, or understand the English language. All volunteers perceived they were highly effective at promoting cross-cultural exchange and tutoring or teaching children, youth, and adults.

Twenty-five percent (72 alumni) believed that if they had not volunteered, a local staff member would have provided these services. However, only 11 percent of those alumni thought that their services would have been provided more effectively by a local staff member. The vast majority of alumni (76 percent) believed they made a lasting contribution to the host organization or community. Sixty-nine percent perceived they had a specific skill needed by the host organization, and 70 percent thought they had transferred a useful skill to the host organization. Compared to CCS, WorldTeach volunteers were more likely to agree that they contributed to the organization or host community in all three areas.

Volunteer challenges. Eighteen percent of all alumni (52 volunteers) believed that their presence in the community may have caused some problems or challenges. Sixteen percent of volunteers thought that they did not share similar goals with local staff, and that they were sometimes in competition. Ten percent did not think that their activities matched local priorities, and six percent did not believe the community wanted or requested their services. CCS alumni reported language barriers and minor cultural clashes occurring between them and local staff members. WorldTeach alumni reported a

wider range of challenges including cultural imperialism, gender and racial tensions, concerns over local labor replacement, local conflicts, resource consumption, dependence, and challenges resulting from differences in power and privilege between volunteers and host community members.

Volunteer international social networking. WorldTeach alumni were more likely than CCS alumni to report international social contacts, which means they are connected to organizations that work internationally and correspond frequently with these contacts. It is not known whether or not these predated their international volunteer experience. While WorldTeach alumni were more likely to use these contacts to link people or organizations with resources, alumni from both organizations were equally likely to provide resources directly to contacts they met while volunteering. Sixty-five percent of all alumni provided money or other resources directly to the host organization or community members.

Volunteer intercultural understanding. More than 95 percent of all alumni reported that international volunteering increased their appreciation of other cultures, exposed them to communities different than the ones they grew up in, helped them gain a better understanding of the community where they worked, exposed them to new ideas and ways of seeing the world, and challenged their previous beliefs and assumptions about the world. The international experience also was attributed with increasing the amount of time that volunteers socialize with individuals from other racial or ethnic groups.

Volunteer civic engagement. Nine out of ten alumni agreed that international volunteering increased their participation in cultural, environmental, or leisure activities. Many reported that their experience particularly strengthened their commitment to volunteer service, both at the local and international levels. Volunteers from the two different programs reported no differences in civic engagement behaviors or interest.

Volunteer career goals. Many respondents concluded that volunteering internationally changed the course of their lives and increased their commitment to international or social and economic development. WorldTeach volunteers were more likely than CCS volunteers to pursue education or careers in development or international areas.

Alumni from both organizations believed the international experience improved their future and current employment. Longer-term volunteers reported a stronger effect in these areas. Thirty-five percent of WorldTeach alumni believed volunteering had a substantial influence on their chances of finding a job, compared to 17 percent of CCS volunteers. Likewise, 41 percent of WorldTeach alumni agreed that volunteering substantially improved their performance at their current jobs, compared to 28 percent of CCS volunteers.

Seventy-five percent of alumni claimed that their cross-cultural encounter was a transformational experience—one that resulted in significant life changes that would not have occurred if they stayed in their home country. Alumni reported this change regardless of the model with which they served. On average, 95 percent of all respondents were satisfied with their volunteer experience.

Conclusions

Consistent with other research, these analyses suggest that international voluntary service (IVS) has the potential to positively affect volunteers and host organizations. International volunteer service

positively affected volunteers' cross-cultural understanding and career path, in many cases transforming their lives. The majority of volunteers also believed they made a significant contribution to the host organizations and communities, including transferring a specific skill or providing money, time or other resources. The vast majority of volunteers did not believe that their presence in the community caused problems, and nearly all believed the community desired their services.

In conclusion, the two IVS models shared many of the same outcomes. These findings are a valuable addition to current research on IVS, which has not yet compared differences across models. However, the study design does not allow claims of impact, and the limitations temper these results. Forthcoming reports from the larger research project will minimize limitations of this study through rigorous longitudinal, comparative research and will provide more definitive results.

Perceived Effects of International Volunteering: Reports from Alumni

Background

In an era of globalization, more and more individuals are traveling overseas to volunteer in distant communities. According to the US Current Population Survey, nearly one million Americans report volunteering each year.¹ International volunteering may be the most prevalent form of civic service today.² Despite unprecedented growth, however, little is known about the impacts of international volunteering.³ This lack of knowledge is amplified by the expansion of diverse types of programs and organizations sending volunteers overseas.⁴ In the first decades of the twenty-first century, increased knowledge of international service will have meaningful and long-lasting value.

International volunteering and service has the potential to promote new perspectives of the world and shared social responsibility,⁵ develop leadership and organizational skills,⁶ enhance communication and problem-solving skills, and improve the ability to work effectively with different cultures.⁷ International service also can contribute significantly to local economies, with an estimated economic value of US international volunteer labor ranging from 2.3 to 2.9 billion dollars per year.⁸ In contrast, some scholars suggest that under the wrong conditions international volunteering may be ineffective, counterproductive, and imperialistic—leading to greater prejudice, less tolerance, and cross-cultural misunderstanding.⁹ Because research lags behind practice, the impact of international volunteering and service on volunteers, organizations, and communities is not always clear.

Beginning in 2001, the Center for Social Development (CSD) at Washington University in St. Louis initiated a major research initiative to study and inform the knowledge base on civic service worldwide. To advance policy and practice in international volunteering specifically, CSD has worked in partnership with The Brookings Institution’s “Building Bridges Coalition” and others to assess the forms and effects of international service.¹⁰ Beginning in 2008, CSD implemented possibly the most rigorous study ever to assess the impact of international volunteering and service on volunteers, host organizations, and community members.

International voluntary service (IVS) is service across national borders. It includes unilateral service (volunteers from one country serve in another country), multilateral (volunteers serve in each others’ countries), as well as more complex arrangements in which volunteers serve in more than one

¹ Lough, 2006

² Barnett, 2006; McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003; Randel, German, Cordiero, & Baker, 2004

³ Powell & Bratović, 2006; Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008

⁴ Allum, 2007; Caprara, Bridgeland, & Wofford, 2007; Quigley, 2008,

⁵ CCS, 2007; Peace Corps, 2007

⁶ Grusky, 2000; Jones, 2005

⁷ Fantini & with Tirmizi, 2007; Hammer, 2005; Sherraden & Benítez, 2003

⁸ CGP, 2008; Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2007

⁹ Reiman, 1999; Roberts, 2004; Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008b

¹⁰ Eberly & Sherraden, 1990; McBride & Sherraden, 2007

country.¹¹ Volunteers serve as individuals and as members of groups. The duration of IVS may be weeks or years. IVS takes place under the auspices of public, non-profit, faith-based, and/or corporate organizations.

The forms and functions of international volunteering are wide and varied. This report examines how different forms of international volunteering may affect outcomes on volunteers. To the extent that international volunteer sending organizations differ in design, they also may differ in the outcomes they produce.¹² In order to create successful policy and promote effective practices, research is needed to examine institutional differences and investigate how outcomes vary across diverse models. This need is particularly relevant today given recent policy proposals aimed at supporting a greater variety of volunteering and service models.¹³

This report focuses on the perceived effects of international volunteering on returned volunteers only. It is the first report in a series examining the effects of international volunteering and service on volunteers, organizations, and host communities.

¹¹ McBride, Sherraden, Benítez, & Johnson, 2004; Sherraden, Stringham, Sow, & McBride, 2006

¹² Engle & Engle, 2003; Sherraden et al., 2008

¹³ Quigley, 2008; Robert, Vilby, Aiolfi, & Otto, 2005; Rosenthal, 2008

Methods

Researchers sampled alumni volunteers that served with two US-based volunteer sending organizations, Cross Cultural Solutions (CCS) and WorldTeach. The following section briefly describes characteristics of the organizations, research procedures, and the international volunteer impacts survey (IVIS).

IVS Models

Cross Cultural Solutions is a US-based non-profit organization that has facilitated placements of over 15,000 multinational participants in ten countries since 1997. The volunteer placements range from one to 12 weeks, with an average placement duration of about four weeks.

Volunteers usually travel and serve alone, although groups may also volunteer together. They typically serve in local social service agencies for an average of 20 hours per week. Volunteers provide direct care to individuals in childcare centers, homes for the elderly, schools, health clinics, centers for people with disabilities, or other community organizations that request extra hands.

The majority of volunteers come from the United States, although some come from other English-speaking countries including the UK, Canada, and Australia. While the age range of participants is wide, the majority of volunteers are age 25 or younger. Volunteers are mostly female (79 percent), and more than 40 percent are students. The program sets no specific eligibility requirements for education, language abilities, or occupational experience.

Volunteers typically live in urban settings and board at a “home base” together with other volunteers. Incoming volunteers receive a one-day in-country orientation and the benefit of continued support from full-time field staff. Volunteers pay a program fee to cover the cost of facilitating these placements.

WorldTeach is a US-based non-profit organization and has placed thousands of volunteer educators in communities throughout Asia, Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Pacific. WorldTeach provides volunteer opportunities through two placement programs. “Year programs” are 10 to 12 months in length, while “summer programs” are about two months in length. Seventy percent of the current volunteers serve in the year-long programs, most are in their mid-twenties, and the majority (71 percent) of volunteers are female. There are currently over 300 year-long volunteers serving worldwide.

Volunteers are placed individually and teach in a variety of educational settings including elementary, high school, college, and adult education centers. Volunteers teach full-time in the host organization or sponsoring institution. All volunteers must be native English speakers. The majority of volunteers come from the United States, while the remaining volunteers come primarily from other English-speaking countries. Volunteers participating in the year-long program must have a Bachelor’s degree. The program has a competitive selection process.

Most volunteers live with a host family or in teacher housing and can live in a rural or an urban setting. No prior teaching or foreign language experience is required but the program provides extensive in-country teaching and language training. Volunteers receive a one-month orientation and

the continued support of full-time field staff. Volunteers pay a program fee to cover the cost of these services, although a substantial portion of the total cost is covered by the host government.

Design and Sampling Procedures

In the larger longitudinal quasi-experimental design study, we sampled three groups within each of the two organizations, including 1) departing volunteers; 2) comparison non-volunteers; and 3) volunteer alumni. This report summarizes the responses of alumni volunteers only, who were surveyed once in 2008, asking that they reflect back on their experience. The alumni sampling frame includes all volunteers from both programs that served during 2002 or 2006. Because the survey was administered electronically, only alumni with a valid email address were included in the sampling frame.

CCS located 4,103 volunteers that served in 2002 or 2006. Of the 1,183 alumni serving in 2002, they located contact information for 265 individuals. For 2006, 2,906 of 2,920 CCS alumni had email addresses on file. Among those with email addresses listed, 175 alumni were randomly chosen for each year and included in the sample. WorldTeach located 381 of 450 alum with email addresses that served in 2002 or 2006. Of these, 103 served during 2002 and the remaining 278 served during 2006. Consequently, all 2002 WorldTeach alumni were included in the sampling frame and the remaining 247 were randomly chosen from among the 2006 alumni. Random selection of survey participants was completed using SPSS statistical software.

In total, the survey was administered to 680 randomly-selected individuals from the two organizations. Of those, 582 people received the survey and 291 responded, resulting in an overall response rate of 50 percent.¹⁴ In some cases, emails were outdated, filtered through a bulk email program, or otherwise bounced back, never reaching the intended participant.

Instrument

CSD's International Volunteering Impacts Survey (IVIS) was designed to help build a comparative evidence base on international service. The survey is grounded in research assessing the effects of international volunteering and service on volunteers and perceived effects on organizations and communities.¹⁵

Researchers at CSD developed the survey to provide a rigorous measurement tool that can be administered to various groups over time.¹⁶ The IVIS is currently the only known instrument related to international volunteering designed specifically to assess effects on both volunteers and a comparison group of non-volunteers, which also can be used in a repeated measures design. The majority of questions on the survey utilize a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "highly disagree" to "highly agree." The survey prompts respondents to rate their attitudes and behaviors along this

¹⁴ Non-response bias may limit the degree to which data accurately represent the volunteer population. This bias is reflected in some key sociodemographic characteristics of the volunteer sample. For instance, the mean age of survey respondents is higher than mean age of the actual volunteer populations.

¹⁵ Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2008a

¹⁶ Daniel, French, & King, 2006; Dingle, Sokolowski, Saxon-Harrold, Smith, & Leigh, 2001; IVR, 2004

response continuum. Previous pilots studies indicated that reliability estimates of internal consistency for main factors in this survey were high.¹⁷

Data Collection

The IVIS was administered electronically using QuestionPro software. Data were entered by each respondent. Researchers sent two reminder emails to non-respondents, each spaced one-week apart. After repeated electronic attempts, researchers followed-up with a maximum of two phone calls. In total, five attempts were made to solicit survey responses.

As an incentive for participation, respondents were offered three choices: a small monetary contribution to a carbon off-setting program, a small donation to an international volunteer scholarship fund, or a small personal gift certificate amounting to around ten US dollars.

Descriptive statistics reveal that respondents from the two organizations differed on a number of key socio-demographic characteristics. When compared with CCS respondents, a higher proportion of WorldTeach respondents were single and male (see Table 1). WorldTeach respondents also were more likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and to have low individual income; 23 percent of WorldTeach respondents reported making \$5000 or less per year, as compared to only four percent of CCS volunteers in this same category. On average, WorldTeach respondents were younger and had considerably less occupational experience.

Analysis

Data are presented descriptively. Tests of difference between the two alumni groups are conducted using the appropriate analysis, either Chi-square or t-test, and are included in footnotes for ease of reading. Answers to open-ended questions have been summarized where possible and direct quotes from alumni are used for illustrations throughout the report.

¹⁷ Cronbach's alpha statistics ranged from 0.74 to 0.89 for all main factors. See Lough, et al., 2008a

Table 1: Respondent Characteristics by Sending Organization (N=291)

Demographic Category	CCS (N = 97)		WorldTeach (N = 194)	
	Frequency	Percentage ⁱ	Frequency	Percentage
Education				
Some college or less	12	16.7%	6	4.4%
Bachelors degree	31	43.1%	82	60.3%
Masters degree	21	29.2%	41	30.1%
PhD MD or other professional degree	8	11.1%	7	5.1%
Individual income				
Less than \$5,000	3	4.3%	30	22.5%
\$5,000-\$14,999	9	12.8%	24	18%
\$15,000-\$24,999	4	5.7%	15	11.3%
\$25,000-\$39,999	8	11.5%	16	12.1%
\$40,000-\$59,999	10	14.3%	21	15.7%
\$60,000-\$99,999	13	18.5%	4	3.1%
\$100,000 or more	8	11.5%	5	3.8%
Don't know or refused	15	21.4%	18	13.5%
Marital status				
Married	18	25.4%	25	18.4%
Single never married	37	52.1%	102	75.0%
Widowed or divorced	9	12.7%	4	2.9%
In a domestic partnership	7	9.9%	5	3.7%
Race				
Black or African American	3	4.2%	4	3.0%
White or Caucasian	56	78.9%	111	82.8%
Asian	7	9.9%	10	7.5%
Other	5	7.0%	9	6.7%
Gender				
Female	83	85.6%	141	72.7%
Male	13	13.4%	53	27.3%
Year of service				
2002	28	28.9%	46	23.7%
2006	68	70.1%	148	76.3%
Total weeks lived internationallyⁱⁱ	73.2 (1.4 years)		102.1 (2 years)	
Mean age at year of service	32.9 ⁱⁱⁱ		24.5	
Total weeks volunteering with program	6.1		43.1	
Mean occupational experience (years)	15.0		4.3	
ⁱ Valid percentage (does not include missing values)				
ⁱⁱ Number reflects total time lived internationally, volunteering, or otherwise.				
ⁱⁱⁱ The mean age of the CCS sample is significantly higher than the average alumni population in 2002 and 2006 (CCS $\mu = 27.6$, WorldTeach $\mu = 24.3$), indicating a possible response bias. Other demographics such as the gender ratio, however, are representative.				

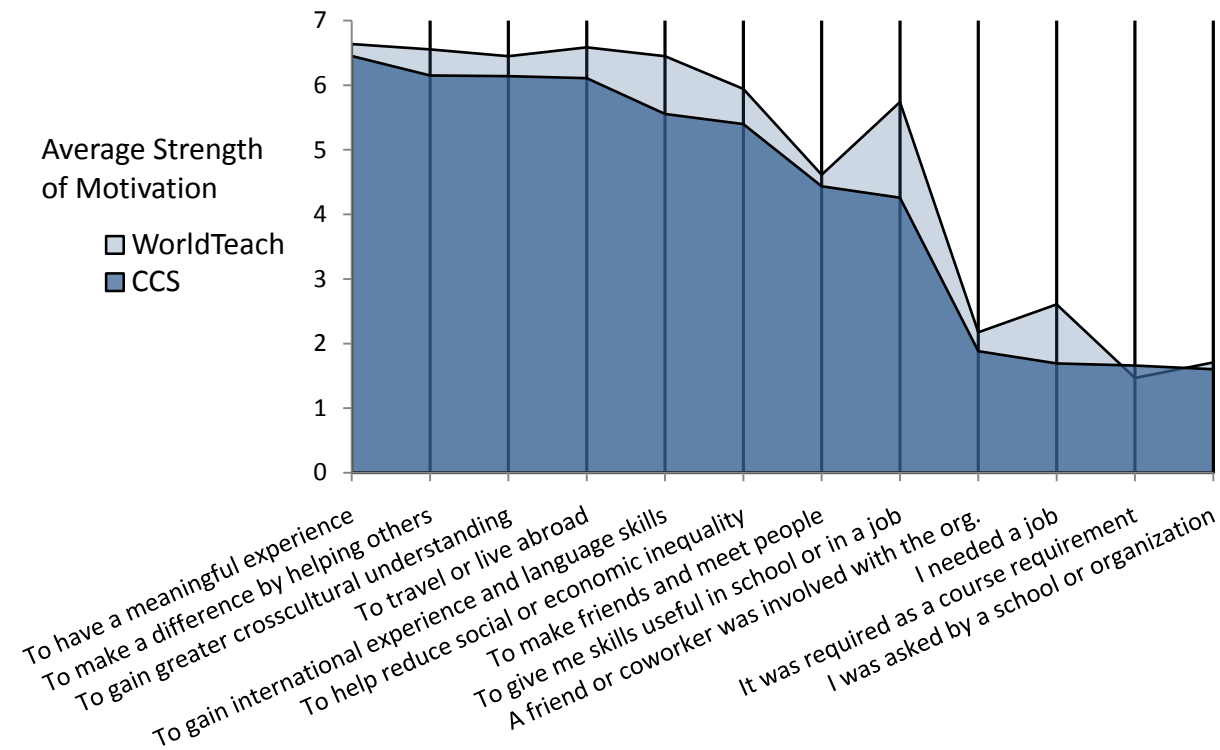
Findings

Findings presented in this report encompass ten areas related to volunteer outcomes. These areas include motivations for volunteering, activities performed, perceived effectiveness of these volunteer activities, international social networks, intercultural understanding, civic engagement, life plans, employment prospects and performance, potential challenges of volunteering, and overall life changes. These findings mainly focus on the self-reported effects of volunteering on volunteers. However, they also cover volunteers’ perceptions of impact on the host organizations and communities.

Volunteer Motivations

Volunteer alumni ranked the strength of their motivations for participating in the program.¹⁸ Volunteers’ motivations between the organizations were fairly consistent. The top five motivations for both organizations were: to have a challenging or meaningful experience; to make a difference by helping others; to gain greater cross-cultural understanding; to travel or live abroad; and to gain international experience and language skills (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Alumni Motivations for Volunteering (N = 291)ⁱ



ⁱ Duration of placement varies: CCS = 6.1 weeks, WorldTeach = 43.1 weeks

¹⁸ Volunteers ranked the strength of their motivation on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

WorldTeach alumni were more likely than CCS alumni to volunteer because they needed a job, wanted to gain useful skills for school or a job, and wanted to help reduce social or economic inequality. WorldTeach alumni ranked their desire to travel or live abroad and to gain international experience and language skills more highly than CCS alumni.¹⁹ Because WorldTeach is a year-long program, volunteers may have considered the international placement as a viable alternative to employment that allowed them to fulfill their desires to live abroad and gain international experience.

About ten percent of alumni listed additional motivations that prompted them to volunteer internationally. The most common response was a desire to be immersed in a culture in a way that was not possible by touring or traveling overseas. As volunteers served on the ground they hoped to meet local people and experience the culture firsthand. Their personal contribution to the community was often seen as an added bonus. As stated by one volunteer, “I wanted to travel to Africa and explore a new country, but become integrated and contribute to the community while I was there.”

Many respondents also hoped to gain a global education, one that they could not achieve by staying in their home country. A few volunteers referred to the tragedy of 9/11 as an eye-opening experience that connected them with the rest of the world. Others mentioned their desire to be involved firsthand with people and cultures dealing with issues such as the HIV/AIDS crisis and

“I had a need to experience a culture outside the U.S. in a meaningful way--not just as a clueless tourist.”

human rights violations. Others simply wanted to “witness firsthand the very different ways people live in the world.” These respondents felt that staying in their home country or touring abroad was insufficient to gain a substantial global education.

Volunteering for career preparation was also frequently mentioned, especially by WorldTeach volunteers. Many were interested in pursuing careers related to social or economic development, the non-profit sector, human rights, or one particular country or region of the world. Some wanted to explore these areas to see if they were “cut out” to do it. Others hoped to gain intercultural or language skills in a specific country or “wanted to get a foot in the [chosen career] world.” All of these volunteers saw the volunteer experience as an opportunity to prepare for or advance their careers. Many volunteers also saw the experience as a brief career break or as good timing for a “gap-year” after finishing college.

Self-growth was also frequently mentioned. Volunteers hoped the experience would help them reach outside their comfort zone and stretch psychologically or interpersonally. Many mentioned they that they felt trapped, empty, or without meaningful purpose in their current situation. They believed an international volunteer experience would help them “do something, however short, that brought more meaning to life,” to feel they were “contributing to something on this earth.” Others did not expect such existential outcomes but simply hoped to learn from the experience and from the new cultural environment.

¹⁹ For all five items measuring motivations, $t > 2.5$, $df \sim 245$, and $p < 0.01$

Many alumni mentioned a desire to “give back” after realizing their privilege, educational opportunities, wealth, or other advantages offered in their home country. Some wanted to pass on lessons learned or contribute specific skills that they believed would benefit the host organization or community. Overall, motivations varied widely and reflected both reflexive and collective rationale.²⁰

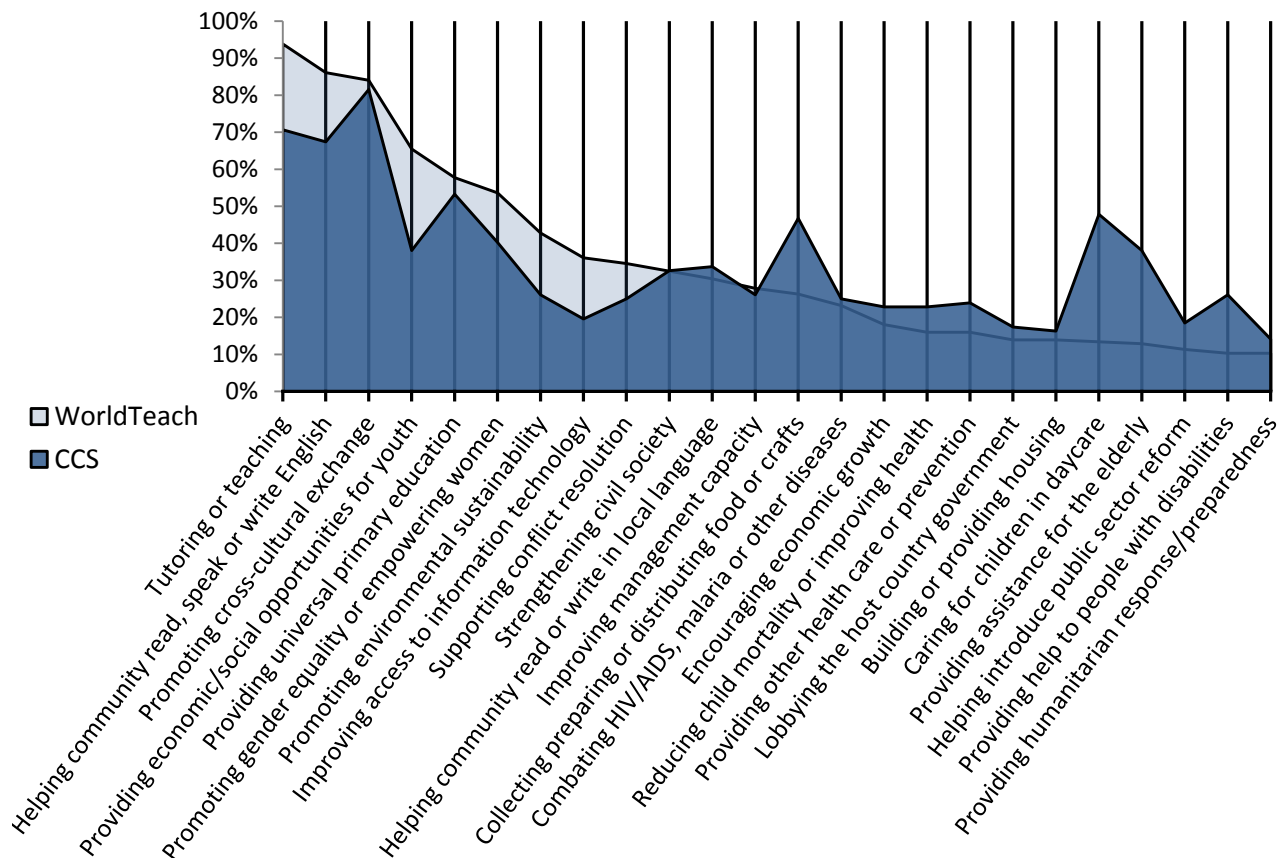
²⁰ Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003

Volunteer Activities and Perceived Effectiveness

Activities

The main activities were fairly consistent across organizations. The three primary activities identified by alumni from both groups included tutoring or teaching children, youth, or adults; helping community members learn to read, speak, write, or understand the English language; and promoting cross-cultural exchange. In other areas, volunteer activities from the two programs differed. More WorldTeach volunteers engaged in activities consistent with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), such as providing economic and social opportunities for youth, promoting gender equality, improving access to information technology, and promoting environmental sustainability (see Figure 2).²¹ Likewise, more CCS alumni reportedly engaged in social service related activities such as caring for infants and children in daycare, providing assistance for the elderly, distributing food and crafts, and providing physical therapy or other assistance to people with disabilities. These differences likely reflect organizational goals, service duration, volunteer selection, and volunteers' skills and abilities.²²

Figure 2: International Volunteer Activities Reported by Alumni (N = 287)



¹ Duration of placement varies: CCS = 6.1 weeks, WorldTeach = 43.1 weeks

²¹ UNV, 2000

²² Sherraden et al., 2006

Fifteen percent of alumni listed additional activities in open-ended responses. The most frequently referenced activities included coaching sports teams, and organizing local sports leagues. Volunteers also frequently worked to promote the arts. In addition to direct support such as “painting a map for the school” or “providing photography and design for artistic brochures,” volunteers also taught various art courses including photography, visual art, and music, and they organized choirs and community artistic performances.

Alumni frequently reported activities associated with building organizational capacity. Specific examples included teaching workshops to staff on subjects such as child development, play therapy, education techniques, mental health methods, ecotourism, and library science. Volunteers also engaged in fundraising, and coordinated organizational committees or coalitions to sustain their capacity-building efforts such as “starting an NGO of like organizations to collaborate on future funding requests,” and “creating a successful Health Academy program for senior students” to promote sustainable service delivery systems in the host organizations.

Technical support was also frequently listed, particularly informational technology, computer-related training, and translation services. Volunteers who spoke the local language helped translate websites or other local documents to promote the organization to English-speaking audiences. In a few cases, volunteers helped translate English-language documents into the local language, such as health-related research or educational materials.

Additional activities included construction and remodeling of organizational facilities, farming or other labor-related work, and research and documentation of local cultural activities, practices, ceremonies, and rituals. One short-term volunteer documented practices on a video-camera, which he later gave to the host organization, while another shared a final written paper of her experience to local groups.

Alumni also viewed their work as an opportunity to connect one-on-one with host community members by “building self-esteem through individual and small group work,” “giving young people confidence in academic and personal life,” or “developing a strong personal relationship” with younger peers or community members.” While perhaps not tangibly recognized as volunteer activities, alumni perceived their work in this area as significant. As one volunteer expressed, “I feel that the ‘other’ category indicates the more emotional aspect of what CCS offers.”

Activity Effectiveness

Alumni who reported engaging in a given service activity were asked to rate the activity’s perceived effectiveness. CCS volunteer alumni perceived they were most effective at promoting cross-cultural exchange; caring for infants and children in daycare facilities; tutoring or teaching youth and adults; collecting, preparing, or distributing foods, crafts, or other goods; and providing assistance for the elderly (see Table 2).

Similarly, WorldTeach volunteers listed their most effective activity as promoting cross-cultural exchange. They also shared CCS volunteers’ perceptions that they were effective at tutoring or teaching. However, WorldTeach volunteers listed their next most effective activities as helping community members learn to read, speak, write, or understand the English language; providing universal primary education; and promoting gender equality or empowering women and families.

When compared with WorldTeach volunteers, CCS volunteers perceived that they were more effective at caring for infants, children, and the elderly. This may reflect the fact that caring for children and adults is often the primary activity of CCS volunteers, while WorldTeach volunteers perform these activities secondarily. WorldTeach volunteers' perceptions of effectiveness ranked higher in tutoring or teaching children, youth, or adults and helping them read, speak, or write in the English language. This is also, perhaps, unsurprising considering that WorldTeach programs to achieve these outcomes and volunteers spend a significant period of time in orientation to achieve teaching-readiness.

Table 2: Perceived Effectiveness of Volunteer Activities Reported by Alumniⁱ

Volunteer Activity	CCS ⁱⁱ (N = 97)		WorldTeach (N = 194)	
	N	mean	N	mean
Promoting cross-cultural exchange	75	5.87	163	5.98
Caring for infants and/or children in a daycare facility*	44	5.77	26	3.85
Tutoring or teaching children, youth, or adults*	65	5.42	182	5.77
Collecting, preparing, or distributing food, crafts, or other goods	43	5.16	51	4.65
Providing assistance to the elderly*	35	5.03	25	3.84
Promoting gender equality or empowering women and families	37	4.81	104	4.84
Helping community members learn to read, speak, write, or understand the English language*	62	4.66	167	5.53
Supporting conflict resolution and peace	23	4.65	67	4.61
Providing universal primary education	49	4.61	112	4.95
Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria or other infectious diseases	23	4.43	45	4.31
Providing other medical or dental health care or prevention	22	4.41	31	3.90
Reducing child mortality or improving maternal health	21	4.38	31	3.90
Providing physical therapy or other assistance to people with disabilities	24	4.38	20	3.40
Strengthening civil society	30	4.33	63	4.35
Providing economic and social opportunities for youth	35	4.26	127	4.62
Encouraging economic growth through microenterprise, agricultural, or rural development	21	4.24	35	4.40
Promoting environmental sustainability	24	4.21	83	4.08
Improving access to information technology	18	4.06	70	4.63
Improving management capacity such as fundraising or strategic planning capabilities	24	4.00	54	4.39
Helping community members learn to read or write in their local language	31	3.90	59	3.80
Building or providing housing	15	3.60	27	3.85
Helping introduce legislation or influencing public sector reform	17	3.59	22	3.73
Lobbying the host country government for increased resources to an organization	16	3.44	27	3.70
Providing disaster and humanitarian response and preparedness	13	3.38	20	3.25
ⁱ Activities rated on a scale from 1 through 7, where 1 = very ineffective, 4 = neither effective nor ineffective, and 7 = very effective				
ⁱⁱ Duration of service varies greatly between the two organizations. On average, CCS volunteers in this sample served for 6.1 weeks, whereas WorldTeach volunteers served for 43.1 weeks.				
*Difference in perceived effectiveness is statistically significant. For all significant items, $t > 2.2$, $df > 58$, $p < 0.05$				

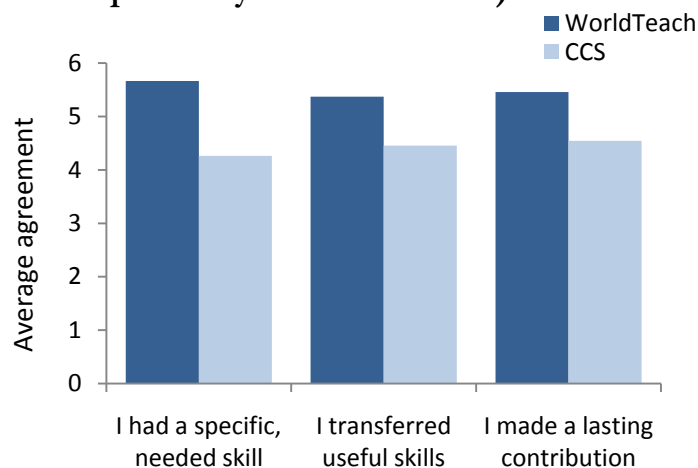
Volunteers from both organizations identified five areas where, on average, they were less engaged and less effective. These activities include providing disaster and humanitarian response and preparedness, lobbying the host country government for increased organizational resources, introducing public sector reform or legislation, building or providing housing, and helping community members read or write in the local language. However, neither of the organizations in

this study explicitly aim to achieve these objectives. Volunteer organizations designed to achieve these specific objectives may realize more effective results in these areas.

Perceived Overall Effectiveness

In addition to rating their perceived effectiveness in particular activity areas, the survey also asked alumni to rate whether they were generally helpful to the host organization or community. Twenty-five percent of volunteers believed that if they had not volunteered, then a local staff member would have provided these services, but only 11 percent of volunteers believed that their services may have been provided more effectively by a local staff member. In some cases, this may be directly related

Figure 3: Perceived Effectiveness Reported by Alumni N = 284)ⁱ



ⁱDuration of placement varies: CCS = 6.1 weeks, WorldTeach = 43.1 weeks

to the type of services volunteers provide. As one volunteer elaborated, “I think my job could have been filled equally effectively by another native English speaker, but it would not have been effectively filled by a worker from the host country.” Volunteers perceived they were particularly effective when local staff did not have the skills to meet the specific demand for services.

The vast majority of alumni (76 percent) believed they made a lasting contribution to the host organization or community. Sixty-nine percent believed they had a specific skill needed by the host organization, and 70 percent believed they transferred a useful skill to the host organization.

Alumni from the two organizations varied in their agreement with these items, however. WorldTeach alumni were more likely than CCS alumni to agree that they provided skills and contributions to the organization or host community (see Figure 3).²³ This finding could also be an artifact of inherent differences between the aims and structure of the two models. WorldTeach volunteers are in the community for a longer duration, are highly integrated, and frequently speak the host-country language. These qualities provide volunteers more opportunities to transfer skills to those in the host country.

²³ For all three items measuring general effectiveness, $t > 4.4$, $df = 270$, $p < 0.001$

Potential Challenges

Eighteen percent of the alumni believed that their presence in the community may have caused some problems or challenges. Sixteen percent of the alumni believed that they did not share very similar goals with local staff, and that they were sometimes in competition. Ten percent did not believe their activities matched local priorities, and six percent did not believe the community wanted or requested their services.

WorldTeach volunteers were more likely to report potential challenges,²⁴ perhaps due to their longer engagement with the community. They reported a wide range of challenges including language barriers, concerns over labor replacement, resource consumption, dependence, cultural imperialism, gender and racial tensions, and challenges resulting from differences in power and privilege between volunteers and host-community members. CCS volunteers mainly listed language barriers and minor cultural misunderstandings occurring between them and local staff members.

Language barriers were the most significant challenge for many volunteers. In some cases, a volunteer's inability to speak in the local language may have resulted in less effective service delivery. In other cases, "the language barrier caused extra work" because the organization was obligated to supply additional time and resources to explain a volunteer's responsibilities, particularly when the volunteer was only in the organization for a short time. According to one respondent, this inability to communicate in the local language may have "caused more confusion than assistance" to some organizations and their clientele.

Alumni gave examples of a number of cultural misunderstandings that resulted from working with local staff or community members. These differences typically arose from disagreements about cultural values and controversial topics such as homosexuality, race and gender roles, or politics. Some reported being assertive in challenging activities that they believed were inappropriate or morally wrong. Seven alumni described incidents when they confronted corporal punishment or abuse, which resulted in significant tension with the school or community. A handful of volunteers mentioned additional minor differences including disagreements over work ethics, spending priorities, etiquette, or educational values and techniques.

In line with these challenges, around twenty alumni expressed concern that their cultural values may have been inappropriately absorbed by the host community. For instance, one alumna expressed that, "While having the benefit of a cross-cultural exchange, my presence on the island also enforced the allure of the outside world in my small community, and the long term presence of volunteers could cause a further weakening of traditional culture." Some volunteers were concerned that cross-cultural exchange was not equally shared due to power differences, leading to "further glorification of American culture and therefore a devaluing of their own culture." Some locals, aware of this concern, "were sometimes suspicious of [volunteers] and what messages from the U.S. [they] might transmit to the students."

Eleven WorldTeach alumni also mentioned complications arising from gender-related dynamics. The responsibilities of female volunteers were often incompatible with normative gender role expectations in the host culture. Alumni reported challenges in working in male dominant societies,

²⁴ $t = 5.8, df = 270, p < 0.001, x_1 = 2.9, x_2 = 1.7, sd_1 = 1.8, sd_2 = 1.1$

working with males as colleagues instead of bosses, and handling sexual advances from staff or community members. Examples included female volunteers participating in male-dominated sports or working in jobs typically performed by male workers. Others said that community members found it difficult “adjusting to Western points of view of the value of the involvement of women in decision-making roles.” Some responses were nondescript but cited some form of gender-related tensions including “challenges of having a foreign female on the island” or “distractions to older students at the high school as a young female Asian teacher.” While a fair number of female volunteers reported these difficulties, no male volunteers described their gender as a specific challenge. Likewise, no CCS alumni reported gender-related challenges.

Labor replacement contributing to local unemployment was also a concern for some volunteers. Whether or not this perception was accurate, volunteers sometimes felt they were “taking a job away from qualified and unemployed teachers in the community.” Volunteers received feedback that staff members sometimes “felt their positions were being compromised” due to labor replacement performed by the volunteer work:

The local teaching staff sometimes received fewer classes because every volunteer was required to have 5 classes. I sometimes felt that this created a negative view —like it was stealing jobs away from the local people.

This concern was exacerbated by other potential problems such as language barriers or the delivery of services by non-professionals:

Many of my students spoke so little English to begin with; I could barely communicate with them, a situation I did not have the training to handle. I thus worry that I did not contribute enough to my school to justify taking a job from a local.

The fact that volunteers were non-professionals created concern for some staff members and volunteers. Although the vast majority believed their services were needed and valued, a small percentage of volunteers felt they were unprepared and therefore less effective. A recent college graduate reported, “I was young, naive and not very good at teaching—it took more effort to have me there than it would have if I hadn’t been there.” The fact that volunteers were novice made it difficult for them to receive full programmatic support at a local level:

The principal of my school didn't have buy-in from the local teachers for bringing a volunteer from the States into their school, especially one who had never taught before, so it was difficult to get support from my colleagues [at the school].

Other volunteers felt that community members perceived them as “foreign tourists” or “random volunteers who had no formal teaching background.” Consequently, it took a while to convince work colleagues and host community members that they could effectively deliver services.

Power differences inherent between volunteers and local staff and community members may also have created tension in some cases. Because of their privilege, some volunteers expressed a belief that they were treated better than local staff or community members, which occasionally resulted in jealousy, resentment, and hostility.

A small number of volunteers also discovered their host communities had difficulty providing them with basic necessities such as food and housing. As one alum reported:

It is challenging for a small village to provide adequate housing and food to outsiders during times of economic hardship. I sometimes felt like I was being given the best available housing and the lion's share of food when others needed it much more.

“Housing was a challenge, but I feel that my work within the community offset the difficulties.”

While obtaining these resources may have been difficult, most alumni believed they were able to give back sufficiently to compensate for these costs. As an example, one respondent wrote, “Housing was a challenge, but I feel that my work within the community offset the difficulties.”

Resource dependence was another main concern expressed by some alumni. Because volunteers often originate from resource-rich countries, and invest their time and resources in the host community, some were concerned that these investments would decrease a community’s self-reliance and engender entitlement. As two alumni articulated:

I think that the community grew to depend on volunteers and saw it as something they deserved from the developed world.

The main challenge was the dependency built in the community after years of having volunteer teachers, to do certain work, and to be a resource of money or opportunity.

Less frequently mentioned challenges included drains on staff time to train the volunteers; heightened awareness of *relative* poverty due to perceived differences in opportunity, resources, or power; stress resulting from having foreigners in small communities; and general lack of trust towards foreign volunteers.

Regarding re-entry to the United States, 85 percent of alumni recalled some degree of difficulty reintegrating into their home country after returning. Although the majority of alumni described this difficulty as “average,” around 25 percent considered reintegration quite difficult.²⁵ Alumni offered few concrete examples to describe these challenges.

While many of these challenges are significant, the majority (82%) of volunteers did not believe that their presence in the community caused any problems or challenges. Likewise, 94 percent believed the community wanted or requested their services despite these perceived difficulties.

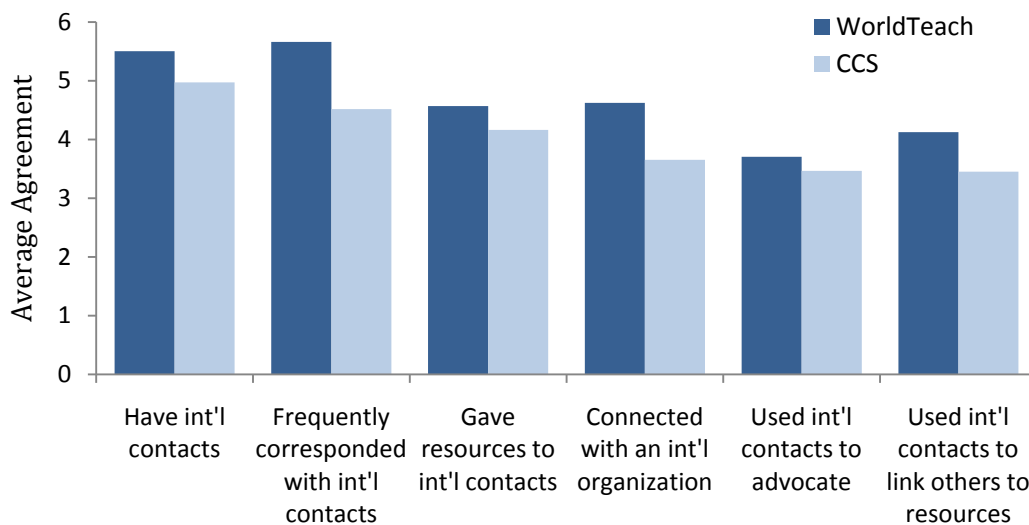
²⁵ Twenty-six percent of volunteers marked a score of 6 or 7 on a scale where 1 = no difficulty, and 7 = a great deal of difficulty.

Network-Related Resources

International Networks

As volunteers interact with community members in host countries, they build relationships that may continue when volunteers return home. It is anticipated that volunteers who stay in the host country for extended periods of time may build more enduring relationships. These data suggest that this may be the case. WorldTeach alumni were more likely than CCS volunteers to report having international networks and to correspond frequently with these connections (See Figure 4).²⁶ Although it is not known whether these networks predated their international volunteer experience, qualitative comments suggest that volunteers develop many connections during their placement.

Figure 4: International Network Resources Reported by Alumni
(N = 269)ⁱ



ⁱ Duration of placement varies: CCS = 6.1 weeks, WorldTeach = 43.1 weeks

Across both organizations, a majority (65 percent) of alumni report corresponding with contacts in other countries through email, followed by regular postal mail (32 percent) and telephone (30 percent). Volunteers also reported corresponding with their host community connections on social network sites such as Facebook or MySpace. Twenty percent of the alumni revisited someone in the community, and eight percent had someone from the host community visit them.

While social networks are often mutually beneficial, one significant advantage of these relationships for host organizations and communities are the resources that these connections may provide.²⁷ Perhaps due to their longer engagement with host communities, WorldTeach alumni were more

²⁶ Significance testing utilizes a composite variable composed of six items measuring social networks, $t = 3.38$, $df = 268$, $p < .001$, $x_1 = 4.7$, $x_2 = 4.1$, $sd_1 = 1.4$, $sd_2 = 1.4$

²⁷ Mayer, 2003; Randel et al., 2004; Wilson & Musick, 1998; Woolcock, 1998

likely to be connected to organizations that work internationally, and to use these contacts to link people or organizations with useful resources.²⁸

Some respondents explained how they continued to utilize these connections. The most common response was maintaining intercultural friendships. In the case of WorldTeach volunteers, these friendships often remain highly prominent in their lives—to the point of considering their host-family a “second family.” A handful of CCS volunteers reported staying in touch with friends they met while volunteers, or continuing to use these connections. An equal number of these alumni expressed regret for not staying in closer touch with people they met while volunteering after they returned home.

WorldTeach alumni listed a host of additional ways that they continued to make use of these connections, both for their personal benefit and for the benefit of host communities. They used these networks to coordinate humanitarian aid projects, exchange opportunities, or schedule return trips to the host country. They would frequently connect friends and business contacts with local contacts to facilitate future volunteer placements or intercultural exchanges. In some cases, alumni helped former students or friends travel to their home country to study or work.

Alumni have also utilized these connections to coordinate research trips, internships, or to advance career goals. As expressed by one alum, “I was able to use program staff connections to learn about other national organizations that have interested other past international community volunteers. I now work for an organization recommended to me by a former program staff.” Others continue to use community connections to refine language or intercultural competence skills.

While these connections have been helpful to alumni in a number of ways, the majority of them reported no direct benefits beyond friendship. In some cases, alumni expressed lasting value from these relationships, but found it difficult to articulate how they have been beneficial. As one respondent expressed, “The connections I made with people in my host community have enriched my life considerably, though it's hard to quantify how I have ‘used’ these connections.”

Resources and Supplies

While WorldTeach alumni were more likely to use their contacts to link people or organizations with resources, volunteers from both organizations were equally likely to provide resources directly to contacts they met while volunteering. Sixty-five percent of all alumni provided money or resources directly to the host organization or community members.

In order to better understand what type of resources alumni provided to the host organization or community members, the survey asked respondents to describe these provisions. Although alumni reported supplying a wide range of resources, the vast majority provided books and school supplies. Books included textbooks, dictionaries, children’s books, and teaching instruction materials. School supplies ranged from pencils, erasers, markers, and crayons to bubbles, balloons, games, puppets, backpacks, and microscopes. A number of alumni also listed teaching materials, specifically English-related teaching resources and lesson plans. In some cases, these materials included thousands of dollars worth of supplies, while others simply left materials they brought with them from their home

²⁸ As components of the social networks composite variable, $t > 3.38$, $df = 268$, $p < .001$

countries with the host community or organization. Additional examples of resource provisions included facility improvements—particularly libraries and classrooms, computer or technology-related donations, money, sports equipment, medical and dental supplies, arts and craft supplies, clothing, office supplies, transportation, and photographs.

Many alumni listed their time or skills as the greatest resources they provided. These alumni perceived the human capital or facilities that resulted from their service as a significant resource that would not exist without the volunteer’s contribution of skill or time. As one alum stated, “Through CCS we did not provide monetary or physical resources. Our goal as volunteers was to use our skills

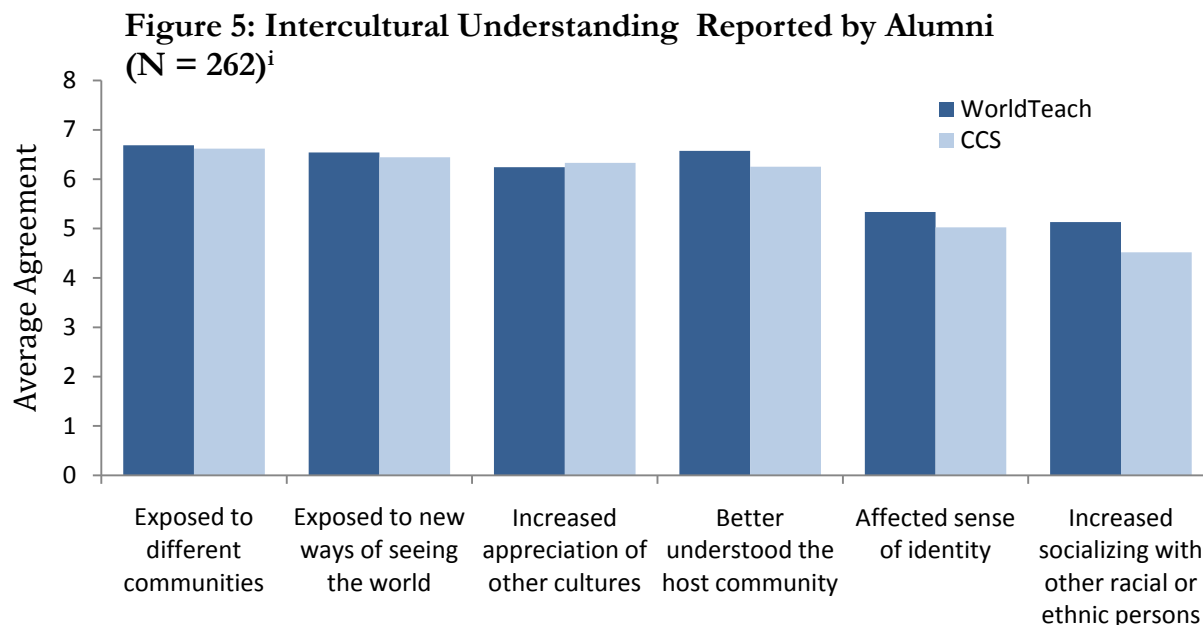
“Our goal as volunteers was to use our skills to help empower community members. We provided services but did not give things.”

to help empower community members. We provided services but did not give things.” A WorldTeach alum echoed similar sentiments, “As a volunteer English teacher, my primary resource was a native speaker of English something that in the developing world is difficult, if not impossible, to find.”

Alumni also engaged in fundraising activities during and after their international service that brought sizable resources into the organizations. During their service, volunteers often raised donations from the local or international community to buy supplies and improve facilities. In a few cases, volunteers set up ongoing fundraising plans with the host organization to ensure a regular inflow of resources. As one example, a volunteer organized a recurrent recycling effort with their local school to sustain local donations. Others helped the organizations write grants to fund current and new programs. Some alumni continued to be involved with fundraising efforts and support years after they returned home.

Intercultural Understanding

One of the most frequently reported outcomes of international volunteering is an increase in intercultural understanding and competence.²⁹ Consistent with this claim, more than 95 percent of the alumni reported that international volunteering exposed them to communities different than the ones they grew up in, exposed them to new ideas and ways of seeing the world, increased their appreciation of other cultures, and helped them gain a better understanding of the community where they worked (See Figure 5).



ⁱ Duration of placement varies: CCS = 6.1 weeks, WorldTeach = 43.1 weeks

These sentiments were reflected in many statements from alumni that described how the international experience exposed them to new ideas and peoples, altered their worldview, and increased their intercultural understanding:

It made me aware of the extent to which preconceptions about how I should approach my life were shaped by my native culture. I no longer consider my own outlook as “standard” or as a kind of default, but often remind myself it sits within a distinct cultural “norm” that is one of a great many.

You quickly learn that the things that you encounter are not “weird”; they are just the result of a different way of life. I truly felt a connection to my host country and the people that live there. You learn that beyond all the socioeconomical and geopolitical differences people are, at their core, human beings with hopes, dreams and aspirations.

These comments not only reflect greater intercultural understanding and competence, but a greater understanding of diversity in general. The concept of “diversity competence” is considered a highly

²⁹ Canada World Youth, 1993; Cook & Jackson, 2006; Jones, 2005; Thomas, 2001; Universalis, E.T. Jackson & Associates, & SALASAN, 2005

valued skill in an increasingly global workforce where international, intercultural, and interracial project teams are commonplace.³⁰

In line with this skill, the international experience also reportedly increased alumni interaction with individuals from other racial or ethnic groups. Some alumni indicated that they have “become a more tolerant and accepting person” or “more patient and understanding of other people and their backgrounds.” By interacting with people outside of their own racial or ethnic circles, alumni realized that people from all walks of life are more similar than they are different:

I realized how similar we all are to each other. Governments and cultures may be different, but people are the same.

I know that the culture that I lived in with always be with me and be a part of the decisions I make in the future. I also see people of different races differently now. I was not racist before, but I feel no barriers like I did before.

Alumni from both organizations reported high levels of intercultural understanding. This exposure often helped even in the short term, as expressed by one alum: “In spite of the fact that my experience was short, it helped continue the process of opening my mind to other cultures and worldviews.” Despite a high level of intercultural understanding among both groups, WorldTeach alumni were more likely than CCS alumni to agree that the volunteer experience helped increase socialization with diverse groups.³¹

Some claimed that the volunteer experience made them feel like a “citizen of the world.” A few, however, also reported that the experience served to strengthen their sense of what it means to be a U.S. citizen. As one respondent wrote, “It totally changed my identity as an American. It made me feel more American and more positive about my own culture and identity.” Some claimed that the experience helped them learn about their cultural identity by allowing “time to reflect upon myself since I was in a different culture and could examine myself out of context and really see what was there.”

Overall, alumni reported learning a great deal from the experience, not only about themselves but also about global issues and affairs. These respondents believed volunteering in the community gave them firsthand knowledge of community life and the daily struggles of individuals in the developing world. Being immersed in the host culture increased their awareness of the causes and consequences of poverty and deprivation. In line with this, many reported that their views on social and economic development are now more “realistic” and practical, with a belief that development must be grounded in local grassroots participation:

I am now perhaps less likely to assume easy fixes to social problems—I think that volunteers can only do so much, provide some new options and examples, but ultimately that change must come from within a community, not without.

³⁰ Dhooper & Moore, 2000; Iles & Hayers, 1997; Kandola & Fullerton, 1998

³¹ $t = 2.55$, $df = 253$, $p < 0.05$, $x_1 = 5.1$, $x_2 = 4.5$, $sd_1 = 1.8$, $sd_2 = 1.7$

Civic Engagement

International service is believed to promote civic engagement and community activism, thus helping volunteers' home and host communities upon their return.³² Consistent with this belief, nine out of ten volunteers agreed that international volunteering increased their participation in cultural, environmental, or leisure activities. Alumni did not offer commentary describing the composition of these "cultural" or "leisure" activities. Future reports will delve deeper into this area.

Ten volunteers reported that their volunteer experience specifically strengthened their commitment to "service work" or "volunteer service," both at the local and international levels. As two alumni expressed:

I developed a greater love and commitment to my local community and the local and international education efforts.

I believe that my career path will continue to be service oriented and will possibly have an international focus, depending on the need in the world and in our local communities.

While a majority of alumni agreed that their volunteer experience increased their civic participation, there were no significant differences in engagement between alumni from the two organizations.³³

³² Kelly & Case, 2007; VSO, 2006

³³ The IVIS survey uses 20 items to measure civic engagement including involvement with local and international groups and clubs, domestic volunteering, voting behaviors and other political involvement, media attentiveness, and religious participation. For all 20 items measuring civic engagement, $t > 2.0$, $df = 241$, $p > 0.05$, means vary.

Life Plans

Education and Career

Many respondents concluded that volunteering internationally changed the course of their lives. This is consistent with previous research, which suggests that international volunteering helps to define volunteers' educational and career objectives.³⁴ This survey measured volunteers' life plans related to international issues and social and economic development.

Respondents reported pursuing degrees in areas such as international education, international law, non-profit management, regional or language-specific studies, public/global health, and international development. These alumni attributed their decision in large part to their international volunteer experience:

I have changed what I want as an ideal career path. I am now seeking to combine my volunteering and educational interests with my career, instead of treating them as two different parts of me. I will seek to always have an international and development oriented career.

Volunteers who returned to their home country reported working closely with immigrants, refugees, or other internationals. Others continued to focus on social and economic issues they encountered while volunteering. As one alum expressed, "I am currently pursuing a new job that may be domestic in nature, but still dedicated to social justice." Some WorldTeach alumni also reported founding their own non-profit organizations upon returning home.

"It set off a chain of events in my life that have shaped everything that followed."

In the case of WorldTeach, a few volunteers remained in their host country after the volunteer placement ended or returned to the host country soon afterwards. Some continued to live and work in the community where they served, while others moved from the community but continued to work for non-profits, governmental agencies, or others schools or universities

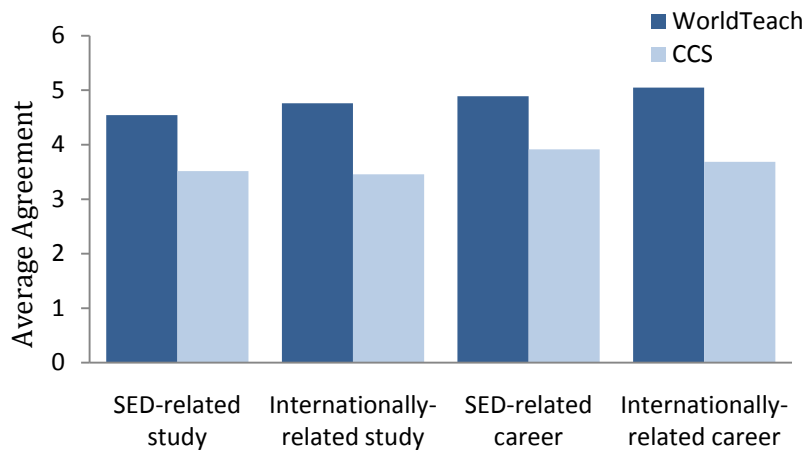
in the host-country. WorldTeach alumni also frequently mentioned a desire to pursue a career in teaching or international education, both at home or abroad.

Although alumni from each organization expressed how volunteering affected their life plans, WorldTeach alumni were more likely than CCS alumni to pursue educational or career prospects in development or international areas (see Figure 6).³⁵ CCS alumni reported a general interest in international or social and economic development (SED)-related issues, but few directly cited how their life plans had been altered as a result of volunteering. These alumni reported making short-trips to the host-country, sponsoring a child, or encouraging international service domestically, but few reported changing their educational or occupational goals as a result. On the other hand, many WorldTeach alumni reported making significant changes in their life plans after their volunteer experience.

³⁴ Hudson, 1996; South House Exchange & Canada World Youth, 2006; Universalis et al., 2005

³⁵ For all four items measuring life-plans, $t > 2.8$, $df = 232$, and $p < 0.01$, means vary

Figure 6: Life Plans of Alumni (N = 249)ⁱ



ⁱ Duration of placement varies: CCS = 6.1 weeks, WorldTeach = 43.1 weeks

The larger longitudinal research project (of which this alumni survey is a part) will be able to determine whether these plans were made before or after the volunteer experience. One alum illustrates this notion, “Broadly speaking, the social values I had before volunteering were merely reinforced by my WorldTeach experience, so my life plans and goals remained the same.” Another alum elaborated that while “long-term plans did not change; I felt that I was better able to meet those [educational or career] goals than I would have been without my WorldTeach experience.” On an aggregate level, however, alumni responses to open-ended items reflect a belief that volunteering directly influenced their life plans.

Employment Prospects and Performance

Previous research suggests international service increases volunteers’ skills and ultimately employment and earning potential.³⁶ The majority of volunteer alumni agreed with this assertion. Findings, however, differed considerably by program (see Figure 7).³⁷

WorldTeach respondents were more likely to report that volunteering improved their future and current employment. Thirty-five percent of WorldTeach respondents believed volunteering had a substantial influence on their chances of finding a job, compared to 17 percent of CCS alumni.³⁸ As one alum expressed, “Through my WorldTeach network, I learned about my current job and do not think I would have earned this job had it not been for the basic skills of resourcefulness and communication that I developed while volunteering.” Consistent with this finding, 41 percent of WorldTeach alumni believed volunteering substantially improved their performance at their current job, compared to 28 percent of CCS volunteers.

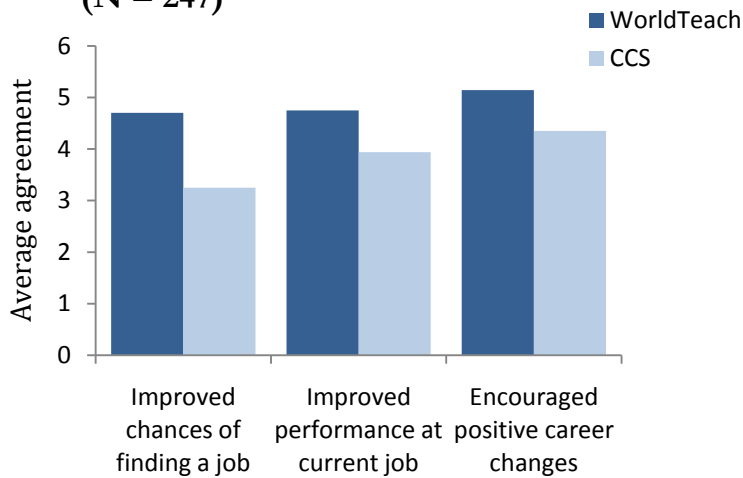
³⁶ Brook, Missingham, Hocking, & Fifer, 2007; Cook & Jackson, 2006; Davis Smith, Ellis, & Howlett, 2002; Thomas, 2001; Universalis et al., 2005

³⁷ Responses for employment prospects are based on a 7-point scale, where 1 = “none”, 4 = “average”, and 7 = “a great deal.” Means vary for all three items measuring employment prospects and performance, $t > 2.8$, $df = 228$, $p < 0.01$.

³⁸ A response of 6 or a 7 on the 7-point scale is considered “substantial improvement”.

This finding is reflected in differences among volunteer motivations as well as the nature and purpose of the two organizations and their respective programming. WorldTeach alumni were more likely to volunteer with the intent of gaining employment skills to improve their chances of finding a job, whereas CCS alumni were less likely to express this initial motivation. Programs of a longer duration may also offer greater opportunities to practice and build upon newly acquired skills.

Figure 7: Employment Prospects and Performance as reported by Alumni
(N = 247)ⁱ



ⁱDuration of placement varies: CCS = 6.1 weeks, WorldTeach = 43.1 weeks

Overall Life Changes

Seventy-five percent of alumni (218 volunteers) claimed that their cross-cultural encounter was a transformational experience (one that resulted in significant life changes that would not have occurred if they stayed in their home country). Alumni reported this transformational change regardless with which organization they served.

Although respondents listed numerous ways in which their lives were altered, alumni most frequently referred to changes in their educational or career trajectories and intercultural knowledge and understanding. Other popular responses included lifelong friendships, an increased appreciation for life, a desire to simplify their lives, and a stronger commitment to service.

Alumni frequently claimed that they experienced a period of reevaluation during their volunteer experience, which reminded them of what they “truly treasure in life.” This change gave them a greater appreciation for what they have, both in material and relational terms. This expression of gratitude was often connected with a commitment to share their resources with others:

I realized how fortunate I was compared to those in the vast majority of the world, and this realization fueled a renewed sense of moral urgency in me that I dedicate my energies toward making the world a better place for all, regardless of where they happened to have been born.

I saw the differences of how we were in the states compared to Tanzania... how materialistic we are and how the differences in perceptions were. It really gave me more appreciation and wanting to be less of a consumer and more of an advocate.

In line with this realization, respondents often expressed a desire to simplify their lives and reduce “unnecessary and wasteful conveniences.” Alumni learned that they could “easily live without the comforts of home”. In order to live in harmony with this realization, some expressed a desire to spend less on material goods and more on philanthropic endeavors; to more efficiently utilize the “surplus we have in this country.”

While alumni from both organizations expressed these changes, WorldTeach alumni listed a number of additional personal improvements gained through their service such as self-reliance, self-confidence, self-efficacy, responsibility, increased language abilities, the capacity to reflect, and a feeling of certainty that they can overcome challenges. The reasons for these gains may vary, but one alum attributed them largely to isolation in a new culture:

The challenges I faced as a volunteer, largely due to the environment I lived in (socially, religiously, intellectually, and physically isolated), and overall experience of living abroad propelled me to take further steps forward—I gained the capacity to explore further and push my limits.

Some alumni felt strongly that the volunteer experience changed them, but they had a difficult time articulating the specific benefits:

I can't really describe it. I am who I am today because of that time. I have never looked at my life the same way I did before I volunteered. It changed my life in virtually every way.

It's difficult to explain the change, but it has had a lasting impact. I think about and refer to my teaching experience in Guyana almost on a daily basis. I had spent some time in developing countries before that, but after my experience I had a slightly different perspective. Although I think it was the best experience of my life, in some ways, there were a lot of serious disappointments and challenges. There were times when I was really ready to quit, but looking back on my work, I also really value the experience more than any other I've had.

On average, 95 percent of the respondents were satisfied with their volunteer experience, regardless of which organization they volunteered with. They perceived the experience as one that improved their lives and the lives of those with whom they served. A few reasons behind this general satisfaction are exemplified in the following quote from a returned volunteer:

I believe travel overseas and cross-cultural immersion is and should be a large part of everyone's educational and life experience. I have learned that whether or not I feel I have contributed professionally or materially I still have given of myself, and the exchange people-to-people has been of incalculable value to all involved. We simply must have an understanding and care for others in our world if we are to heal our earth and survive as a human species. I hope that we can indeed become a global community.

Discussion

As a cross-sectional survey, these data provide a retrospective perspective on how alumni of two different international volunteer-sending organizations view their service experience and its impact on their lives. While this design does not permit definitive claims of impact, it provides insight into the views of returned volunteers, and suggests that there may be differences in outcomes depending on the type of volunteer model under which one serves. However, it is important to point out the similarity in outcomes between the two models.

Overall, the two international volunteering models share a range of outcomes. Regardless of the model through which they volunteered, alumni reported similar outcomes of increased intercultural understanding and civic engagement, and both were equally likely to provide resources to individuals and groups they met while volunteering. They also were just as likely to report that volunteering internationally was a transformational experience, and that they were satisfied overall with the experience.

The two groups of alumni diverged in their motivations, which is not surprising given that the two organizations put emphasis on different goals. The alumni also differed in their perceptions of their effectiveness as international volunteers. As for personal outcomes, they were different in terms of their development of international social networks and their pursuit of particular career paths. The following discusses these findings in more detail.

Motivations. Volunteers' primary motivations were highly consistent across both models of service, and reflected both altruistic and instrumental motives. Some alumni were motivated by good will, while others were motivated largely by self-interest. Alumni who volunteered for a longer duration with WorldTeach were more likely to report secondary motivations related to future employment or career preparation.

Activities. Activities ranged from promoting cross cultural exchange to providing universal primary education. Overall, alumni tend to report high rates of service effectiveness in tutoring or teaching children youth or adults; helping community members learn to read, speak, write, or understand the English language; and promoting cross-cultural exchange. There is correspondence between respondents' assessment of service effectiveness and the IVS sending organizations' objectives. In other words, volunteer alumni rate effectiveness highest in the areas where each program tends to focus its efforts.

This finding suggests that programs of differing lengths may be appropriate for specific types of service activities. Short-term volunteers may breathe fresh life and perspective into otherwise routine social service delivery to children, adults, or the physically challenged. Likewise, long-term volunteers may enhance the capacity of development initiatives as they provide continuous assistance. Programs can take this finding into consideration as they plan activities for volunteers' based on volunteer demographics and time commitments. In order to effectively achieve given objectives, sending organizations can plan goals and activities that realistically consider their volunteers' capacities and availability.

International networks. Respondents from both organizations believe that their lives were enhanced by making friendships with those in other nations. Longer-term WorldTeach alumni were more likely to continue corresponding with these connections. In addition to friendship, alumni reportedly drew upon these associations to coordinate humanitarian aid projects, research trips, internships, exchange opportunities, or return trips to the country. Those in the host country also benefited from these connections as alumni provided money and resources to the organization or community members, even after they returned home. This finding indicates that volunteers' networks are a win-win for both parties. However, alumni occasionally expressed concern that resources associated with these relations may engender a sense of entitlement and decrease a community's self-reliance.

Intercultural understanding. While a top motivation for all alumni was to travel and live abroad, respondents believed that volunteering would offer a unique experience, different from other forms of travel or tourism. Nearly all alumni reported that their experience increased their appreciation of other cultures and exposed them to new ways of seeing the world. Volunteering allowed them to gain firsthand knowledge of global realities through direct interaction with host communities. This finding has valuable implications for policy aimed at enhancing global education and cross-cultural understanding.

Some alumni expressed concern, however, that this transfer of knowledge was in one direction. The unilateral structure of sending programs may exclude individuals in the host culture from gaining a comparable understanding of a volunteer's customs, traditions, and ways of life.

Civic engagement. Survey data for this report reveal little about the effect of IVS on volunteers' civic engagement. Although some alumni believed the experience increased their participation in cultural, environmental, or leisure activities, we know little about the nature of these activities. Future reports will reveal more on the effect of IVS on volunteers' civic engagement.

Career outcomes. The effect of volunteering on current and future employment is consistent with volunteer motivations as well as the respective goals of the two organizations. A higher percentage of WorldTeach volunteers serve with the intent of gaining employment skills, or to improve their chances of finding a job. Longer-term volunteering may be viewed as an employment alternative, similar to internships, where volunteers can "test the waters" or gain specific skills to advance their future careers. In this sense, volunteer service may be considered job training for individuals aspiring to work in international development, non-profit management, or intercultural studies.

As a new experience, international volunteering in any capacity can stimulate reflection, which is critical to developing new skills and abilities.³⁹ However, programs of a longer duration may offer greater opportunities to build upon language skills, intercultural competence, and other abilities that may be useful in current or future employment.

International volunteer experiences typically fall outside of normal, day-to-day routine. Theory suggests that encounters which are radically different from normal routine have the potential to change an individual's life direction.⁴⁰ Open-ended comments seem to support this theory, suggesting that international volunteering, particularly when extended over the mid to long term,

³⁹ Pusch & Merrill, 2008; Reiman, Sprinthall, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1997

⁴⁰ Hunter, 2008; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 1998

may have a substantial influence on volunteers' future education, careers, and other life plans. Future research will help determine whether these plans preceded or followed the service experience.

Conclusions

Findings from this study suggest that overall alumni of the two volunteer programs have a positive perception of their IVS experience. Specifically, they report engaging in productive activities during their period of service. They report improved intercultural understanding, expanded work skills and career options, greater awareness of global issues, increase in international social networks, and an increased propensity to engage in civic affairs.

At the same time, some alumni report challenges they encountered during their service. The most frequently mentioned include language barriers that impeded productive engagement in the field, and cultural misunderstandings that spark disagreement and occasional conflict. Nonetheless, the vast majority of alumni from both organizations did not report any problems, and nearly all believed the hosting organization and host community desired and benefitted from their service.

These findings are an initial comparative contribution to research on IVS, which has not yet examined differences across models. This information is particularly valuable today given the diverse international volunteering models.⁴¹ International volunteering may benefit both volunteers and the host community. Forthcoming results from this research project will assess whether this is the case.

⁴¹ Allum, 2007

Appendix

Impacts of IVS on Volunteers, Host Organizations, and Communities

To advance IVS policy and practice, the largest gap in knowledge pertains to its impacts. To study impacts, longitudinal studies are needed to measure the effects of different program designs over time. Ideally, studies should be experimental or quasi-experimental in design, and include random sampling techniques as well as comparison groups of non-volunteers. In order to address this informational need, researchers at the Center for Social Development (CSD) at Washington University in St. Louis continue to examine the effects of international volunteering and service on volunteers, organizations, and community members.

The larger research design will incorporate multiple programs that differ across key characteristics, such as organizational type, internationality, directionality, continuity, level of volunteer skill.⁴² CSD will work with research partners, utilizing a comparative design overlaid across all programs, so that we can compare potential differences in outcomes.

Ongoing research consists of two primary methods of data collection, including 1) an electronic longitudinal survey administered to outgoing and returned volunteers as well as comparison groups of non-volunteers, and 2) cross-sectional, structured interviews with key staff and focus groups with community members of host organizations. Research reports using survey data will be primarily quantitative, whereas reports using interview and focus group data will be qualitative in nature.

Forthcoming quantitative reports will be longitudinal and comparative, using survey data from volunteers and comparison non-volunteers, who applied to, but did not participate in, the international volunteer experience. Likewise, forthcoming qualitative reports will be comparative using interview data from volunteer host organizations and matched comparison organizations that do not host international volunteers.

To date, CSD has conducted fieldwork with two US sending IVS organizations, one that sends volunteers for short-term projects (CCS), and one that sends volunteers for mid and long-term projects (WorldTeach). We are currently collaborating with international research partners to expand knowledge across key differences and to build understanding about effective practice for international volunteering and service.

⁴² Sherraden et al., 2006, 2008

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