

Perceived Effects of International Volunteering:  
Reports from CCS Alumni

Edited version of CSD Research Report 09-10

Prepared by Cross-Cultural Solutions in collaboration with  
The Center for Social Development at Washington University in St Louis

May 2009

## Table of Contents

<b>List of Tables and Figures</b> .....	2
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	2
<b>Background</b> .....	3
<b>Methods</b> .....	5
IVS Models .....	5
Design and Sampling Procedures .....	5
Instrument .....	6
Data Collection .....	6
Analysis.....	6
<b>Findings</b> .....	8
Volunteer Motivations .....	8
Volunteer Activities and Perceived Effectiveness .....	10
<i>Activities</i> .....	10
<i>Activity Effectiveness</i> .....	10
<i>Perceived Overall Effectiveness</i> .....	12
<i>Potential Challenges</i> .....	13
Network-Related Resources .....	14
<i>International Networks</i> .....	14
Intercultural Understanding .....	16
Civic Engagement .....	17
Life Plans .....	18
<i>Education and Career</i> .....	18
<i>Employment Prospects and Performance</i> .....	19
Overall Life Changes.....	20
<b>Appendix</b> .....	21
<b>References</b> .....	22

## List of Tables and Figures

Table 1: Respondent Characteristics by Sending Organization .....	7
Table 2: Perceived Effectiveness of Volunteer Activities Reported by Alumni .....	11
Figure 1: Motivations for Volunteering. ....	8
Figure 2: Perceived Effectiveness .....	12
Figure 3: International Network Resources.....	14
Figure 4: Intercultural Understanding .....	16
Figure 5: Life Plans .....	18
Figure 6: Employment Prospects and Performance.....	19

## Acknowledgements

This is an edited version of CSD Research Report 09-10 which used a cross-sectional design to sample volunteer alumni who served with two different volunteer-sending organizations: Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS) and WorldTeach. This version of the report presents the findings based on the responses from CCS volunteers.

This research was possible from support from the Ford Foundation. We thank all those who helped with this study, especially the volunteer alumni who took the time to complete the online surveys. We are particularly grateful to Cross Cultural Solutions staff (Cassandra Solderitsch, Quinn Sidon, Steven Rosenthal, and Volodymyr Zharyy) who provided essential administrative and logistical support. We also thank Kathleen O'Hara from the Center for Social Development for her tireless and diligent work interviewing alumni. We also express appreciation to David Caprara and the Brookings Institution as well as the entire Building Bridges Coalition for their encouragement and continued interest in international volunteering and service and its impacts.

# Perceived Effects of International Volunteering: Reports from Alumni

## Background

Cross-Cultural Solutions is honored to participate in a major research initiative on the impact of international volunteering on both volunteers and communities undertaken by The Center for Social Development, Brown School of Social Work, Washington University in St. Louis. Funded through a multi-year grant from the Ford Foundation, the project is intended to study, inform, and assist in the development of civic service worldwide.

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.<sup>1</sup> International volunteering may be the most prevalent form of civic service today.<sup>2</sup> Despite unprecedented growth, however, little is known about the impacts of international volunteering.<sup>3</sup> This lack of knowledge is amplified by the expansion of diverse types of programs and organizations sending volunteers overseas.<sup>4</sup> 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,<sup>5</sup> develop leadership and organizational skills,<sup>6</sup> enhance communication and problem-solving skills, and improve the ability to work effectively with different cultures.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> Beginning in 2008, CSD implemented possibly

---

<sup>1</sup> Lough, 2006

<sup>2</sup> Barnett, 2006; McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003; Randel, German, Cordiero, & Baker, 2004

<sup>3</sup> Powell & Bratović, 2006; Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008

<sup>4</sup> Allum, 2007; Caprara, Bridgeland, & Wofford, 2007; Quigley, 2008,

<sup>5</sup> CCS, 2007; Peace Corps, 2007

<sup>6</sup> Grusky, 2000; Jones, 2005

<sup>7</sup> Fantini & with Tirmizi, 2007; Hammer, 2005; Sherraden & Benítez, 2003

<sup>8</sup> CGP, 2008; Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2007

<sup>9</sup> Reiman, 1999; Roberts, 2004; Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008b

<sup>10</sup> Eberly & Sherraden, 1990; McBride & Sherraden, 2007

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 country.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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.

---

<sup>11</sup> McBride, Sherraden, Benítez, & Johnson, 2004; Sherraden, Stringham, Sow, & McBride, 2006

<sup>12</sup> Engle & Engle, 2003; Sherraden et al., 2008

<sup>13</sup> Quigley, 2008; Robert, Vilby, Aiolfi, & Otto, 2005; Rosenthal, 2008

## Methods

The following section briefly describes characteristics of CCS, 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 22,000 multinational participants in twelve countries since 1995. 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.

### 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 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. Random selection of survey participants was completed using SPSS statistical software.

In total, the survey was administered to 280 randomly selected individuals. Of those, 97 responded, resulting in an overall response rate of 35 percent.<sup>14</sup> In some cases, emails were outdated, filtered through a bulk email program, or otherwise bounced back, never reaching the intended participant.

---

<sup>14</sup> 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.

## **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.<sup>15</sup>

Researchers at CSD developed the survey to provide a rigorous measurement tool that can be administered to various groups over time.<sup>16</sup> 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 response continuum. Previous pilots studies indicated that reliability estimates of internal consistency for main factors in this survey were high.<sup>17</sup>

## **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.

## **Analysis**

Data are presented descriptively. Answers to open-ended questions have been summarized where possible and direct quotes from alumni are used for illustrations throughout the report.

---

<sup>15</sup> Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2008a

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

<sup>17</sup> 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)			
	Frequency	Percentage <sup>i</sup>		
<b>Education</b>				
Some college or less	12	16.7%		
Bachelors degree	31	43.1%		
Masters degree	21	29.2%		
PhD MD or other professional degree	8	11.1%		
<b>Individual income</b>				
Less than \$5,000	3	4.3%		
\$5,000-\$14,999	9	12.8%		
\$15,000-\$24,999	4	5.7%		
\$25,000-\$39,999	8	11.5%		
\$40,000-\$59,999	10	14.3%		
\$60,000-\$99,999	13	18.5%		
\$100,000 or more	8	11.5%		
Don't know or refused	15	21.4%		
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	18	25.4%		
Single never married	37	52.1%		
Widowed or divorced	9	12.7%		
In a domestic partnership	7	9.9%		
<b>Race</b>				
Black or African American	3	4.2%		
White or Caucasian	56	78.9%		
Asian	7	9.9%		
Other	5	7.0%		
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	83	85.6%		
Male	13	13.4%		
<b>Year of service</b>				
2002	28	28.9%		
2006	68	70.1%		
<b>Total weeks lived internationally</b> <sup>ii</sup>	73.2 (1.4 years)			
<b>Mean age at year of service</b>	32.9 <sup>iii</sup>			
<b>Total weeks volunteering with program</b>	6.1			
<b>Mean occupational experience (years)</b>	15.0			
<sup>i</sup> Valid percentage (does not include missing values) <sup>ii</sup> Number reflects total time lived internationally, volunteering, or otherwise. <sup>iii</sup> The mean age of the CCS sample is significantly higher than the average alumni population in 2002 and 2006 ( $\mu = 27.6$ ), indicating a possible response bias. Other demographics such as the gender ratio, however, are representative.				

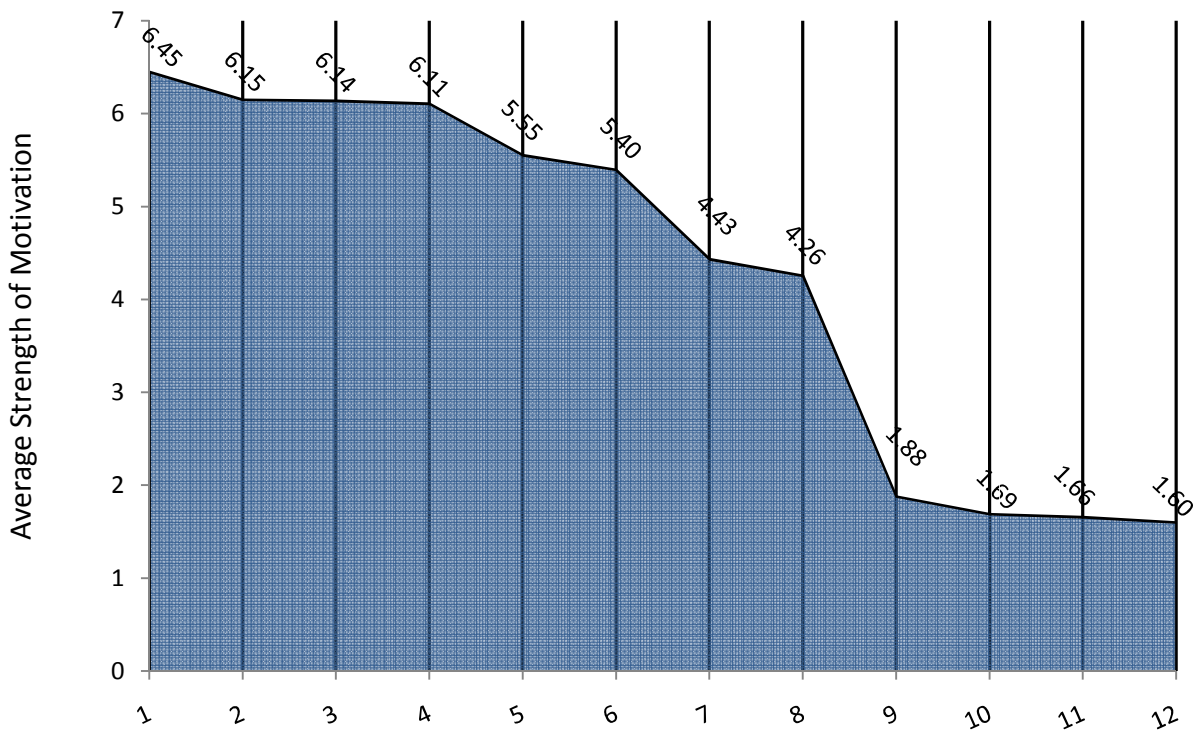
## Findings

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.<sup>18</sup> 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 = 97)**



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

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.

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. 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. 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..

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.

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.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003

## Volunteer Activities and Perceived Effectiveness

### *Activities*

The three primary activities identified by alumni 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. 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. 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

### *Activity Effectiveness*

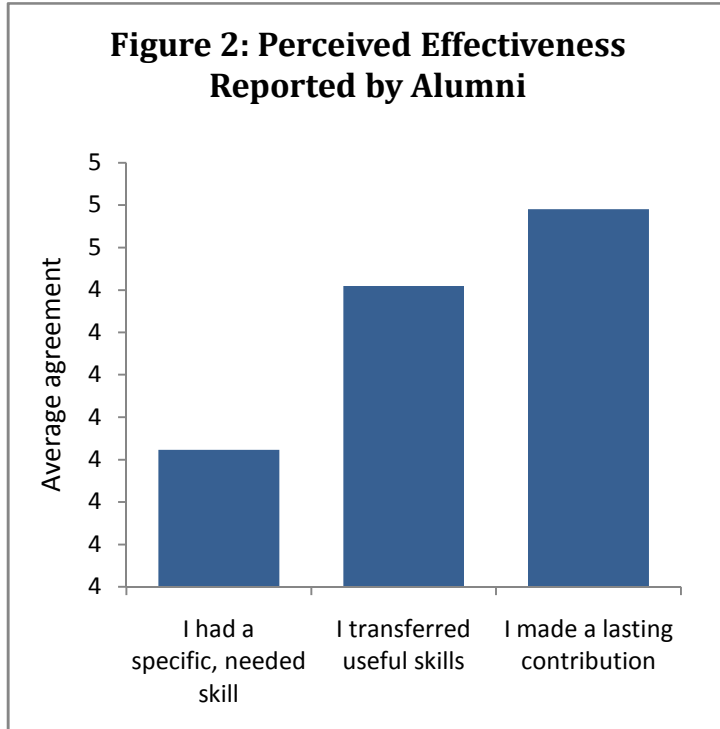
Alumni who reported engaging in a given service activity were asked to rate the activity’s perceived effectiveness. CCS volunteer alumni perceived they were most effective at promoting cross-cultural exchange; caring for infants and children in daycare facilities; tutoring or teaching youth and adults;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

Table 2: Perceived Effectiveness of Volunteer Activities Reported by Alumni<sup>i</sup>

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

*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.



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.

### *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.

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. 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. A handful of volunteers mentioned additional minor differences including disagreements over work ethics, spending priorities, etiquette, or educational values and techniques.

No CCS alumni reported gender-related challenges.

Regarding re-entry to the United States, 75 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 18 percent considered reintegration quite difficult.<sup>25</sup> Alumni offered few concrete examples to describe these challenges.

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.

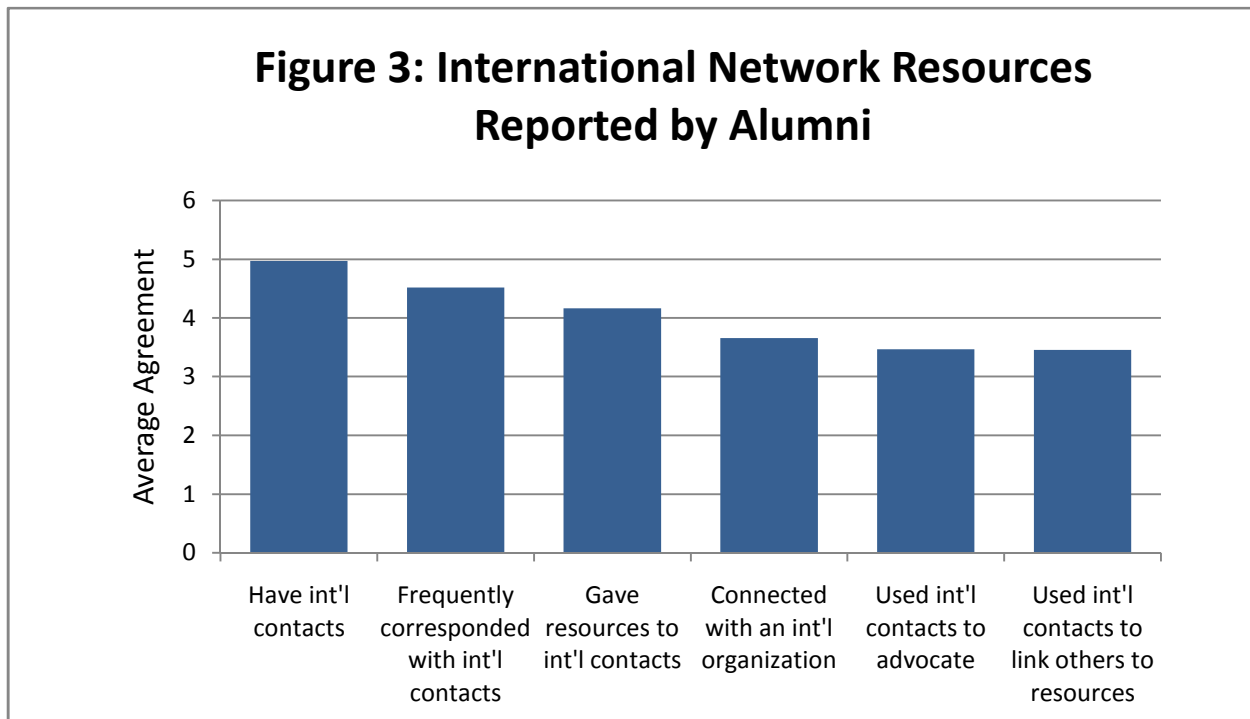
---

<sup>25</sup> 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. Although it is not known whether these networks predated their international volunteer experience, qualitative comments suggest that volunteers develop many connections during their placement.



Twenty percent of the alumni revisited someone in the community, and eight percent had someone from the host community visit them.

Some respondents explained how they continued to utilize these connections. The most common response was maintaining intercultural friendships. 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.

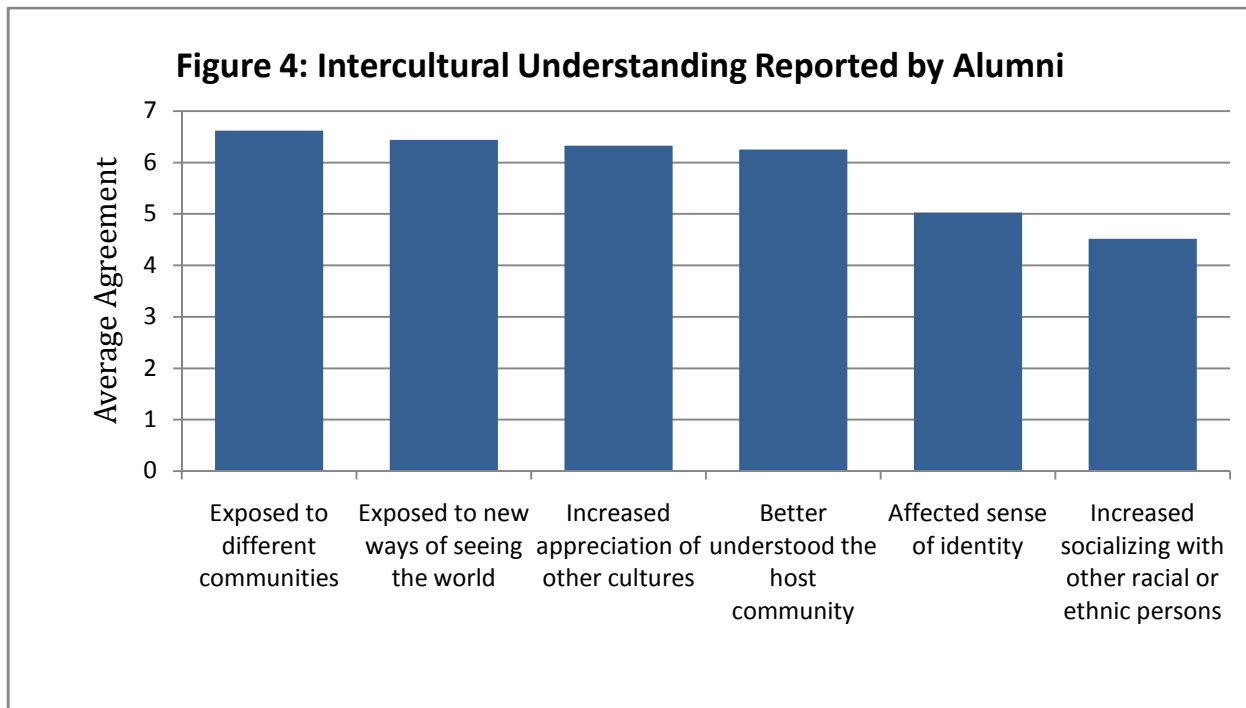
Alumni have also utilized these connections to coordinate research trips, internships, or to advance career goals. Others continue to use community connections to refine language or intercultural competence skills.

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.” 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 to help empower community members. We provided services but did not give things.”

## Intercultural Understanding

One of the most frequently reported outcomes of international volunteering is an increase in intercultural understanding and competence.<sup>29</sup> 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 4).



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.

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

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

<sup>30</sup> Dhooper & Moore, 2000; Iles & Hayers, 1997; Kandola & Fullerton, 1998

In line with this skill, the international experience also reportedly increased alumni interaction with individuals from other racial or ethnic groups. 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.

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.

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.

### **Civic Engagement**

International service is believed to promote civic engagement and community activism, thus helping volunteers’ home and host communities upon their return.<sup>32</sup> 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.

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

---

<sup>32</sup> Kelly & Case, 2007; VSO, 2006

## Life Plans

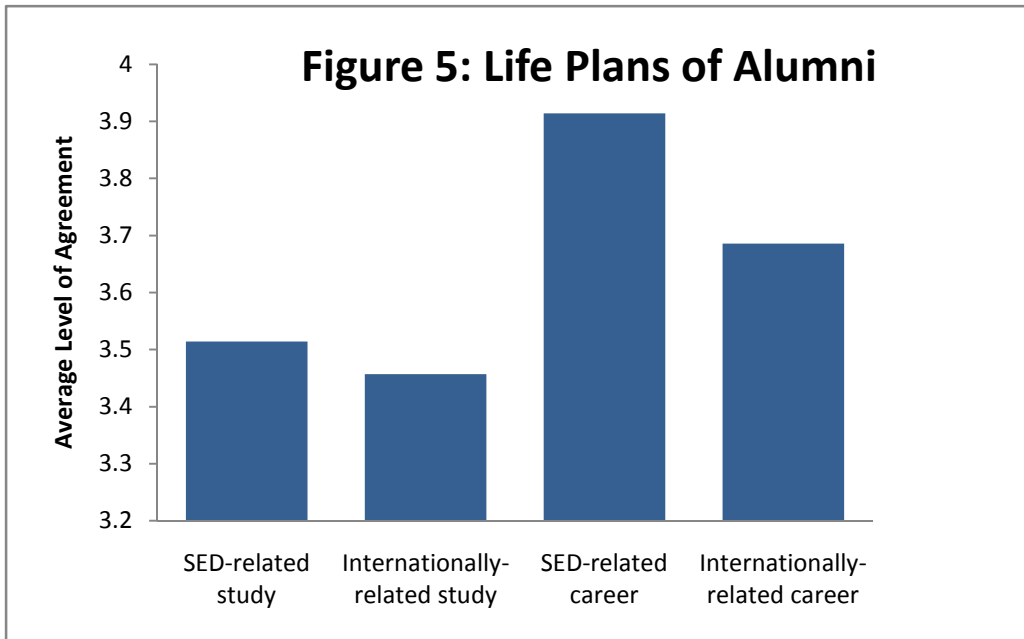
### *Education and Career*

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.<sup>34</sup> 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.

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.

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.



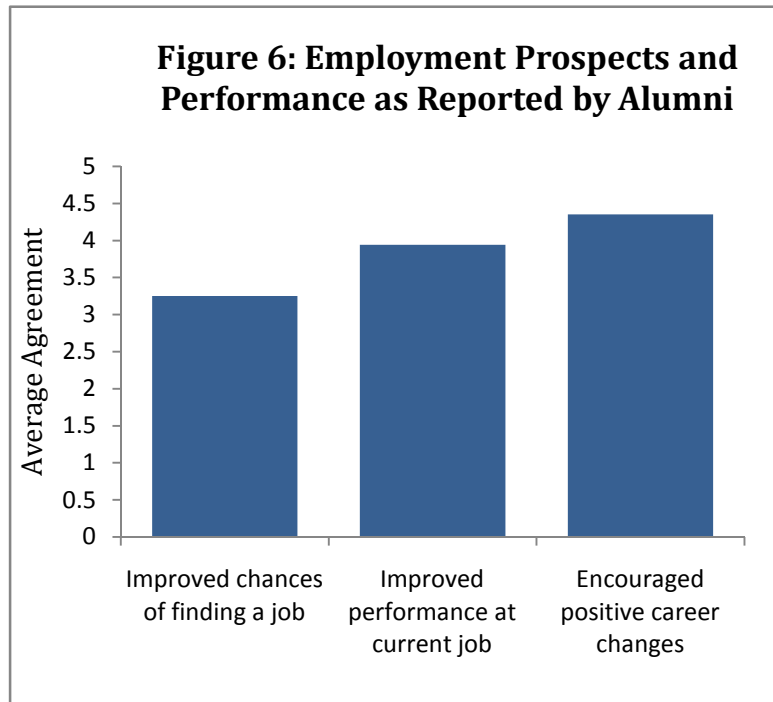
The larger longitudinal research project (of which this alumni survey is a part) will be able to determine whether these plans were made before or after the volunteer experience. On an aggregate

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

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.<sup>36</sup>



---

<sup>36</sup> Brook, Missingham, Hocking, & Fifer, 2007; Cook & Jackson, 2006; Davis Smith, Ellis, & Howlett, 2002; Thomas, 2001; Universalia et al., 2005

## Overall Life Changes

Seventy-five percent of alumni (72 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).

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 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.”

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.

On average, 95 percent of the respondents were satisfied with their volunteer experience. They perceived the experience as one that improved their lives and the lives of those with whom they served.

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.

## 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.

---

<sup>42</sup> Sherraden et al., 2006, 2008

## References

- Allum, C. (September 17-19, 2007). *International volunteering and co-operation: New developments in programme models*. Paper presented at the IVCO 2007 Conference, Montreal, Canada.
- Barnett, N. (June 19, 2006). International volunteer conference to focus on global disaster response. *Volunteers for Prosperity Press Release*, from <http://www.volunteersforprosperity.gov/news/archive.htm>
- Brook, J., Missingham, B., Hocking, R., & Fifer, D. (2007). *The right person for the job*. Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia: Australian Volunteers International and Monash University.
- Canada World Youth. (1993). *Building a constituency for development, Volume 1*. Montreal, Quebec: Canada World Youth.
- Caprara, D., Bridgeland, J., & Wofford, H. (2007). *Global service fellowships: Building bridges through American volunteers*. Policy brief 160. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Cook, P., & Jackson, N. (2006). *Valuing volunteering: A route to professional development, views from VSO volunteers and managers*. London: Chartered Management Institute & VSO.
- CCS. (2007). Why volunteer overseas? Retrieved August 18, 2007, from <http://www.crossculturalsolutions.org/>
- CGP. (2008). *The index of global philanthropy, 2008*. Washington DC: The Center for Global Prosperity.
- Daniel, P., French, S., & King, E. (2006). *A participatory methodology for assessing the impact of volunteering for development: Handbook for volunteers and programme officers*. Bonn, Germany: United Nations Volunteers & Centre for International Development Training.
- Davis Smith, J., Ellis, A., & Howlett, S. (2002). *UK-wide evaluation of the Millennium Volunteers Program*. Research Brief No: 357. London: Institute for Volunteering Research.
- Dhooper, S. S., & Moore, S. E. (2000). *Social work practice with culturally diverse people*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Dingle, A., Sokolowski, W., Saxon-Harrold, S. K. E., Smith, J. D., & Leigh, R. (Eds.). (2001). *Measuring volunteering: A practical toolkit*. Washington DC and Bonn, Germany: Independent Sector and United Nations Volunteers.
- Eberly, D. J., & Sherraden, M. (1990). *The Moral equivalent of war?: A study of non-military service in nine nations*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Engle, J., & Engle, L. (2003). Study abroad levels: Toward a classification of program types. *Frontiers, The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 9, 1-20.
- Fantini, A. E., & with Tirmizi, A. (2007). *Exploring and assessing intercultural competence*. Brattleboro, VT: Federation of the Experiment in International Living.
- Grusky, S. (2000). International service learning: A critical guide from an impassioned advocate. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(5), 858-867.
- Hammer, M. R. (2005). *Assessment of the impact of the AFS study abroad experience*. New York: AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc.
- Hudson, D. K. (1996). A new beginning: the U.S. Peace Corps and South Africa--an interview with Peace Corps deputy director Charles R. Baquet III. *Africa Today*, 43(2), 199-204.
- Hunter, A. (2008). Transformative learning in international education. In V. Savicki (Ed.), *Developing intercultural competence and transformation: Theory, research, and application in international education* (pp. 92-108). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Hustinx, L., & Lammertyn, F. (2003). Collective and reflexive styles of volunteering: A Sociological modernization perspective. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 14(2), 167-187.
- Iles, P., & Hayers, P. K. (1997). Managing diversity in transnational project teams: A tentative model and case study. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 12(2), 95-117.

- IVR. (2004). *Volunteering impact assessment toolkit: A practical guide for measuring the impact of volunteering*. London: Institute for Volunteering Research.
- Jones, A. (2005). Assessing international youth service programmes in two low income countries. *Voluntary Action: The Journal of the Institute for Volunteering Research*, 7(2), 87-100.
- Kandola, R. S., & Fullerton, J. (1998). *Diversity in action: Managing the mosaic* (2nd ed.). London: CIPD Publishing.
- Kelly, S., & Case, R. (2007). *The overseas experience: A passport to improved volunteerism*. Toronto, Ontario: CUSO and the Center for Research and Education in Human Services.
- Lough, B. J. (2006). *International volunteerism in the United States, 2005*: (CSD Working Papers, No. 06-11). St Louis: Center for Social Development at Washington University in St Louis.
- Lough, B. J., McBride, A. M., & Sherraden, M. S. (2007). *The estimated economic value of a US volunteer abroad* (CSD Working Papers, No. 07-29). St Louis: Center for Social Development at Washington University in St Louis.
- Lough, B. J., McBride, A. M., & Sherraden, M. S. (November 20, 2008a). *Assessing the impacts of international volunteering and service*. Paper presented at the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) 37th Annual Conference, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Lough, B. J., McBride, A. M., & Sherraden, M. S. (2008b). *Measuring the impacts of international volunteering and service*. St. Louis: Center for Social Development.
- Mayer, P. (2003). *The wider economic value of social capital and volunteering in South Australia*. South Australia: Office for Volunteers of the Department and the Premier and Cabinet.
- McBride, A. M., & Sherraden, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Civic service worldwide*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- McBride, A. M., Sherraden, M., Benítez, C., & Johnson, E. (2004). Civic service worldwide: Defining a field, building a knowledge base. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 33(4), 8S-21S.

- McBride, A. M., Benítez, C., & Sherraden, M. (2003). *The forms and nature of civic service: A global assessment* (Research report). St. Louis: Center for Social Development, Washington University.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Peace Corps. (2007). *Peace Corps congressional budget justification fiscal year 2008: Reaching around the globe one community at a time*. Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps.
- Powell, S., & Bratović, E. (2006). *The impact of long-term youth voluntary service in Europe: A review of published and unpublished research studies*. Brussels: AVSO & ProMENTE.
- Pusch, M. D., & Merrill, M. (2008). Reflection, reciprocity, responsibility, and committed relativism. In V. Savicki (Ed.), *Developing intercultural competence and transformation: Theory, research, and application in international education* (pp. 53-73). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Quigley, K. F. (2008). It takes a community. *WorldView*, 21, 3.
- Randel, J., German, T., Cordiero, M., & Baker, L. (2004). *International volunteering: Trends, added value and social capital*. Somerset, UK: Development Initiatives.
- Reiman, A. J., Sprinthall, N. A., & Thies-Sprinthall, L. (1997). Service learning and developmental education: The need for an applied theory of role-taking and reflection. *International Journal of Group Tensions*, 27(4), 279-308.
- Reiman, A. J. (1999). The evolution of the social roletaking and guided reflection framework in teacher education: Recent theory and quantitative synthesis of research. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15, 597-612.
- Robert, P., Vilby, K., Aiolfi, L., & Otto, R. (2005). *Feasibility study on the establishment of a European Civil Peace Corps (ECPC)*. Belgium: Channel Research.
- Roberts, T. (2004). *Are western volunteers reproducing and reconstructing the legacy of colonialism in Ghana? An analysis of the experiences of returned volunteers*. University of Manchester, Manchester.

- Rosenthal, S. (2008). Volunteers rising. *WorldView*, 21, 15-16.
- Sherraden, M. S., Lough, B. J., & McBride, A. M. (2008). Effects of international volunteering and service: Individual and institutional predictors. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 19(4), 395-421.
- Sherraden, M. S., Stringham, J., Sow, S. C., & McBride, A. M. (2006). The forms and structure of international voluntary service. *Voluntas*, 17, 163-180.
- Sherraden, M. S., & Benítez, C. (2003). *North American community service pilot project* (Research report). St. Louis: Washington University, Center for Social Development.
- South House Exchange, & Canada World Youth. (2006). *Canada World Youth impact assessment: Synthesis report*. Montreal, Quebec: Canada World Youth.
- Taylor, E. W. (1998). *The theory and practice of transformative learning: A critical review* (Information Series No. No. 374). Columbus, Ohio: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, Ohio State University.
- Thomas, G. (2001). *Human traffic: Skills, employers and international volunteering*. London: Demos.
- Universalia, E.T. Jackson & Associates, & SALASAN. (2005). *The power of volunteering: A review of the Canadian Volunteer Cooperation Program*. Montreal, QC: Universalia.
- UNV. (2000). *Volunteers and the Millennium Development Goals*. Bonn: United Nations Volunteers.
- VSO. (2006). Raising awareness. Retrieved March 29, 2007, from <http://www.vso.org.uk/awareness%5Faction/>
- Wardorf, S. (2001). My time in the Peace Corps. *Public Interest*(142), 72-82.
- Wilson, J., & Musick, M. (1998). The contribution of social resources to volunteering. *Social Science Quarterly*, 79(4), 799-814.
- Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework *Journal of Theory and Society*, 27(2), 151-208.