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Dear Amigos,

As we celebrate 50 years since the incorporation of AMIGOS this fall, we reflect on the breathtaking path behind us. We also look towards the future and make our plans for our journey ahead.

As we look forward, we continue to impact generations of young people and prepare for the future. Our 51st year of Summer Programs concluded this August, and with it another amazing group of young people were challenged and built an understanding of their own capacity to confront change in the world. Our 4th year of Gap Programs launched on September 1, initiating the first year of our partnership with Tufts University. On September 10, our first group of Ecuadorian youth arrived to Houston for their community development training and host family immersion before returning home to carry out their service projects. And over the course of the last year, our team has worked to launch a new brand and website that truly reflects the power of our history and our work and will enable us to reach new generations of potential Amigos.

As we blaze the trail into our next 50 years, we ask each of you to reflect on how AMIGOS has touched your life and share your story with us. We also ask you to keep up with us on our new blog, which will highlight alumni perspectives, our expertise in youth leadership development, and insights on international experiential learning.

The work of AMIGOS begins with youth. Yet it is made possible year after year by each and every one of you. Thank you for being an essential part of AMIGOS as we forge ahead.

Best,

Sara Nathan
AMIGOS & Universidad del Norte Offer New Global Health Program

By Marta Ascherio, Regional Director

In 2013 AMIGOS partnered with Universidad del Norte (UNINORTE) in Barranquilla, Colombia to launch a new program model specifically for college students and focused on social transformation from an anthropological perspective. In 2015, our partnership was so strong we decided to expand and add a global health track option. The AMIGOS-UNINORTE global health track provides real world experience to young people interested in health from a clinical, social, or educational perspective.

This summer, participants took a 3-week intensive global health course offered by UNINORTE. The course provided theoretical elements that facilitated understanding the human being as a subject of health care, which the AMIGOS participants observed and applied by analyzing the family and community context in which they were immersed. Students learned to recognize the changes that have occurred in society that influence health: demographics, social structures, regulatory and legal frameworks, and social activities with emphasis on the community. Upon completion of the initial training and coursework, participants were placed in a six-week practicum focusing on clinical, social, or educational approaches to health.

Our partners included CE Camilo, a nongovernmental organization that provides educational and recreational activities for disabled youth, as well as the local health clinics in Salgar and Puerto Colombia. AMIGOS participants implemented an environmental health campaign with local youth and carried out activities aimed at preventing drug and alcohol abuses and teenage pregnancies.

The professors of the global health course were impressed with the focus, dedication, and maturity of the AMIGOS participants. The professors who shared the teaching load and provided mentorship throughout the summer are looking forward to expanding the practicum to include more clinically-focused options for incoming students in 2016.
The pickup came to a stop in flat area of grayish sand amid a handful of adobe dwellings. The houses were roofed with a thatch of corn stalks, harvested from the corn field that ran along the edge of the settlement for as far as the eye could see. I knew from my studies that this was an ejido, communal land farmed by the members of the community. Despite all sorts of new and unexpected experiences during our three-day orientation, I felt that I was ready for this moment -- the “drop-off” when my partners and I would fend for ourselves. We hopped off the back of the truck with our duffle bags, and we greeted the crowd of community members that had gathered around in the seconds it took for us to come to a stop. “Mande?” “Mande?” That seemed to be all they were saying. And, despite the fact that I had been studying Spanish in one way or another for 10 years, and that at 23 I was the oldest person on the entire AMIGOS project, I had no idea what they were saying. That word was never in a junior high Spanish dialogue and never appeared in a Garcia Lorca poem. Crap. This was not going to be so easy after all.

At that moment, I crossed into a new dimension. It was a place where suddenly only about 50% of what was going on was clear. There was an invisible haze of uncertainty surrounding all of us. Our route leader had told us that there was a mother and three children, but there seemed to be a husband here. We made our way to the backyard of our new home and sat among the chickens, piglets, and a dog that was either the family pet or a stray that had followed us in the truck. We tried our hand at small talk, but nearly everything that came out of our mouths was again greeted by that now
ubiquitous expression, “Mande?” After an hour or so, in a moment of sudden clarity that would be repeated countless times over the next eight weeks, we realized that the loose translation of “Mande?” was, in fact, “Huh?”

After our Coke bottles were empty and the length of the awkward silences were growing longer, a neighbor came by, looked at us, and made an odd gesture with his hand to his mouth, almost like he was scratching his lips. Margarita and Reinaldo, our host parents, indicated that we should go with him. We followed our new friend in silence across the dusty landscape to another home, where we were invited to sit down at a table set for the three of us. We were offered more Cokes, which were followed shortly by bowls of tortillas, beans, rice, and chicken. Reassured that, if nothing else, the food was what we expected, we ate, although the children looking in on us at the window and the family standing awkwardly in the doorway limited the conversation to a few whispered words in English between us. After we finished eating and our hosts cleared the dishes, the children from the window herded us back to our home as the sun began to set. Our belongings had been moved into the main room of the house where we were left to set up our cots and retire for the evening. Day one was complete.

Over the course of the next three weeks, we would work with our neighbors to build over a dozen ventilated pit latrines. Reinaldo, who it turned out had just returned with a suitcase of US dollars from several months working in Dallas, and Margarita generously shared their home and lives with us. Two or three times a day a member of the community would show up where we were working or come up to us along the road and make that familiar gesture with their hand to their mouth, indicating that we should come and eat with them. After a while we stopped worrying about whether we should follow, finally understanding on the very last day that there was, in fact, a master plan whereby each family in the ejido took turns feeding us.

While our skills at making the cement forms for the latrine floors took a little bit of time to develop, our hosts were always gracious and would know just when to step in before we made some fatal error. They enthusiastically performed about 80% of the work required for each latrine, all along thanking us for our efforts and sacrifice. We got to know nearly everyone in the small community, well enough to identify them in the dark at the dances improvised when the man with the car-battery-operated-record-player-in-a-horse-cart arrived each Saturday evening. It turned out that nearly everyone in Villa Nueva was related, the extended families of Reinaldo’s father and two uncles who had settled the ejido some twenty years before.

Before it was time to leave Villa Nueva, I had realized that while my graduate school training in community-level economic development was valuable, what really moved me was watching my partners and my young route leader shape their lives through this experience. None of them had yet stepped foot on a college campus. The lessons learned and experiences we shared would influence, if not drive, choices they didn’t even know were ahead of them. One year later I arrived at the AMIGOS headquarters to start a thirty-year career sending teenagers and young adults overseas for volunteer service and academic exchange. The haze that fell over us that first day has never fully lifted, and it would be repeated later over breakfast in Lithuania, at a community meeting in Guatemala, or negotiating with government officials in Vietnam. But now I embrace it, and when I find myself in that haze of uncertainty, I don’t even bother with asking, “Mande?” More often than not, I just smile and nod.

Steve Kirk is the Director of Finance and Administration at Interise and has over 20 years of experience managing international volunteer and educational exchange programs. He was an AMIGOS participant in Mexico in 1984 and Paraguay in 1985, worked in the AMIGOS National Office, and has served on the International Board of Directors and the Boston Chapter Board of Directors.
A Decade of International Volunteering from the United States (2004-2014)

By Benjamin Lough

Until recently, our collective knowledge about who is volunteering abroad and what they are doing has been quite limited. Beginning in 2004, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) began gathering data on volunteering abroad. Thanks to the BLS annual Current Population Survey, we now have ten years of data to illustrate patterns of international volunteering from the US.

Our report, published in 2015 by the Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis, brings these data together in a succinct research brief. This brief provides information that can inform decisions related to the management of international service and leadership programs like AMIGOS.

Selected highlights from the report include:

■ In 2014, nearly one million people volunteered internationally. This figure fluctuates from year to year but has changed relatively little over the past decade.

■ Nearly half of international volunteers spend two weeks or less abroad; around 15% spend 6 months or longer abroad.

■ From 2004 to 2014, international volunteers aged 65 or older had the greatest growth (63%), followed by adults aged 55 to 64 years (53%).

■ From 2004 to 2014, young people aged 15 to 24 years volunteered internationally most frequently (26%), followed by those aged 45 to 54 years (20%).

■ Higher household income is highly associated with volunteering internationally; the total proportion of international volunteers from households earning $100,000 or more increased 20% over the past decade—those earning $30,000 or less decreased by 8%.

■ Considerably more individuals identifying as white reported volunteering abroad (85%) than those in other racial groups (15%).

■ Higher education is strongly associated with service abroad. About one quarter of all international volunteers had a bachelor’s degree, and more than half of volunteers aged 16–24 are students.

■ 44% volunteered with a religious organization.

■ Common volunteer activities include tutoring or teaching (29%), mentoring youth (27%), engaging in general labor (26%), and providing medical care and counseling services (21%).
Overall, this report provides a limited picture of international volunteer service among the US population, as well as the characteristics of those who engage in international volunteerism. Although rates of volunteering fluctuate moderately, opportunities and incentives to volunteer change over time -- including a greater variety of alternatives for young adults, such as service as part of study abroad programs in higher education institutions.

Less volunteering abroad by people with lower incomes may indicate less access to international volunteer service among this group. An increasing trend of volunteers from households making $75,000 or more suggests that international volunteering may be becoming more exclusive or expensive or that there may be other social and economic factors influencing these trends.

The ability to associate demographic variables with the type of volunteer experience can improve our understanding of international volunteerism in the US population and establish a benchmark from which to study volunteer status, form, and function over time. For instance, considering the finding that higher education is strongly associated with service abroad, those in college may have greater exposure to international volunteer opportunities or may simply have stronger motivations to engage in international service.

In comparison with national data, AMIGOS programs run from 4 weeks to 9 months, with the majority being 6-8 weeks. On average, this is a longer duration than about 60% of volunteers from the US. On the other hand, the average age of our AMIGOS participants is 17 years old, which is younger than most US Americans that serve abroad.

We invite you to use the report as a starting point for additional dialogue and discussions about international volunteering from the United States. If you are interested in learning more about the report or the data, contact Ben Lough.

Benjamin Lough is an assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Faculty Director of International Service with the Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis. He is also a senior research associate at the Center for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Duration of Time Abroad</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 2 weeks</td>
<td>841,864</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3–4 weeks</td>
<td>330,086</td>
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<td>5–9 weeks</td>
<td>166,986</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10–26 weeks</td>
<td>274,134</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 26 weeks</td>
<td>271,868</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
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AMIGOS Expands Two-Way Exchange Programs this Fall and Winter

by Molly Friend, Programs Coordinator & Emma Smith, Regional Director

Fall 2015 marks a very exciting season for our US and South American Youth Ambassadors! AMIGOS was awarded an expanded grant from the US Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to implement the YA Program for Paraguay, Uruguay, Ecuador, and San Francisco Bay Area youth, as well as a new grant through the American Youth Leadership Program for Houston, TX youth to travel to Ecuador. AMIGOS hosted the first cohort of Ecuadorian Youth Ambassadors in Houston this September. The structure for each of the exchanges is very similar: students travel abroad, live with host families, participate in leadership development training, then return to implement a service project in their home communities.

Unique to the Ecuador program, the Ecuadorian Youth Ambassadors are not required to speak English in order to participate. Removing this language requirement for applicants enables increased accessibility of this program to youth from rural sectors and lower economic backgrounds. As a result, AMIGOS received nearly 300 applications from all provinces of Ecuador for the thirteen spots.

Meet one of the Youth Ambassadors selected for the program:

Name: Gilda Bravo (age 17)  Hometown: Junin, Manabi, Ecuador
Gilda is a health volunteer, focused on the prevention of pregnancy in adolescents in her community, and plans to create a club for youth where they can develop their talents and express themselves artistically in a safe space while building self-confidence. In her application, Gilda said, “To be someone in life isn’t easy, but it’s not impossible. Above all, I want to be a good human being and a clinical psychologist. I believe ... growing is positive when we put our skills to good use, always remembering that we live to serve and serve to
Meanwhile, as the Ecuadorian cohort embarked upon their international adventure in September, the Uruguayan and Paraguayan Youth Ambassadors celebrated their achievements and program wrap-up. On August 21, the 2015 Uruguayan YAs wrapped up their program with community-based initiative presentations and a graduation ceremony. Of course, the day also ended with hamburgers and bowling.

In Paraguay, the 2015 Youth Ambassadors are in the final month of their project implementation and will celebrate the end of their program. Depending on the goals of each community-based initiative, some end with the program and others continue to evolve. For example, in Paraguay, Kuñamba J.A. is the active project of 2015 Youth Ambassador, Camila. Kuñamba J.A. is an educational project that promotes awareness about domestic violence in Paraguay through prevention. In August, Cami and her leadership team presented theatrical skits for nearly 600 young people, demonstrating how to be in a healthy and non-violent relationship. Some Youth Ambassadors like Camila elect to tackle very sensitive subjects. The Kuñamba team has done an excellent job collaborating with specialists so that their information is relevant and their activities are most accessible to their peers. Learn more here: www.facebook.com/pages/kuñamba-JA

The Youth Ambassadors from California, who began the development of their own initiatives in June, were able to meet the Paraguayan participants and see the next stage in their program. Celssy, a 2015 San Francisco Bay Area Youth Ambassador, reflected that meeting the Paraguayan group makes the experience feel “very real and gives us an idea of what our projects are supposed to look like, and all the work and effort that it takes and that they put into their projects. AMIGOS teaches you that through your friends and support from your community, you can be the change that you wish to see in your community.”

To learn more about the Youth Ambassadors Program, please visit: http://amigosinternational.org/programs/youthambassadors
Mil Gracias! Thank You!

We want to sincerely thank the generous individuals, foundations, and corporations who have supported AMIGOS with a gift of $500 or more this year (through Sept. 1, 2015). We are grateful for your support!

You can make your own gift online today at www.amigosinternational.org/donate.

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Gifts to AMIGOS support our important work, including initiatives like financial aid awards for participants who would otherwise not have access to our programs. In the words of Adriana, a 2015 financial aid recipient from Washington, D.C.:

“I will continue to look back on the lessons I have learned from my community, my host family, my partners, my supervisors, all 48 participants, and la República Dominicana. Thank you for giving me the chance to step out of my comfort zone and have the best summer of my life.”
US and Costa Rican youth cheer on a fellow participant.
GET OUT OF YOUR ELEMENT
www.amigosinternational.org