

# Comprehensive Health Education Manual: History, Progress, & Final Report

Returned Peace Corps Volunteer: Adrienne Gilbert

Dominican Republic, 2006-2009

## Ongoing History:

I am writing to you to inform you about the history and the progress of the continuing basic health education project which I have been working on during my service here in the Dominican Republic as a Health Volunteer. During my two years of service, beginning in September of 2006, living in a rural village, El Batey, in the southwest of the country, I had the opportunity to work with a group of rural health promoters that were originally hired by SESPAS, the national public health authority. These individuals were selected by public health officials of San Juan to help the rural clinic lead their people in improving basic public health issues. As a health extension volunteer I shadowed all of the health promoters on their house visiting routes into the rural mountains, conducted interviews with them and helped them collect data for various health surveys which were being conducted by SESPAS. What I struck me was that most of the effort by the promoters was simply "gofer" work that the government had sent them to do by sending them into the mountains to collect information for studies, as opposed to prepare them to teach their community members preventative health care information.

This lack of proper and useful education and misuse of time and energy inspired me to come up with a creative way to teach the women information that they would be both excited about learning and which would be useful to their friends and families in their sectors of the community. In a weekly class basic health education class that I taught at the community clinic, I realized that a few of the promoters were illiterate, which reflects the literacy rate of the majority of the community. (The class included various topics such as basic household sanitation, infectious diseases, family planning, adolescent sexual health and domestic violence, etc.) The manual that I was using to teach the course was mainly text-based and the women had a hard time paying attention to the presentations because they were busy reading their individuals manuals. Although enthusiastic about the topics, I noticed a need for a manual that they could call their own, which was more culturally appropriate and user friendly.

For a national health promoter conference that fell near the end of my service, I decided to create a health education manual completed in all drawings, with minimal text that accompanies the topic drawings. Volunteers from all over the country came together to put on a week of creative learning activities and brought the health promoters their communities. We taught the women how to use the manual in a teaching-the-trainer style. The funds for the first round of printing came from PEPFAR money that was already within the Health Sector budget. The manual was a hit and it was evident that the women were even more excited than before about having a tool to teach in their communities. Because of the printing costs of the manual we were only

able to provide each community a limited number of books (2-3, depending on the number of representatives from each community), so that the women could share the manuals. Our hope was to provide each woman with a book in order to give the women a sense of ownership over their teaching tool.

Our hope is that providing as many volunteers as possible with access to this book, they will be able to empower the health promoters in their own communities to be self-sufficient promoters by giving them the tools to teach their friends, families and neighbors in a more effective, efficient and fun manner. At this national conference we were able to provide fifteen volunteers with three manuals a piece, for a total of forty-five copies.



Since the end of my formal service in November, I have extended my service to La Romana, an urban area east of Santo Domingo to work through La Clinica del Fundacion MIR, which is the only clinic in the country of its size and caliber that offers free anti-retro-viral medications to those people living with HIV/AIDS in the country. My efforts as a volunteer in this region of the country are to strengthen and coordinate educational materials and services to those who are most in need in the area.

The Eastern region of the country is heavily populated with Bateyes where many of the Haitian immigrants come to work as cane cutters. Our work in the clinic is shared with several other partnering health facilities in the area, each which have counselors, home visitors and staff have showed interest in using the manual with their clients. Good Samaritan Hospital provides the bateyes with health educators, the Public Health Hospital offers HIV counseling, the Modulo Anexo Materno Infantil (MAMI) offers pre-natal care and adolescent education, and our clinic, La Clinica de la Familia MIR, sends home visitors into the neighborhood to educate patients about their health. Our hope, as well, is that by receiving funding from the Friends of the Dominican Republic, we will be able to finish out the Peace Corps Partnership Program grant (currently listed on the national website) an continue to provide a creative and innovative teaching tool to health workers and volunteers, on the ground, who need our services the most.

The original grant amount for the PCPP grant was: \$2,887.98 USD. The amount that currently remains to be filled is \$2,512.98 USD. (The difference was filled by anonymous friends and family members). I was recently notified that my local hometown Rotary Club will be donating \$400 USD. The total remaining amount to be filled will then be approximately \$2,100 USD.

I am requesting from the Friends of the Dominican Republic, \$2,100 USD, which is a portion of the total budget for the project. This portion will give us a part of our second round of printing and help us to expand upon our network of health promotion that has already spread geographically to volunteers around the country. By printing more manuals at one time, we will be able to reduce the printing costs and have a supply of manuals before the national health conference occurs. With your help, we will be able to reach community health workers in more bateyes, provide assistance to domestic house visitors who are in dire need of educational support and provide manuals to more incoming health volunteers, by training them to use the manual with their health promoters and providing them with a sufficient amount for their communities.

Budget Update: We printed 50 manuals instead of 70 in the second round of printing.

15 of those manuals were given to incoming health volunteers who are currently using them in the field; 35 of those manuals were disseminated to local Dominican and Haitian house visitors, nurses and social workers in the La Romana area who were trained to use them at the clinics and in house-hold visits.

Due to the following circumstances, the total number of manuals went down. After the proposal was written, 15 more pages of information were added to the manual.

Total: 1,960 per manual x 50 manuals= approximately 98,000 DRP or \$2,882 USD. Friends of the Dominican Republic donated \$2100 USD for the printing.

I understand that this is a large difference in number of manuals, but I guarantee that the use of the manuals that are being used is tremendous. This project was very time consuming, but the outcomes was incredibly beneficial. The women and men who were trained with the manual were thrilled and now have a tool of their own that they use in their daily lives. Most of these women have never had their own books before and now they have a tool that makes them feel self-sufficient and successful within their communities.

I feel very fortunate to have come across this funding possibility. As the economy in the United States has been difficult lately, it has been very hard to find friends and family members who have been able to help donate to the public grant. It is very challenging, as well, to find smaller funding organizations that have the money to support the project. My service ends in late June and I am very



grateful to the Friends of the Dominican Republic for helping me to finish the project, which I feel has made my service fruitful and has, in reality, led me to understand more about my passion.

Follow Up:

Since my Peace Corps service has ended in June of 2009, I have made grand efforts at continuing to communicate with those volunteers and community members who are using the manual. The National Peace Corps headquarters is in the process of reviewing the manual for publication within the Latin American Region to be used by health sector volunteers as part of their health training curriculum. A follow-up health sector volunteer has been sent to both, El Batey and La Romana to continue guiding the health workers with their efforts with the manuals. The health sector volunteer leader has also promoted the use of the manual within the incoming group of health volunteers (see attachment). She has sent a letter of reference to her work with the manuals in her own community. The efforts to continue using the manual in Spanish speaking clinics and communities in the United States are underway.

Adrienne October 2, 2009

Testimonial Letter - July 17, 2009

To whom it may concern:

I am a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Dominican Republic, as well as the Peace Corps Volunteer Leader (PCVL) of the Health and Water Sectors. Over the past year I have worked with the Health Promoters' Manual illustrated by Adrienne Gilbert. The manual has proved to be an integral teaching tool in the creation of health promoters as well as in community outreach.

Since November 2007, I have served in a rural community outside of San José de Ocoa with two women's groups and two youth groups. After training the women's groups in Nutrition, Reproductive Health, First Aid and "How to be a Community Health Promoter" over the course of a year, the women began to use Adrienne's Health Promoter Manual to conduct house visits in the surrounding communities. So far they have completed over 250 house visits.

The manual created by Adrienne is particularly useful because it caters towards illiterate and semi-literate populations, which are generally the populations with which Peace Corps Volunteers work. While training my health promoters, I was unsure of how the illiterate promoters would retain and teach all the information learned in the courses. With this manual, they are provided a tool so that they stay on task and do not forget the key points of the health topics.

I owe many thanks to Adrienne for her hard work and creativity that went into the creation of the *Promotoras de Salud Manual*.

Sincerely,

Katherine Tuidor, PCVL Healthy Families and Environments