

A STORY FROM THE FIELD-VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

My name is George Muriithi from Kenya. I first arrived in Guyana on 20th September 2005, four days after my other UNV colleagues. My first impression of Georgetown is how closely it resembles our Kenyan Coastal town and second largest city of Mombasa.

After one week of orientation at the UNDP office and another two weeks of intensive training at FXB, I was finally sent to my current posting at GPHC Chest Clinic. It did not take long for me and my supervisor, Dr. J. Mohanal to bond and start social activities outside of official work; he is such a sociable person. Dr. Mohanal is the Program Manager of the National Tuberculosis Control Program (NTP).

Dr. Mohanal has formed a volunteers group that offers medical outreach services country-wide to communities that have difficulties in accessing health care. Once he learnt that I am a willing volunteer, he invited me to join this group. The group is composed of young persons with various expertises in health care and strong volunteer will and spirit. Some members work in public health institutions, private sector, and social groups like religious organizations etc.

We have pharmacists and pharmaceutical technicians, laboratory technologists, nurses, social workers and youth leaders. One of our most active members is Mr. Compton Giddings, our project driver, who also happens to know the country inside-out. He also is involved in the Filarial control program where he distributes Dy-ethycarmazine fortified salt among other services.

Since I joined the group we have had outreach clinics to Mahaicony, up Pomeroon River in region 2, in West Coast Demerara. The clinics respond to requests from church groups, Islamic mosques, Hindu temples etc. Logistic support for the activities in terms of medications, fuel, boat transportation etc comes from well-wishers in the business community, the religious organizations requesting for the outreaches and the Ministry of Health. Some material and financial assistance comes from Dr. Mohanal's family.

The most exciting feature of these outreach activities is the unique way they are planned so that they offer relaxation benefits to the volunteers. Accompanying activities like entertainment by the beneficiaries, sumptuous lunches, boating extravaganzas etc, make the volunteers to always want to come for the next clinic. I personally have taken advantage of these outings to see the country. Apart from Dr. Abdalla, I think I am the most travelled international volunteer within Guyana and this include the non-medical volunteers.

The team-leader has plans to register the group as a local non-governmental organization (or such formal group) to strengthen fund-raising opportunities and cover wider areas. An organized and registered group will receive more hearing and more help form the business community and other leaders that can help in logistic as well as technical support. We need participation of a wide range of supporters including doctors, social workers persons who can mobilize material support.

I am proud to be associated with such an organization. During interludes after clinics I take the opportunity to give talks on volunteerism to the youth attending the outreaches or within the group. This also includes those that assist in whichever way (from the benefiting communities). I have noted that since I joined, the group has been growing in terms of numbers and also diversity of technical know-how.

It may be useful for other UNVs to explore if there are such groups in their areas so that they can assist them in terms of technical input and also in order to take up the opportunity to expand our volunteerism. After all, that is one of our mandates here in Guyana.