



## DESCRIPTION OF PEACE CORPS SERVICE

**MS. BRIENNE THOMSON**

**REPUBLIC OF PARAGUAY 2012-2015**

After a competitive application process stressing technical skills, motivation, adaptability, and cross-cultural understanding, Peace Corps invited Ms. Brienne Thomson to serve as a Community Economic Development (CED) volunteer in the South American nation of Paraguay

### PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

Brienne began an intensive 10-week pre-service training on May 31, 2013, in Guarambaré, a small agricultural town located an hour south of the capital, Asunción. The program and family homestay experience consisted of language, culture and technical training, an introduction into CED sector specific projects, health and safety sessions, in-site training with active volunteers, and reinforcement of the intercultural objectives of the Peace Corps.

The training program included:

- 137 hours of intensive language and culture training in Guaraní and Spanish
- 177 hours of technical training and field based activities
- 78 hours of Common Areas training which encompasses CORE sessions, such as cultural adaptation, expectations of volunteers, diversity instruction, as well as safety, security, and health training
- In addition, as part of the language and cross-cultural component of the pre-service training program, Brienne lived with a Paraguayan family for 10 weeks.

### Assignment

On August 9, 2013, Brienne completed training and was sworn in as a Peace Corps Volunteer. She was assigned to San Estanislao, a community in the Department of San Pedro, roughly 150km northwest of Asunción, where the Spanish language is predominantly spoken.

### Primary Projects/Activities

Since Brienne's arrival in the site of San Estanislao, Paraguay in August of 2013, she has taught two semesters of the CED sector's *Construye Tus Sueños* entrepreneurial/small business development course. In July of 2014, her student succeeded in placing second in a national business plan competition, and was awarded seed-funding for her event planning start-up company.

Other projects Brienne has accomplished related to the Community Economic Development sector goals are as follows:

- The 14-week long **entrepreneurial course, *Construye Tus Sueños***, or Build Your Dreams, was taught twice by Brienne at a private technical school and a community college, both in San Estanislao. She also created PowerPoint presentation slides that she shared with fellow CED teachers.
- The Entrepreneur's Challenge or, ***Desafío al Emprendedor* regional workshop** was planned by the CED sectors' *Paraguay Empeende* team. Brienne took the lead on organizing it in San Estanislao, which was quite an



undertaking; from securing space with the municipality, to radio promotion, to flyer distribution, to gathering and printing materials, to organizing the speaker and catering.

- The **Paraguay Emprnde National Workshop** was the culmination of Brienne's *Construye Tus Sueños* entrepreneurial classes. She traveled to the workshop with two students; one of whom won seed-funding money based on her business plan presentation and the other planned and led peer-participants in a presentation on elevator speeches.
- After her courses and workshops, Brienne was invited to give an **entrepreneurial lecture at the local campus of the Universidad Nacional de Asunción**. There were approximately 100 students and faculty from the Psychology Department present for her hour-long interactive lecture.
- Brienne also compiled a dynamic online **Community Study** to document opinions, perspectives and actions taken that relate to economic, governmental, infrastructure and communication issues that citizens face on a daily basis in San Estanislao. It includes a 'state of the community' introduction, a questionnaire, and recorded interviews held with a variety of community members.
- Brienne attended weekly meeting with one of her main community contacts, the **Rotaract Youth Group**. They would discuss event plans, neighborhood issues and organize community service projects.

### Secondary Activities/Projects

As well as CED related projects, Brienne was also very active in other community events and projects, including a recycling awareness campaign, *Nuestra Tierra Guaraní No Es Basurero*, or, Our Guaraní Land is Not a Trashcan. She launched the campaign with a local youth group, Rotaract, a subsidiary of Rotary International for 18 to 30-year-olds. It began with an Asunción-based NGO, *Ita Enramada*, speaking about the importance of minding our environment, involved seven high-schools and two competitions. The first was of the construction of trashcans for public use, and the second was a street fair of waste, recycled into art. The creativity and assertiveness this brought out in the youth of San Estanislao was inspirational.

Other secondary activities and projects Brienne was involved in are below:

- A **Día de los Niños** article Brienne wrote in Spanish was initially requested by the director of the regional branch of Plan Paraguay for an even organized by Plan, Rotaract and SENADIS, a center for human rights for the disabled. The objective of this Children's Day celebration was to dissuade people from hiding and being ashamed of disabled people.
- As a lifelong runner and athletic person, Brienne has also been teaching a weekly **aerobics class, Sana Condición para la Vida**, since her arrival in site. It is open to all community members with the objective of promoting fitness and nutrition, and is also a great way to meet new community contacts.
- As follow-up to the aforementioned **waste/recycling awareness campaign** that Brienne planned with Rotaract, she subsequently wrote an article for KUAT, the Peace Corps Paraguay newsletter, about the organization and results of the campaign titled, "*Nuestra Tierra Guaraní no es Basurero: The Wrapper that Unfolded a Campaign.*"
- Also, as a result of the recycling awareness campaign, Brienne received a request do a follow-up **Recycling Workshop** a local high school, *Colegio San Francisco*. With the help of a four VAC members from the San Pedro Department, the volunteers gave a presentation followed by three interactive stations showing students different creative and useful things they can do with assumed "waste."
- In a city of over 55,000 urban residents with no printed press Brienne initiated another community project with the Rotaract youth group to assist in attenuating misinformation in the word-of-mouth culture. It was to create an **information board** in the central plaza of San Estanislao to post events, classified, job listings, emergency contact information, local news and statistics. In total, two high-schools and one architectural university were involved in designing, promoting and constructing what will hopefully become a center for communication.



- With experience and previous study of international communication and teaching methods, Brienne traveled to Itacurubi to assist a VAC-mate in a **Pedagogical Workshop** with her local primary school on the topic of dynamic and interactive teaching.
- The Volunteer Advisory Committee (VAC) of the San Pedro Department organized a **Health Workshop** on the topics of AIDS, STDs, myths of condoms, and locating body parts that Brienne participated in. It was given at three rural high schools in the department, during two long days of bicycling to participating schools. Due to the success, Brienne organized a follow-up workshop with a fellow VAC volunteer, given at the *Centro Tajy* in the community of San Estanislao.

### Language Skills

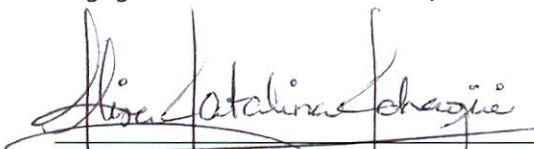
Ms Brienne Thomson achieved an Advanced Mid competency level in Spanish during her service and effectively used Spanish to communicate in the entrepreneurial courses she taught at schools, the talks and workshops she gave on health, entrepreneurship and pedagogy, with her colleagues, Paraguayan community contacts, and in daily life.

### NCE

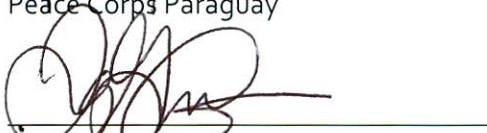
Ms. Brienne Thomson finished her Peace Corps service in Paraguay on May 11th, 2015.

Pursuant to section 5(f) of the Peace Corps Act 22 U.S.C 2504 (f) as amended, any former volunteer employed by the United States Government following her Peace Corps Volunteer service is entitled to have any period of satisfactory Peace Corps Volunteer service credited for purposes of retirement, seniority, reduction in force, leave and other privileges based on length of federal government service. Peace Corps service shall not be credited toward completion of the probationary or trial period or completion of any service requirement for career appointment.

This is to certify in accordance with Executive Order No. 11103 of 10 April 1963, that Ms. Brienne Thomson served satisfactorily as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Her service in Paraguay ended on May 11th, 2015. She is therefore eligible to be appointed as a career-conditional employee in the competitive civil service on a non-competitive basis. This benefit under the Executive Order entitlement extends for a period of one year after termination of the Volunteer's service, except that the employing agency may extend that period for up to three years for a former Volunteer who enters military service, pursues studies at a recognized institution of higher learning, or engages in other activities that, in the view of the appointing authority, warrant extension of the period.

  
Elisa Echague  
Program Manager  
Community Economic Development  
Peace Corps Paraguay

June 3, 2015  
Date

PA   
Louis Alexander  
Country Director  
Peace Corps Paraguay

6/9/2015  
Date

