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TRANSFORMING 'INTERNATIONAL AID' TO 'INTERNATIONAL
PARTNERSHIPS': AN ANALYSIS OF THE U.S. VOLUNTOURISM INDUSTRY

by

Caroline Scott

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(International Affairs)

The Honors College

University of Maine

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the United States' international humanitarian voluntourism industry. Four organizations are studied from various realms of aid, these organizations include the Peace Corps, United Planet, Break Away, and Cru and their humanitarian ministry, Unto. Key themes that are relevant to all the organizations studied are defined and interpreted. These organizations' training efforts to promote ethical voluntourism are closely examined and critiqued. Finally, several improvements are suggested at the end of this thesis that serve as suggestions for ways in which the voluntourism industry can improve their partnerships with their host communities.

DEDICATION

To Mom and Ivan, my best friends, my biggest supporters, and my inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I'd like to thank for all the support and guidance they've given me. Firstly, my family: Mom, Ivan, and Em—thank you for always believing in me and reminding me that I am intelligent and capable. Thank you to my friends for being there for me on my best and worst days. Most importantly, I'd like to thank my professors at the University of Maine. Melissa, thank you for all that you've done for me, you are truly the reason as to why I've been able to make UMaine a home. Julie and François, thank you for all the mentorship and knowledge you've instilled upon me through the years. Thank you to my committee members, Professor Glover and Professor Vekasi, for all the guidance you gave me. Finally, thank you to Professor Micinski for being the best advisor I could have ever asked for. Even on the other side of the world you have provided me with the support and encouragement that I needed, it has been an absolute pleasure to learn from you.

PREFACE

Growing up, I dreamed of saving the world. I read about people like Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi and was inspired by their actions—I saw how much hate and despair was present in the world, and I wanted to find solutions. I strategized ways to improve issues like poverty, discrimination, hunger, and homelessness, all without seeing those issues with my own two eyes, for I had never truly seen the world outside of my suburban bubble.

I've grappled with my fascination for international aid for several years. I had so many unanswered questions about cultivating an ethical mindset—am I interested in this work for the right reasons, or am I just trying to build my ego? Am I even wanted in these host communities? Do I have the experience and expertise to actually help? Why am I putting myself in this position when there are thousands of locals, many of whom are much more qualified and knowledgeable than me that could do the work I aspire to do?

These questions paralyzed me for years. It had always been a dream of mine to work for the Peace Corps after graduating college, but as I continued to dive deeper into these questions, my fear of this industry became even more prevalent. At one point or another, I stopped believing in ethical international aid and forced myself to come to terms with the fact that I'd never be more than a tourist outside of the United States.

I lived in this trance for about a year, though I never completely lost hope that I'd one day find the perfect organization and create the perfect formula for being an ethical

international aid worker. Thus was cultivated the seed that has now grown into my Honors thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

When I was eighteen years old, I interned for a small nonprofit in my hometown called Partners in Development. Their mission is to provide humanitarian aid to people in Haiti, Guatemala, Peru, and parts of Mississippi, though I worked at their base office in Massachusetts. Much to my dismay, I almost never interacted with the organization's international partners. Instead, I completed administrative tasks like taking inventory of donated supplies, recruiting financial donors, editing pictures for the organization's website, and mailing newsletters. I learned a lot while working for Partners in Development, mostly through trial and error.

I spent several of my days in the organization's dusty warehouse where they kept trash bags full of secondhand clothes and medical supplies. My first few weeks as an intern were dedicated to sorting through these items, separating the clothing based on size and versatility and the medical supplies by expiration date. I was astonished by the quantity of useless items, though thinking back on it now, it doesn't surprise me at all—people in my community saw an opportunity to help the less fortunate, and they did so without entirely thinking it through. This was prevalent with the tens of coats I dropped off at thrift store donation sites and the plethora of expired medical supplies that ended up in the dumpster.

I've learned that the notion of not thinking things all the way through can have detrimental consequences in the aid industry. Underthinking or not considering the longevity of donor actions is what turns good intentions into harmful mistakes. This is the case for so many individuals, myself included, that get involved with international aid organizations because they believe they have the capacity to save the world. This, I've

learned through much self-reflection, should not be the goal. Aid organizations should not be composed of saviors but rather of individuals with selfless mindsets that must be comfortable acknowledging their privilege, their ignorance, and their insignificance in relation to the host community and their adversities.

An ethical volunteer must be passionate and kind-hearted, but that is the mere tip of the iceberg, there are thousands of other traits that volunteers need to obtain before embarking on their journey, and it is the responsibility of the aid organizations to guide their volunteers through this path of learning equity and unlearning bias that is so ingrained in our minds as citizens of the United States.

In this thesis, I argue that ethical partnerships between United States volunteers and foreigners in host communities are achievable when aid organizations provide their volunteers with training and resources that teach individuals how to recognize and dismantle their sentiments of saviorism and superiority. My overall research question is: How does the United States aid industry promote ethical, unbiased, antiracist aid?

The section titled “Background” gives an overview of the aid system in the United States and addresses some of the structural issues of the system, as well as defines some key terms including “voluntourism” and “white saviorism.” After this is the “Review of Literature” where I write about the peer-reviewed literature that addresses my research question about ethical international aid. The next section, “Methodology,” outlines the course of action I took concerning research. “Key Themes” is after “Methodology,” where I define and analyze the important words and phrases that prevailed while conducting interviews. Following this comes four case studies that each correspond with an organization—I give an overview of the four organizations and explore

their commitments to cultivating ethical relationships. The next section is titled “Comparison Across Organizations” where I examine the four organizations in contrast to one another. After this is “Critiques and Improvements” where I identify some of the features of the organizations that need improvements, and I recommend solutions based on those areas. I also write about other improvements that these organizations can adopt to make their aid practices even more ethical. Finally, in the conclusion, I address the importance of the themes relevant in the voluntourism industry and how they apply to broader subjects in the world.

Overall, I find that the voluntourism industry in the United States provides a unique experience to individuals that are passionate about traveling and helping others, but there are several great possibilities of perpetuating harm, which is why it is critical that organizations properly train their volunteers on how to appropriately interact with their host communities and provide aid that is genuinely wanted and helpful to these communities.

BACKGROUND

The United States began its role as an international aid donor in 1948 when President Truman established the Marshall Plan, an economic assistance act from the United States to the countries of Europe to help them in rebuilding their infrastructure after World War II.¹ The United States continued to allocate aid to other countries, not just those in Europe but worldwide, and in 1961 the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was created with the purpose of combining multiple pre-existing international aid programs.² Since its origin, this department has allocated several billions of dollars to foreign countries—the estimated total amount of foreign assistance for the year 2024 is \$32 billion.³ The United States is the world’s largest international aid donor “accounting for nearly 23% of total development assistance” in the year 2019.⁴ Despite this considerable amount, international aid makes up only 1% of the United State’s budget.⁵

The focus of this thesis is on international humanitarian aid, which is defined as tangible and procedural assistance with the goal of saving lives and alleviating

¹ “Marshall Plan (1948),” National Archives, last modified September 28, 2021. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/marshall-plan>.

² “USAID History | About Us,” U.S. Agency for International Development, accessed February 10, 2023. <https://www.usaid.gov/about-us/usaid-history>.

³ “Budget Justification,” U.S. Agency for International Development, accessed March 13, 2023. <https://www.usaid.gov/cj>.

⁴ Morgenstern, Emily, M., and Nick M. Brown. “Foreign Assistance: An Introduction to U.S. Programs and Policy,” Congressional Research Report, January 10, 2022. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R40213>. 2.

⁵ “A Brief History of U.S. Foreign Aid,” World101 from the Council on Foreign Relations, accessed March 25, 2023. <https://world101.cfr.org/global-era-issues/development/brief-history-us-foreign-aid>.

suffering.⁶USAID estimates that the budget for humanitarian aid in the year 2024 will be more than \$10.5 billion.⁷ These funds are allocated to several spheres of support including food and water, shelters, healthcare, sanitation conditions, child services, and much more.⁷ USAID provides humanitarian aid to more than 70 countries worldwide.⁸ Some of the top recipients of U.S. humanitarian aid for the year 2022 include Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen, Ukraine, South Sudan, Somalia, Syria, and Sudan.¹⁰ All recipients of humanitarian aid are classified as states of the Global South due to their low economic stance, and almost all recipients are former colonies of Europe.

There are many different channels of delivery of international humanitarian aid, but this thesis focuses specifically on four: government, nonprofit, school/university, and religious. One organization from each channel was chosen to examine in this thesis based on a series of criteria including the variety of programs offered by the organization and availability of information on the internet about the organization. The names of these organizations can be found below.

⁶ “Refugee and Humanitarian Assistance,” United States Department of State, accessed March 25, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/policy-issues/refugee-and-humanitarian-assistance/>. ⁷ U.S. Agency for International Development. “Budget Justification.”

⁷ United States Department of State. “Refugee and Humanitarian Assistance.”

⁸ “Humanitarian Assistance | What We Do,” U.S. Agency for International Development, accessed March 1, 2023. <https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance>.

⁹ “FA.Gov.” U.S. Agency for International Development, accessed March 25, 2023. <https://foreignassistance.gov/>.

Figure 1 - Organizations

Organizations	
Government	Peace Corps
Nonprofit	United Planet
School/University	Break Away
Religious	Cru/Unto

Another element that this thesis focuses on is volunteer tourism, also referred to as voluntourism. This is a relatively new term that gained popularity in the 1990s to explain the act of traveling somewhere and working with little or no payment.¹¹ There is no universally agreed upon definition for the term voluntourism, though for this thesis, a typical voluntourist is defined as a young adult with an affluent background that has little professional experience who travels outside of their community to work with little or no financial compensation for any period of time less than three years.¹² This term is not particularly admired, many people that fit this definition do not define themselves as such. Changing the word used, however, does not change the defining characteristics of the term. This thesis uses the word ‘voluntourism’ because it correctly describes what is occurring in this industry, it is a descriptive term of analysis. This thesis examines the United State’s international voluntourism industry, a small subsection of the country’s foreign humanitarian aid industry.

¹¹ “Definition of VOLUNTOURISM,” Merriam Webster Dictionary, accessed February 20, 2023. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/voluntourism>.

¹²Margaret S. Sherraden, Benjamin Lough, Amanda Moore McBride, “Effects of International Volunteering and Service: Individual and Institutional Predictors,” *Springer* 19, no. 4 (December 2008): 398, 0.1007/S11266-008-9072-X

A prevailing theme in the U.S. voluntourism industry is white saviorism. This term is defined as the mentality that some white individuals possess when they help non-white individuals leading to them feeling morally superior.¹³ This mentality of white saviorism is usually derogatory and harmful, but many individuals are unaware that they are white saviors. This is why it is important that aid organizations work with their volunteers to not only recognize their saviorist mindsets but also to overcome them so that the aid provided to host communities is ethical and genuine.

¹³ Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, "Volunteer Tourism and 'The White Man's Burden,'" *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 27 no. 3 (March 2019): 331, 10.1080/09669582.2019.1578361

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section reviews the peer-reviewed journals addressing the United States' international aid industry. There is much criticism about this topic, many scholars hold the position that the international aid industry is corrupt and fraudulent. The three prevailing critiques in the academic literature are that international aid is a form of neocolonialism, that the United States uses its international aid industry as a foreign policy tool, and that the voluntourism industry romanticizes the development of the Global South in such a way that perpetuates harm.

Former Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah defines neocolonialism as the use of economic and thus political control that one sovereign state can assert over another.¹⁴ Many scholars are in agreement that the United States using its economy to assert dominance in developing countries in the form of international aid is synonymous with neocolonialism.¹⁵ The notion that the United States hides its power-seeking agendas behind its international aid efforts is a common finding in academic literature. Some authors even argue that agencies like the Peace Corps contribute to this neocolonialist corruption by creating a relationship of reliance on international aid from the United States in the Global South.¹⁶ Other scholars emphasize that the West knows best mentality that originated as a colonial construct is still prevalent in the neocolonial era,

¹⁴ Kwame Nkrumah, "Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism," accessed April 4, 2023. <https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/nkrumah/neo-colonialism/introduction.htm>.

¹⁵ Katherine M. Bell, "Raising Africa?" *Portal : Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 10, no. 1 (January 2013): 2, 10.3316/informit.945733532941135.

¹⁶ Lilly Wilcox, "Reforming the Unreformable," *Undergraduate Journal of Global Citizenship* 4, no. 1 (January 2021): 1, <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/jogc/vol4/iss1/5>. particularly in the form of so-called 'partnerships' between the Global North and South that continuously uphold the notion of the West's superiority.¹⁷ This theory is related to the critique that the teaching of English by individuals from the United States in non-English speaking countries is also a form of neocolonialism as it asserts dominance in the West's language.¹⁸

Similar to the critique that the U.S. international aid industry is a form of neocolonialism is the argument that it is used as a foreign policy tool because of the theory that aid is a means of influencing other countries. It is widely accepted by many scholars that humanitarian aid is allocated to countries with whom the United States desires to have relations.¹⁹ Jason Hickel argues that global superpowers like the United States used international aid as a way to control natural resource-rich developing countries using interest rates and debt as leverage, creating the Third World Debt Crisis.²⁰ Many scholars are in accord with Hickel's assessment of this situation, developed countries have had a monopoly on natural resources for several decades because of the control they have over the countries that produce them.²¹ Another level of power in

¹⁷ Gemma Sou, "Aid Micropolitics," *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 40, no. 4 (June 2022): 878, [10.1177/23996544211048196](https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544211048196)

¹⁸

Ruanni Tupas, Honey Tabiola, "Language Policy and Development Aid: A Critical Analysis of an ELT Project," 18, no. 4 (2017): 410, [10.1080/14664208.2017.1351329](https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2017.1351329). Rob Kevlihan, Karl DeRouen Jr., and Glen Biglaiser, "Is Humanitarian Aid Based Primarily on Need or Self-Interest?" *International Studies Quarterly* (2014): 851, [10.1111/isqu.12121](https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12121).

²⁰

Jason Hickel, "Debt and the Economics of Planned Misery," In *The Divide: Global Inequity from Conquest to Free Markets*, 169. ²¹

Sukhwants Bindra, "Foreign Aid and Foreign Policy," *Kapur Surya Foundation* 22, no. 3 (2018): 128, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48520086>. ²²

Des Gasper, "Ethics and the Conduct of International Development Aid: Charity and Obligation," *Forum for Development Studies* 26, no. 1 (January 1999): 23, 10.1080/08039410.1999.9666094.

international aid is that it is often conditional, there are obligations that aid recipients have to their donors including military and trade alliances that they must abide by.²² A final way in which aid is used as a foreign policy tool is that it is propaganda for the United States on a global scale—promoting a positive narrative of the United States and its citizens.²³

The voluntourism industry receives criticism from individuals that believe it is only composed of privileged, attention seeking individuals that exploit poverty by traveling to developing countries to do volunteer work that is of no value to the community.²⁴ While this is true of some voluntourists, it is not necessarily true for everyone in the industry. There are thousands of individuals that work hard to ensure the work they're doing as a voluntourist is genuinely helpful, sustainable, meaningful, and culturally appropriate. In this thesis, I define a voluntourist as an individual that travels across a national border to work for a short amount of time with little or no financial compensation.²⁵ There are several ways in which voluntourism can mitigate harm including the inequitable distribution of profit, the perpetuation of white saviorism, and the misrepresentation or idealization of poverty.²⁶ This industry is notorious for

²³ George Ingram, "What Every American Should Know about US Foreign Aid," Brookings, accessed April 4, 2023,

<https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervital/what-every-american-should-know-about-us-foreign-aid/>

²⁴ Nisha Toomey, "Humanitarians of Tinder," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3 no. 2 (2017): 2-5, 10.5749/jcritethnstud.3.2.0151.

²⁵ Sherraden, Lough, and McBride, "Effects of International Volunteering and Service: Individual and Institutional Predictors," 397-398. ²⁶

Jackie L. Clark, "Ethics and Etiquette in Humanitarian Engagement—101," *Seminars in Hearing* 41 no. 2 (May 2020): 84, 10.1055/s-0040-1708526 ²⁷

Diane M. Hoffman, "White Savior or Local Hero?" *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 23 no. 1 (2022): 99, 10.1353/gia.2022.0016.

misallocating funds. This was prevalent in 2010 when billions of dollars were donated to over two thousand non governmental organizations in response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti, yet an extremely small amount of money was actually distributed to Haitian people.²⁷ Not only did this misconduct rob Haiti of money that was supposedly for its people, but the intervention of these nongovernmental organizations from the United States further perpetuated the notion of white saviorism, "the actions white people take when they feel that they have to save the world."²⁸ Ranjan Bandyopadhyay argues that white saviorist mindsets are prevalent in all voluntourism organizations but perpetrate every aspect of Christian affiliated voluntourism because of these individuals' desire to share their faith with the world and thus inflicting the belief that Christians, who are predominately white, are superior.²⁹ The idealization of poverty is synonymous with white saviorism. People from the United States and other developed countries sometimes have the misconception that poor communities are full of beautiful lost souls that need saving.³⁰ But voluntourists are not saviors, they are individuals that have the privilege of visiting a community outside of their own for a short amount of time and in exchange for cultural immersion and experiences, they are lending a hand to these communities in any way that they are able.

Many individuals are unaware of their saviorist beliefs, this is particularly prevalent among young generations of voluntourists who are ignorant due to their age and lack of experience. These beliefs are a direct result of colonialism and are thus a form of neocolonialism, and acting upon them can be viewed in the lens of foreign policy.

Although saviorism stems from good intentions, individuals that hold these beliefs have the ability to inflict a great amount of harm onto their host communities when they misstep or impose their beliefs onto members of the host communities.³¹ Although voluntourists themselves should make an effort to educate themselves on issues like white saviorism, cultural appropriation, and bias, the aid organizations need to be held accountable for providing adequate training and resources to their volunteers that teach them about these subjects.

²⁸ Pippa Biddle, *Ours to Explore: Privilege, Power, and the Paradox of Voluntourism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021) 71.

²⁹ Bandyopadhyay, “Volunteer Tourism and ‘The White Man’s Burden,’” 340.

³⁰ Noel Becchetti, “Why Most Mission Trips Are a Waste of Time (and How to Make Sure Yours Isn’t),” 4. https://porchdesalomon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/no_waste_mission_trips.pdf. ³¹ Clark, “Ethics and Etiquette in Humanitarian Engagement–101.” 84.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, I describe my overall research methodology, including the selection criteria for case studies, the interview and analysis process, and the approach to desk research. My project examines the United State's international humanitarian aid industry with a specific focus on volunteer tourism, also known as voluntourism. As such, I selected one organization from four different areas (government, nonprofit, university, and religious) of the international humanitarian aid industry to represent a wide variety of voluntourism programs. These four areas represent a diverse cross-section of international humanitarian aid, which was the selection criteria for choosing them. I created spreadsheets for each of the four areas and began collecting data on prominent organizations, including the locations in which they provide aid, their base location within the United States, the duration of their volunteer periods, the net worth of the organization, the cost of volunteering with the organization, and the amount of information on the organization that was accessible via the Internet. I selected one organization from each area with the most availability of data. The cases include: The Peace Corps (government), United Planet (non-profit), Break Away (school and university), and Cru and their international aid sector of the organization, Unto (religious).

I chose to interview individuals to learn about the organizations from people that have worked with them firsthand and to be able to ask specific questions relating to the organization's commitment to providing ethical, unbiased, and antiracist aid through their voluntourism opportunities.

After selecting my organizations, I applied for an IRB from the University of Maine and completed the CITI trainings required to interview human subjects. While waiting for IRB approval, I collected contact information of people within the organizations. I created four spreadsheets, one for each organization, and collected peoples' names and emails. After my IRB was approved at the beginning of February 2023, I began contacting people via email. I set up Zoom interviews with the individuals that were willing to participate.

Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded, audio and video, though participants could opt out of this if they wished. Participants were also given two opportunities, once at the beginning and once at the end, to state if they wished to keep their identity confidential. These interviews were semi-structured: I had a list of 16 questions besides me that I would refer back to if needed, but oftentimes I strayed from the list of questions by asking follow-up questions about topics that interviewees addressed, to gain more clarity or to further investigate the matter. After the interview, I analyzed the transcripts for the most important quotes that related to my key themes of white saviorism, discrimination, representation, partnerships, diversity trainings, cultural sensitivity, and justice-centric aid. Each theme was assigned a color and all transcripts were analyzed for quotes relating to these themes. Quotes were highlighted in their assigned color and then separated into documents based on theme that served as a tool for further analysis. A coding tree was created to organize the definition of each theme, along with the addition of one quote from an interview that represented

the theme. Figure 2 is the coding tree which can be viewed below. Further analysis of the coding tree can be found in the section titled “Key Themes.”

Figure 2 - Coding Tree for Interview Transcripts

Coding Tree for Interview Transcripts		
Theme	Definition	Example
White saviorism	an ideology that white people are responsible for helping others	“The general cautionary motive [of white saviorism] is good but I don’t think it gets the rich West out of its responsibility to use its resources to make the world a better place.” ³²
Discrimination	act of treating one person better or worse than the other	“Making sure [Cru/Unto is] respecting the dignity of every person inside the organization and that [refers to] things like gender and race and even age discrepancies.” ³³
Representation	How volunteers and the organization talk and use visuals about their experience	The “look at me, I’m doing good” mentality is “super common [in voluntourism] but it’s also very exploitative of these people and of their situations and of what their reality and their life is like... it’s a lack of awareness and a lack of impact of what someone’s doing.” ³⁴

Theme	Definition	Example
Partnerships	A balance of power between volunteers and members of the host community that occurs through the cultivation of mutually beneficial relationships	“My goal for joining the Peace Corps was largely about learning... [volunteers] have two plus years to really become part of a community and see it from the inside and spend all [their] time there, not just [their] working time but all of [their] time and so if [a person] really takes advantage of that then [they] can learn a lot about the community and about the culture.” ³⁵
Diversity trainings	Structured lessons that teach individuals how to appropriately interact with individuals that are of different backgrounds than their own	“I wouldn’t call it a training per se but anyone who comes on the team [must undergo an] onboarding process where [they] go through [issues concerning race, bias, and ethics], it’s also about the HR manual that [is shared] with every team member [which addresses] some of the practical issues but also discrimination policies that [the organization] [has] in place.” ³⁶

³² Jonathan Malacarne, “Thesis Interview,” interview by Caroline Scott, February 15, 2023.

³³ Al Goff, “Thesis Interview,” interview by Caroline Scott, March 28, 2023.

³⁴ Buck Cooke, “Thesis Interview,” interview by Caroline Scott, March 9, 2023. ³⁵ Malacarne, interview.

Theme	Definition	Example
Cultural sensitivity	Respecting and honoring the culture of the host community and the willingness to learn more and be an active member in cultural activities if the opportunity arises	Cru teaches their workers to “visit [people] at their homes, sit with them, drink chai and listen to their stories, take the time to execute the aid because this will feel more normal and restorative and it’s being done by the local staff, not by people [the organization] is sending so that it feels more organic and normal.” ³⁷
Justice-centric aid	Work that is done by volunteers that is intentionally tailored to the community’s needs while promoting equality	“The goal for [volunteers] is not to go in and put a Band-aid on things, the goal is to go in and help cultivate what’s already there... certainly [the] skills and expertise [of volunteers] [are welcomed] but [Break Away] very much thinks of it through what is already in the community and what will be sustainable for the community rather than what can [volunteers] bring to create a reliance on external sources.” ³⁸

³⁶

Oudou Sanogo, “Thesis Interview,” interview by Caroline Scott, March 24, 2023. ³⁷ Goff, interview. ³⁸

Meg Evans, “Thesis Interview,” interview by Caroline Scott, March 2, 2023.

In addition to interviewing, I approached desk research by conducting exhaustive online searches for public websites, reports, books, academic peer-reviewed journals, news articles, and YouTube videos. With this research, I was able to decipher the weak points of the industry relating to the cultivation of ethical, antiracist relationships. I learned about and critiqued the administrative responses to cases of discrimination, and grasped a better understanding of the existing prejudices among volunteers and aid workers. I studied the current structures in place within the four organizations to address topics such as discrimination, white saviorism, bias, superiority complexes, and cultural appropriation. I noted the effectiveness of the existing structures and contrasted them with similar structures from other organizations to build a framework of the most effective tools. I also read academic and gray literature about race-conscious biased training and how it relates to humanitarian aid.

There were several limitations to the methodology. My first limitation is that my number of case studies was limited to four. This quantity was appropriate for the amount of time I spent researching and writing my thesis, but it did not provide an adequate overview of the entire United State's international aid industry. Another limitation was the number of people that I was able to interview—although I interviewed 1-2 people per organization who all provided insightful knowledge about their organization, it would have been beneficial to have more interviewees so that the range of data collected would be more broad and diverse. Only a small fraction of the individuals I contacted were interviewed, a large number of people did not respond, and a few individuals expressed that they were not interested in participating. The last limitation to this research was the

quantity of data available on the internet about these organizations: there was little to no data on how these organizations deal with issues of discrimination, and although this was one of the questions I asked in interviews, individuals were not inclined to answer this and often gave vague responses. This also applied to the accessibility of the training resources that these organizations use to prepare voluntourists for their trips, these trainings were inaccessible to me because I am not a member of the organization or a paying customer. Despite this limitation, I collected as much data as I could about these trainings from the interviewees and the organizations' websites.

KEY THEMES

This section expands upon the key themes that prevailed during the interviewing process that uniquely relate to international voluntourism. The most frequent themes include white saviorism, discrimination, representation, partnerships, diversity trainings, cultural sensitivity, and justice-centric aid. Definitions of these themes along with a key quote from one of the interviewees regarding the theme can be found in Figure 2 (p. 14-15), the coding tree in the methodology section of this paper.

White saviorism is the ideology that white people are responsible for helping others. People that hold the white saviorism belief often have good, altruistic intentions and are genuine about their desire to help others. Despite this, these sentiments are deep rooted in superiority beliefs and the West knows best mentalities. Many individuals within the voluntourism industry are unaware of their white savior tendencies, which in turn leads to the perpetuating of harmful stereotypes, an imbalance of power, and a lack of partnership between the volunteers and the community they are working with. It is very important that volunteer organizations discuss white saviorism with their volunteers so that they can work towards understanding and overcoming it. Out of the four organizations studied, The Peace Corps, United Planet, Break Away, and Cru/Unto, only two of them, the Peace Corps and Break Away, include discussions specifically about white saviorism in their training sessions. Break Away addresses white saviorism “head-on” by discussing “it straight away. [They] talk about how often the intent is really good [and how] the vast majority of folks engaging in service or community engagement or volunteering are altruistic and the intent is good but so often the impact can be

harmful.”³⁹ This harm that Dr. Meg Evans from Break Away refers to comes in many forms including discrimination, ineffective volunteer efforts that have the potential to cause more problems for these communities, a loss of trust for foreign aid and foreigners as a whole among host country participants, and many more. Dr. Jonathan Malacarne, a Peace Corps volunteer from 2010-2012 in Nicaragua who now works as an agricultural economics professor at the University of Maine, did not remember the specifics on the trainings that were offered to him concerning white saviorism, but he knows they spent at least an hour or so discussing it.⁴⁰ He took it upon himself to learn more about white saviorism and stated that through all that he has learned, “it’s a real danger to impose ideas and impose things that [people from the United States] think are solutions on more vulnerable communities that might not have the voice to advocate for themselves” and while a “cautionary motive is good [he doesn’t] think it gets the rich West out of its responsibility to use its resources to make the world a better place.”⁴¹ There is a fine line between white saviorism and this responsibility to take action that Dr. Malacarne mentioned, some may even argue that there is no line at all and that they are in fact the same. This is an ongoing debate within the international aid industry, which is why it is incredibly important for international voluntourists to recognize their white savior beliefs and put in the work to educate themselves on overcoming them. This path to overcoming sentiments of saviorism can be nonlinear and confusing, and it is never ending as there is always more to learn about a person’s own sentiments relating to these beliefs.

³⁹ Evans, interview.

⁴⁰ Malacarne, interview. ⁴¹ Ibid.

Overcoming saviorism looks different for every individual, but the end goal is to have a genuine understanding that being a voluntourist is never about saving people but rather learning from them, helping them where they can, appreciating them, and being grateful for the opportunity to enter these communities.

Another theme that prevailed during interviews was discrimination, the act of treating one person better or worse than the other. This action is closely associated with white saviorism as it can often be the result of someone that is unaware of their saviorist beliefs. All four of the organizations studied reported to have trainings relating to discrimination, though they were much more concerned about internal cases of discrimination rather than discrimination among volunteers towards members of their host communities. According to Dr. Malacarne, “the largest challenges aren’t of discrimination from Peace Corps volunteers to host country collaborators largely because [individuals that are] Peace Corps volunteers have extremely little power” and that in his experience, “the much more common challenges that [he knows] of are of people higher in that hierarchy in a host country structure discriminating against Peace Corps volunteers or putting them in dangerous situations or things of that nature.”⁴² The Peace Corps had two Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints, allegations of discrimination, in the fiscal year of 2014.⁴³ These allegations were on the grounds of sex and age.⁴⁴ In 2012,

⁴² Malacarne, interview.

⁴³ “Peace Corps (PC) FY 2014 EEO Complaint Processing Statistics,” US EEOC, accessed April 2, 2023, <https://www.eeoc.gov/federal-sector/reports/peace-corps-pc-fy-2014-eeo-complaint-processing-statistics>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Peace Corps (PC) FY 2012 EEO Complaint Processing Statistics,” US EEOC, accessed April 2, 2023, <https://www.eeoc.gov/federal-sector/reports/peace-corps-pc-fy-2012-eeo-complaint-processing-statistics>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

six EEO complaints were filed on the grounds of age, nationality, and race.⁴⁵ Of these cases, three of them found no issues of discrimination and three that did display issues of discrimination.⁴⁶ One individual was dismissed from the agency because of their actions regarding one of these cases.⁴⁷ There are no publicly documented EEO complaints after the year 2014.

Each organization has unique preventative measures of limiting discrimination within their organization. According to Oudou Sanogo from United Planet, it is his job as their human resources coordinator to review the human resource manual with all new employees.⁴⁸ This manual contains the organization’s policies regarding discrimination. Although United Planet was unwilling to share this manual with me as it is for personnel use only, the organization has a strict no-discrimination policy.⁴⁹ Cru and Unto have similar policies regarding discrimination, the President and CEO of Unto, Al Goff informed me that the majority of the discrimination cases reported in this company are related to age—it’s often the older folks in the company that are mistreated by the younger generations.⁵⁰ Discrimination is a serious issue that is finally beginning to be taken seriously in the United States after decades of injustice. These four organizations appear as though they have systems in place to mitigate this harm, though it is important to remember the limitations to this research. With the exception of the Peace Corps because of its governmental status and legal obligation to report discrimination issues to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, these organizations are able to filter the information available to the general public by being selective about the material that is

published online and addressed during interviews. This also does not address the issues of discrimination that go unreported within these organizations, including discriminatory interactions with volunteers and locals that have no affiliation to the organization and therefore do not report these instances. A reporting mechanism that allows locals to report issues of discrimination would create a balance of power between voluntourists and their partners, as well as help the aid industry better address these issues.

A third theme that was repeatedly addressed in almost all of my interviews was representation. This is defined as how volunteers and organizations talk about their voluntourism experience and the use of visuals that are found online, specifically on the organizations' websites and volunteers' social media, to convey their altruistic deeds. Break Away addresses the subject of representation in one of their trainings titled "ethical storytelling," which is further examined in the "Case Study" section of this thesis. This training emphasizes how the effect volunteers have on the communities they've worked with does not end when they board the plane to go home, that the ways in which they talk about these communities and the types of pictures they share on social media can impact these people through the perpetuating of harmful stereotypes or creating the idea that people in these places are helpless and in need of saving.⁵¹ Buck Cooke, the director of Break Away, explained this by stating a question he often encourages volunteers to think about: "the people and the community and the social issues with which [volunteers are] engaging with, are those real to [volunteers] or are those just parts of a story that

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Sanogo, interview.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Goff, interview.

⁵¹ Evans, interview.

[volunteers will] tell about what [they] did on Spring Break?”⁵² While researching these four organizations, I noted the pictures on their website and was overwhelmed by the number of children present. Certainly, they are used to evoke the emotions of prospective volunteers, but these pictures are a prime example of the exploitation that occurs in this industry. It is likely that these children’s parents are unaware that these photo of their children exists and are being used in such a public manner, and “even if their parents have said yes, it’s fine [to using the photos] the child didn’t have a say” or is too young to understand what is happening.⁵³ Break Away makes a conscious effort to avoid the use of photos of minors and of people outside of the nonprofit in general. Cru and Unto’s websites, on the other hand, have many photos of people from the communities they serve, and although the intentions behind these photos are harmless, they are nevertheless exploitative and unethical.

⁵² Cooke, interview.

⁵³ “Stop Hunger for People Living in the Toughest Places on Earth,” Unto.com, accessed March 28, 2023, <https://unto.com/food-and-agriculture/>.

Figure 3 - Pop-up ad from Unto's website.⁵⁴



Figure 4 - Picture from Unto's website.⁵⁵



The title of this thesis is “Transforming ‘International Aid’ to ‘International Partnerships’” which was devised after noticing the frequency of the word ‘partnerships’ on these organizations’ websites. For this thesis, the word ‘partnerships’ is defined as a balance of power between volunteers and members of the host communities that occurs through the cultivation of mutually beneficial relationships. Creating and maintaining partnerships is the ideal, but it is almost never executed properly due to the structural

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ “Provide Access to Clean Water for People in Tough Places,” Unto.com, accessed March 28, 2023, <https://unto.com/clean-water/>.

⁵⁶ Sou, “Aid Micropolitics,” 878.

inequity of the relationship between recipients and donors.⁵⁶ Factors such as saviorist mindsets, discrimination, poor representation, a lack of cultural sensitivity and community involvement, and ulterior motives of donor organizations are some of the reasons why partnerships are rarely accomplished. Oudou Sanogo from United Planet said in his interview that his organization works extremely hard to establish “win-win situations” where both the volunteers and the community members gain something from their aid trips, and that they try not to be “just another kind of international donor organization that brings their own ideas.”⁵⁷ Instead, United Planet tries to incorporate the host communities in the planning process of aid projects, an initiative that, according to Sanogo, has been successful in the cultivation of mutual respectful partnerships.⁵⁸ Not only is it the responsibility of the organizations to have structures in place that promote partnerships, it is also the responsibility of the volunteers themselves to cultivate relationships with people in their communities and integrate themselves as best they can. Dr. Malacarne from the Peace Corps said that his “goal for joining the Peace Corps was largely about learning... [volunteers] have two plus years to really become apart of a community and see it from the inside and spend all [their] time there, not just [their] working time but all of [their] time and so if [a person] really takes advantage of that then [they] can learn a lot about the community and the culture.”⁵⁹ Having a mindset like Dr.

⁵⁷ Sanogo, interview.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Malacarne, interview.

Malacarne's is extremely important in the voluntourism industry, as it greatly impacts the ways in which an individual forms connections with the people around them.

Organizations should conduct discussions that work on shifting any savior mindsets that might exist so that individuals think about their service work in a more opportunistic way. Partnerships can only be accomplished when there is an equal amount of respect and trust coming from both sides, which is why shifting the mindsets of some individuals can make a big difference in these relationships. “We’re a deeply globalized society yet in the U.S. we’re so individually driven and so [they] think being able to open lines of humanity...to be in relation with one another in a way that just feels authentic and honest in aid work has the ability to create real authentic human relationships with one another,” said Dr. Evans from Break Away when I asked how aid organizations could help their volunteers reframe how they think about their service work.⁶⁰ Discourse among individuals plays an integral role in developing and maintaining partnerships, making respect one of the most important virtues in this industry. It is critical that organizations define and practice appropriate interactions among the volunteers with the host communities.

This need for the practice of respectful interactions is directly related to the importance of diversity trainings, structured lessons that teach individuals how to properly interact with individuals that are of different backgrounds than their own. This part of the research was greatly limited because I did not receive access to these trainings.

⁶⁰ Evans, interview.

Despite this barrier, I was able to learn about the diversity trainings offered by each organization. More information on these trainings is discussed in the “Case Studies” sections of this thesis. The Peace Corp’s “first three months... are intensive language training... [volunteers] are also trained to do their specific job that [they’re] going to be doing, but most of [their] time [in the first three months] is devoted to the language side and also a fair bit of it is focused on culture” according to Dr. Malacarne.⁶¹ These trainings occur in-country and are conducted by locals of the region that are employed by the Peace Corps. By taking these steps, the Peace Corps uses an immersion-style of training that typically sets their volunteers up for success. United Planet has a similar pre-departure training session, but on a much smaller scale. These trainings last anywhere from one hour to four days depending on the length of the volunteer trip.⁶² These trainings, however, are more focused on preparing volunteers for their travels rather than versing them on the importance of inclusivity. An anonymous staffer from United Planet expressed that they “think [the organization] needs to do more in their pre-departure trainings... at the end of the day [the volunteers] are not a citizen of that country so [they] technically don’t have a good clue of what is going on over there and [they] definitely need to be aware of all surroundings at all times, even though, yes, there are people [there] from United Planet that can help [volunteers], but they’re not with [volunteers] all of the time.”⁶³ Though this person’s concerns about the trainings were more to do with the safety of the volunteers, they still express a similar sentiment that the

⁶¹ Malacarne, interview.

⁶² “Quests Pre-Departure Sessions,” Volunteer Abroad with United Planet | (your journey here), accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.unitedplanet.org/volunteer-abroad/quests-pre-departure-session>.⁶³ Anonymous Staffer, “Thesis Interview,” interview by Caroline Scott, March 3, 2023.

organization is not providing adequate training to their volunteers. Contrasting this is Break Away. This organization functions differently than the other three in that they do not provide direct service trips but rather train individuals on doing so, therefore this is the area in which they excel. Break Away has over twenty-four trainings that address issues such as “the systems and structures that uphold and maintain dominance and supremacy... identity, particularly race, and its connection to oppression... socialization and how identities [affect] communities... cultivating active anti-racism... utilizing the tempered radical approach... how [volunteers] work within systems to advance justice, particularly at risk-averse institutions or organizations” that all have the end goal of “eventually [dismantling] some of the systems that continue to perpetuate saviorism.”⁶⁴ This organization’s repertoire of trainings is exceptional, it is evident that they care about their volunteers’ success and want their trips to be impactful. Lastly, Cru/Unto has a “whole unit of Cru called Oneness in Diversity that “leads trainings in... making sure [the organization is] respecting the dignity of every person.”⁶⁵ These lessons in these trainings, like most aspects of Cru and Unto, are deeply rooted in the Christian faith. Videos of sermons of the director of the Oneness in Diversity unit of Cru can be found on YouTube.⁶⁶ The presenter in the video, Darryl Smith, cites a plethora of Bible verses that exemplify the kindness and generosity of Jesus and urges his congregation to follow in his footsteps.⁶⁷ Although these trainings take a nontraditional approach, they still teach

⁶⁴ Evans, Thesis Interview.

⁶⁵ Goff, Thesis Interview.

⁶⁶ Winter Conference (@winterconference), “Jan. 2020 Winter Conference_Darryl Smith,” YouTube video, May 21, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVETGDCTQ9c>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

individuals about the importance of respecting one another. These trainings also provide another level of value that the other three organizations do not offer, that they are rooted in common beliefs that these individuals are already committed to and therefore are that much more susceptible to learning these lessons.

A sixth theme regards cultural sensitivity, respecting and honoring the culture of the host community, and the willingness to learn more and be an active participant in cultural activities if the opportunity arises. This includes having meals with community members, joining them in activities, attending events within the community, and engaging in conversations with locals, especially when the conversation is focused more on their lives than that of the volunteers. Cru/Unto has a unique work structure in that locals lead and guide their missionaries. This promotes cultural sensibility as these people are already familiar with their own culture, and it also plays a big role in their ability to cultivate partnerships. For the missionaries that are from the United States, Cru/Unto emphasizes the importance of being culturally appropriate because “when [missionaries] make a cultural mistake, [they] may be actually stripping [locals’] dignity and making them feel worse by the humanitarian work [missionaries are] doing.”⁶⁸ This organization also teaches volunteers how to appropriately carry out their aid work, they teach their volunteers to “visit [people] at their homes, sit with them, drink chai and listen to their stories, take the time to execute the aid because this will feel more normal and restorative.”⁶⁹ Another more

⁶⁸ Goff, interview.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

individualistic take on cultural sensitivity came from Dr. Malacarne who stated that it is important “to understand that the cultures [volunteers] are in and the communities [volunteers] are in are no more homogeneous than the ones that [they] came from, in [their] own communities [they] can’t agree on exactly what should be done and what needs to be done and who’s good and who’s bad and what’s right and so to expect the same thing from the communities around the world doesn’t make a whole lot of sense.”⁷⁰ This was an important point that is not addressed in the definition of cultural sensitivity and it is a sensible thing that volunteers should keep in mind: no community members all share the exact same perspectives on any given topic, it is therefore that much more important that voluntourists put in much effort to being polite and sensible.

The last theme is justice-centric aid, work that is done by volunteers that is intentionally tailored to the community’s needs while promoting equality. This term is one used by Break Away but can be applied to all four of the organizations. All of Break Away’s trainings are justice focused, meaning that equality is at the center of all of the work they do.⁷¹ Dr. Evans from Break Away addressed this theme by stating that “the vast majority of folks who engage in service or aid work or volunteering do it from a really altruistic place saying ‘I want to help, I want to do good, I want to give back’ and that’s rad! Yes please, right? But [individuals] now have to dig a little bit farther to unpack these systems and structures that... negatively impact others.”⁷² This in-depth learning technique is often overlooked by many aid organizations, and by doing so they

⁷⁰ Malacarne, interview.

⁷¹ Cooke, interview. ⁷² Evans, interview.

are missing out on so many new levels of understanding from which volunteers could benefit. The aid industry would benefit from adopting a justice-centric aid system that resembles that of Break Away. This organization believes that “the goal for [volunteers] is not to go in and put a Band-aid on things, the goal is to go in and help cultivate what’s already there... certainly [the] skills and expertise [of volunteers] [are welcomed] but [Break Away] very much thinks it through what is already in the community and what will be sustainable for the community rather than what can [volunteers] bring to create a reliance on external sources.”⁷³ This furthers the notion that this organization is setting their volunteers up for meaningful voluntourism trips.

Many of these themes overlap and are intertwined with one another, and that is because they are all traits of what makes an aid organization effective and ethical. While all organizations have their flaws, it is evident that there are some that prioritize these themes more than others.

⁷³ Ibid.

INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

The four organizations that were chosen from various sectors of the international aid industry include the Peace Corps (government), United Planet (nonprofit), Break Away (school/university) and Cru/Unto (religious). Each of these organizations is closely examined in four separate case studies that identify the organization's key information, interviewees, volunteer efforts, training resources, and community involvement efforts.

CASE STUDY: PEACE CORPS

This section describes the Peace Corps' history, volunteer efforts, interviewees, and the ways in which they promote ethical aid through their training process and community involvement. The Peace Corps is an agency of the United States government that was founded by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 that is based in Washington DC.⁷⁴ It is a 27-month-long commitment where individuals travel to developing countries to provide humanitarian and development aid.⁷⁵ The agency's mission statement is "to promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals: 1) to help the countries interested in meeting their need for trained people 2) to promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served 3) to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans."⁷⁶ The Peace Corps serves in over 60 countries worldwide including Armenia, Costa Rica, Fiji, Jamaica, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam, and several others.⁷⁷ Volunteers are financially compensated for their efforts with a monthly stipend that is compatible with the community's average income, this stipend is purposefully calculated to be a livable wage in the host country and not much more to create equality amongst their workers and the locals in the community.⁷⁸ Some other benefits to the Peace Corps include the \$10,000 or

⁷⁴ "History," Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/history/>.

⁷⁵ "Legal Information For Applicants," Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/legal-information-applicants/>.

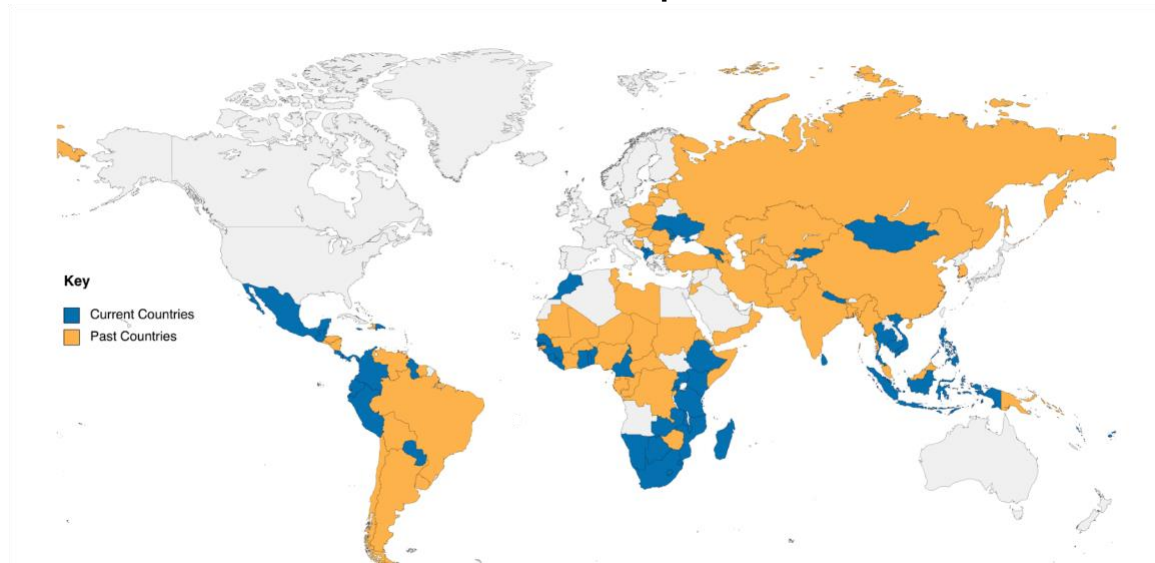
⁷⁶ "About," Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/>. ⁷⁷ "Countries," Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/countries/>.

⁷⁸ "Benefits," Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/benefits/>.

program for former volunteers.⁷⁹ The Peace Corps’ fiscal year budget for 2023 was \$430,500,000,⁸⁰ more that each volunteer receives at the end of their service to help with the transition back to the United States, the possibility of student loan deferment or forgiveness, two paid vacation days per month, medical and dental care, and an extensive career support

Figure 5 - Peace Corps Countries

The Peace Corps



There are six main sectors of volunteer work: agriculture, community economic development, education, environment, health, and youth in development.⁸¹ Volunteers working in the agriculture sector work with local farmers to boost crop turnout and adapt to climate change.⁸² Volunteers working in the community economic development sector have a variety of roles such as teaching computer skills to community members and

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ “The Peace Corps’ Congressional Budget Justification,” *PeaceCorps*, (2022): 7, https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-government/peacecorps_cbj_2023.pdf.

⁸¹ “What Volunteers Do,” Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/what-volunteers-do/>.

⁸² Ibid.

working with local business owners and entrepreneurs to improve their marketing and communication skills.⁸³ The education sector is the largest program in the Peace Corps, volunteers serve as teachers of all subjects and all ages and also work closely with local educators to improve curriculum.⁸⁴ Individuals that work for the health sector of the Peace Corps work alongside community members to increase knowledge about topics such as nutrition, hygiene, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and reproductive health.⁸⁵ Volunteers working in the youth in development sector provide communities with wholesome recreation opportunities and help promote knowledge of subjects such as technology, gender and sexuality awareness, employment opportunities, and many others among the community's youth.⁸⁶ Volunteers have a say as to what sector they work in and are assigned to areas based on their interests and expertise.

One individual from the Peace Corps was interviewed for this thesis, Dr. Jonathan Malacarne, who worked in the community economic development sector of the Peace Corps working closely with small business owners in Nicaragua to help them build and expand their companies. He chose to volunteer with the Peace Corps because he “wanted to work in applied poverty alleviation” and thought that the Peace Corps presented him

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Malacarne, interview.

⁸⁸ “Volunteer,” Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/>.

⁸⁹ “Application Process,” Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023,

<https://www.peacecorps.gov/apply/application-process/>. ⁹⁰ Ibid.

with the perfect opportunity to “get on the ground for an extended period of time” and learn first-handedly about the programs and structures used to address this subject.⁸⁷

Peace Corps volunteers must be at least eighteen years old and they must be citizens of the United States.⁸⁸ Individuals interested in volunteering with the Peace Corps must go through a multi-step application process including an application form, a health history form, and an interview.⁸⁹ More medical and legal information is obtained after an individual is admitted to the agency.⁹⁰ All Peace Corps volunteers participate in several trainings throughout their 27 months of service, but the most intensive training occurs during the first 10-12 weeks of their contracts which is referred to as the pre-service training.⁹¹ Local community members that work for the Peace Corps, known as host country staff, are generally the individuals that facilitate this training period.⁹² All volunteers reside with host families during this training period to promote language immersion and cultural knowledge.⁹³ These trainings include lessons on technical competency, language, health and wellness, safety and security, intercultural competence, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.⁹⁴ Technical training refers to one’s ability to teach local community members about pre-existing skills that volunteers obtained prior to their service while engaging in mutual learning and respectful collaboration.⁹⁵ Language training involves learning to speak, read, and write the local language. Volunteers must pass a language proficiency exam in order to continue their service after the first pre-service training period.⁹⁶ Health and wellness training refers to the “preventative strategies” and “medical guidelines” that the Peace Corps uses to

respond to health-related issues.⁹⁷ Safety and security training involves informing volunteers of preventative measures they can take to reduce their risks to harm.

The trainings regarding intercultural competence, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (ICDEIA) directly corresponds with ethical aid work.⁹⁸ These trainings have three parts to them: 1) the self-awareness and self-reflection portion, 2) the perspective-taking portion, and 3) the bridging of perspectives portion.⁹⁹ These trainings create “experiential learning opportunities” for staff and volunteers to “demonstrate their ability to engage with both identity and intercultural differences and similarities across complex environments in ways that effectively and appropriately contribute to a culture of inclusion, equity, and belonging.”¹⁰⁰ Throughout these trainings, individuals are prompted to practice critical skills such as “perspective taking, humility, empathy, suspending judgment, and intercultural code-shifting.”¹⁰¹ In addition to the ICDEIA training, all members of the Peace Corps must complete a “mandatory unconscious bias training.”¹⁰²

The Peace Corps sends its volunteers to countries where they have been invited.¹⁰³ The agency cultivates partnerships with local nonprofits, corporations and businesses,

⁹¹ “Training and Ongoing Learning,” Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/training/>.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Malacarne, interview.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility,” Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility/>.

inational and local governments, tribal nations, schools, and humanitarian organizations.¹⁰⁴ The Peace Corps makes an active effort to center their host communities and partners by prioritizing projects they feel are the most important and by recognizing that they play an integral role in the agency’s mission.¹⁰⁵ The Peace Corps employs over 2,000 non-U.S. citizens that serve as their host country staff.¹⁰⁶ These individuals train volunteers and work alongside them or as project supervisors. Since 2014, the Peace Corps has conducted a “Host Country Staff Survey” that serves as a feedback tool to help the agency make changes and adaptations to better promote equity and proper working conditions for these individuals.¹⁰⁷ In 2022, 1,586 host country staffers responded to the survey.¹⁰⁸ Of these responses, “91% reported that they were satisfied working for the Peace Corps” and “90% agree that the Peace Corps policies and programs promote workplace diversity.”¹⁰⁹ Despite this high satisfaction rate, only “76% feel that they were valued by Peace Corps Washington” and only “74% report that they are satisfied with their job training.”¹¹⁰ This data shows that although the majority of host country staffers

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. ¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² “The Peace Corps Commits to Further Action to Foster More Equitable, Inclusive Agency,” Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/news/library/the-peace-corps-commits-to-further-action-to-foster-more-equitable-inclusive-agency/>. ¹⁰³

“The Peace Corps Enters Strategic Partnership with Reach the World” Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/news/library/the-peace-corps-enters-strategic-partnership-with-reach-the-world/>.

¹⁰⁴ “Our Strategic Partners,” Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/partners/>

¹⁰⁵ “Agency Priorities,” Peace Corps, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/agency-priorities/>.

¹⁰⁶ “2022 Host Country Staff Survey Overview,” Peace Corps (February 2023): 3-5, https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-government/2022_HCSSL_Full_Report_Final.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. ¹¹⁰ Ibid.

are happy with their employment and the diversity policies, there are a large quantity of them that do not feel as though they received an adequate amount of training and do not feel as though they are receiving proper respect from the agency's base operation site in Washington DC. This statistic concerning Peace Corps Washington's respect for host country staffers is particularly important to note because it shows that the programs and trainings to promote equality between locals and US workers are not working to their fullest potential and that there is work that must be done to ensure that these staffers feel more valued by Peace Corps employees and volunteers from the United States.

CASE STUDY: UNITED PLANET

This section will describe the nonprofit organization chosen for this study, United Planet, along with its history, volunteer programs, interviewees, and the ways in which they promote ethical voluntourism. United Planet was founded in 2001 by Dave Santulli who still resides as the organization's President.¹¹¹ Mr. Santulli developed a passion for traveling at a very young age and was inspired by the people he met and the random acts of kindness he experienced.¹¹² United Planet's mission is to "unlock [individual's] potential as a global citizen [and empower individuals] to create a more peaceful, cohesive, and sustainable world. With partnerships all over the world, United Planet fosters cross-cultural understanding and addresses shared challenges to unite the world in a community beyond borders."¹¹³ This organization is based in Boston, Massachusetts, and sends volunteers to over 30 countries worldwide including Ecuador, Ghana, Japan, Peru, New Zealand, Italy, and many more.¹¹⁴ United Planet has several volunteer opportunities that range in length from one week to one year.¹¹⁵ Volunteers that opt for long-term opportunities such as a gap year or 6 month voluntourism trip partner with the International Cultural Youth Exchange Federation, an international nonprofit with several

¹¹¹ "Meet United Planet's Founder," United Planet Blog, last modified March 9, 2016, <https://www.unitedplanet.org/blog/2016/03/09/meet-united-planets-founder>.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ "2023 Volunteer Abroad & Virtual Volunteering Programs | United Planet," Volunteer Abroad with United Planet | (your journey here), accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.unitedplanet.org/>.

¹¹⁴ "2023 & 2024 Volunteer Abroad Countries | United Planet," Volunteer Abroad with United Planet | (your journey here), accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.unitedplanet.org/volunteer-abroad/countries>.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ "Gap Year Programs | United Planet," Volunteer Abroad with United Planet | (your journey here), accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.unitedplanet.org/volunteer-abroad/long-term>.

members including United Planet.¹¹⁶ This partnership allows volunteers to meet individuals from other voluntourism organizations outside of United Planet that have similar interests and passions.¹¹⁷ United Planet also offers virtual volunteering opportunities in over twenty countries where individuals can serve communities without leaving their homes.¹¹⁸ All of United Planet’s volunteer opportunities have fees that cover housing, meals, tours of local cities and attractions, cultural excursions, pre-departure trainings, language lessons, in-country transportation, medical and travel insurance, in-country support, and a United Planet tee shirt.¹¹⁹ The cost varies depending on length and location but ranges between \$895 to \$18,560.¹²⁰ In 2019 this organization made a total of \$376,362 in net assets.¹²¹

There are three project areas that volunteers can choose to work in: children and education, environmental sustainability, and global health.¹²² Volunteers working with children and education have the opportunity to teach subjects such as English, math, and science, coach sports teams, work in homeless shelters, daycares, after-school programs,

¹¹⁷ “Why ICYE,” International Cultural Youth Exchange, accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.icye.org/whyicye/>.¹¹⁸

“Virtual Internships Virtual Volunteering,” Volunteer Abroad with United Planet | (your journey here), accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.unitedplanet.org/virtual-internships-virtual-volunteering>.

¹¹⁹ Volunteer Abroad with United Planet | (your journey here), “2023 Volunteer Abroad & Virtual Volunteering Programs | United Planet.”¹²⁰

“Volunteer for Ukrainian Refugees in Moldova,” Volunteer Abroad with United Planet | (your journey here), accessed March 30 2023, <https://www.unitedplanet.org/volunteer-for-ukrainian-refugees-in-moldova>.

“Volunteer Abroad in Nepal | Gap Year Nepal | United Planet,” Volunteer Abroad with United Planet | (your journey here), accessed March 30 2023, <https://www.unitedplanet.org/volunteer-abroad/long-term/nepal>.

¹²¹ “United Planet - GuideStar Profile,” GuideStar, accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/04-3582778>.

(your journey here), accessed March 30, 2023,
<https://www.unitedplanet.org/volunteer-abroad/global-health-projects>

¹²⁶ Ibid.

time with the organization a week before our interview took place, though they did not feel comfortable discussing this in detail so the circumstances of their departure are unknown. The second person was Oudou Sanogo, the organization's International Program Supervisor and the Human Resources Coordinator. As the International Program Supervisor, Sanogo coordinates program activities and conducts monitoring evaluations of the staff. As the Human Resource Coordinator, he is responsible for managing and overseeing the various departments of the organization and creating onboarding programs for new employees.¹²⁷ Sanogo is originally from Mali and has seen the international voluntourism industry from both the giving and receiving sides. He knows what ineffective volunteering can do to a community and has worked hard within United Planet to ensure their aid is genuinely helpful.¹²⁸

One thing that stood out about this organization is that, with the exception of the individuals in Moldova, all of their volunteers participate in homestays, which is when an individual stays with a local individual or family in their home.¹²⁹ This is an advantageous opportunity for volunteers to have a more authentic experience and teaches them about the local culture, cuisine, and language. It is also a way to make long-lasting friendships and meet lots of new people. Volunteers that work on projects specifically geared towards helping the community are able to interact with locals in this way, though all of

¹²⁷ Sanogo, interview.

¹²⁸ Sanogo, "Optimizing the Social Impact of International Volunteer Service (IVS) in Host Communities:

A Case Study of United Planet Volunteer Programs.” 4.

¹²⁹ Anonymous Staffer, interview.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

the programs that United Planet offers are led by people from the United States that are employed by United Planet.¹³⁰ According to Sanogo, these individuals from United Planet work closely with community members to ensure that the work they assign to volunteers is genuinely helpful and will benefit the community.¹³¹

All volunteers are required to attend a pre-departure session before embarking on their voluntourism trip.¹³² For trips spanning 1-16 weeks, these training sessions typically last about an hour long.¹³³ Topics covered in these sessions include “expectations, international volunteering, cross-cultural adjustment, in-country logistics, communication, health and safety” and the opportunity to receive answers to questions one might have.¹³⁴ For long-term trips that are 6 months to 1 year long, these training sessions span over the course of 3-4 days.¹³⁵ Topics covered in these sessions include “working in a different country, dealing with culture shock, staying healthy and safe while abroad, cross-cultural communication skills, and more.”¹³⁶ There is minimal information about these trainings available to the general public.

Sanogo shared his Master’s thesis with me, a dissertation for a Master's in Sustainable International Development which he wrote in 2018 while completing a practicum with United Planet. This paper was full of suggestions for the organization on ways to improve their relationships with the host communities. One of his suggestions

¹³¹ Sanogo, interview.

¹³² Volunteer Abroad with United Planet | (your journey here), “Quests Pre-Departure Sessions.”

¹³³ Ibid. ¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Volunteer Abroad with United Planet | (your journey here), “Gap Year Programs | United Planet.”

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Sanogo, “Optimizing the Social Impact of International Volunteer Service (IVS) in Host Communities: A Case Study of United Planet Volunteer Programs.”

that resonated with me was a more active effort from United Planet to involve host communities in all aspects of their programs, stating that “without voice and participation, the community becomes just another subject of development aid.”¹³⁷

According to a survey Sanogo conducted among volunteers, the lack of community involvement is a mutual dissatisfaction—only 47% of volunteers between the years of 2015-2017 expressed “high satisfaction in forging a relationship with their host people in the host community during their stay.”¹³⁸ Although these figures are slightly outdated, it does not appear as though United Planet has done much to alter the ways in which their volunteers interact with community members. In his thesis, Sanogo states that “people at the receiving end [of aid] should not merely be seen as passive recipients of cunning development programs.”¹³⁹ Although United Planet claims to prioritize authenticity and transnational relationships, it is apparent that they are not versed in cultivating equitable partnerships.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 13.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 22.

CASE STUDY: BREAK AWAY

This section examines the school-based organization, Break Away, and their history, leaders, and training workshops that promote ethical volunteering. Break Away is a nonprofit organization that was officially created in 2000, though their roots go back much further back.¹⁴⁰ In 1991, two students at Vanderbilt University founded an organization on their campus that provided themselves and other students with the opportunity to engage in voluntourism during their school vacations.¹⁴¹ This organization became known as Alternative Breaks, and as students around the United States began creating their own chapters of Alternative Breaks at their respective universities, Break Away was created to serve as the umbrella organization that would provide justice-centric training to all of the Alternative Breaks chapters. There have been over 150 chapters throughout universities in the United States since its origin at Vanderbilt University.¹⁴² Break Away's base location is Decatur, Georgia.¹⁴³ The organization's mission "is to inspire and activate thoughtful community engagement through justice-based trainings and programs."¹⁴⁴ This organization does not organize volunteer trips but rather prepares individuals for these opportunities with their trainings and tools that prioritize equality and justice. Break Away has two types of chapter memberships:

¹⁴⁰ "History of Alternative Breaks & Break Away," Break Away, accessed March 27, 2023, <https://alternativebreaks.org/about/history/>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. ¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ "Break Away - GuideStar Profile," GuideStar, accessed March 27, 2023, <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/59-3647339>.

¹⁴⁴ “About,” Break Away, accessed March 27, 2023, <https://www.break-away.org/about>.

¹⁴⁵ “Chapter Membership,” Break Away, accessed March 27, 2023, <https://www.break-away.org/membership>.

Advantage Membership and Associate Membership.¹⁴⁵ Advantage memberships are \$750 per year per chapter and Associate Memberships are \$400 per year per chapter.¹⁴⁶ Both have several benefits including “site and housing banks, ongoing consultation with Break Away staff, planning resources through [their] Sample Documents Library, relationships with colleagues through [their] national listserv, access to webinars and discussion guides, and discounts on all trainings.”¹⁴⁷ Advantage members also are allowed one free registration to the Alternative Break Citizenship Schools, the annual summer conference hosted by the organization.¹⁴⁸ Some schools with Advantage Memberships include American University, Southern New Hampshire University, and the University of Utah.¹⁴⁹ Some Associate Member schools include the University of South Carolina, Bridgewater State University, and Keene State College.¹⁵⁰ In 2021 Break Away’s net assets came to a total of \$126,600.¹⁵¹

Two individuals from Break Away were interviewed for this thesis. The first person was Dr. Meg Evans, the organization’s director of education and research. Dr. Evans writes all of the training curricula and conducts the vast majority of the organization’s training sessions since they began working with the organization in 2019.¹⁵² The second individual was Buck Cooke, the organization’s executive director. Cooke “is responsible for guiding the organization at the strategic level, supervising the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Break Away, “Break Away - GuideStar Profile.” ¹⁵² Evans, interview.

¹⁵³ Cooke, interview.

staff, fundraising, [creating] partnerships with other organizations... and being the external fact of the organization to the public.”¹⁵³ He joined Break Away in 2022 after spending over twenty years admiring the organization from his desk at Florida State University as a student affairs practitioner.¹⁵⁴ It was apparent within the first few minutes of their interviews that both Evans and Cooke are passionate about the work they do with their organization and the steps they have taken to promote ethical aid.

Break Away has over twenty-four trainings that are all focused on advancing equality and justice through service work.¹⁵⁵ These trainings are only available to paying membership chapter members, so unfortunately, I was unable to experience them in their full effect as the University of Maine’s chapter has been inactive since 2021. Despite this setback, I was able to obtain lots of information about some of these trainings from Evans, Cooke, and the organization’s website.

The first training that Dr. Evans encourages members to engage with is titled “Foundations of Community Engagement.”¹⁵⁶ This training teaches individuals about Break Away’s “9 Components of Quality Community Engagement” which include “strong engagement, education, orientation, training, full immersion, identity-consciousness, equity, reflection, and reorientation.”¹⁵⁷ Each of these terms are deeply defined and discussed to prompt trainees to think about their value and importance in aid work. Strong engagement is defined as the act of performing service work that is needed and wanted from the community.¹⁵⁸ This is often overlooked in the aid industry by organizations and volunteers that go on service trips with a “west knows best” mentality

and forget to engage with the community to find out their true needs. Education is defined as the teaching of the causes and effects of social and political issues that are

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Evans, interview.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ “9 Components of Quality Community Engagement,” Break Away, accessed March 27, 2023, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6195650b58c3d055e5b88d0f/t/62b4caa0965dba467417f24d/1656015530951/9+Components+of+Quality+Community+Engagement+%7C+Break+Away>.

¹⁵⁸ ingrained in our daily lives.¹⁵⁹ This prompts aid workers to think about the bigger picture and the systemic issues that have resulted in their privilege. Orientation is defined as the lessons individuals learn about the communities they are helping.¹⁶⁰ An important note about this definition is that orientation is not just something that occurs before departure, but during and after service trips as well. At Break Away, it is believed that individuals

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶

should never stop learning. Training is defined as the skills and tools that volunteers learn to complete their aid work.¹⁶¹ Full immersion is defined as the cultural respect that volunteers must demonstrate to show appreciation to communities.¹⁶²

Identity-consciousness is defined as the self-reflection relating to one’s position of privilege and power.¹⁶³ This component is particularly relevant to the theme of white saviorism that is present in all sectors of voluntourism. Equity is defined as sustainable, long-term relationships between the community and volunteers that promote the

redistribution of power.¹⁶⁴ Reflection is defined as the synthesizing of information a volunteer has learned throughout their trainings and service trip.¹⁶⁵ Break Away advocates that their chapters take time for volunteers to process all that they've learned, and they provide activities that prompt individuals to do so. Finally, reorientation is defined as the steps that volunteers should take after their service trip to continue engaging with the community they served.¹⁶⁶ These nine components are used extensively throughout Break Away's trainings, making them important to understand and internalize. The "Foundations of Quality Community Engagement" serves as the backbone for Break Away's curriculum.

Another training that Break Away offers is titled "Cultivating Active Anti-Racism."¹⁶⁷ This training explores "a brief history of oppression and [highlights] the

¹⁶⁷ "Leadership Trainings," Break Away, accessed March 27, 2023, <https://www.break-away.org/leadership-trainings>.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Evans, interview.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Break Away, "Leadership Trainings."

¹⁷²

importance of being actively anti-racist rather than non-racist."¹⁶⁸ The theme of white saviorism, the ideology that white people are responsible for helping others, is extremely relevant in this training. In Break Away, this ideology is addressed head on and they are "very intentional about talking about ways in which we mitigate harm."¹⁶⁹ This training provides volunteers with resources that will enable them to grow into anti-racist advocates, identifies the root causes of oppressionist mindsets that tie issues of systemic racism and voluntourism together, and gives individuals the space and time they need to

unpack and start relearning.¹⁷⁰ It is said that unlearning is much harder than learning, and that statement rings extremely true in this training.

A third training Break Away offers is called “Ethical Storytelling.”¹⁷¹ This training identifies the role that narratives of service trips play on the communities that hosted the volunteers and that oftentimes, volunteers words perpetuate harm.¹⁷² This is relevant to the theme of representation, how volunteers talk and use visuals about their experience. Although stories can seem harmless, words hold an exorbitant amount of power and have the ability to uphold systems of oppression. This training teaches volunteers about creating ethical narratives that don’t exploit the work they did or the

people they worked with but rather uplift and show appreciation for the community that welcomed them.¹⁷³

Another training Break Away provides is called “Identity Works and Justice,” which emphasizes the importance of self reflection and self awareness.¹⁷⁴ White saviorism plays a big role in this training, individuals are very much challenged to think of their privilege and where their desire to volunteer comes from. This training teaches volunteers how to “combat the pitfalls that come with working within systems of power and oppression, and make connections between power, privilege and oppression.”¹⁷⁵ With this training comes the importance of accepting that all the answers to these questions are not known and that learning and listening to what others have to say is a big part of growing as an individual.¹⁷⁶ At the university level in particular, individuals are “taught that [they] should always have the answers,” which is very much not the case in this field.¹⁷⁷ This training emphasizes the importance of self reflection and ongoing learning.

Break Away offers many more trainings to promote ethical aid and Dr. Evans is continuously working to build upon their curriculum. I hope to one day find a way to experience these trainings first hand and learn all that they have to offer. Because this organization does not orchestrate their own volunteer trips, they have the means to focus all of their attention on their trainings, which is exactly what they have done. They have

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Evans, interview.

crafted many learning opportunities that have and will continue to teach young adults all over the United States about what it means to be an ethical voluntourist.

CASE STUDY: CRU/UNTO

This section describes Cru and their humanitarian ministry, Unto, as well as the voluntourism opportunities they provide, the trainings they offer, and the ways in which they promote ethical aid. Cru is a “caring community passionate about connecting people to Jesus Christ.”¹⁷⁸ Cru, formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ, was founded in 1951 by two passionate Christians at the University of California Los Angeles and since then has grown to have a tremendous impact on Christianity around the world.¹⁷⁹ Unto, formerly known as Global Aid Network (GAiN), is a section of Cru with the purpose of relieving suffering, restoring dignity, and revealing hope “through humanitarian aid.”¹⁸⁰ This organization promotes humanitarian aid “in the toughest places on Earth because through this we become better ambassadors of Jesus.”¹⁸¹ Unto’s U.S. headquarters are located in Pano, Texas, but their Global Logistics Center, the place where all of their domestic volunteering occurs, is located in Mount Joy, Pennsylvania.¹⁸² Unto serves in over 75 countries including El Salvador, Guatemala, Greece, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Honduras, and many others.¹⁸³ Their trips typically span between 1-4 weeks in length.¹⁸⁴ Volunteers are responsible for paying for their personal trip cost which can range

¹⁷⁸ “What We Do | Cru,” Cru.org, accessed March 28, 2023, <https://www.cru.org/us/en/about/what-we-do.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ “Who Is Unto? The Humanitarian Ministry of Cru,” Unto.com, accessed March 28, 2023, <https://unto.com/about/who-is-unto/>.

¹⁸¹ “Frequently Asked Questions,” Unto.com, accessed March 28, 2023, <https://unto.com/about/faq/>.

¹⁸² Unto.com, “Who Is Unto?” ¹⁸³ Goff, interview.

¹⁸⁴ “Humanitarian Trips,” Unto.com, accessed March 28, 2023, <https://unto.com/get-involved/humanitarian-trips/>. ¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

anywhere from \$1,500-\$4,550 depending on location and trip length.¹⁸⁵ Volunteers work in four sectors of humanitarian aid: food and agriculture, clean water, critical aid, and disaster relief.¹⁸⁶ Food and agriculture programs are defined as the delivery of “meals and supplies to communities that need food the most.”¹⁸⁷ Clean water programs are opportunities for volunteers to dig and repair water wells and install water filtration systems.¹⁸⁸ Critical aid programs involve delivering essential items like blankets, tarps, clothing, and hygiene items to impoverished or displaced people as well as providing individuals with mobility aids including wheelchairs and canes.¹⁸⁹ Finally, the disaster relief programs involve traveling to places affected by natural or anthropogenic disasters and helping communities rebuild their lives.¹⁹⁰ In addition to providing aid, Unto’s program volunteers also “help ensure people have the opportunity to hear about the eternal hope of Jesus” through their prayers and sermons that aid recipients are encouraged to take part in, though it is not a requirement.¹⁹¹ At the end of 2022, Unto made a total of \$14,163,129 in net assets.¹⁹²

One individual from Unto was interviewed for this thesis, the President and CEO, Al Goff. He has held this position since 2013 but has been doing work with Cru for over

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Unto.com, “Stop Hunger for People Living in the Toughest Places on Earth.”

¹⁸⁸ Unto.com, “Provide Access to Clean Water for People in Tough Places.”

¹⁸⁹ “Critical Aid for People Living in Tough Places,” Unto.com, accessed March 28, 2023, <https://unto.com/critical-aid/>.

¹⁹⁰ “Help Disaster Victims Rebuild Their Lives,” Unto.com, accessed March 28, 2023, <https://unto.com/disaster-relief/>.

¹⁹¹ Unto.com, “Stop Hunger for People Living in the Toughest Places on Earth.”

¹⁹² “Unto, Inc. d/b/a A Subsidiary of Cru Global Inc.: Financial Statement with Independent Auditors’ Report,” CapinCrouse, (November 18, 2022): 5, <https://unto.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Unto-22-FS-FINAL-1.pdf>.

¹⁹³ Goff, interview. ¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

25 years.¹⁹³ As the President and CEO, Al Goff is responsible for overseeing a team of nearly 100 full-time humanitarian workers that reside all over the world.¹⁹⁴

During his interview, Goff repeatedly stressed the importance of local involvement within Untos programs. Referred to as “field partners,” these individuals create their own humanitarian strategies for “relieving suffering and increasing the effectiveness of their service to people in their communities.”¹⁹⁵ These individuals along with the majority of the staff at Unto are responsible for raising their own financial support to cover their salaries, benefits, and ministry expenses.¹⁹⁶ This model of pay is referred to as Ministry Partner Development and is a common pay structure among mission organizations.¹⁹⁷ According to Cru, this pay structure “is rooted in the Old and New Testaments” and it promotes equality and passion for the missions.¹⁹⁸ Individuals from the United States that attend Unto’s mission trips are there to play a supportive role to the local field partners—this is so that self-sustainability can eventually be achieved and so that the locals have control of the aid work being done in their community.¹⁹⁹ This practice of putting field partners “in the driver's seat” ensures cultural sensibility,

¹⁹⁵ Unto.com, “Who Is Unto? The Humanitarian Ministry of Cru”

¹⁹⁶ “Humanitarian Ministry Staff Opportunities,” Unto.com, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://unto.com/about/careers/staff-opportunities/>.

¹⁹⁷ “How Will I Be Paid?” Unto.com, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://www.cru.org/us/en/opportunities/careers/supported-staff/how-we-raise-our-salaries.html>

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Goff, interview.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

“Oneness in Diversity | Cru,” Cru.org, accessed March 29, 2023,

effective and helpful aid, autonomy, and preservation of community dignity.²⁰⁰ According to AI, this structure has also helped the organization limit their issues of discrimination and white saviorist mindsets among volunteers.²⁰¹

Working underneath locals is not the only practice Unto uses to ensure ethical volunteering. Cru provides their staff and volunteers with resources and prompts discussions relating to “Oneness and Diversity”, their version of inclusivity and equity.²⁰² Cru turns to the Bible for the answers to questions relating to race, ethnicity, and culture

²⁰² <https://www.cru.org/us/en/about/oneness-in-diversity.html>.

and cites four biblical verses to justify their position: “1) God created humanity in his image with great dignity and worth, 2) humanity has rebelled against God and is alienated from God and one another, 3) Jesus Christ died and rose to gather a community of redeemed people from every tribe, language, people, and nation to reflect God’s glory in the world, and 4) Christ has called that community to proclaim this good news and make disciples of every nation.”²⁰³ With these verses, the organization conveys the message that “Racism and prejudice go against the very heart of God.”²⁰⁴ According to AI, all Cru and Unto staffers must complete trainings created by the Oneness in Diversity program, but these trainings are not available to the general public.²⁰⁵ Despite not having

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ “Oneness in Diversity Resources | Cru,” Cru.org, <https://www.cru.org/us/en/about/oneness-in-diversity/resources.html>.

²⁰⁵ Al Goff, “RE: Clarifying Question,” March 29, 2023.

²⁰⁶ Cru Inner City Chicago (@CruInnerCityChicago), “Darryl Smith - Keynote Speaker,” YouTube video, May 14, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJLMakMvQIk>.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Cru.org, “Oneness in Diversity Resources | Cru.”

access to their trainings, videos of the Oneness in Diversity's director, Darryl Smith, are available on YouTube. These videos are sermons and speeches that Mr. Smith has given to members of Cru, he talks about the generosity and kindness that Jesus displayed to everyone around him and how those that love and follow him will do the same.²⁰⁶ He cites many Bible verses to support his claims, serving as an alternative form of training and laws.²⁰⁷ In addition, the Cru website provides lots of resources including books, videos, articles, and podcasts that connect the subjects of religion and diversity.²⁰⁸

COMPARISON ACROSS ORGANIZATIONS

This section compares the efforts that the four organizations put forth to promote ethical international aid among their volunteer programs. Undoubtedly, all four of these organizations have made an impact all around the world and have bettered many people's lives while doing so, host community members and volunteers alike. Demonstrating their ability to conduct aid, however, is not the purpose of this thesis. There are positives and negatives to each of the organizations, and there is much to be improved upon in every realm.

An important factor when comparing organizations is the variety of structure across the four organizations. For example, the Peace Corps is an agency of the U.S. government, and therefore receives more funding and is able to operate at a larger scale than any of the other three organizations. Another example is how Break Away's structure is different from the other three organizations as they are the organization that educates and trains individuals that desire to attend voluntourism trips through their schools' Alternative Breaks chapters. These differences play a key role in evaluating the various similarities and differences and aspects of strengths and areas of improvement among the four organizations.

A key factor in promoting ethical aid is the involvement of the host communities. Each organization interacts with the local people in their own unique ways and to varying degrees. The Peace Corps employs over 2,000 individuals from the various places where

²⁰⁹ Peace Corps, "Training and Ongoing Learning."

they volunteer that serve as volunteers' mentors and counterparts.²⁰⁹ These individuals conduct the pre-service training sessions, giving locals agency over the new volunteers, a measure that promotes a healthy and appropriate power dynamic between the volunteers and the staff.²¹⁰ These individuals also continue to work with Peace Corps volunteers as they serve their communities, whether as counterparts or supervisors.²¹¹ Cru/Unto has a similar model of community involvement in which their field partners are employed by the organizations, though their pay structure is determined by their individual sponsors and not the organization itself.²¹² These individuals are the primary people involved in the humanitarian mission trips, they are the ones that carry out the majority of the aid actions and interact with the recipients of the aid.²¹³ Any U.S. missionaries are there to help the field partners with any and all tasks at hand.²¹⁴ This structure of volunteering ensures cultural competency, limits language misunderstandings and interpretation errors, and helps aid feel "more organic and natural."²¹⁵ Although Break Away does not conduct voluntourism trips themselves, cooperation with communities is a major theme in almost all of their trainings, they teach individuals that their volunteer work should first and foremost be decided upon, executed, and maintained in collaboration with people from the community.²¹⁶ According to their executive director, building relationships with

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Goff, interview. ; Unto.com, "How Will I Be Paid?" ²¹³ Goff, interview.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Cooke, interview. ²¹⁷ Ibid.

members of the host communities “is a part of everything that we think, do, and believe here at Break Away.”²¹⁷ These three organizations put much effort into building partnerships with the local communities. This sentiment is not quite equal at United Planet. This nonprofit takes on a different approach to incorporating locals in their programs by recruiting them as hosts for their volunteers.²¹⁸ While this practice promotes cultural and language immersion and has several other educational benefits, it is not the same as local involvement within the actual voluntourism service.

The second important element that plays a big role in the ethics of aid are the trainings that organizations provide to their volunteers, particularly trainings relating to subjects such as discrimination, white saviorism, representation, partnerships, and cultural sensitivity. Break Away paves the way in this sphere, they are an exemplary model of how volunteers should be trained before embarking on a voluntourism trip. This organization has over twenty-four trainings that are all geared towards providing ethical aid.²¹⁹ They offer a variety of resources and exercises to ensure these subjects are resonating with volunteers.²²⁰ They address the issues of white saviorism and discrimination immediately and do not shy away from making people feel uncomfortable.²²¹ They encourage individuals to self-reflect in ways many people never

²¹⁸ Anonymous Staffer, interview.

²¹⁹ Evans, interview.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Cooke, interview.

²²² Evans, interview.

²²³ Peace Corps, “Trainings and Ongoing Learning.”

²²⁴ Ibid.

have before, and they provide safe spaces to work through these intellectual barriers that systemic racism has ingrained in so many peoples' brains.²²² Break Away's quantity of trainings, however, does not diminish the quality of the other organization's trainings. The Peace Corps has a whole section of their pre-service training dedicated to intercultural competence, diversity, equality, inclusion, and accessibility.²²³ These trainings are designed to create self-awareness, prompt self-reflection, change peoples' perspectives, and bridge different mindsets together.²²⁴ There are also other alternative forms of training that are used by one of the organizations. Cru has trainings through their Oneness in Diversity Program that are only available to their employees, however, they still provide education to the general public through this program, but not in the traditional training sense.²²⁵ They use their common belief in the Christian faith to teach individuals about the importance of inclusivity and equality. They use examples of Jesus and verses from the Bible to inspire acts of service and generosity among their people, putting a new motive behind aid work that the other three organizations are unable to do.²²⁶ Lastly is United Planet that provides very little resources relating to these critical issues. This organization prioritizes the enjoyment component with their emphasis on tourism and excursions more than the educational value that voluntourism holds, though this is not unusual for organization's of its kind.

While voluntourist organizations are supposed to promote fun, meaningful adventures, they also have a great responsibility in assuring that their involvement does

²²⁵ Cru.org, "Oneness in Diversity | Cru."

²²⁶ Cru Inner City Chicago, "Darryl Smith - Keynote Speaker."

not mitigate harm. Organizations that fail to provide their volunteers with proper education on subjects that are so centric to this work are irresponsible and dangerous. It is crucial that this industry takes into account the role people from the United States play in these communities and the damage they are able to inflict when not properly trained. Luckily, not all hope is lost for the voluntourism industry. If organizations were willing to collaborate and share resources with one another, to accentuate the strong points and reform the weak ones, this industry would have the potential to make an even more meaningful impact on the world.

CRITIQUES AND IMPROVEMENTS

This section identifies the aspects of the four organizations that are ineffective in promoting ethical relationships and provide adequate solutions for them, as well as identify more improvements that all international voluntourism organizations can adopt to better promote ethical aid.

I critiqued United Planet in the previous section for the inadequacy of its training programs. This organization along with many others of its sort—those that organize short-term aid trips for exorbitant amounts of money with a heavy focus on cultural excursions—tend to bypass the training step and dive head-first into the fun. These organizations are the reason that voluntourism has a bad reputation, it's these organizations that do not properly prepare their volunteers which in turn results in “missteps and contradictory actions” that have the potential to be catastrophic.²²⁷ Not only is inadequate training irresponsible of the organization because of the potential harm volunteers can inflict with their ignorance, but it is also a lost opportunity to teach younger generations about the importance of transnational relationships, cross-cultural experiences, and basic etiquette. Good intentions are not enough for this work, and it is the responsibility of organizations to educate and train their volunteers on how to provide aid in the most ethical manner possible. While United Planet was certainly the weakest of the four organizations in this area, all four have room for improvement.

²²⁷ Clark, “Ethics and Etiquette in Humanitarian Engagement—101.” 87.

Break Away's justice-centric aid trainings are some of the most progressive and educational resources I have ever studied. They put so much thought into the sectors of international aid that have the potential to mitigate harm and they've created solutions for all of them. These trainings provide tools for individuals to overcome bias and sentiments of white saviorism, learn about their role as international volunteers in the communities they partner with, and become more aware of the structural inequities that uphold oppression in our society. All aid organizations would benefit from adopting a training curriculum similar to Break Away's—the potential that long-term volunteers would have if they received training similar to Break Away's would be limitless.

In addition to justice-centric trainings, volunteer organizations should also provide location-specific training that addresses their specific community's culture, customs, language, and political scene. These subjects are important for volunteers to be knowledgeable of in order to create meaningful relationships with locals in their communities. The best way an organization can go about these trainings is by having them take place in-country and be taught by locals. This enables volunteers to learn about these subjects from a primary source sort of perspective, eliminating the 'middleman' that is the person from the United States that some organizations have teach trainings of similar aptitude. The Peace Corps' 10-12 week pre-service training sessions are the closest to this recommendation reviewed in this thesis, though this solution adds the element of the political situation of the country, which was a proposed solution from the anonymous staffer from United Planet.²²⁸ Not only do trainings that address these topics

promote ethical aid, they also help keep volunteers safe from potentially dangerous situations within their communities.

In addition to incorporating place-specific training, organizations should consider clarifying their websites as they are often vague about the areas in which they volunteer. Both Cru and Unto lack concise lists of the areas where they send missionaries, which is the reasoning as to why that case study lacks a map—there was not enough information on their websites about where they volunteer. Al Goff, the director of the organization, even admitted to me that a list of locations like this does not exist.²²⁹ This issue was especially prevalent with three of Unto’s trips, their “North Africa Vision Clinic” humanitarian trip, their “Southeast Asia Vision Clinic” trip, and their “Middle East Vision Clinic” trip.²³⁰ Nowhere in their descriptions nor anywhere else on their website defines in which country these trips take place. Not specifying the location of these trips is insensitive to these places and the people that live there, for each country is its own unique state with its own unique communities, cultures, languages, political situation, and people. By not specifying the location of these trips, Unto is demonstrating a lack of awareness of the individuality of the various countries that exist within these regions. It is also inconvenient for potential volunteers who now have to take the extra step of inquiring about where the trip takes place.

Another improvement that all four organizations can make is the implementation of a mechanism that enables locals to report grievances to the organizations. The Peace

²²⁸ Anonymous Staffer, interview.

Corps' "Host Country Staff Survey" is the closest tool that any of the four organizations currently possess, but it is only applicable for their employees and not the general public.²³¹ The implementation of a system like this would give community members the opportunity to speak their minds and give feedback on the voluntourists, especially if submissions were collected anonymously. This mechanism could help aid organizations learn from locals so that they can then improve their aid and training techniques, benefiting everyone in the long run.

While none of the organizations studied in this thesis have programs with orphanages, many voluntourism organizations do. Orphanage work is problematic on many levels. It is estimated that 80% of children worldwide that live in these institutions are not in fact orphans and have parents that could care for them.²³² Families often send their children to live at an orphanage due to their inability to properly care for the child due to poverty.²³³ While the hope is that orphanages will provide for the child, this is not always the case. Children in orphanages are at higher risk of being abused and neglected than they would be in their homes, and once the child is old enough to leave the institution, they experience higher risks of experiencing homelessness and trafficking and are more subjected to mental health difficulties because of the lack of individuality, socialization, and decision making skills they were subjected to while growing up.²³⁴ Voluntourism organizations that partner with these institutions not only provide financial support to these facilities, they also perpetuate attachment issues for the children they

²²⁹ Al Goff, "RE: Clarifying Question," March 29, 2023.

²³⁰ Unto.com, "Humanitarian Trips."

²³¹ Peace Corps, "2022 Host Country Staff Survey Overview."

visit, who experience a vicious cycle of love and then neglect from complete strangers.²³⁵

The coalition Rethink Orphanages is a network of many organizations around the world that work towards building awareness of the harm orphanages perpetrate and to diminish the support of these institutions.²³⁶ Alternate programs to promote that are more ethical in the ways in which they care for children include family-oriented child sponsorship programs, volunteering at after school programs, and teaching in educational settings. It is important to remember that volunteering with children, even through reputable organizations, has the potential to perpetuate harm without the proper training.

Another improvement the aid industry can make that is related to the ethical care of children is the implementation of regulating photography. Dr. Jackie Clark argues that if educators and healthcare professionals in the United States are required to abide by HIPAA laws, voluntourists in other countries that work these same positions should also follow the same guidelines.²³⁷ The reason this is not the case, Clark argues, is because of the normalization of saviorism within the voluntourism industry.²³⁸ This relates to the theme of representation addressed in this thesis. Implementing HIPAA guidelines in the voluntourism industry would show respect for the individuals in the host communities

²³² “Orphanage Tourism: Shedding Light on the Orphanage Scam,” Rethink Orphanages, accessed April 6, 2023, <https://rethinkorphanages.org/problem-with-orphanage-tourism>.

²³³ Ibid. ²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ “Planning Visit to an Orphanage? Avoid Scams in Cambodia, Nepal, etc.” Rethink Orphanages, accessed April 6, 2023, <https://rethinkorphanages.org/responsible-travel/planning-visit-orphanage-avoid-scams-cambodia-nepal-et>.

²³⁶ “About ReThink Orphanages,” Rethink Orphanages, accessed April 6, 2023, <https://rethinkorphanages.org/about-rethink-orphanages>.

and diminish the dehumanization that occurs when a volunteer takes a photo with someone and posts it to social media to show off their good will.

None of the four organizations studied in this thesis have adequate ways in which they measure the impact of their trainings. This is an improvement that should be adopted immediately as it will give the organizations quantifiable data on the effectiveness of their trainings. This tool could be a survey that all voluntourists are asked to take after they complete their trainings, a survey that host community members could take to evaluate the voluntourists' behaviors, or a combination of the two. Implementing this sort of survey enables organizations to learn about the areas they are excelling and the areas that need improvement, allowing them to build upon and reform their practices.

A final improvement that the voluntourism industry can make is transforming the nature of one-sided trips into exchange programs. This is the epitome of creating partnerships, enabling it so both parties have the opportunity to be recipients and donors. Although the purpose of most voluntourism is to provide aid to developing countries that need assistance, there is no reason, aside from financial barriers, that should prevent these relationships from being fully mutual. Voluntourism organizations can sponsor individuals to travel to the United States where they can do the exact same work that their counterparts do in their communities. This is not a common practice in this industry for many reasons that all circle back to the structural issues of the industry that uphold

²³⁷ Clark, "Ethics and Etiquette in Humanitarian Engagement–101." 89.

²³⁸ Ibid.

notions of superiority and oppression, but that is not to say that this does not have the potential to be a common practice in the future.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examines the voluntourism industry and its effectiveness in promoting ethical partnerships. Firstly, I reflect on my experience with the industry when I worked as an intern for an international aid nonprofit organization in my hometown and connect that to my theories on cultivating ethical partnerships, that relationships of this manner are achievable when organizations take on the responsibility of training their volunteers on how to appropriately and ethically interact with members from their host communities. Next, a summary of the international aid industry is provided as background information relevant to this research. This includes the origin story of the United States becoming an international aid donor, the creation of the United States Department for International Development (USAID), and several statistics that exemplify the magnitude of the industry. Next, the four organizations that are studied in this thesis are identified and some of the key terms are defined. The review of the literature identifies some of the scholarly critiques of the United States aid industry, including its colonial roots and foreign policy agendas. Critiques specifically relating to the voluntourism industry are also identified, including the notion that this sector of aid romanticizes poverty. Next, the approach to research is explained, including the steps taken to conduct interviews. The key themes that prevailed during these interviews are identified in a coding tree that also provides a definition and a quote from an interviewee that relates to the theme. These themes are further evaluated in the section titled “Key Themes” where an in-depth analysis of each theme is provided. Quotes and examples from interviews are present in this section to exemplify the themes’ significance in the

industry. Following this are the four case studies. Each organization is examined in its respective sections. These case studies identify the history of the organizations, the people interviewed from the organizations, the trainings provided that promote ethical partnerships, and the other efforts which the organizations take to provide unbiased aid. The trainings and efforts are then compared across the four organizations and the strengths and weaknesses are identified. Finally, several critiques of these organizations are made, with an accompanying list of improvements that can be made to progress these organizations and the voluntourism industry as a whole.

Overall, this thesis finds several aspects of the voluntourism industry that can be improved to better promote ethical partnerships. These findings can be applied to a variety of industries on a global scale, not just within the United States. The Black Lives Matter movement sparked a worldwide discussion on white privilege in which millions of people, myself included, learned about the ways in which the world functions within systems that oppress people of color. A global initiative to become antiracist was born where people began to listen to the voices that have been suppressed since the very beginning. The themes addressed in this thesis—white saviorism, discrimination, representation, partnerships, diversity training, cultural sensitivity, and justice-centric aid all relate back to this effort of being antiracist. Every individual that has taken any sort of initiative in acknowledging their white privilege can therefore benefit from learning about these themes.

Racism is not going to disappear overnight. The aid industry will still continue to uphold systems and sentiments of oppression. Voluntourists, however, and their

organizations, can make changes within themselves to dismantle the inequalities they perpetuate. They can learn from their partners, make more of an effort to incorporate their knowledge and expertise, and give them platforms that promote their needs and desires. Changing the ways in which the voluntourism industry operates could have the potential to commence a new wave of antiracism, one that promotes ethical transnational relationships throughout the world.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX II - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please state your name, pronouns, and role in the organization you are affiliated with.
2. Describe your role in the organization.
3. What made you decide to work with this organization?
4. What kind of research did you do before entering this industry and what made you decide you wanted to work with your specific organization?
5. Have you ever volunteered abroad? If so, what work did you do?
6. What kinds of trainings did your organization have related to race, bias, and ethics?
7. How does your organization address issues with discrimination?
8. Did you interact with the locals in your host community? If so, to what degree, and how was it?
9. What did you learn while volunteering abroad?
10. Have you ever heard of the term 'white saviorism'? How does that make you feel?
11. What mentality did you have when you were applying to work with your organization and did that mentality change while you went through this process?
12. Do you think the work that you engaged in while volunteering was helpful to the host community?
13. If you could go back and do something different during your time abroad, what would you have done?
14. Do you think there's anything your organization could have improved to better prepare you for your time abroad?
15. Is there anything I haven't asked you about yet that you feel is worth mentioning?
16. Who else would be beneficial for me to talk to about this subject?

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

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