VAW Global Health Alliances

PRESS RELEASE

February 2020

Many of you have probably heard some rumors about this, and some of you have also been involved in the planning of this. Arush Lal, a former TDC and current advisor to VAW, has been working very hard to update our image. I think it is also worth mentioning that Arush recently accepted a position at the World Health Organization because it emphasizes his level of experience on this subject and because I am super proud of him for accomplishing such a high level of professional achievement! Arush has been interviewing TLs, SOCs, former volunteers, and others to identify ways that VAW can be better at telling our story and also help VAW move to the next level in developing long term, sustainable projects around the world.

Voluntourism or Old Tendencies

Let me give you a little bit of background. In recent years many studies have been done which show that voluntourism is a negative thing. Not always, but often enough that it is a problem. Volunteers from High Income Countries (HIC) travel to Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC) to carry out projects that can sometimes be detrimental to local people and economies. A doctor from the United States can roll through a town in Guatemala, for example, not knowing local customs, not understanding the local language, and giving out medicines that don't make sense for the region. Diseases that present in that region may have similar symptoms to diseases seen where the doctor comes from, but are caused by something totally different, something that only a local doctor could know. Other potential problems come from creating dependencies among local populations on free items given by foreign volunteers. For example, if a foreign volunteer brings free shoes to give away in Peru, what impact does that have on the local shoe cobbler? What happens when the local shoe cobbler is forced out of business, and then the foreign volunteers stop coming to give away free shoes? How does that community get shoes going forward? I know that we don't do any of the things described here, but I want to show you why voluntourism, which sounds like a good thing, can actually be very damaging.

Our VAW Global goal

It is the responsibility of our organization and others like ours to promote local businesses, to work within the boundaries that exist for a community, and to partner with local organizations and professionals while following their lead on new projects. VAW has always championed our local professionals, we have always strived to be sensitive to local requirements, and are committed to building long term alliances and partnerships for permanent growth. **It is time that the language we use to describe ourselves reflects how we operate.**

New Logo & Language

Included in this email is information about the new language we all need to start using in our daily interactions. Arush will also soon be sending out a handbook that all employees will be expected to read and understand. **Volunteers Around the World is changing its**

name to VAW Global Health Alliances. We will no longer be a volunteer organization. We are a professional organization that focuses on building partnerships with local experts to develop projects to improve the health of the communities we serve. Instead of recruiting volunteers we will focus on offering internships. We are updating our website. We have a new logo:

Partnerships and internships for better health.

Our main source of funding still comes from providing a professional enhancement experience to students from the United States, and we need to be sure to emphasize both the work aspect and the professional development aspect of the trip. I will be asking our SOC's to look at new ways we can fill the students' time with professional activities to be less focused on tourism activities. We are looking for ways that local volunteers can get involved. We will create opportunities for local students to engage in the professional activities alongside the visiting students. We are expanding our collaboration with local NGOs, governments, and experts.

VAW Global has a proud history of constantly seeking a better way. We are open to new ideas, and willing to adapt when we can improve. I hope you are as excited as I am about this advancement. We will need to help each other use the proper words. I know I regularly still say "volunteer" when I should say "intern," so if you catch me saying it wrong, I hope you will correct me, and I will help you too! It is an honor and a great privilege to work with all of you. I was recently in Peru and the Dominican Republic, and was blown away by how amazing our teams are there, as in all of our communities. I enjoyed dinner with our Medical Director in Peru, also dinners and meetings with the SOC, assistants, and other support staff in both countries. I even got to meet our transportation guy in Peru! Everyone is working so hard and coming up with fantastic ideas! Every time I visit one of the sites I come away from the experience extremely grateful for every one of you. You are the reason that VAW is what it is today! Becky and I thank you and we look forward to many more years of growth together!

Thank you!

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