

Shriver Peaceworker Program Alumni Survey:

Narrative Summary Report 2007¹

A 2007 survey of Peaceworker Program alumni supported, in many cases dramatically, the popularity and effectiveness of this Peace Corps Fellows/USA program based at UMBC and serving the Greater Baltimore region. It also provided useful input for continued program development.

Peaceworker Satisfaction and Feedback:

The Peaceworker program provides financial assistance and other support to fellows for two years of graduate study. Importantly, 88% of respondents completed their Master's program within this two-year span, matching their original length of time expectations. Importantly, 95% noted that they would not have been financially able, or only with major hardships, to complete their degree without the assistance provided by the Peaceworker program. Without a single exception, alumni reported that they would choose the Shriver Peaceworker Program again if they had it to do over. In fact, 75% reported that they continue to identify themselves as "Peaceworkers." As one alumn put it, "Peaceworker is really a title we can aspire to...its more of an approach to work and life than a time-limited program." A vast majority of respondents (90%) described their overall experience with the Peaceworker Program as very or extremely meaningful. In an open question about the personal significance of the Peaceworker Program many respondents made dramatic claims. "The Peaceworker Program was one of the most influential and important experiences of my life. I continually think about how blessed I am to have been part of such a great group of people and an incredible journey." For some the impact exceeded even their expectations. An alumn from an early cohort stated, "For me the Peaceworker Program was a really big deal—and I had no idea that it would be this for me. It directed me and set my course...It remains a nostalgic piece of time (now over 10 years ago) that I consider important on the scale of the Peace Corps." Other respondents put it in simplest terms: "I loved it!" and "It meant everything!" These strong numeric and personal testimonies are humbling confirmations of what the Shriver Center has known anecdotally for some time. They also present a challenge for us to continue this quality of personal experience, and, further, to grow and develop the program towards its potential for significant regional impact. In one alumn's words, "Peaceworker program represents tremendous potential, an amazing idea that is gradually being realized." Investigation into the specific findings of the survey will provide a basis for directing this process.

A strong majority of respondents (75%) reflected that in conjunction with the Peaceworker Program they would choose the same graduate major and/or service placement again. The fact that a quarter of respondents expressed that they would choose differently regarding their graduate major and community service placement presents an

¹ This report compiled from data received in May 2007 is based on 46 responses to the survey, a 50% return rate given 90 total alumni.

opportunity for further program development. When asked specifically about future directions for the Peacemaker Program, 60% note that the Peacemaker Program would be enhanced by continued cross-cultural experience such as could be designed through service opportunities with Baltimore's international and immigrant communities. This was the strongest response rate among presented options that included international service opportunities (40%), additional credentials like graduate certificate in service learning (28%). This is not surprising given that 90% of alumni noted cross cultural experience as a primary impact of their time in the Peace Corps and over 70% describe the Peacemaker Program as an important part of their reintegration to life in the U.S. Representing this majority, one alumn described Peacemaker as "a bridge, both personally and professionally, from Peace Corps service to my U.S. community." The Peacemaker Program attracts and engages Returning Volunteers at an important juncture in their lives. The opportunity to engage with local domestic service and to professionally develop along a service oriented career path sets a life course for many of our program participants. The potential for linking this engagement in domestic service with continued cross-cultural service experience is highly attractive.

Additionally many respondents reported significant learning about urban issues during their time in the Peacemaker Program, which have led to ongoing commitments to urban service both in their recommendations for the Peacemaker Program and in their own career and personal pathways. Over 80% note that the Peacemaker Program contributed significantly to their thinking and experience around urban and domestic issues and service (very much 64%, quite a bit 19%). Over 90% reported better understanding of issues and dynamics in Baltimore City specifically. In one respondent's words, "Peacemaker was a great opportunity to explore service within a small urban area with a group of highly committed and skilled Returned Volunteers." Many Fellows are drawn to the program precisely as an opportunity to have this urban service-learning experience. This contrasts with the general survey of Baltimore area graduate students the largest number of who desire to live in the suburbs after graduation (40% suburbs compared to 19% big city, CollTown survey). While the majority of Peacemaker attend graduate school in Baltimore County (i.e., UMBC), an equal or greater majority choose to live in Baltimore City during their Fellowship years. This stems not only from the program's urban service mission and Baltimore City studies focus, but also increasingly because of local alumni connections (tours, hosted events, housing tips). Regarding program recommendations one representative respondent stated simply "Keep service placements in BMore." This charge to develop additional meaningful service placements in Baltimore coupled with the expressed desire to have continued cross-cultural experiences in a domestic setting (e.g., work with Baltimore's immigrant communities) will be incorporated into our program proposal.

Over 70% of respondents chose to pursue graduate school in order to develop themselves along a professional career path which was mirrored, and even slightly exceeded, by the more than three-quarters who stated that the Peacemaker Program provided solid preparation for their current work (29% extremely well, 32% very well, 24% well). A strong majority noted that a career opportunity was a major factor in whether they stayed or left the region. We know anecdotally that a number of graduates have remained in Baltimore for up to a year after graduation hoping for the right local career opportunity to present. Peacemaker graduates self describe as well prepared for their careers of choice, and, further, with increased career options in the region, an even higher percentage of our graduates would be retained in the area.

Post-program achievement:

All alumni, including those employed part-time are working in fields for which they were prepared through graduate study and the Peaceworker program curriculum. Nearly 90% of Peaceworker alumni are currently employed full-time. Those few who are not full time professionals are employed at their level of choice or have returned to graduate school for an additional degree. It is also important to note that 85% received jobs for which their Master's level of education was required or an advantage and there is not a single alumn who is unemployed involuntarily. A median salary of \$50,000-\$60,000/yr is particularly significant given their across the board employment in careers of public service.

Many alumni reported a high degree of satisfaction in their work, which would be a strong factor in retention and continuing advancement and professional development. In response to an open question asking them to describe their "dream job" nearly 20% of alumni replied that they are in fact living it. One alumn put it succinctly: "I am living the dream!" Others referred to their specific professional areas. A teacher wrote, "I feel that I am doing my dream job working with children to assist them in reaching their educational aspirations." Another alumn in education training wrote, "I think that I'm in a pretty good place at this point in time, managing a mentoring program for new teachers. I have long wanted to stay in education, particularly in an urban setting, but not necessarily in a teaching role. My Master's program and the Peaceworker program were really helpful to me in getting to where I am at now." Another working locally in corporate service and philanthropy stated, "I am extremely pleased with my currently position working at a company that places high value on community involvement and is working to improve the reach of their community involvement and philanthropy."

As would be expected from an interdisciplinary program, Peaceworker alumni are working in a variety of fields and positions. They represent agencies from the local community level to the national and international level, and their work ranges from research and management to front-line program direction and community organizing. For example, Peaceworker alumni teach and counsel in schools and colleges; they direct after-school and service-learning programs; they coordinate public health programs; they work for city governments; they lead National Service organizations; and they serve international organizations in the fields of small business development, social justice, and refugee services, to name just some of their fields (see attached appendix listing employing organizations).

In addition to these broad and impressive career developments, Peaceworker Alumni are highly engaged community members and many report that their participation in the Peaceworker program increased and enhanced their civic engagement. 86% consider themselves civically engaged or involved in their local community and 89% reported that PW impacted that fact. This general engagement was specified in a number of ways, for example, 77% vote in elections and nearly 50% are active in politics and advocacy (see appendix for additional civic engagement measures). In short, as highly prepared service professionals and as citizens/community members, Peaceworker Alumni represent a creative and engaged class of individuals whose retention in the region would have long term civic, professional, and economic impact.

Baltimore Retention

While 84% of Peaceworkers came to the program from outside the state of Maryland, nearly 60% have remained in the Maryland/Washington DC area after completing the program. A full 95% of those coming to Baltimore from outside the region noted the Peaceworker Program as an influence in their decision to relocate to this region. The need to follow career opportunities elsewhere has been the major reason for most who have left the region. One respondent reluctantly listed his residence as “Seattle WA, but determined to be back in B-More someday!” In contrast, a majority of Baltimore’s graduate students either plan to leave the area or are unsure about staying (approximately 40% state that they are likely or very likely to remain). This is despite the fact that approximately 60% are from Maryland and over 40% lived in Baltimore prior to attending college. Why this discrepancy, especially given the dramatic number of Peaceworkers who have no family ties to the region? While some fellowship programs carry a requirement that participants remain in their geographic area for a certain amount of time after graduation, retaining graduate-educated and ethically sophisticated community service leaders is happening naturally through the Peaceworker program without such a requirement. Beyond beginning their career path in the area, many alumni are beginning to put down roots locally. Nearly three quarters (70%) of alumni are now married or in committed relationship, and over 50% now have children (and anecdotally from our attendance at local baby showers, there are several new ones on the way). The same three quarters now own homes, most purchased within the last five years, demonstrating a growing geographic commitment, much of which is to our Baltimore area. Here’s how one respondent put it: “We came with no expectation of staying...and here we are eight years later, homeowners in the City and connected to a great network of people. Its like Peace Corps, only you don’t have to leave after two years. You can stay and raise families together and keep the conversation and learning going!”

Whether remaining in the area or relocated across the U.S. and internationally, Peaceworker Alumni reported a strong connection to the program and its community and expressed a strong desire to participate in alumni activities. Nearly 90% want to attend alumni retreats or trainings and nearly that strong a majority (82%) would like opportunities to network with other alumni. Nearly 60% stated their desire to participate in real or virtual activities such as book clubs. As we reach our 100th graduate milestone this Spring (07) we are beginning to plan and implement these alumni suggestions and see in this an opportunity to expand this network to include other Baltimore area Fellows groups.