

Bringing It Home: A Toolkit for Returning Participants

If you put yourself in a position where you have to expand your comfort zone, then you are forced to expand your consciousness. --Les Brown

Welcome back. Phew. That was exhausting, mind-altering, devastating, joyous, delicious. Queezy, overwhelming. Hard-to-say-what. Many participants return to the US profoundly affected by the poverty and humanity they've seen. Many experience culture shock coming home worse than going there: friends and family seem not to understand; big box stores feel grotesque; the privilege evident in our belongings, our rooms, our refrigerators, just makes no sense. And many find it hard to translate what felt like a life-changing experience into day to day, real-life changes. This toolkit is your deep breath, your context. It contains tools for dealing with culture shock and suggestions for bringing home the lessons of volunteerism, as well as resources for exploring the larger, global community of volunteers, do-gooders, and social entrepreneurs.

Acclimating to home

Culture shock affects everybody differently. Some returning volunteers become irritable with family and friends. Others lock themselves in their rooms, emotionally distraught. Still others are relatively unaffected. These recommendations are good practices for the whole spectrum:

1. Stay connected with your fellow volunteers. If you are in the same region, plan a pot luck or take a day-trip to solidify the friendships you made in the DR. Connect and reconnect with your DR team.
2. Journal. Follow through on what you started in the DR by working through the hodgepodge of memories, thoughts, and feelings you have now. Articulate your perspective for yourself. Get it out.
3. Share your trip with your family and friends, especially those who helped make it happen. Invite loved ones over for a slide-show, a Madres Jewelry party or a donor thank you dinner. These thoughtful gestures allow your supporters to share in your experience in a meaningful way, and help you process what you've learned.
4. Bring home lessons learned in the DR....

Bringing home lessons learned

Coming down from the culture shock phase, it can be surprisingly easy to fall back into old routine. It felt life-changing; now it feels like an experience put in a shoe box up in a closet. Bringing it home is about framing your experience, sharing it, keeping it in the foreground.

Now. Your trip and how you bring it home is ultimately very personal. Una Vida could encourage you to volunteer so many hours at such and such non-profit organization in your home town (in fact we do encourage this!), but that gets away from the point, which is how *you* relate to the world around you. What lessons *did* you learn? What most affected you in the DR? What was the point? Grappling with these questions is the beginning of bringing it home.

Here's what you do after that:

1. Volunteer. It's less visible in our culture, but poverty, malnutrition, homelessness, and hunger are

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- challenges we face in the US as well. Find an organization locally to volunteer with, or think up your own plan.
2. Build community. In any way you can. Start a book club. Have a barbeque. And don't think you have to reinvent the wheel; part of building community is actively participating in and strengthening communities that already exist.
 3. Keep learning, reading, watching. Revisit the book list in "Planning Your Trip." See the next section in this kit, "List of goodness."
 4. Speak up, advocate, be a voice for the voiceless. Write an article for your local paper. Post. Blog. Tweet.
 5. Continue to challenge yourself. Play at the edge of your comfort zone, where growth happens.
 6. Investigate and choose career paths that align with your heart and your gut. Particularly for you young adults on the cusp of big life choices, seek out internships—unpaid if necessary—with organizations you admire.
 7. Seek out mentors. Find one that will invest in you emotionally. This sounds terrifying but it's really not so bad: network with Una Vida alumni; consider asking for an informational interview from someone you respect; be in touch with Lynne and Una Vida staff.
 8. Think about a second (or third (or fourth!)) trip. Each trip gets better, affords more perspective. We know this because we've been told this by *every multi-trip alumni we've ever had*.

List of goodness

The list of goodness is fodder for the global citizen: a compilation of programs, organizations, and media outlets that work generally toward alleviating poverty, improving public health, defending social justice, providing opportunity, educating youth, and other such goodness. Use it to engage the issues, and to get inspired.

Acumen Fund (www.acumenfund.org) funds social enterprises, emerging leaders and breakthrough ideas all over the globe. They've championed the idea of investing patient capital—meaning well-researched and long-term investments—in health, water, housing, energy, and agriculture.

Americorps (www.americorps.gov) sponsors a myriad of year-long positions at non-profits across the US. In addition to the environmental or educational or social work required of the position, Americorps volunteers log development hours—garnering career building skills, planning community action projects, attending technical trainings, etc.—intended to better prepare members for their future careers. 1700 hour volunteers receive a \$4,700 educational award for future or past educational expenses.

Good Magazine (www.good.is) publishes media with a kind of goodness bias. "In a world where things too often don't work, GOOD seeks a path that does. Left, right. In, out. Greed, altruism. Us, them. These are the defaults and they are broken. We are the alternative model. We are the reasonable people who give a damn. No dogma. No party lines. No borders. We care about what works--what is sustainable, prosperous, productive, creative, and just--for all of us and each of us."

Kiva (www.kiva.org) links lenders—such as you—to would-be entrepreneurs in the developing world.

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When those entrepreneurs repay their loan, lenders can extract their money, or choose a new investment. Since Kiva's founding, more than 740,000 lenders have lent \$299 million with a 99% repayment rate.

Peace Corps (www.peacecorps.gov) sends American citizens to developing countries to participate in a cultural exchange whilst working to improve health, agriculture, industry, technology, and/or education. Volunteers serve 27 months including a 3 month training with fellow volunteers.

Skoll Foundation (www.skollfoundation.org) invests in social entrepreneurs, i.e. "society's change agents: creators of innovations that disrupt the status quo and transform the world for better." Click around their page of 91 entrepreneurs and know that many of our best ideas for alleviating poverty are indeed being realized. The Skoll Foundation accounts for \$315 million in funding over the past 12 years.

TED (www.ted.com) spreads ideas worth spreading. The non-profit holds two large annual conferences (Long Beach, CA and Edinburgh, UK) and a handful of others (TEDx events) in addition to funding an ambitious fellowship program and awarding, annually, several \$100,000 TED prizes. TED prize recipients, including the artist JR, the food advocate Jamie Oliver, and Bill Clinton, utilize the funds to manifest their TED wish. 1100 talks are posted online.

YES! Magazine (www.yesmagazine.org) "reframes the biggest problems of our time in terms of their solutions." The tabs of the YES! website read "peace and justice," "planet," "new economy," "people power," and "happiness."