

STHS grad using her hands to educate the deaf in Jamaica

By Megan Hicks

BROWN'S TOWN, Jamaica – For over a year and a half now, I have been working as a Peace Corps volunteer at the St. Christopher's School for the Deaf in Brown's Town, Jamaica.

I have revamped the school's library by organizing existing books, giving the room a fresh coat of paint, and hiring a deaf artist from the community to paint a beautiful mural of the alphabet in sign language. The school has also received donations from various organizations – including the Moose Lodge of South Lake Tahoe – that donated books, bookends, and DVDs. This generous donation allows students to read books in and out of the classroom and to participate in other reading-related activities during designated "Library Time".



South Lake Tahoe's Megan Hicks is working with the deaf in Jamaica.

Photo/Provided

Because the ability to read and comprehend is such an invaluable skill, I have endeavored to instill a love for reading among my deaf students. To this end, I have assisted

in the implementation of a reading competition and a pen pal program for students in fourth, fifth and sixth grades with a school in San Ramon. The students not only learn about another culture, but they improve their writing skills through the pen pal program. And through partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development, St. Christopher's School has also become involved in the Junior Achievement program, which teaches students financial literacy along with other valuable life skills.

I also teach sign language classes to ancillary staff members who work in the school dorms and to community members. I interpret meetings at my school and occasionally for the Jamaican Association for the Deaf in Kingston.

I initially learned about the Peace Corps from one of my college roommates, and later again, from a teacher in my interpreting program, who served as a volunteer working with the deaf community. Though I always thought that giving two years of your life to help others was extremely honorable, my teacher's experience made me think more seriously about becoming a Peace Corps volunteer. Growing up in South Lake Tahoe, I always felt so lucky to have amazing family and friends and I thought it was time to give back. The Peace Corps is the best way to do that.

Volunteering in Jamaica has been enormously rewarding. Every day I am rewarded by seeing my students' beautiful faces light up when they pick out a book or when they run to give me a hug first thing in the morning. Knowing that I have helped the students increase their motivation to read is extremely gratifying.

A little background

I'm a true Tahoe girl. I was a Thunderbird at Tahoe Valley Elementary School, a Timberwolf at South Tahoe Middle School, and a Viking at South Tahoe High, graduating in 1999. I was

even a Fighting Kokanee Salmon at LTCC until I graduated 2002 and transferred to UC Berkeley to get a degree in American studies with an emphasis in disability studies. After graduation, I attended Berkeley City College for two years to learn more sign language and the Interpreter Preparation Program at Ohlone College in Fremont. I became a freelance interpreter in the Bay Area for about two years, and then moved to South Lake Tahoe to spend time with my parents before leaving for the Peace Corps. In South Lake Tahoe I worked as an interpreter for the Lake Tahoe Community College, and also waited tables at new Red Hut on Ski Run Boulevard.