

# Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers

## Activities Report for 2023



The Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (WMRPCV) continue to thrive and enjoy both fellowship and outreach activities to promote and celebrate our Peace Corps experience. In 2023, we welcomed several new members to our group and sustained many of our traditional activities. Looking forward to 2024 we anticipate a closer connection to the University of Montana as a new part-time Peace Corps recruiter has been hired on campus and has already reached out to WMRPCV members to support recruitment efforts.

In 2023 the WMRPCV's members reinforced our ongoing relationships with the refugee community in Missoula and western Montana with the acquisition of a grant from the Peace Corps Community for Refugees (PCC4R). Over the past decade two Missoula-based organizations, the International Rescue Committee and a local NGO, Soft Landing, have actively welcomed refugees from war-torn nations across the globe. The WMRPCV's have been consistently available to help these newly arrived families adapt to lives in the United States. Because of this work and commitment, this grant award allowed for additional support to refugee families in Missoula. Comments in the grant award letter highlight our contributions: "I am delighted to share with you that your efforts to make refugees feel at home in our country have been recognized and rewarded. Your dedication to extending the same level of hospitality we received during our service in their countries is truly admirable, and we are grateful for your hard work." Further, Missoula, MT was officially recognized on World Refugee Day 2023 as a welcoming community by the PCC4R. This commitment to supporting these families in Missoula will only grow in 2024.

The WMRPCV's also paid attention to local needs in 2023, as our members supported the Missoula Food Bank. During Peace Corps week 2023 alone, WMRPCV's delivered over 100 pounds of food and financial assistance to the food bank and offered volunteer hours to keep services flowing. Speaking of Peace Corps week, plans are in motion to make sure the WMRPCV's revitalize our Ambassadors Program to provide descriptions of the Peace Corps experience to students across western Montana's public schools. Because of understandable COVID restrictions, the number of visits to schools during Peace Corps week slowed during the previous three years, but 2024 should bring many of our members back to the classroom to highlight the opportunities Peace Corps offers to make a difference around the globe.



In terms of sharing the joys and memories of our experiences as Peace Corps Volunteers, the WMRPCV has continued its tradition of frequent potlucks and gatherings to bring our members together and share ideas for how we may further Peace Corps' third goal. Sometimes our meetings are as simple as a gathering at a local brewery, and sometimes they are as involved as our annual Christmas party, where we occupy a downtown meeting venue to share food, singing, and storytelling that celebrates the holiday season. Our most notable event each year is a three-day family-oriented gathering on beautiful Flathead Lake at a church camp, an

event we've named the Goat Chase Retreat. In 2023, we had another sensational weekend at this retreat, with Peace Corps members from across the state of Montana participating in our celebration. The Goat Chase Retreat also serves as our annual meeting, where we reaffirm our leadership, review our plans for the year, address our financial wherewithal, and consider new ways to advance the ideals of the Peace Corps.

We believe that 2023 was another fine year for the WMRPCV's, and we eagerly look forward to making additional contributions in 2024. As we have articulated in previous years, the WMRPCV's operate with an unflagging sense of hope, optimism, and commitment to international learning and peace.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jim Burchfield (RPCV, Guatemala, '73-'76)  
WMRPCV President  
*February 2, 2024*

