

Midwifery & Health in the Americas: Weaving Maya & Western Medicine

Study Abroad Service Program – **July 22-29, 2017**

Health and wellness is critical to both individual growth and the overall success of a community. Hosted by the VCU Institute for Women's Health in partnership with the Highland Support Project, Partners in Service Program and the Association of Highland Women (AMA) this learning through service/exchange program provides a unique opportunity to spend time in partnership with indigenous midwives, health promoters and community leaders in Guatemala.



The work of a midwife in Guatemala is an ancient art form, using philosophies and techniques that are virtually unknown in Western medicine. Her practices are founded on the belief that we must achieve and maintain a balance between humanity and its environment. In the Highlands of Guatemala, midwives are often the only health care providers for many miles in isolated, rural communities. They are eager for more knowledge of medicine and the opportunity to develop their abilities in order to improve the quality of care given to their patients. According to some official figures, between 40 & 50 percent of all babies in Guatemala are delivered by indigenous midwives.

Health promoters play an integral role in rural villages as they work to differentiate among common illnesses--and refer serious ones before they advance. Maya medicine is closely tied to spirituality. Illness is regarded as an imbalance and health is understood as a balance between different energies, and between the human being and nature, as well as the rest of the cosmos. Our service team will work to share our expertise while learning from our hosts, empowering all of us with more knowledge and skills to teach and serve in our communities.

We are offering an opportunity for health professionals, social workers, nurses and interested others, from the U.S. to visit Quetzaltenango, Guatemala to participate in this weeklong service/exchange program with a group of Guatemalan midwives, health promoters and community leaders. Together we work with the local women's cooperative called the Association of Highland Women (AMA) following up on community identified training needs and supporting the villages in their efforts to provide culturally appropriate and sustainable health care services.

Team Design: Space is limited to 12 participants. The project is open to VCU students, faculty and staff, community members - anyone interested in women's health, midwifery, lay community health promoters, traditional medicine, global health and international service.

Team Leader: Elizabeth (Beth) Collins works in the VCU Research & Innovation Office – as a Clinical Research Auditor. Currently in VCU's doctoral program in Media, Art, & Text (MATX), Beth's academic focus is in narrative medicine/ethics with base interdisciplinary ties to the fields of philosophy, anthropology, and healthcare. Beth participated in one of our midwifery- health teams in 2013. Beth in partnership with another 2013 team member Amy Whitehurst, captured in photos their experience from the “Marrying Mayan & Western Medicine” service trip in hopes of supporting the holistic health work being done within these indigenous circles of women by exposing the haunting beauty of Guatemala as well as the need for human rights/multicultural understanding.

Trip Details: The standard 8 day trip with all expenses paid includes all in country transportation, food, lodging and translators. The cost is **\$985.00** plus airfare (around \$600-\$700 round trip)

Itinerary:

The itinerary includes cultural, educational, service and exchange aspects and will be tailored to the interests of the team participants, but do expect time with midwives and community leaders, learning about traditional midwifery practices, spirit guides, energy healing, herbal medicine, perhaps a lecture from a Maya Cosmo-vision expert and bone-setter. We will have time to shop at local indigenous markets in La Antigua Guatemala, which was the colonial Spanish capital of Central America. It is a World Heritage site, and one of the most popular tourist destinations in Guatemala. We will also be spending one day on Lake Atitlan, considered a ‘jewel’ of the highlands, surrounded by three amazing volcanoes.

Information Session:

Once applications have been received and acceptance notices sent we will organize an informational meeting in late April. Together we will develop our final trip itinerary to match the interests and needs of participants. We’ll also answer any questions and provide some context on Guatemala, maternal and child health, and our previous work with AMA and the villages in the Highlands



For more information visit:
<http://highlandssupportproject.org/>
www.amaguatate.org/

Applications are available at: www.womenshealth.vcu.edu
www.womenshealth.vcu.edu/community/servicetrips.html

***** **May 20, 2017 is the deadline for applications** *****

Contact information for questions or to secure an application:

Contact Janett Forte @ e-mail: janett.forte@vcuhealth.org or

2017 team leader : Beth Collins @ estoddert@vcu.edu

Or leave a message for a return call at (804) 827-1200