



Peace Corps



# PST 135

## PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

January 7 - March 20, 2024  
Don Chedi, Suphanburi, Thailand



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# TESS PCTs

**Alyssa Strong**

**Joseph Kunetz**

**Arleth Nelson Cooper**

**Kenneth Norris**

**Ayla Malefakis**

**Kristen Lekstrom**

**Cameron Booth**

**Lillian Hromadka**

**Cesily Phomphakdy**

**Monique Sayh**

**Chad Menear**

**Olivia Goldstein**

**Charissa Claassen**

**Reid Stautberg**

**Charles (Lalo) Carter**

**Samantha Stolworthy**

**Colt Dreyer**

**Taleah Vazquez**

**Dakeilyn Kollie**

**Wade Zick**

**David Garfinkel**

**Yu Pheng Lee**

**Giselle Wong**



# YinD PCTs

**Amanda (Natasha) Morgan**

**Mackenzie Devoto**

**Cassidy Haglund**

**Mae Garland**

**Clara Kennedy**

**Melena Vanderford**

**Clayisha Norris**

**Mia Buffington**

**Elsie Pagel**

**Michael Swerdlow**

**Emily Hoffmeister**

**Michael Thoeresz**

**James Whitmore**

**Shaunte Ekpo-Otu**

**Jiin Woo**

**Tammy Norris**

**Kiera Hurley**

**Zetao (Andy) Weng**



# Sessions & Activities at PST



# Training Of the Trainers

Dec 11- Jan 5,  
2023

# Arrival of PCT Group 135

Jan 7, 2024





# Orientation Week

Jan 8-10, 2024



# Bike Day

Jan 10, 2024





# Meet Host Family

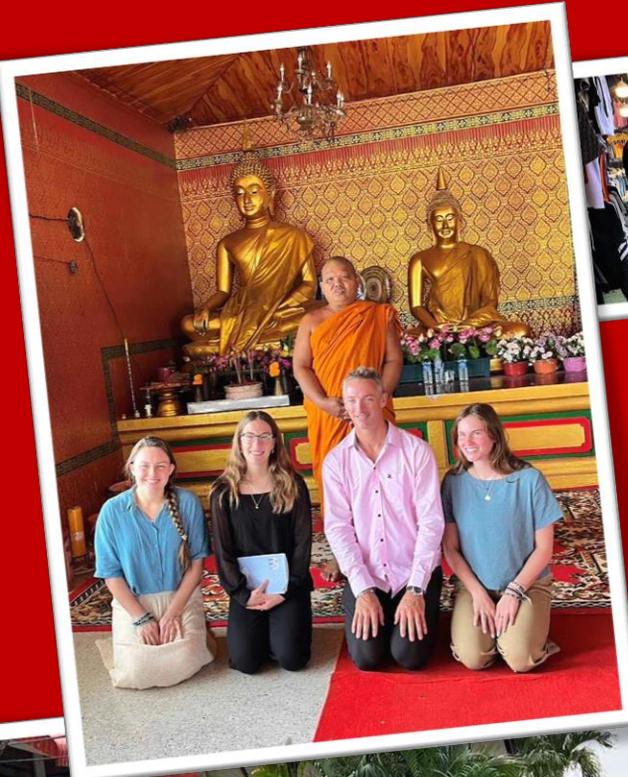
Jan 11, 2024





# Meet the Governor

Jan 17, 2024



# Using PACA tools in the community

Jan 24-25, 2024

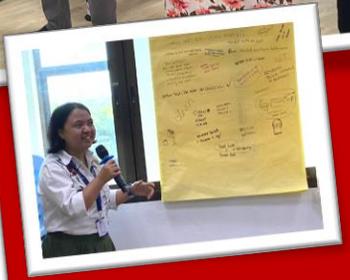




# Community mapping

Jan 27, 2024





# Language Classes



# Culture Classes





# Culture Classes

# Thai Day

Feb 9, 2024





# Thai Day

Feb 9, 2024

# TESS Practicum





# TESS Practicum



# PC's Bangkok Office Tour

Mar 2, 2024





# YinD Practicum



# YinD Practicum





# TESS Teacher Training

Mar 9, 2024





# Bio of **TESS**

## Peace Corps Trainees



# Alyssa Strong

Alyssa is from Michigan and graduated from the University of Florida. If you would like to learn more about Alyssa's background and why she joined the Peace Corps, Alyssa would love to chat via WhatsApp at +1 (248) 974-4931





# Arleth Nelson Cooper

Arleth Nelson Cooper was born in La Esperanza, Honduras in 2002. At a young age, her parents sought better opportunities, leading the family to relocate to the United States. Her parents' decision to immigrate to the United States during her childhood instilled in her an appreciation for her roots and a deep commitment to create positive change in the world. As an immigrant in the U.S. Arleth learned how to navigate the complexities of adapting to a new culture while holding onto her Honduran heritage.

Her family's decision to seek better opportunities in the United States exposed her to a world far removed from the life she was given in Honduras. Frequent travel to Honduras provided her with a stark reminder of the poverty and hardship that plagued many communities in Honduras. Her experiences as an immigrant instilled in her a unique perspective on the intersection of cultures and the importance of understanding and embracing diversity. Arleth was drawn to the idea of "expanding the table of opportunity" for others. Ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, has access to the resources and support they need to succeed.

During high school, Arleth committed herself to community service including serving meals at soup kitchens, participating in building efforts after natural disasters like Hurricane Florence, and volunteering as a translator for rural clinics in Honduras.

In college her involvement in leadership development programs like Lead the Change initiative and the Ignite Institution showcased her commitment to personal growth and positive change. Inspired by the transformative power of education, Arleth actively advocated for underrepresented minority students ensuring they received access to higher education through The Lawton grant program.

Throughout her academic journey at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. Arleth pursued a degree in International Politics and World Affairs driven by a desire to understand and address global disparities. The coursework in her program deepened her understanding of the interconnectedness of nations and the importance of diplomacy in promoting peace and stability.

Inspired by the Peace Corps' mission of promoting peace and friendship through service. Arleth has been drawn to the opportunity to work directly with communities. She saw the Peace Corps as a platform to not only provide assistance asked for by the communities but also to foster understanding and cooperation between different cultures.

As a recent college graduate, Arleth is excited to embark on her journey with the Peace Corps. Recognizing the importance of education in empowering communities, she focuses on educational work, leveraging her skills, passion, and cross-cultural understanding to make a lasting impact on underserved communities worldwide.

Arleth's passion to take on Peace Corps comes from her belief in the power of diplomacy and collaboration between nations to address global challenges and work together to further world peace initiatives.



# Ayla Malefakis

Ayla was born in Chicago, Illinois in the United States. As a kid, she loved reading, writing and spending time outdoors. She spent a lot of time thinking about people and the characters in her books. She moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania when she was eleven years old.

Ayla was a strong writer and humanities student in elementary school but didn't discover her love of science until studying chemistry in high school. She graduated from high school in 2019 and struggled to pick an undergraduate major in her first year of college. She was interested in political science and policy reform but realized that she was still captivated by people, and what makes them tick. She enrolled in a social psychology course and was hooked. By 2023, she graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in psychology and a minor in sociology.

Growing up, Ayla's first job was working as a babysitter around her neighborhood. In college she worked for her university's community outreach program where she was an afterschool tutor for the Philadelphia school system. Throughout college, she worked in retail on the weekends and as a research assistant in qualitative research before she graduated. Her experience in qualitative research includes

- analyzing interviews from adolescents in the Galapagos and their thoughts on climate change. Fall semester of her senior year in college she lived abroad in Ecuador and interned at a nonprofit organization. She helped facilitate sexual education workshops to high school students in Cuenca, Ecuador. Before joining the Peace Corps she was analyzing interviews with researchers from the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health. Their research centered around how COVID-19 affected food access for residents of California receiving government aid.

As a kid, Ayla first heard about the Peace Corps from a family friend who had served in Uruguay in the 1980's. She was instantly enamored by the idea and couldn't quite shake the feeling that she needed to join the Peace Corps herself one day. She realized that in order to truly know herself and grow as a person, she would have to explore the world and take as many opportunities as possible. Ayla was eager to apply to Peace Corps Thailand. As a psychology student, she learned about the differences between individualist and collectivist cultures and is excited to further witness the prosocial norms and Buddhist influences of Thai culture. As a lover of nature she is beyond thrilled to explore Thailand's beauty and biodiversity. Having worked with children before, she is excited to teach elementary school English. She is eager to incorporate lessons on climate change, nature and neuroscience in her teaching curriculum.

In her free time, Ayla loves running, biking and taking photos outside. She enjoys reading, learning new facts, cooking, eating, laughing and dancing with friends. She is an animal lover and hopes to travel the world extensively. She tries to see the beauty and design in everything around her. One day, she hopes to live near the beach and mountains in a home full of books and good food, always ready to host a friend or loved one.



# Cameron Booth

Studying Health Science at Howard University marked a significant chapter in Cameron Booth's life, one that began in the familiar streets of Cheltenham, Pennsylvania. Raised in this suburban community, it was there that Cameron first recognized the disparities in healthcare access and outcomes, particularly for women and families from marginalized backgrounds. Motivated by a desire to make a difference, she set her sights on Howard University, drawn by its reputation for excellence in education and its commitment to social justice. Arriving on campus in the heart of Washington, D.C., Cameron felt a mix of excitement and apprehension. Stepping into the bustling classrooms and engaging with a diverse community of students and professors, she found her passion for women's health and midwifery ignited. Through rigorous coursework and volunteer opportunities, Cameron gained invaluable experience working with underserved communities and advocating for better healthcare solutions. However, it was Cameron's transformative trip to Tanzania that deeply impacted her journey. Volunteering at Tengeru Hospital, she dedicated her time to the women's ward and maternity ward. In these busy corridors, she witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by mothers and newborns in resource-limited settings. Despite the obstacles, Cameron was inspired by the resilience and strength of the women she met, reinforcing her commitment to serving others and advocating for improved maternal healthcare worldwide. As graduation approached, Cameron's determination to make a difference only grew stronger. Inspired by her experiences in Tanzania and fueled by the values instilled in her during her time at Howard, she eagerly applied to join the Peace Corps. Armed with the knowledge, skills, and passion acquired through her education and volunteer work, Cameron looked forward to embarking on this new chapter of her life, ready to continue her journey of service and advocacy in communities near and far.



# Cesily Phomphakdy

Cesily has recently graduated from Texas A&M-Corpus Christi (December 2023) with a major in Environmental Science with a minor in Biology and a certification in TESOL. Her main focus of studies at university was marine and coastal resources. Cesily is originally from Dallas, Texas, and a proud Lao/Mexican American. She speaks English, Spanish, and now a little bit of Thai (hopefully more to come) She is excited to have the opportunity to share her culture with the Thai people she will meet and have them share theirs in return. Her culture is a big part of her identity.

Cesily is passionate about environmental education and teaching English. She has experience teaching adults, with mixed ages and L1's, and children English. She also has experience in animal education as well as conservation fundraising. Because of this, she hopes her project during the two years will tie in the environment with English education.

It has always been a dream of Cesily's to live and work in Thailand ever since she was a child. This dream was especially solidified when she visited Thailand last year. She learned about the Peace Corps and its presence in Thailand from a recruiter during a TESOL seminar class in her second to last semester in college. She applied, was accepted, and is here now.



# Chad Menear

Chad Menear is from Warner Robins, Georgia. He has a Master's degree in sociology, and was working on his PhD, but left the program after he failed to meet grade standards for a particular required course. He used this opportunity to join the Peace Corps, an organization he had wanted to join since high school, both to give back to the world in service, and to grow as a person so that he might come back stronger and try to finish his PhD.

Chad's experience teaching comes from his years in grad school teaching undergraduates, as well as about 3 years-worth of substitute teaching experience for the schools in his hometown. His training in sociology gives him a particular awareness of social and cultural differences, as well as the knowledge and experience to work with and learn from people with a variety of different cultural backgrounds.



# Charissa Claassen

Charissa Luree Claassen graduated from Naropa University in Boulder, CO with her bachelor's degree in Contemplative Somatic Psychology. This branch of psychology focuses on the person, through body, mind, and spirit awareness. In addition to her bachelor's degree, she earned her Yoga Teacher certificate, as well as has instructed students in the art of swimming and snowboarding for a decade. One of Charissa's favorite modern yoga teachers, psychologists and writers name was Ram Dass. Ram Dass once said, "If you would truly bring peace to the world, identify with that place within you where you are Peace."

Charissa is a humanitarian, in search of ways to better support the children and young people of this world through their life development. Her goal is not only focused on the best for the child, but also to help provide the best support and services for the parents and/or guardians involved. Through her undergraduate studies, she learned how to amplify her patience with meditative practices and self - reflection. These practices are a portion of what she wishes to bring to the Peace Corps TESS program. Along with the value of teamwork, perseverance, and resilience.

She hopes to achieve this by informing, inspiring, and motivating those that are willing to listen and learn. She hopes to educate and advocate for children, by guiding them toward opportunities the world has to offer. By cultivating body, mind, and spirit connection within the core self.

Charissa enjoys the motto of the JEDI; justice, equality, diversity, and inclusion. She is a deep listener, empathetic towards others life experiences, sets aside biases to understand the individual's nature, compassionate towards emotions, and aware of cultural differences. She hopes to be a light source for those in need of guidance. As well as a support for individuals seeking acceptance in their stages of human development and societal structure.

Behavior and cognitive learning are a complex paradigm. A recognition of multiple coping tools, teaching tools, assessments and beyond are imperative to provide the best services to a child during the education programming. Interventions of study are multifaceted and must be approached in a non-linear way for each individual student. Problem solving is a key quality, in which Charissa hopes to facilitate in the classroom. All the while, connecting with the people that she will be working alongside. A trusting relationship helps build and foster a hope for change in the outcome of a student's sense of belonging within the education system.

Charissa has always found interest in human behavior. In the way that we think, take actions towards goals, and those things that interest us. This is her purpose: to hold unconditional love for children and young people through their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Accompanied by being a positive advocate for children to achieve their highest potential.

Charissa's oath toward the TESS program is to maintain compassion, loving-kindness, dependability, and courtesy throughout her service. These core values for Charissa are what initially incentivized her to participate in the Peace Corps TESS program of Thailand.



# Charles (Lalo) Carter

Once upon a time, in the serene mountains of Arizona, a boy named Lalo came into the world, his spirit already wandering to faraway places. Quiet and contemplative, he found solace in daydreams and nurtured a love for art and knowledge. With a curious nature and a gentle heart, he forged connections with animals and people alike.

As he grew older, Lalo pursued higher education at Northern Arizona University, delving into Art Education and Ethnic Studies. It was during this time that he first heard of the Peace Corps, igniting a spark within him. Upon graduation, he eagerly joined group 116 in beautiful Thailand, where he immersed himself in a vibrant new culture. Amidst the bustling streets and warm smiles, he rediscovered the joy of learning and the beauty of human connection, shaping his perspective in profound ways.

Returning to the United States after his service, Lalo found himself drawn to the warmth of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Here, amidst the chill of winter, he carved out a new space for himself, blending his past experiences with newfound aspirations. Enrolling in school to study Art Direction in Advertising, he embarked on a career that would meld his creativity with his passion for design. It was during this time that he crossed paths with Wade, his future husband, and together they built a family, welcoming two adopted boys, Milo and Pinot, into their lives.

After eight years in the Midwest, Lalo, Wade, and their sons ventured to the Pacific Northwest, where they found refuge in the tranquil embrace of the forest. Surrounded by the beauty of nature, Lalo found inspiration in his surroundings and began a career in User Experience Design. With each step, he honed his skills, blending empathy and creativity to craft meaningful experiences for users across various industries.

After many years playing in the verdant mountains of the Olympics, Milo and Pinot eventually moved to Paris, and Lalo and Wade decided to explore the many wine regions of South America. It was during a conversation in Peru that Wade proposed a new journey: joining the Peace Corps together. This was something they always thought they would do, and the timing felt right. With hearts full of anticipation, they embarked on this new chapter, now part of group 135 in Thailand. Together, they continue to discover the world and each other, weaving their own happily ever after with each shared moment of joy and growth.



# Colt Dreyer

Colt would start off with writing in the third person is super strange and borderline uncomfortable, but he shall digress. Colt is a 24-year-old man from the state of Arizona. While born in Phoenix, he has lived all over the state and has many places he would consider home, however his favorite home is up in a small town named Williams, about an hour or so south of the Grand Canyon. Here is where his father owns a small hunting cabin on a small plot of land, and where he would spend his summers and other time off of school. Here he would learn to hunt, fish, camp, hike, and a whole array of other outdoor skills. Colt would be the first in his family to attend college, and at the age of 18 move to Flagstaff, Arizona to attend Northern Arizona University. Here he would study and obtain a bachelor's degree in political science with a minor in business. During his time in university, he would go on to try many different clubs and organizations, where he will have a variety of positions such as recruitment officer, philanthropy chairman, and even vice president. When not studying or at a club, he would spend his time hiking, fishing, and volunteering at the local family food center. Colt had developed a passion for volunteer work long before learning about the peace corps. He would gather hundreds of hours of community service through various organizations such as the American Legion, Arizona Autism Charter School, Arizona Recreational Center for the Handicap, and many more.

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Colts desire to serve in the peace corps started when a family friend revealed she had served as a volunteer in Kenya during the mid 90s. They would spend all night talking about her time in the peace corps and would be berated with questions. Now knowing the wonderful opportunity, the peace corps is and all it has to offer, he would make his decision to sign up for peace corps service during undergrad. With the chance to provide assistance to underprivileged communities, travel the world, and challenge his own abilities as well as world views, this was a perfect opportunity. After interviews, legal clearances, and a medical clearance process that would make even the most sane of people want to pull their hair out, Colt would finally find himself on a plane to Thailand, where he will be trained to teach English as a foreign language. Things that should be known about Colt are his commitment and dedication. It took a lot of effort and sacrifice to be here so there is the full intention of seeing it to the end and not wasting a single day. Everyday is an opportunity to provide someone with knowledge that could make a slight or significant difference in their life. Colts goals are to provide assistance with learning the English language for those that request it, challenge personal beliefs and world views, and leave a positive mark by the end of service, regardless of how big or small.



# Dakeilyn Kollie

A Liberian-American from Rhode Island turned New Yorker. Dakeilyn is a Graphic and Interactive Design that embraces the challenges brought by the ever-changing atmosphere of the design world. In her youth, Dakeilyn Kollie was told that it was taboo to work in the arts. She defied all odds as a result, she pursued a degree in Graphic and Interactive Design. As a result, she sought opportunities to learn and grow. During her high school years, she was fortunate to attend Summer@Brown with Brown University and Project Open Door with the Rhode Island School of Design. These experiences prepared her and broadened her horizons. As well as challenging my way of thinking, this course also encouraged her to empathize with others and navigate difficult conversations. Maya Angelou, a poet who has inspired her life in many ways, once wrote, "We may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated." It was often implied to her as a young woman from a lower middle-class background that she wouldn't be able to succeed in life since she grew up feeling the weight of negative perceptions from the media and society. Due to the color of her skin, her class, and her gender, she was simply to be ignored. She had to prove that stereotypes are not always true. It has always been difficult for her to show others she is not a symbol of long-held labels imposed upon women of color. As a result of her interests in the arts and computer science, I was able to find opportunities, but she also had to be aware of the glass ceiling society had placed over her. As an aspiring artist, she tries to capture a hint of realism in my artwork based on these experiences. Art has helped her cope with her struggles thus far. However, given her struggles, she was determined to use her experiences to help others who were marginalized. As such, I am confident she will be equipped with the necessary skills to promote positive dialogue and build bridges between people by participating in the Peace Corps. Dakeilyn has acquired leadership skills, creative senses, communication skills, and teaching abilities through her involvement in direct care, tutoring/mentoring, fashion, and social media. Through her talents, Thailand will gain a unique and strong voice. Being able to learn about and fully integrate into a culture that differs from her own is a great honor.



# David Garfinkel

David L. Garfinkel, a seasoned professional with over 15 years of diverse experience in English as a Foreign Language teaching, possesses a rich educational background and extensive expertise in various fields. Originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, he pursued his BA in History from Occidental College in Los Angeles, California, and furthered his education at the Master of Business Administration program at Duquesne University Donahue Graduate School of Business in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Additionally, he attained a Cambridge Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (TEFL) from Cambridge University: International House in Barcelona, Spain, and a Digital Data Strategist Post Graduate Degree (with Distinction) from Hyper Island in Stockholm, Sweden.

With a multifaceted skill set, David has demonstrated proficiency across various domains. He has honed his teaching abilities through years of instructing English as a Foreign Language both internationally and remotely to learners of all ages and backgrounds.

Moreover, he possesses a robust background in research design, brand strategy development, and business consulting, having worked with international clients spanning diverse industries and markets. His expertise extends to mentoring youth in life skills, leadership, and wilderness survival, as evidenced by his tenure with the Boys Scouts of America.

David harbors a profound passion for community service and global engagement, which fuels his passion for working with the Peace Corps. He intends to leverage his skills, knowledge, and experiences to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development initiatives and foster positive change in underserved communities in Thailand. His commitment to empowering youth, promoting education, and facilitating cross-cultural understanding aligns seamlessly with the ethos of the Peace Corps, driving him to pursue this noble endeavor wholeheartedly.

Beyond his professional achievements, there are several facets of David's personality and interests worth noting. He is deeply engaged in a myriad of hobbies, including competitive sports such as powerlifting, wrestling, and hockey, alongside creative pursuits like photography, design, and artificial intelligence image generation. His active involvement in the 52 Peaks competitive hiking/scrambling club in Las Vegas not only underscores his adventurous spirit but also reflects his resilience and determination in overcoming personal challenges, such as a fear of heights.

Furthermore, he finds joy in culinary exploration, formerly residing in Las Vegas's Chinatown and indulging his passion for cooking with access to a diverse array of international cuisines.

In summary, David Garfinkel embodies a blend of professional excellence, compassionate service, and adventurous spirit, making an ideal addition to your school and community.



# Giselle Wong

Born and raised in New Jersey, Giselle is a recent graduate of Colgate University, receiving her bachelor's in International Relations. Having traveled to multiple countries under various contexts, she desired to experience living and working in a new country for a longer period of time, while learning to utilize her skills to serve others.

Giselle's inspiration to work abroad came from her aunt, who works at the World Bank, traveling every few years after finishing a project in one country. Discovering her interest for human development, she gained experience through working with non-profit organizations aimed towards aiding specific communities. One such experience was through interning at an organization called the Syrian Emergency Task Force (SETF), whose goal was to raise awareness of the Syrian war and humanitarian crises, as well as pursue justice and accountability for war crimes. Having interned at SETF during her college years, Giselle was able to bring some members of the organization to her university, in order to hold a panel discussion on the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019, a U.S. legislation that had passed with SETF as one of the driving forces behind it.

In regard to her desire to travel, in 2019, Giselle traveled with a small team to Baozhong, Taiwan, where for a few weeks she collaborated with Taiwanese university students in leading an English summer camp for elementary school children. In 2022, Giselle studied abroad in Geneva, Switzerland for a semester, and was offered the opportunity to extend her internship at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) into the summer, allowing her to experience living abroad in Europe without the direct guidance of her university. During her internship, Giselle was a member of the Immigration and Border Management Team, where she worked on processing visas through IOM centers across the globe. It was through this team that Giselle met American colleagues who had previously served in the Peace Corps, and who had encouraged her to consider joining after she had graduated. Through both experiences, Giselle has learned how to grow comfortable in placing herself in new environments and uncomfortable situations and is looking forward to the new lessons and experiences she will gain while in Thailand. During her time here, she hopes to collaborate and work on projects with community members related to the development of her students and local community that emphasize the change they want to see, rather than the change that others may think is necessary.

In her free time, Giselle enjoys dancing, both by herself and with friends. Growing up, Giselle has learned ballet since the age of 3; in college, she committed to expanding her dance knowledge and explored other styles including contemporary, hip-hop, and ballroom. Giselle became a large part of her university dance community, leading dance groups in technique classes and choreographing performances for students of all levels. Giselle hopes to continue dancing while in Thailand, to be able to share her love for the artform with those who are interested, as well as learning for herself traditional Thai dance styles from the community.



# Joseph Kunetz

Joseph Kunetz is from Darien, Connecticut and studied English and Theology at Villanova University. After graduation, he spent more than two years teaching high school English in Kalasin, Thailand, but left at the onset of COVID. On his return to the US, he researched and wrote articles for a business publication for more than a year. Finding office life unsatisfying, he moved on to organic farming in Maryland, where he and a team of farmers cultivated and sold over 50 kinds of fruits and vegetables throughout the year.

Joseph joined Peace Corps Thailand because he loves Thailand, Thai culture, and Thai people, and he wanted to continue the cultural exchange. He also wanted to improve his Thai language skills, and he missed working with children.

In his spare time, Joseph enjoys Tai Chi, Qi Gong and kickboxing.



# Kenneth Norris

Kenneth (K.D.) Norris, first and foremost was blessedly married to his lovely wife, TJ, 30 years ago. And together they are on this Peace Corps Thailand adventure. At 67 years of age, Ken us the oldest volunteer in Thailand Group 135, and he often feeds off the energy of the youth surrounding him.

Ken comes to the TESS/TEFL program with limited American public school teaching experience, primarily as an elementary school substitute teaching in 2023 as his Peace Corps entry became more real. Prior and for much of the past four decades he worked as a journalist using the byline “K.D. Norris”. After gaining his journalism degree from Humboldt State University, he has written for and edited newspapers large and small, from California to Vermont, and won numerous awards for his writing. In 2023, K.D. also published his debut fiction novel, *The View from Gleninagh North*, which is currently available in print and will soon be available in e-book.

Originally from the high plains of western Washington state, Ken spent six years in the U.S. Navy — briefly visiting Thailand in the 1980s — before gaining his associates and then bachelors degrees and starting his career. He lived in California, and then in Portland, Oregon, where his met his beautiful wife. Together they have lived in Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Vermont before moving to Michigan, from where the entered the Peace Corps.

Ken and TJ’s motivation for volunteering for the Peace Corps stems from their desire to give back to a world which has been good to them in their life and careers, and to adventure as few of their friends and none of their family has ever adventured. While having no children, Ken has also always enjoyed working with young people as a mentor and teacher, and, hopefully, as an example of work ethic in the workplace and morality in the wider world.



# Kristen Lekstrom

Kristen is from the Washington, DC area, but her family comes from a small town in rural Minnesota called Viking. She graduated from Virginia Tech with a B.S. in Biochemistry and attended the University of Virginia, where she earned her Masters in Biology.

She discovered her love of science in high school where the biology and chemistry classes always made sense, and she excelled. She considers herself lucky. Not everyone finds their passion for learning and turns it into a career. She's worked and published journal articles at the National Institutes of Health and for small-, medium-, and large-size biotech/pharmaceutical companies. Still, somehow that wasn't enough. She wanted to connect with people outside of her field. To see a bigger picture of the world around her. Over the last twenty years, various volunteer opportunities opened her eyes. Helping to teach Sunday School Kindergarten through Third Grade at her Unitarian Universalist Congregation showed her how to be flexible when interacting with impressionable young minds.

English as a Second Language enabled her to think outside the box when tutoring; how to convey the structure of a new language. Toastmasters and Fire Department volunteering developed her leadership and problem-solving skills while working with large groups of people with different goals and backgrounds. Indeed, these types of connections demonstrated that she could, in fact, make a difference in her community. This realization brought her to the Peace Corps. So, when you ask her why she wants to serve as a Peace Corps volunteer, there are three main reasons:

- 1) Sharing her curiosity and passion for learning,
- 2) Wanting to be part of something bigger,
- 3) Serving communities through the exchange of ideas and cultures.

She knows that Peace Corps service won't be easy. From her Peace Corps training as well as website information, reading blogs, watching application webinars, and by talking to a recruiter, this is not something to be taken lightly. The English Language Teacher position in Thailand presents significant physical, emotional, and intellectual difficulties. She plans to face these challenges head-on by working at her site to integrate into the community. She wants to encourage her school to create/develop a Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM) program that might award science internships. It would be great to give students hands-on experience in a laboratory or engineering setting. Another potential goal would be to invite guest speakers to talk about their STEM careers and the challenges they faced and overcame.

Kristen has a variety of hobbies that she pursues in her spare time. She enjoys playing the acoustic guitar and watching Thai football with her host family. She likes birding, biking, and hiking/camping. If she has the opportunity, she would love to learn to cook Thai foods.



# Lillian Hromadka

Originally from Houston, Texas, Lilly pursued a Bachelor of Science in Athletic Training at Florida State University, graduating Magna Cum Laude. Her concentration was in Physical Therapy, and she earned a minor in Psychology and a Developmental Disabilities Certification. Additionally, she played a pivotal role in the Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity, serving as the Gamma Eta Chapter President in 2018-2019. During university, she worked as an Athletic Trainer with Clup Sports and Recreation and in the Social Psychology Department as a Research Assistant.

Post-graduation, Lilly delved into the world of education, working as an English Language Assistant and Private Language Teacher in various Spanish classrooms for the past two years. This experience provided insights into curriculum development, lesson planning, and the ability to adapt lessons on the fly.

She discovered a genuine joy in helping students find their passions and overcome challenges, especially relishing those moments of connection with students who initially seemed indifferent to learning.

The idea of joining the Peace Corps came from a desire to extend the impact on communities beyond the classroom. With all its challenges and rewards, Spain prepared her for the two-year adventure ahead. The mix of adaptability, patience, and perseverance that worked well in the Spanish classroom is now geared up for a fresh chapter. Her experience sparked an interest in understanding diverse perspectives, fostering connections, and embracing continuous learning.

Peace Corps Thailand offered her the chance to be more than a Co-Teacher. It's not just about teaching English; it's about creating an environment where learning flourishes. The Peace Corps' focus on community-driven development resonates with Lilly's philosophy as an educator – fostering a collaborative approach that empowers communities and individuals to be self-sufficient and self-motivated.

Beyond the professional realm, Lilly is more than a teacher. Her volunteer experiences include medical scribing, assisting in a classroom for pre-schoolers with behavioral difficulties, and mentoring high school students. She also possesses certifications in TEFL, CPR/AED/First Aid, PADI Open Water Scuba Diving, and as a Pharmacy Technician, which highlight her commitment to continuous learning and personal development. Lilly is also an avid hiker, dancer, traveler, and reader, reflecting a passionate individual with a zest for life.



# Monique Sayh

Monique was born and raised in Long Beach, a Southern California city within the Los Angeles County area. Prior to joining the Peace Corps, she was studying biology right in her backyard at Long Beach State University with the intention to eventually becoming a pharmacist.

Joining the Peace Corps had been on the back of her mind since hearing about it when she was in high school. As someone who lived in one place all her life, Monique was drawn to the idea of living in a completely different country and doing something entirely out of her comfort zone. But the two-year commitment had been daunting, so after graduating high school, she opted to apply to college and forgot about the Peace Corps.

A few years into college, Monique began to feel restless and unsatisfied with her career choice. After COVID-19 restrictions lifted in the United States, Monique took to traveling more. During one her trips to Portland, Oregon, she met a woman who was a Peace Corps volunteer that was evacuated at the height of the pandemic. Despite not being able to complete her service, she couldn't stop singing her praises.

She met a world of new people, got to live in a whole other country, and even learned a new language. Talking to her, Monique was reminded of all the reasons she initially wanted to join. The woman talked about how being a Peace Corps volunteer really shifted her perspective on what's important and taught her how to deal with challenges in many new ways. And just like that, Monique was convinced.

During her last year at college, she did a short-term study abroad in Thailand. The class she took included a few days of volunteering at a school in Northern Thailand. While working there with the students, she learned from the staff the importance of learning English and how it aids in continuing education and making candidates more competitive for most jobs in Thailand. Hearing this, Monique could see how teaching English in needed communities can be beneficial to the people. So, when she applied to Peace Corps Thailand and they offered her an assignment in the TESS program, she accepted.



# Olivia Goldstein

Ollie Goldstein grew up in Honolulu, Hawaii, and attended Punahou School for her K-12 education. After graduating high school in 2019 Ollie majored in Mathematics and Computer Science (MACS) at the University of Oregon from October 1st, 2019 - June 20th, 2023. After graduating from University of Oregon Ollie moved back home to Hawaii where she took up a part time job as an assistant teacher at Punahou School for the class Game Academy 2D. During her senior year in college, Ollie discovered the Peace Corps. She was immediately drawn to the idea of teaching English in Thailand because she, her grandmother, and her mother are Thai. Ollie had also started taking an interest in teaching while she was in college when she found herself tutoring a few classmates in math every quarter, and figured this would be a great opportunity to discover a potential passion for teaching. Furthermore, Ollie has Thai citizenship, so she thought that after she was finished with the Peace Corps, she would be able to speak some Thai, which would make living in Thailand after her service much easier if she chose to do so.

Not only this, but Ollie knew it would make her grandmother very happy if she could speak the language. However, Ollie's desire to join the Peace Corps in Thailand became even greater after she learned that her grandfather, Jack Bilmes, was a member of the very first cohort serving in Thailand in 1962. Ollie also learned that her grandmother was her grandfather's Thai teacher during PST, and despite the fact that they were separated during her grandfather's service, they ended up getting married. While Ollie's grandfather passed away in mid 2021, just a little under two years before Ollie would decide to join the Peace Corps and would therefore never know of this decision, Ollie knew her grandfather would be proud of her. This fact fuels Ollie's sense of motivation and positive attitude as she goes through PST and will continue to fuel her during her two years of service. Knowing that she is going through similar experiences that her grandfather went through over 60 years ago gives Ollie a sense of fulfillment and pride, so much so that even her cohort members have noticed. Michael, a fellow volunteer, told Ollie that she was visibly excited and happy to be where she was during the orientation in San Francisco. During her service, Ollie hopes to change at least one child's life by teaching them English. She is confident she can do this because one day, while getting a vaccine for Peace Corps medical clearance, the nurse administering her vaccine revealed that his English teacher was a Peace Corps volunteer and encouraged Ollie that she would end up making a difference. While she is a little scared of the mosquitoes, Ollie looks forward to bonding with her community and ever experiencing Thai New Year, Songkrankan, for the first time.



# Reid Stautberg

Reid Stautberg is a volunteer who comes from Cincinnati, Ohio. In May 2023, he graduated with a bachelor's degree from Kenyon College. Reid majored in economics and minored in German language. He also took a special interest in international public policy – studying the structures and functions of the European Union during a semester abroad in Germany. During his time at Kenyon, he also involved himself deeply in the student-run campus newspaper. In Reid's senior year, he acted as the executive director of the organization, managing a staff of nearly 40 writers, editors, and other creatives. Reid enjoyed taking advantage of all the resources present on campus to learn more about the world and the characteristics that define it. Beyond his main courses of study, he took classes in history, sociology, anthropology, and an array of other disciplines. He enjoyed meeting other students from around the world and was inspired by the professors who he had built close relationships with.

Reid is also deeply passionate about outdoor education and conservation. During his collegiate summers, he worked as a backpacking guide for American high school students. He led trips around the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (2021), the Colorado Rockies (2022) -

and the Swiss Alps (2023, post-graduation). Leading these expeditions was extraordinarily fulfilling, and Reid loved seeing the how his students would grow both individually and as a unit when they stepped out of their comfort zones. He was inspired by the way his students could push their limits and achieve what they thought was previously impossible. Further, without access to technology, Reid could see how deeply students could become connected to themselves, each other, and the present moment. His experiences with outdoor education were a major motivator in his decision to join the Peace Corps.

After his time in Switzerland in 2023, Reid moved to the White Mountains in New Hampshire. He worked with a major conservation nonprofit, performing trail conservation work for a fall season. Reid loved the opportunity to give back to the land and create more sustainable access to the beautiful area for others. Reid plans to use this conservation experience to teach Thai students and their communities about the importance of preserving and caring for natural spaces. He also wants to implement teachings about the causes and effects of climate change – in the hope that it can begin a consistent driver of conversation and action.

Reid grew up in a family with parents who deeply valued his education as well as three supportive older brothers. He is grateful that he is still connected with his family and that they support his Peace Corps journey. Reid acknowledges that he would not be here without them. His family always stressed the importance of understanding other cultures, religions, and backgrounds. He learned from a young age that this understanding is incredibly necessary to provide for a more unified world. Serving others was also a core characteristic of Reid's upbringing. It was an expectation in his family for him to engage in community service in his youth. One of the most empowering and memorable of these engagements was mentoring with Big Brothers as a high school student. He continues to hold his family's values and they will remain important to Reid as he navigates his time as a volunteer.

Reid is looking forward to working with the students and teachers of his community to support English learning and teaching. He is also excited to integrate with the local people. He hopes to gain a unique understanding of the beautiful culture, language, and life that exists in Thailand.



# Samantha Stolworthy

Samantha, a nomad originating from the sunny coast of California, with a Utah zip code as her current place of residence. She has lived in two countries and seven states between both coast of the US. She has a wide variety of work experiences from a cumulative of nearly 20 years in the workforce beginning when she was 16; including being a business owner of two businesses for the past four years. She has her BSBM from the University of Phoenix, and a dual Master of Business and Public Administration minoring in Nonprofit Management from Eastern Washington University. However, she began her career path in culinary school, first pursuing a career as a chef, then specializing in pastry arts. Most recently, she began a new career in the legal field with her sights set on potentially going to law school upon her return from Peace Corps Thailand.

Samantha is an RPCV who served in CED in Peace Corps Kenya from 2013 to late 2014, unfortunately having to end service a bit early due to a country-wide closure and evacuation. She also has lived in Thailand previously in 2018 for a year as an M3-6 English Teacher in Khon Kaen, where she obtained her International TESOL Certification with Xplore Asia. Aside from her volunteering in Peace Corps, in her spare time she volunteered building houses with Habitat for Humanity Seattle and Global Village in Ethiopia.

Outside of her career and volunteer roles, she has held the title of wife, and the loss of her husband in 2023 was a driving force for coming back to Peace Corps service as she navigated the next chapter of her life. Her previous experience living in Thailand was the reason she chose to revisit the beautiful country for her second PC service post, and she only applied for a position, specifically in Thailand. Her passion projects include work with animals, and she has spent much time volunteering with various animal shelters. She aspires to own a non-profit cat wine café and hopes to find secondary projects in Thailand during her current Peace Corps service with local animal rescues or sanctuaries.



# Taleah Vazquez

Taleah Vazquez, a remarkable individual originating from the vibrant city of Jacksonville, Florida, stands as a proud alumna of the University of South Florida. Holding a Bachelor of Arts and Science in International Studies, complemented by a minor in Chinese Language and Culture, Taleah's educational journey is an odyssey marked by a vibrant spirit and an unwavering commitment to global service. Her story unfolds against a backdrop of familial ties, community engagement, a deep love for music, and a profound passion for teaching.

Central to Taleah Vazquez's narrative is the endearing presence of her beloved pet bunny, Joey. In the tapestry of her life, Joey emerges as more than just a pet but a cherished companion, a whimsical confidant who transforms her home into a sanctuary of warmth and unconditional love. Their bond speaks volumes about Taleah Vazquez's nurturing nature, transcending the ordinary to create a haven where affection and companionship intertwine.

The canvas of Taleah Vazquez's life is painted with a diverse palette of interests, showcasing her dynamic personality. From the fluid motions of roller skating to the captivating narratives of foreign films and the artistry captured through her lens in photography, Taleah embraces a rich array

- of passions. However, it is her profound love for music that becomes the harmonious thread weaving through the fabric of her experiences, providing a constant source of inspiration and giving rhythm to the chapters of her life.

As Taleah Vazquez stands on the brink of a new chapter, she is poised to share her fervor for education as she embarks on a transformative journey as an English teacher for the Peace Corps Teacher Empowerment for Student Success (TESS) program. Motivated by an earnest desire to effect positive change, Taleah Vazquez's decision to join the Peace Corps is grounded in the belief that education is a formidable catalyst for societal transformation.

Her dedication to fostering connections and building bridges across cultures reflects a profound commitment to empowering students with the tools to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. The alignment of Taleah Vazquez's values with the Peace Corps mission underscores her aspiration to make a tangible difference in the lives of those she encounters, further solidifying her role as a catalyst for positive impact.

Preparing to immerse herself in a new cultural context, Taleah Vazquez brings not only her academic acumen but also a rich tapestry of life experiences. The harmonious blend of her diverse interests, coupled with the warmth of her family-oriented spirit, is destined to elevate the educational environments she creates during her Peace Corps service.

In envisioning the upcoming chapter, Taleah Vazquez sees beyond the role of a traditional English teacher. Her ambition extends to facilitating a holistic educational experience that nurtures creativity, encourages critical thinking, and fosters cross-cultural understanding. As she embarks on this transformative journey, Taleah Vazquez's role as a Peace Corps volunteer promises to be a symphony of service, cultural exchange, and the empowering influence of education.

In summary, Taleah Vazquez, rooted in the dynamic city of Jacksonville, Florida, narrates a life that resonates like a symphony—a composition of love, community, music, and an unwavering passion for global service. Positioned to crescendo into a meaningful chapter as an English teacher for the Peace Corps TESS program, Taleah Vazquez emerges as a valuable ambassador poised to orchestrate positive change in the communities she is destined to serve.



# Wade Zick

Wade Zick, born and raised in the Midwest of the United States, grew up in a primarily Dutch community - often known for its direct communication style and thrifty financial standards. He is the youngest of four siblings, and his family could often be characterized by its loudness, conservative religious values, and humor. Wade has always been passionate about helping young people as a youth educator and directed his education toward that goal.

Wade enjoyed a successful nearly 30-year career in education, earning Bachelor's and Master's degrees in the field. A few highlights of his educational and professional journey include:

- Serving as a national trainer and facilitator for 16 years, introducing a student-centered curriculum for comprehensive sexuality education to teachers, religious educators, doctors, and health professionals.
- Contributing as a team member and curriculum writer for "Faith Practices," specifically the "Playing and Living Joyfully" middle school component.

- Completing a master's thesis project on experiential education, focusing on integrating cooperative learning activities within a challenge-course environment. This laid the foundation for his commitment to student-centered educational approaches.

- Attending culinary school to obtain a degree in wine appreciation. He then went on to pass the Master Court of Sommelier certified sommelier exam.

In the first half of his career, Wade worked directly with students and volunteer leaders, developing programs like summer-long leadership development initiatives for at-risk teens, coordinating international and national service projects, and facilitating youth programs in Michigan and California. These programs often centered around diversity, cooperative games, spiritual growth, sexual health, volunteering, and global citizenship.

In the latter half of his career, Wade shifted his focus to leadership development programs for adults working with youth. He also directed and oversaw programming at two camps, providing hospitality for various non-profit groups and progressive religious communities. One of his unique experiences was transitioning the camp he managed to a 16-month COVID isolation and quarantine site for the county. They welcomed nearly 200 COVID patients during that time, with the goal of providing a welcoming and healing space for their guests.

In 2010, Wade married his husband, Lalo, and established a shared goal of volunteering in the Peace Corps early on. Lalo, having previously volunteered in the Thailand Peace Corps from 2004-2006, and Wade are particularly excited to volunteer in Thailand now together. Their shared passions include travel, culinary experiences, wine, meditation, and their adopted family of friends. They also loved having their two dog children, Milo and Pinot, as they were part of the family for many years until both passed away.

Wade is particularly excited about teaching English in a more traditional classroom setting. He is deeply grateful for being part of Peace Corps Thailand and looks forward to the upcoming adventures!



# Bio of **YinD**

## Peace Corps Trainees



# Amanda (Natasha) Morgan

Natasha is a young New Yorker that was living in North Carolina prior to her coming to Thailand. She graduated from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte with her Bachelor's in Science majoring in Clinical Psychology. Natasha has been working with kids for 6 years but working in Mental Health for 4 years. She specializes in counseling with children and adolescents. She was an RBT for kids with autism for 3 years and a psychiatric therapist at a hospital for 1 year. She describes her motivation for working in the Peace Corps as a rewarding experience being able to be a mentor for the youth of Thailand. She wants to create a mental health club for both adolescent girls and boys to be able to express their feelings appropriately and learn new coping skills and strategies when dealing with hardships in life.



# Cassidy Haglund

Cassidy is from Tampa, Florida but has been living in Tallahassee, Florida, since her freshman year of college in 2017. She is a two-time alumna of Florida State University, earning a Bachelor of Science in Family and Child Sciences and a Master of Social Work. Cassidy has dreamed of being a Peace Corps Volunteer since she was a kid after hearing about her mom's experiences serving in Costa Rica from 1991-1993. Cassidy is passionate about working with and empowering children and youth and cannot wait to do so in Thailand.

Cassidy has worked in many professional settings with children including but not limited to working for the Stoop's Center for Communities, Families, and Children with preschool-aged children in Leon County Public Schools, being a Child's Advocate with the Oasis Center for Women and Girls, coaching kickball and baseball for children and adults with special needs, multiple graduate researcher opportunities in which she delivered interventions to children in schools, and working in multiple special education classrooms. She has many fitness certifications and six years of experience teaching Group Fitness classes to university students. She has a deep love and passion for the outdoors and the water.

As a Youth in Development Volunteer, Cassidy hopes to form meaningful and enriching relationships with the children she will get to work with. She is passionate about inclusion and mentoring and is eager to work on projects that promote both.



# Clara Kennedy

Clara Kennedy was born and raised in San Diego, California. She is a recent graduate with a bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of San Diego. In her free time, she enjoys practicing yoga, arts and crafts, reading, and surfing. Before joining the Peace Corps, she worked in a school setting as a behavior interventionist for children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Clara joined the Peace Corps seeking an expanded worldview to further her knowledge of social justice and what that means under the scope of a global perspective. Clara is passionate about social justice and is excited to work as a volunteer in her community while in Thailand over her two years of service. She is eager to work on a variety of projects, but she is especially interested in volunteer work involving the empowerment of young women and girls. Clara has always been passionate about working with the youth population, as she believes they will be the change in society. From babysitting to behavior intervention, she has always made it a priority to create a safe space and be a positive mentor for the youth in her care. Clara is eager to exemplify these qualities at her site in Thailand, as well as when she returns to work in America. She believes that she has a lot to offer her community in Thailand and is committed to doing everything she can to support them, but she is most excited about what she has to learn from Thai culture, specifically from the people she will come across and the connections she will make over her two years of service.



# Clayisha Norris

Clayisha Norris is a twenty-three years old, African American woman. Although Clayisha lived in Charlotte for most of her life, she was born in Louisville, Kentucky. Clayisha is an older sister of two sisters, which has played a huge part in her life. As it is her goal to show her sisters that they can do anything they set their mind to. Clayisha attended a Historically Black college called Fayetteville State University, located in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Clayisha graduated in December 2023 with a degree in Social work. Clayisha has been involved with many organizations throughout college including Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. Being involved in many clubs and organizations in college has opened many doors for Clayisha to volunteer and help her community. Clayisha has been able to give back in a variety of ways, such as hosting food drives and clothing drives, by doing street and campus cleanups, and giving out warm food to the homeless while praying with them. After Clayisha graduated, her goal was to join the Peace Corps as a youth developer in Thailand. As a young girl, she has always been passionate about making a positive impact on the world. Clayisha is very passionate about working with children and helping them reach their full potential. She could assist in ensuring a brighter future for generations to come through projects like young leadership development and educational programs. Clayisha would also have the chance to immerse herself in other cultures, pick up new languages, and gain useful 2 skills that would help her both personally and professionally. Being a youth developer in the Peace Corps would fulfill her desire to help others while also enabling her to develop and learn in ways she had never thought was possible. Clayisha would like to teach English and life skills in a fun way for Thai students. Clayisha is so excited to take on this new journey and can not wait to see what is stored for her with in the next two years.



# Elsie Pagel

Elsie was born and raised in a city of 100,000 people in Northwest Oregon, close to mountains, forests, and the ocean. She has lived in the Northeastern United States for the past four years, attending the University of New Hampshire. She joined the Peace Corps because her education and experience have made her passionate about fostering leadership, success, and integrity among youth. Elsie is also excited to dive into Thai culture, history, language, food, and festivals.

Elsie graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a Bachelor's of Science in Recreation Management and Policy and a minor in Biology in May of 2023. She's a former collegiate NCAA Division I swimmer. In college, she volunteered over 80 hours at Friends In Action, a nonprofit community serving adults with intellectual disabilities in the New Hampshire seacoast. Additionally, she completed over 400 hours interning with Exeter Parks and Recreation, gaining valuable experience in program development, administration, coordination, and public service. During that time, Elsie led a team of twelve swim lesson instructors and taught lessons to kids from ages zero to thirteen. That experience allowed her to grow in a communicative managerial role. Elsie's interests are exploring nature, cooking, and playing sports. After she graduated college, she worked at a bakery in her hometown and has been eager to learn about Thai cuisine.

Elsie plans to use her education and experience to provide the children in her permanent site a fun environment in which to learn and grow. She hopes to be in a community with active clubs and student council. Elsie would like to be involved with sports groups in any capacity, coaching to support, at her site. She is excited about the opportunities that this experience will offer.



# Emily Hoffmeister

Emily Hoffmeister grew up in a small town, Winter Park, Colorado. Here, she spent most of her time outdoors skiing, mountain biking, and backpacking. Emily worked at the local summer camp, Camp Chief Ouray, where she led backpacking trips for teens. She also led leadership programs at Camp Chief Ouray which allowed the campers to better understand and developed their personal leadership styles and strengths. Emily received a Bachelors of Arts in Philosophy at Whitman College, Walla Walla Washington. Her studies were mainly focused on ethics and society. During her time at Whitman, Emily swam for her school's swim team, was a Resident Assistant, a writing fellow, and the head lifeguard. After graduating in May 2023, Emily worked in the tasting room at Long Shadows Vineyards.

During Emily's time studying philosophy, she noticed a frustrating disconnect in "learning about a world" through reading and theory rather than through interpersonal relationships with the people/places undergoing the diverse narratives she was studying. While Emily loves academics, she wanted to "learn about a world" in a more hands on and experiential way. This led Emily to the Peace Corps, due to its emphasis on community integration. Emily will be a Youth and Development Volunteer. She was drawn to this sector as she has a strong skill set and past involvement working with youth. The cross sectionality of this sector was also appealing to her, as it allows for the potentiality to collaborate with and participate in a wider variety of community events.

In her free time, Emily enjoys artistic endeavors, finding new music, tracking the moon, petting any cat that crosses her path, and talking with friends.



# James Whitmore

Throughout his life, James Whitmore has been driven by a deep desire to serve and to create a positive impact in the world. Serving as a volunteer for the Peace Corps in Thailand is a realization of this goal, and for him personally, a chance to cultivate a character rooted in being an effective tool for change.

Upon graduating high school in 2016, James served as a volunteer missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He served in the Cebu Philippines Mission, working across two islands in the Visayas region and living in 5 communities over the course of two years. James' immersion in the local communities, language, and culture ignited a passion for cross-cultural learning and international service. He considers it the "hardest thing he's ever loved to do" and has let that experience define his future academic and career aspirations.

James returned to the United States in August 2018 and started college a week after returning home. While first attending Utah Valley University for a year, James explored educational paths and opportunities that he hoped would parallel with his desire to have a service-oriented career. It wasn't until he transferred to Brigham Young University – Idaho, to begin his second year in school, that James discovered an appealing educational course. James graduated in July 2023 with a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies and Foreign Policy. This was the perfect degree route for James, with classes focused on global politics, linguistics, and cross-cultural studies.

One of his favorite courses was a semester focused on studying Southeast Asia, where James had his first in-depth educational experience with countries in the region, most notably, Thailand.

A few months before graduation, James had a big decision to make. Would he apply for jobs and go straight into work? Would he start a master's program? Did he need to apply outside the country?

While considering these future opportunities, James stumbled across the Peace Corps website. James had never read or seen anything about the Peace Corps, maybe having heard something about it in passing. As James read more and more about the work of the Peace Corps, he was all but convinced it was the right fit. It wasn't an easy decision; James talked it over with friends, leaders, and family, weighing the pros and cons of service and spending that time so far away from home, and once again as a volunteer for two years. A few interviews and applications later, James received his invitation to serve, and readily accepted the invitation to serve in Thailand. Thailand was the only country he applied to, drawn to it heavily by his interest in Southeast Asia and a chance to learn about and join another global community.

Building on his experiences and education, James sees his service in the Peace Corps as an opportunity to contribute to sustainable development efforts in Thailand. He is excited to immerse himself in Thai culture, learn from the communities he serves, and make a meaningful impact through service and collaboration. As a Youth in Development volunteer, James is excited to work on projects with his post's local government to educate and inspire youth. He wants to effectively support the current projects of his community, while also helping develop and execute new ideas. James hopes that his work will help Thai youth imagine opportunities and explore hobbies they wouldn't have initially thought of without the implementation of Thai programs supported by Peace Corps. James hopes that this work will live up to the precedent set by the original Peace Corps slogan, that being "The Toughest Job You'll Ever Love."

James grew up in Redmond, Washington, though he, his parents, and siblings now call Denver, Colorado home. An avid outdoorsman, James finds solace and adventure in nature. James loves to cook and hopes to master some Thai dishes during his time here. He is a pianist and enjoys listening to and learning about music from many different countries and cultures. James is excited to integrate into his Thai community, meet as many people as possible, and eventually grasp the language in a manner that leads to the development of deep and lasting friendships. The Peace Corps embodies the values and purpose that have driven him, and he is grateful for having been invited to serve in Thailand.



# Jiin Woo

Jiin was born in South Korea and moved to the United States with her parents in 2005. After first immigrating, Jiin's mom signed her up for every summer camp available to her ranging from soccer camp to volunteer camp at an animal shelter. These were formative moments that not only helped Jiin to meet new friends and mentors in a new country but also to have fun and try out new things. During her college years studying neuroscience and comparative literature at Emory University, Jiin's favorite summer job was working as a camp counselor and working with kids. After graduation, Jiin moved to Washington D.C. to work at a medical respite for the homeless as a clinical unit assistant. One of her coworkers was a RPCV who had served in South Korea in the 80's and encouraged her to apply to Peace Corps. Her old college roommate bestie was also applying to Peace Corps at the time and influenced Jiin to apply as well. Jiin was accepted into Peace Corps as a YinD volunteer in Thailand, and her roommate was accepted into Peace Corps in Panama. On March 7, the two had their first video call as Peace Corps trainees on opposite sides of the world!

In her free time, Jiin enjoys reading, journaling, and drawing, but very much struggles with consistency in all of the above. She brought a ton of watercolor painting and drawing materials from the States but is highly likely to bring most of them back to the States unused. Nevertheless, she is determined to be at least somewhat productive in creating art over the next 2 years.



# Kiera Hurley

Kiera Hurley is from Orange County, California and is the oldest sister of a family of six. She attended the University of Colorado Boulder from 2019-2023. While there, she majored in Business with an emphasis in Marketing and Social Responsibility and Ethics while also receiving a certificate in Global Business. Kiera took on a multitude of projects during her education relating to sustainability, ethical production, social impact marketing, and event planning. One of the most impactful classes she took was 'Business Solutions for the Developing World' which is how she became interested in working for the Peace Corps. The course delved into how businesses (for-profit, social businesses, NGOs, etc.) can meet the needs of those in developing countries and operate sustainably. She knew if she wanted to do work in this realm, she needed to gain on the ground experience living and working with locals.

Kiera joined the Peace Corps because she wanted to help empower youth, explore and embrace a new culture, and participate in a cultural exchange that left a positive impact on both countries. Most recently, she has been -

-involved in the business space but has always had a passion for working with youth. She always found this work to be the most rewarding which is why she joined the Youth in Development sector. Kiera has helped teach volleyball camps, has been involved in youth mentoring programs, and volunteered at a summer camp. Teaching sports such as volleyball helps to teach youth lessons of teamwork and hard work. Kiera loved being a coach because she was able to see the progress day by day of the kids improving on their skills. Being a mentor provided her with the opportunity to help youth one-on-one and delve into issues that are not as easily addressed in a group setting. Being a volunteer at a summer camp helped her learn to let go of expectations and focus on making sure the kids had fun and felt supported. Through the YinD sector Kiera hopes to be a role model for the youth and all community members she comes into contact with.

The most relevant and impactful work she was involved in during college was a wildlife conservation club she started on campus that worked to raise funds and awareness for endangered species. She recruited eight students to work alongside her to create community events, attend educational meetings, and collaborate with other on-campus clubs. Through this club she gained experience teaching climate education, event planning, and finding partnerships in her community. Kiera hopes to use these skills to help co-facilitate or start a club at her school. Along with this, she hopes to bring wildlife conservation under the umbrella of climate education into the classroom. She believes the youth are our future and in order to create a more equitable world they need to have the skills and confidence to contribute to their communities in turn contributing to the living world.

In her community in California, Kiera has helped to lead beach cleanups and volunteered at local homeless shelters. Some of her interests and hobbies include hiking, swimming, listening to music, traveling, yoga, creating art and reading. She is grateful to get to work in Thailand, alongside Thais, to promote world peace and friendship.



# Mackenzie Devoto

Originally from Des Moines, Iowa; Mack has spent the last five years in Washington, DC. She graduated from the George Washington University in Spring 2023 with a bachelor's degree in International Affairs, a concentration in Conflict Resolution, and a minor in Political Science. Mack has wanted to be a Peace Corps Volunteer since she was around ten years old. Motivated by a desire to immerse herself in new cultures, Mack's journey began with a conversation with her mother's best friend, a former Peace Corps Volunteer in Bangladesh; and her great uncle, also a returned Peace Corps Volunteer in Botswana. Along with her personal ties to Peace Corps, her academic pursuits have provided Mack with a strong foundation in global affairs. Prior to Peace Corps, Mack was working at World Learning Inc. in DC. There, she worked on a project for the Fall 2023 Professional Fellows Congress, which brought professionals from all around the world, together to exchange about their experiences in working in the United States. Working with World Learning Inc. solidified her goals to continue working in international education and affairs.

In addition to her academic and professional experiences, Mack's commitment to service is deeply rooted. From volunteering in her community back home, to serving as the LGBTQ+ Chair for Kappa Delta Sorority's Sigma Mu Chapter, she has consistently fostered inclusivity and positive change. She is particularly looking forward to working with youth to encourage civic engagement within their community. Mack's profound passion for fostering positive change at both local and global levels have thus, led her to setting her sights on working with the Peace Corps. Her desire to serve communities is deeply rooted in a belief that sustainable development requires empathy, cultural understanding, and hands-on collaboration. Mack sees the Peace Corps as a platform to apply her skills and knowledge directly in the field, where she can make a tangible impact on the lives of individuals and communities. Additionally, she acknowledges that this opportunity is not just as a chance to serve communities abroad but also is a transformative, introspective, self journey, a chance to contribute meaningfully to the world, and a subtle tribute to her younger self.



# Mae Garland

Mae Garland was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. Upon graduating high school, she moved to Southern California where she studied Psychology and Environmental Analysis at Pitzer College. She graduated in December of 2022, and began conducting research for the Office of Advancement at Pitzer College. Simultaneously, she worked as a ski lift operator at Mount Baldy in San Bernardino, California. During the summer prior to departing for Thailand, Mae led groups of children on backpacking trips throughout Yosemite National Park.

Mae chose to serve in the Peace Corps because she hopes to leave a positive impact on the earth and believes that the Peace Corps creates the perfect opportunity to consciously serve a community while experiencing a new location. She feels grateful to be given the opportunity to serve the people of Thailand. She looks forward to learning a new language, working with children, and bringing all she has learned back to the United States.

Some of Mae's experience is as follows. Upon graduating high school, Mae spent one month on an Israeli army base where she worked to understand the deep-seated ethnic tension present in the Middle East. Next, she volunteered on a farm for two months in Southern California. During the Corona Virus shut down, Mae took a gap year in which she explored the eleven Western most states in a camper van, worked at a juice bar in Chicago, and taught at an outdoor educator center in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. During college, Mae served a resident assistant, mental health and wellness advocate and a mentor for the Children Youth and Family Collaborative. During the summer of 2022, Mae lived in Isla Vista, California. She worked as a resident counselor for a summer school camp and a coordinator for a compost collective. In her free time, Mae is fond of reading, yoga, art, rock and roll music, and hiking. She is a lifelong vegetarian and enjoys spending time outdoors with animals whenever possible.



# Melena Vanderford

Melena Vanderford is originally from Wyoming but moved around quite a bit growing up. Although many people have speculated that this might have been a very unpleasant circumstance during childhood, Melena really enjoyed it. Leaving her friends was always difficult, but she got the opportunity to experience the cultures of many different states, including: California, Oregon, Colorado, and Tennessee. With each move she was able to develop skills in social networking, adaptability, emotional agility, and self reflection. Even though aspects of moving may have been hard, she had her family as her rock. Melena lived with her mother, father, and sister until she began her studies at Adams State University in Alamosa, Colorado where she received her bachelor's degree in clinical psychology.

While working towards her undergraduate degree, she developed experience in a variety of areas including research and data analysis; reviewing, editing, and writing academic papers; working with and building relationships with individuals of all ages, being in various leadership positions, maintaining multiple responsibilities and roles at a time.

Some of the more specific experiences that she has had relating to her expertise is her work promoting well-being via an online mental health platform called Vision Journaling. She has been helping her family design, kickstart, run, and redesign this mental health tool since she was in high school. Within this platform she aids individuals in developing visions/goals for their lives and create healthy practices such as daily gratitude, intention setting, connecting to nature, forgiveness, and more. She has not only been a facilitator for this program but has also conducted several studies related to the program's effectiveness.

Additionally, she has taken part in research which aims were to determine the effects of exercise on well-being; while dually teaching youth about the important role that exercise has in well-being; and promoting a strong appreciation for self through the practice of positive affirmations. In line with serving youth, she also served as a mentor for youth taking on a "learning challenge" via a nonprofit called "Grip tape." During youths "learning challenge, they would be funded with up to 500 U.S dollars to help them pursue and learn about an interest they had for a duration of weeks. The main goals of the project is to help develop their ability to direct their own learning, think critically, problem solve, and self reflect.

When it comes to Melena's rationale for joining Peace Corps, there are many answers. Well before Melena's projected graduation, she had already been looking into programs that would allow her to travel to other parts of the world, particularly Asia, while serving others along the way. At some point during this search, she came across the Peace corps and it fit all her checkboxes. Melena wanted to travel, immerse into a foreign culture, challenge herself, serve others, and gain perspective all the while promoting a more mature, capable, understanding, and skilled version of herself. Melena is immensely grateful for the opportunity to serve as a Peace corps volunteer. She is eager to learn all the lessons she can from the people of Thailand as well as see in what ways she can be most impactful with the time she has here.



# Mia Buffington

Mia Buffington is a 23-year-old woman born and raised in Fort Worth, Texas, USA. She lived in Fort Worth with her parents and 2 brothers until she was 18 years old when she attended the University of Texas at Austin to receive her Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Sciences in Austin, Texas, USA. While working towards her undergraduate degree, she gained experience in a wide variety of different fields that all had one thing in common: working with the youth community. One of her main roles was her assistance in research on the impact of nutrition on early childhood cognitive and emotional development where she supported in-person and online family collaboration visits for child development evaluation. Another role she maintained was as a medical assistant for a pediatric clinic. Here she executed clinical skills ranging from but not limited to patient vitals, scheduling, vaccinations, venipunctures, newborn metabolic screening, bilirubin checks, ear canal irrigation, nebulizer treatments, urinalysis, administering medications, performing complete blood counts, testing for Influenza / Monospot / RSV / Strep throat / COVID-19. She also conducted medical advice and patient lab result phone consultations. She is hoping to use some of the valuable information she learned working in this clinic at her future Peace Corps site.

Mia also has surgical shadowing and observation experience, as well as roles in volunteering and community involvement. She was a member of a nonprofit organization titled Project Yellow where she educated elementary school students about mental health using lesson plans, activities, and discussions. This program was a large reason why she applied to be a Youth in Development volunteer, as she felt that their missions and roles aligned. Throughout her college experience, Mia also volunteered twice a week at a breast milk clinic in Austin repackaging donated breastmilk and organizing hospital records and clinical supplies. Assisting mothers and families who wanted help has always been a passion of Mia's, and she hopes to carry on this supporting role throughout her Peace Corps experience. Along with her work experience and courses that corresponded to her degree, she has also completed a wide variety of science and social science courses such as Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Organic Chemistry, Racial and Ethnic Relations, Gender and Sexuality, and Ethics Across Life. Science has been an interest of Mia's since before she can remember, and she is looking forward to integrating science topics into her future lesson plans.

Mia's reasons for wanting to be a Peace Corps volunteer are to educate and instill confidence in the children while providing herself with lifelong leadership skills. She wishes to serve the Thai community and immerse herself in their culture, to ultimately earn their trust and respect. She is excited about the cultural exchange opportunity that the Peace Corps provides and realizes that it is a privilege that many individuals will not get the chance to experience. She hopes that her past exposure to working with children from different backgrounds will help her in her commitment to supporting a deserving community and creating a lasting impact on herself and others.



# Michael Swerdlow

Michael Swerdlow is from Cumberland, Rhode Island. He graduated from the University of New Haven in Connecticut with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and has minors in Biology and Sociology. He is interested in applying psychological principles to improving people's quality of life. Michael has worked with youth for his entire professional career. He began working as a Camp Counselor at his local YMCA. As a camp counselor, he led a group of about 25 kids through sports, swim, art, and various other activities. Michael then became a Youth Advocate where he assisted youth prepare for independent living and reach their own personal goals. As a Youth Advocate, Michael worked with older youth and worked to develop a safe and effective program for adolescent youth. Michael's passion is in working in youth development to promote a sustainable future. His expertise in program development and working interpersonally with youth and youth service providers.

Michael joined the Peace Corps because it supported his goals. The Peace Corps mission of promoting friendship and world peace spoke to him. He loved the idea of traveling to another country and working alongside a counterpart. He is very interested in learning about other cultures to broaden his world view. Michael believes through cultural understanding of two countries' cultures promotes world peace and friendship. For these reasons, Michael became interested in joining the Peace Corps. He believed his experience in working with youth matched the Youth in Development center and thought being immersed in a new culture would enrich his own life along with the world around him.

Michael enjoys spending quality time with family and friends. He has a love of travel and experiencing beautiful scenery. Hiking in the mountains and sight seeing are some of the traveling he enjoys. He also enjoys watching and playing sports for fun and the life skills that it naturally teaches. Basketball is one of his favorite sports, but he enjoys all sports. He also enjoys listening and playing music. Lastly, Michael loves animals and dogs are his favorite animals.



# Michael Thoeresz

Mike is from Portland, OR. He went to college in Southern California. After college Mike was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Armenia Village, Belize (2006-2008).

Post Peace Corps Mike received his MBA and then began his career as a Director of Racquet Sports at different Country Clubs in California.

Throughout his life Mike has enjoyed volunteering. During Co-Vid he volunteered with Catholic Charities. Prior to Co-vid he volunteered for the Red Cross after Hurricane Katrina, Portland After School Tennis and Education (PAST&E), and countless other organizations.

Mike decided to re-join the Peace Corps in the hopes of changing careers to International Development. Mike loves living abroad, seeing natural beauty, learning about new cultures, and development.

Mikes personal interests include personal development—health, fitness, diet, investing, and personal finance. He also enjoys trail running and riding motorcycles.

He is thrilled to be serving in Peace Corps Thailand! He is grateful for this amazing opportunity!



# Shaunte Ekpo-Otu

Shaunte Ekpo-Otu was born in Newark, NJ and raised in Dudley; a small town in NC. She received her B.S. in Biology and Psychology and her Masters in Immunology. Since childhood she has always been very energetic, ready to help, and ready to learn. In grade school when she wasn't outside playing with friends or playing video games, she was helping her friends and peers with various school subjects. She has always had a passion for working with and helping others and has participated in many volunteer projects and volunteer organization memberships throughout university and graduate school.

These projects have ranged from picking up trash on the beach, to bringing gifts to and spending time with children in the hospital. In graduate school she also co-presided over a student-led initiative to improve the lives of people in local impoverished neighborhoods. Because of this she is well versed in brainstorming how to best make a real and lasting impact in the lives of those that need it, finding vendors/business partners that share a similar vision and want to help, as well as organizing and planning events and fundraisers. Once it came time to choose a career, she chose healthcare because she was very aware of the disparities that exist in her own country and wanted to dedicate herself to making a difference where she could.

Shaunte is also passionate about the environment and is excited for the possibility to integrate awareness and sustainability projects both during her time in the Peace Corps and thereafter. Her passions include the beach, pancakes, video games, crafts, mental/physical well being, STEM, and her friends and family (and K Dramas). She hopes that she can bring a ray of sunshine and the most positive impact she can to the youth of Thailand and their communities over the next 2 years.



# Tammy Norris

Tammy “TJ” Norris is 63 years old and was born in the small town of St. Joseph, MO. She is married to her husband Kenneth whom she met and married while living in Portland, OR. They have been happily married for 30 years and have no children. TJ and Ken are serving together as a couple in the Peace Corps. She also has an older sister living in St. Joseph, MO and an older sister living in Portland, OR.

As a child growing up in Missouri, one of her favorite meals was fried chicken and watermelon. She was surprised to find her host family serves this meal as well. This is just one small example she’s already found that people are similar around the globe.

TJ received her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a major in Accounting from Missouri Western State University in St. Joseph, MO. She graduated in 1982.

After college, she moved from home and spent her career working as an accountant for various manufacturing companies in the United States. She has lived and worked in Kansas, California, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Vermont and Michigan. Her last position was as a Financial Controller for an international company manufacturing air conditioning and furnace supplies for homes, schools, hospitals and businesses.

As a bridge between working and retirement, TJ and her husband decided to join the Peace Corps. They have both routinely volunteered their time. They and are excited to teach English and life skills to students in another country on full time basis. In addition, TJ is eager to give Thai people a view of Americans that they would not see otherwise. Mentoring is important to her, and Peace Corps is a great opportunity to reach out to the youth in her community. TJ is excited to live in a new culture and to learn a second language.

TJ is also an advocate for physical activity and a healthy lifestyle. She is open to sharing her knowledge and be an example to those around her. This includes talking about the benefits of regular exercise and a balanced diet.

She is also particularly passionate about gardening and environmental related issues. TJ is interested in working with people to understand the effects of the changing climate in the world around them and ways the whole community can help with those issues. Engaging students to assess and improve recycling programs and encouraging art projects made from recycled items are both ways to make an impact.

TJ’s greatest joy will be assisting with the youth and the community to find ways they want to improve the world around them.



# Zetao (Andy) Weng

Andy's journey began in Flushing, New York, before he transitioned to the Poconos in Pennsylvania for high school and later pursued his education at Lehigh University. During his time at Lehigh, where he served as the vice president of the class of 2019, he studied computer science and finance.

Upon graduating, Andy fulfilled his dream job of being a software engineer at Google in California. Yet, despite the allure of the tech giant's perks such as ping pong tables and free meals, he eventually found himself yearning for a more fulfilling adventure.

In 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Andy departed from the comforts of Google to embark on a new chapter, joining a finance startup in Chicago. This change led him into venture capital, where he became an entrepreneur in residence. By 2023, he found himself coming full circle as he secured venture funding to establish a video game studio in the Bay Area, alongside his former roommate from Google.

Though the studio enjoyed initial success, including winning a global game competition and selling 20,000 copies of their game on Steam by September 2023, Andy and his co-founder realized that their hearts lay elsewhere. Consequently, they returned the venture funding to their investors.

This turning point in his career afforded Andy the opportunity to pursue a long-held desire since his college days: joining the Peace Corps. With a passion for volunteering ingrained in him from coaching chess to counseling cub scouts, he found a perfect fit in the YinD program in Peace Corps Thailand. Here, the focus was on fostering children's self-confidence and critical thinking skills.

At his Peace Corps site, Andy aims to impart critical thinking through strategy games, drawing from his own learning experiences. Additionally, leveraging his background in software engineering, he plans to engage children in the exploration of computers and careers in STEM.



# Bio of PST Staff



# PST Staff

## Core Staff

1. Sabrina Ta'ala  
Director of Programming and Training (DPT)
2. Anuwat Khalertrum  
Training Manager
3. Thanakom Yospolsakul  
Language and Cross-Cultural Coordinator (LCC)
4. Pakin Wongwanitkajon  
TESS TEFL Specialist
5. Thepthira Chaiinkham  
YinD Programming and Training Specialist
6. Pawitra Chamnanrot  
Training Assistant

## PST Staff

1. Rangsim Suttipongkiat  
Administrative Support Assistant
2. Nina Putvichai  
TESS Program Support Assistant
3. Phattaranit Chantratanasit  
YinD Program Support Assistant
4. Kessirirak Nityasuddhi  
Homestay Coordinator
5. Jira Kunkongsatian  
Driver #1
6. Saman Tempiam  
Driver #2
7. Warin Phikunthong  
Driver #3

## Language and Culture Facilitators

1. Apiwit Attakornpipat
2. Atit Budsing
3. Arunee Thongratanakaew
4. Bharistha Sreshthaputra
5. Jongwoot Yuwasilp
6. Mai Yongkhum
7. Nanthanat Sangsawang
8. Nopparat Nakruang
9. Passara Bhurinuntakul
10. Phutthawadee Leelahacheewa
11. Prawate King-Ngern
12. Suchanaree Homklang



# Sabrina Ta'ala

Director of Programming and Training (DPT)

Prior to accepting her current position with the Peace Corps, Sabrina Ta'ala served at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), based in Hawaii: 12 years as an anthropologist, and 3 years as a training program administrator. At DPAA, Sabrina supported the US government's mission to search for, recover, and identify missing servicemembers from past conflicts worldwide.

As a forensic anthropologist, she led US military and civilian teams on archaeological recovery projects around the world, with a particular focus on remote sites throughout Vietnam and Laos. As the Administrator for the DPAA Academy, she facilitated internal and interagency partner training.

In addition to her work with the US Department of Defense, Sabrina has taught hundreds of adult learners as an adjunct professor at several colleges and universities in Colorado and Hawaii. Courses have included cultural, physical, and forensic anthropology.

Sabrina holds a BA in anthropology and an MBA from the University of Colorado, as well as an MA in anthropology from East Carolina University. Though most of her career has been spent as a federal civil servant and an academic, she has also served as a volunteer on short-term projects in Morocco, Ghana, Bolivia, and American Samoa.

Sabrina's husband, Ted Ta'ala, is a retired US Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal technician. They have three sons, ages 16, 14, and 11.



## Anuwat Khalertrum

Training Manager (TM)

Anuwat was working with Peace Corps three years ago. His first tenure with Peace Corps Thailand was during 2013 – 2019. He has been working in the development field right after graduated from the university for more than 10 years. His passion about development work is empowering the most vulnerable and marginalized group of people to be resilient, and able to amplify their own voices to address issues affecting their life and community. Anuwat is excited for his second tour to work along side Peace Corps staff and Peace Corps Volunteers across Thailand. Recently after the pandemic, he wishes to go back on track, spending his free time on trail running and cross fit. Exercise just to eat more delicious food



## Thanakom Yospolsakul

Language and Cross-Cultural Coordinator (LCC)

Thanakom has been working as an LCC (Language and Culture Coordinator) since January 2014. Thanakom joined Peace Corps Thailand in 2011 as an LCF (Language and Culture Facilitator). In 2016, he was a temporary duty officer working with the Language and Culture Coordinator in Peace Corps Timor-Leste. Prior to his roles with the Peace Corps, Thanakom was a teacher for 16 years, teaching the Thai language and culture to expats and international students at Berlitz and NIST international school. Thanakom was also a team leader in developing the Thai language curriculum for Berlitz Thailand.

Thanakom holds a Bachelor of Law from Thammasat University, a master's degree in English for Careers from Thammasat University, and a Master of Education degree in English language teaching from Ramkhamhaeng University. In his free time, he enjoys running, practicing yoga, and watching Broadway musicals!



## Pakin Wongwanitkajon

### TEFL Specialist

Pakin Wongwanitkajon has been working in the training field, both in pedagogy and andragogy, for 12 years. He previously worked with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for 4 years developing and delivering soft skill courses, as well as overseeing training administration at the Asia Regional Training Center. Prior to USAID, he was an English language instructor at the Royal Thai Navy Language Center in 2014 -2019. He began his career teaching English in Thai schools in 2011.

He earned a Master of Arts in English Language Teaching (ELT, Formerly TEFL) from Thammasat University and a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in English from Silpakorn University. He currently holds the Thai official teaching license after completing the Graduate Diploma Program in Teaching Profession from Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University in 2014.

He describes himself as an easy-going person but becomes determined when it comes to jobs and responsibilities. He loves to explore new things, so he looks forward to exploring his new career path with Peace Corps.



## Thepthira Chaiinkham

### YinD Programming and Training Specialist

Thepthira, also known as Gahn, is from Chiang Rai, Thailand's northernmost province. He grew up as a youth volunteer and young leader at YMCA, fostering a strong passion for youth empowerment. Despite earning an MBA in Hospitality and Tourism Management from Prince of Songkla University and a B.A. in Tourism Industry from Chiang Rai Rajabhat University, he remains dedicated to working in the field of youth development. Before joining Peace Corps, Gahn served as a training officer for over 10 years with the Spirit in Education Movement and Right To Play Foundation, where he collaborated with the Universities, Office of the Basic Education Commission, and the Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection. His responsibilities included training and supporting teachers and staff members in experiential learning and life skills development for students and young offenders across the north, northeast, and south regions.

Currently, he is furthering his education in the Innovation and Research for Learning Program at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang. He finds enjoyment in activities such as running, stand-up paddleboarding, and camping. He is a cat person, although he currently doesn't have any feline companions, but he has the cat figures on his work desk.



## Pawitra Chamnanrot

Training Assistant (TA)

Pawitra or Mimi started working with Peace Corps Thailand as Training Assistant on February 26, 2023. Prior to this role, she worked as Project Coordinator for Chula Zero Waste Initiative - a role in which she provided public relations and extra-curricular programs support to the university's zero waste frameworks. The focus of her work was about promoting Eco-conscious consumption, Food Waste Prevention, Household Waste Management as well as Raising awareness on Ocean Plastic Pollution. Mimi earned her Bachelor from the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at Chulalongkorn University, majoring Exhibition/Museum Design.

In the summer of 2022, Mimi participated in the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Professional Fellowship Program (YSEALI PFP). She got matched with the City of Frankfort, Kentucky as her placement host. It was her first-time in the US, gaining knowledge about US institutions and building relationships with American counterparts.

In her free time, Mimi enjoys cooking, darning and urban cycling. Recently, she learned how to repair clothes creatively. She is willing to share the skills with those who are interested in Visible Mending!



## Rangsimma Suttipongkiat

Administrative Support Assistant (ASA)

Rangsimma is originally from Suphanburi, Central Thailand, where she grew up and spent her childhood. She attended high school in Bangkok and later moved to Chiang Mai for her bachelor's degree in economics at Chiang Mai University. Before joining the Peace Corps, she gained experience as a freelance videographer and worked for international NGOs in the field of Election Observations. In 2004, she volunteered for a couple of months in Phang Nga, assisting with the Tsunami relief efforts.

She first joined the Peace Corps Thailand in PST-135 as an ASA. Rangsimma is a dog person who loves traveling, taking photos, and cooking



## Nina Putvichai

TESS Program Support Assistant

Nina is from Nakhon Ratchasima, the northeast of Thailand where she lives and worked more than 3 years. She originally came from Bangkok and moved to study for her bachelor's degree at Khon Kaen University in Mathematics Education majoring. This is my very first year to joined Peace Corps Thailand.

She has more than 3 years' experience working as a mathematics teacher at government schools. Nina is always eager to learn new things. She likes to do volunteer activities, travelling, and water sports, especially surfing and diving. She loves to see others grow and develop.

Being a part of PST 135 is meaningful for her deliver all the support to volunteers who will do their best for Thai students.



## Phattaranit Chantratanasit

YinD Program Support Assistant

Phattaranit is from Khon Kaen, the Northeast of Thailand, where she was born, raised, and studied. She mostly works and lives in Bangkok after finishing her bachelor's degree in Law. However, she never had the opportunity to work in the field. She first learned about the Peace Corps while in college because she had the chance to attend the Global Youth Leadership Camp as a Thai Ambassador. The camp was organized by Brighter Thailand Foundation in collaboration with Peace Corps Thailand. This marks her first time joining the Peace Corps as a PST staff member. Phattaranit has a background in working as a Training Coordinator in the Association of Thai Securities Companies and as an Account Executive in a company that provides full services in PDPA Law. Her interests include hiking, traveling, volunteering, eating, and working out. She loves animals, especially dogs.



## Kessirirak Nityasuddhi

Homestay Coordinator

Kessirirak (Aj.Apple) graduated from Thammasat University in Bachelor's degree of Journalist and Mass Communication. Then she got interested in working with commercial and entertainment area. She used to be a copywriter, news reporter, DJ on the radio programs, Lyricist and co-producer for music companies. Finally, she fell in love with teaching Thai as a Foreign Language that makes her really understands her own language & culture.

Teaching Thai to foreigner is a very good challenging fun job, but this year she tried new thing that is working as a Homestay Coordinator. It's a lot of fun too. Now she likes working to get the income just enough for living in Bangkok and be able to spend time for the other dimensions of life such as family, pleasurable, studying dhamma, practicing insight meditation and mindfulness. Life goes by, the Goals of life can be changed, what we like to have or be also can be changed... She believes in Impermanence, Dukkha and Anatta. Her favorite artists are Bobby McFerrin, Lisa Ono and like Bossa nova music.

Káo dtèng-ngaán lééo dtèe mii lúuk kú.  
Káo a-yú tâo-rai, mòi bòok kâ!  
Cheers!



## Jira Kunkongsatian

Local Driver #1

Jira was born on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1964. He earned a vocational certificate from Thai Suriya Technical college, Bangkok. He loves playing sports, cooking and playing guitar. Jira has been working with Peace Corps since PST 127. He has no idea about what PC does when he first joined PST, now he has learned more about it and realized this job has been offering him great opportunities to learn things he has never experienced before, e.g., American culture, language and foreigner daily life.



## Saman Tempiam

### Local Driver #2

Saman Tempiam was born on 5th April 1966 in Khai Bang Rachan District, Sing Buri. He finished Matthayom 3 from Tha Chang Wittayakarn School. He has diverse professions ranging from Agriculture, mechanism, carpentry, driving, plumbing to welding. Saman has been working with Peace Corps as a driver since PST 128. He is very appreciated this opportunity as it allowed him to work with talented people from different backgrounds as well as with foreigners. Undertaking this position has enhanced his ability in various aspects, roles and responsibilities, working as a team player, manners, exploring new places and cultures, and language. He is thankful for being trusted to carry out this task with Peace Corps.



## Warin Phikunthong

### Local Driver #3

Warin Phikunthong is originally from Don Chedi, Suphanburi. He is happy to work with Peace Corps. From this opportunity, he has learnt more about language and American culture. He has gained new interesting experiences that he could share them with his son. He humbly thanks Peace Corps for the opportunity to work in PST 130 and 131.



## Apiwit Attakornpipat

Language and Culture Facilitator

Apiwit's originated hometown from Samutprakarn, close to Bangkok. Apiwit graduated from Assumption University, majoring in Business Japanese. Apiwit has joined as General Service Assistant (GSA) since November 2016. He also used to be Language Integrator Facilitator ( L I F ) for Group 125 (2013 ) and Group 127 (2015). Apiwit has been works many multi-cultural companies and many positions as HR Analyst, Sales Coordinator, Marketing coordinator, and senior customer services. He can speak 4 languages, Thai, English, Chinese, and Japanese. Apiwit loves to travel and cooking food. Nowadays, he works as tour guide and financial consultant company.



## Atit Budsing

Language and Culture Facilitator

Atit hails from Utthai Thani and holds a degree in Food Science from King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok (KMUTNB). With four years of experience in military translation, he has developed a knack for bridging communication gaps in diverse environments.

During his university tenure, he immersed himself in volunteer work, dedicating his time to assisting rural communities in Thailand. This experience fortified his unwavering commitment to serving others and instilled in him a profound sense of purpose.

In addition to his professional endeavors, he is an avid enthusiast of volleyball. Whether actively playing or passionately cheering, he relishes the camaraderie and excitement of the sport. Engaging in local matches and community tournaments, he cherishes its dynamic nature and strategic gameplay.

Beyond the court, he finds solace and rejuvenation in exploring nature through travel. Whether trekking through lush forests or admiring scenic landscapes, he is drawn to the beauty and tranquility of the outdoors.



## Arunee Thongratanakaew

Language and Culture Facilitator

Arunee is from Bangkok. She has got B.ED. in English teaching from Silpakorn University and MA in Eng-Thai-Eng from Ramkhamhaeng University. Her working life started from being a teacher in a refugee camp for about 5 years, then she spent more than 20 years working in a few business firms and gained experiences in administration, procurement, CSR, training translation and translation. However, since she has great passion in teaching, she decided to join PeaceCorps as an LCF of PST 130, PST 134 and PST 135. Though she has been a full-time employee for almost all of her life, she can maintain her work-life balance well by dedicating her free time with her beloved family.



## Bharistha Sreshthaputra

Language and Culture Facilitator

Bharistha is from Chiangmai, the north of Thailand where she has lived and works more than 30 years. She originally came from Bangkok and moved to study for her BA at Chiangmai University in French majoring and her MSc. in Geosocial Based Sustainable Development at Maejo University. She has joined the Peace Corps since PST130 as a Language & Culture Facilitator (LCF).

Prior, she has experienced 9 years of teacher training in remote areas where majorities are indigenous people. She commits herself to help the disadvantaged people in Thailand. She was a volunteer in a refugee camp at the Myanmar-Thailand border. She had a chance to work for an American and Swedish INGO in Thailand as well. She is also a French-speaking guide in Thailand for 12 years and a Thai teacher for foreigners in Chiangmai. During the pandemic, she started farming on her land. She loves traveling and gardening.



## Jongwoot Yuwasilp

Language and Culture Facilitator

Jongwoot was born in Chiang Mai Province, located in the northern part of Thailand. He currently works in the restaurant business with his family. His family's restaurant is home to one of the most famous local dishes of Chiang Mai Province, called Khao Soi Lamduan.

Jongwoot has also worked as an architect in Bangkok and in Chiang Mai and devotes part of his time to architectural work as a freelancer. Jongwoot previously worked with the Peace Corps in PST Group 132 in 2020 and has decided to join the Peace Corps again with PST Group 135 in 2024.

Outside of work, Jongwoot has a passion for traveling and going on adventures around the world. He is avid about traveling solo and loves the feeling of discovering the beauty and point of interest of his destinations all by himself. Jongwoot believes this has helped him develop a greater sense of his ability and personality and looks forward to more adventures of self-discovery.



## Mai Yongkhum

Language and Culture Facilitator

Mai is from Chiang Mai, in the north of Thailand, where she has grown up and spent her childhood. She graduated from Chiang Mai University. Before she worked with Peace Corps, she worked for NGOs and student programs. She first joined the Peace Corps Thailand since PST-130 as SLA. She loves the Peace Corps teaching method, so she decided to join the program again as LCF. Mai loves traveling to several countries, and each of her destinations has imparted her different life experiences. She loves hiking and biking, and now she loves to learn more about scuba diving.



## Nanthanat Sangsawang

Language and Culture Facilitator

Nanthanat She's from Chumphon, a place in southern Thailand. She studied at Chiang Mai University, majoring in Tourism. Before that, she worked with the Peace Corps and learned about aged care. She also trained at a public hospital for a month. Nanthanat is really interested in working abroad, especially in Japan. She believes in the saying "when in Rome, do as the Romans do," so she's learning Japanese and wants to learn more about Japanese culture. In her free time, she loves watching anime and TV series. When she travels, she prefers mountains to beaches. And she really loves eating salmon and sôm-dtam bpuu mǎa.



## Nopparat Nakruang

Language and Culture Facilitator

Nopparat Nakruang is a Language and Culture Facilitator or LCF for Peace Corps Thailand for many years. She worked in Pre-Service Training (PST) for 122-124, 128-130, 134, and 135 groups. She used to be a Teacher Assistant at St. Stephen's International School in Bangkok for 3 years before joining Peace Corps. After group 124, she was an English teacher at Jianhua School in Naknon Pathom for 3 years. She taught Mathayom 1, 2 and 4. Then, she came back to work with groups 128, 129 and 130. After that, she went to Australia to pursue her early childhood education. She got Certificate III and Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care. She was a trainee and later an educator at Goodstart Early Learning organization for two years before COVID-19.

She graduated B.A. in Mass Communication from Chiangmai University, Thailand and M.A. in Film and Television Studies from The Waikato University, New Zealand. While teaching at Jianhua School, she earned Professional Teaching Certificate from Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University. She loves teaching all age groups, cooking vegetarian food and enjoys traveling around the country visiting her family, friends, and relatives.



## Passara Bhurinuntakul

### Language and Culture Facilitator

Passara is originally from Thonburi which is now a part of Bangkok. Then she moved to Nonthaburi, the suburb of Bangkok for more than 15 years. She graduated MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language from Srinakarinwiroj University. She had joined Peace Corps since 2015 as a TEFL Specialist and retired last year. Then she becomes Language and Cultural Facilitator or LCF afterwards.

She has experienced in educational field for over 30 years in different positions; as an English teacher in Refugee camp, teacher in school, Trainer for Ministry of Education and Peace Corps. She loves teaching and being around the students. She commits herself to offer an opportunity for kids in remote areas – she sometimes travels to teach or do camp for students with her friends. She loves travelling.



## Phutthawadee Leelahacheewa

### Language and Culture Facilitator

Phutthawadee holds a bachelor's degree in economics. Now she is studying for a master's degree in education. As for her professional experiences, she worked as a language integration facilitator (LIF) in groups 126 and 127 for the Peace Corps. Additionally, she was a homestay coordinator in group 128. From 2016 to 2020, she volunteered as a teacher to teach Thai language in Bhutan and Vietnam as part of the program called Friends from Thailand (FFT), organized by the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA). She has prior teaching experience in rural areas of Thailand, working closely with ethnic groups in the western region, and also taught at an international school located in Chiang Mai, which is her hometown. She loves playing badminton and guitar, traveling and exploring new places, and immersing herself in different cultures. She also spends time writing and collecting postcards, as they serve as reminders of the places she has visited and the memories she has made.



## Prawate King-Ngern

Language and Culture Facilitator

Prawate Kingngern has served as LCF for 10 Pst with both Tess and Yind Programme. Prior to Peace Corps, He joined Japan Airlines(Cargo staff) and Cambodia international Airlines, Qantas Airways, and Icelandic Airways as a flight attendant for almost 17 years and used to be an English teacher in a refugee camp at Chonburi for several years. Prawate is a native Thai who is from Chiang Mai and graduated from Chiang Mai University : BA in English and American Literature. He loves traveling ,cooking, eating organic vegetables. He also loves to have slow life with good coffee ,biking and having dog(named Dollar ) in Chiangmai.



## Suchanaree Homklang

Language and Culture Facilitator

Suchanaree is from Nakhon Ratchasima, the northeast of Thailand. Suchanaree has a BA from Silpakorn University in Chinese. Before she worked with Peace Corps, she had worked for NGOs and student programs. This is her first time working with Peace Corps and being an LCF. She loves teaching and working in a diverse culture. She likes to play tennis and swim, read, and watch movies.



**Bio of**

# **Peace Corps Bangkok Staff**



# PC BKK Staff

## Director's Office

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Parmer Heacox       | Acting Country Director                             |
| 2. Suthanya Sukphaisal | Executive and Communications Assistant (ECA) & SARL |
| 3. Chaturon Kathong    | Safety and Security Manager (SSM)                   |
| 4. Wichai Dornnam      | Quality Assurance Specialist (QAS)                  |

## Administration Office

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. John "JB" Bryan         | Director of Management and Operations (DMO) |
| 2. Phasukee Sombatthanasuk | Financial Manager (FM)                      |
| 3. Suwikhun Waipanya       | Administrative Assistant                    |
| 4. Saleena Vajarapong      | Cashier                                     |
| 5. Sumonsak Thojun         | IT Specialist                               |
| 6. Panatda Chuprasith      | General Service Manager (GSM)               |
| 7. Phenphan Koomkaew       | General Service Assistant (GSA)             |
| 8. Chumnun Chuephohak      | Janitor                                     |
| 9. Kannikar Kaewtree       | Janitor                                     |
| 10. Peeradej Sae Teao      | Driver                                      |
| 11. Danai Paimjaiyard      | Driver                                      |
| 12. Jakkarin Sripong       | Driver                                      |

## Programming Office

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Kulpipit Wongseangchundr    | Program Manager of the YinD Program       |
| 2. Yodmanee Rojnchanathong     | Program Assistant of the YinD Program     |
| 3. Pannathorn Maicharoen       | Program Manager of the TESS Program       |
| 4. Saranporn Prongwitthayakorn | Programming Assistant of the TESS Program |
| 5. Laksiri Chomchuen           | Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist      |
| 6. Prawit Toworakajornkul      | Regional Coordinator (RC)                 |



# PC BKK Staff

## Medical Office

- |                                |                                    |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Dr. Anucha Kongmaneerat, MD | Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO) |
| 2. Dr. Wai Yan Aung, MD        | Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO) |
| 3. Wisakha Phurikrai           | Medical Assistant & SARL           |
| 4. Rungrudee Muthabhon         | Medical Assistant                  |



# Parmer Heacox

## Acting Country Director

Parmer Heacox currently offers his services as Expert Consultant for the United States Peace Corps. In this role he served as Advisor to the Acting CD for PC Cambodia, Belize and Guatemala, and acting Director of Programming and Training (DPT) in Myanmar and Belize. He also participates in special projects and initiatives with the Peace Corps. He has over 27 years working with the Peace Corps starting with his service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ecuador from 1982-1985.

His experience with the Peace Corps includes various roles in 15 countries; technical trainer, pre-service training director, training manager, programming and training officer, country director, overseas staff development for the P&T track, staging director and facilitator for same sex couples training and diversity & inclusion.

Areas in which he has concentrated in recent years as country director in Ecuador and Peru have focused on -

staff development aimed at improved post strategies for volunteer support and communication with a focus on Volunteer and staff accountability, gender equity, ICD&I in addition to sustainable development strategies for Peace Corps programming.

Parmer also worked as the Civic Life Director for 6 years for the Human Services Coalition in Miami, Florida. During this time, part of his role was to support the Americorps program in South Florida. He also promoted and facilitated community small group dialogs for community action and activism in Miami-Dade county helping community groups to better listen to each other, organize, create community development plans and learn how to access resources to carry out those plans. And he worked for 7 years as the director of a vocational school for special needs youth in Quito, Ecuador.

Originally from Michigan, Parmer is a resident of Miami, FL and lives with his husband Aquiles Angulo who is from Ecuador. He is an avid gardener.



## Suthanya Sukphaisal

**Executive and Communications Assistant (ECA) & SARL**

Suthanya originates from Bangkok where she attended Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University and received her Bachelor of Arts (with Italian major and English minor) and Master of Science in International Relations (English Program) respectively. She has been working with Peace Corps Thailand for more than 12 years. Prior to working with the Peace Corps, she worked with international organizations and NGOs. Peace Corps has taught her to be selfless and put the needs of others ahead of her own. She loves cooking, gardening, and all kinds of animals.



## Chaturon Kathong

**Safety and Security Manager (SSM)**

After his graduation in 2003, Chaturon started working with Peace Corps as a Language Integration Facilitator for Group 117-119 and came back again for Group 123. From 2007-2009, he worked with International Organization for Migration (IOM) as a Cultural Orientation trainer, providing pre-departure trainings for refugees in the temporary shelters along the Thai-Myanmar border areas. When Peace Corps Thailand started the Youth in Development Program in 2012, he worked as Youth Programming and Training Specialist until September 2022. From October 2022 to present, he has been working as Safety and Security Manager to make sure that Peace Corps volunteers will work in Thailand safe and sound throughout their service. Working with diverse groups of volunteers and community members each year helps him grow professionally and spiritually.



## Wichai Dornnam

**Quality Assurance Specialist (QAS)**

Wichai began as Quality Assurance Specialist (QAS) in September 2023. The QAS will play a supportive role to post leadership and aims to help guide improvement and optimization of the systems and processes needed to successfully connect American Volunteers with the people of Thailand while also ensuring compliance with Agency policies.

Wichai began working with Peace Corps Thailand in December 2015 as a Training Assistant, providing office and field support to the Program and Training team. It involved the many different aspects needed to provide a concentrated training that is smooth and effective. In that role he managed administrative and logistical support of programming, training, and other events. He also coordinated online communication and utilization of educational online platforms.

In addition to the direct involvement with the Peace Corps training process, he was also the liaison for the Peace Corps sponsored World Wise Schools. Wichai earned a Master of Business Management (MBA) from Khon Kaen University in Thailand. He brings with him experience with training in several different contexts from previous employment with Asia Disaster Preparedness Centre Co-Managing with USAID and the Asian Development Bank in cooperation with Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization.



# John “JB” Bryan

Director of Management and Operations (DMO)

John “JB” Bryan arrived in Bangkok almost three years ago to serve as the Director of Management and Operations (DMO). Prior to his arrival in Thailand, he served as the DMO for three years and the Acting Country Director for nine months for Peace Corps/Liberia. JB has over 15 years of experience in international development and humanitarian aid. He got his start just after college with the Peace Corps as an Agroforestry Volunteer in the mountains of El Salvador. After his service, JB worked for more than three years in the Office of the Director at Peace Corps headquarters. Before rejoining the Peace Corps in 2018, JB worked for the International Rescue Committee (IRC). He served as an Emergency Operations Coordinator in South Sudan, Sudan, and Kenya focusing on reproductive health and water and sanitation programs and in Sierra Leone responding to the West African Ebola virus outbreak. JB earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill and a Master of Public Health from Columbia University. As the DMO, JB believes an essential aspect of his job is to bring efficiency and innovation to Peace Corps/ Thailand’s operations while ensuring staff and Volunteers are personally and professionally supported so that they can be their best selves.



## Phasukkee Sombatthanasuk

### Financial Manager (FM)

Phasukkee Sombatthanasuk has been working as a Financial Manager at Peace Corps Thailand since July 2018. Before coming to Peace Corps Thailand, Phasukkee worked with the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, a Non-Profit Organization, for fourteen years as a senior accountant. Phasukkee was not only responsible for Thailand Financial team, but also be a trainer and mentor for accountant of 3 offices (Myanmar, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka). Phasukkee also coordinated and monitored financial of partners' activities in Myanmar, Malaysia, and Vietnam too. Prior experiences include accounting roles with international corporations in the private sector and Audit roles at KPMG in Thailand. Phasukkee holds an MBA from Chulalongkorn University and a Bachelor's degree in accounting from Thammasat University. She is a Certified Public Account (CPA) and a member of the Federation of Accounting Professionals.



## Suwikhun Waipanya

### Administrative Assistant (AA)

Suwikhun 'Meow' Waipanya is the Administrative Assistant of Peace Corps Thailand since February 2021, with more than 15 years of diverse experience in luxury regional and international hotel chains, working alongside with Global Sales offices. She has extensive experience in Human resourcing, purchasing, supply chain management, and administration. She is using her positive attitude and tireless energy to support others. Suwikhun earned a B.A. in Dramatic Arts from Chulalongkorn University and an M.A. in Language and Communications from National Institute of Development Administration. Outside of work, Suwikhun enjoys reading, travel, foreign films, and all kinds of investment. Also, as a strong believer in continuous sharing, learning, and embracing changes, she is grateful for the opportunity to work with Peace Corps.



## Saleena Vajarapong

Cashier

Saleena recently joined the Peace Corps Thailand in September 2023 as Principal Cashier. Prior to joining the Peace Corps, she worked for USAID Thailand for 9 months as Project Accountant and CGFS Bangkok for 10 years as Supervisory Accountant before that. The decision to join the Peace Corps was easy, that is she wanted to support the organization's mission and volunteers. She holds a master's degree in Public Affairs from Indiana University Bloomington. Saleena was born, raised and earned her education in Bangkok; however, her dream is to move outside Bangkok when she retires.



## Sumonsak Thojun

IT Specialist

Sumonsak, nicknamed is Mon, has been working with Peace Corps Thailand since August 2012. Overall, he has been working in IT support and system administration for 28 years since he received his Bachelor degree in Computer Science from Kasetsart University in 1995. Additionally, he holds a Master of Science in Computer Science from Mahidol University since 2003 and a bachelor's degree in law from Thammasart University since 2012.

Before joining the Peace Corps, he provided information and communication technology (ICT) related services to two international organizations. He spent six years with the Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Sciences (AFRIMS) and two years and six months with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

On his down time, he enjoys playing guitar, surfing the internet, or reading a book.



## Panatda Chuprasith

General Service Manager (GSM)

Panatda goes by her nickname, LoogNoo. She has been working with PC for more than 15 years, starting with GSA in the first year and GSM since then.



## Phenphan Koomkaew

General Service Assistant (GSA)

Phenphan started working with us on November 20, 2023. She has been working as the administrative and purchasing manager at an International University with 10+ years of experience. She is a self-motivated team player with an expertise in purchasing as well as managing an administration team. She holds a bachelor's degree in business administration. She likes to spend her free time reading books, cooking, and listening to music.



## Danai Piamjaiyard

Driver



## Peeradej Sae Teao

Driver



## Jakkarin Sripong

Driver



## **Dr. Anucha Kongmaneerat, MD**

### **Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO)**

Dr. Anucha Kongmaneerat, PCMO, graduated from Faculty of Medicine at Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University. Anucha had been working as an internist and hematologist in government and private hospitals since 2002 after his residency training. He joined Peace Corps Thailand in 2015 and loves working with volunteers and trainees. He also plays Thai traditional music and sings. He likes traveling and he loves cats.



## **Dr. Wai Yan Aung, MD**

### **Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO)**

Dr. Wai transferred to Peace Corps Thailand from Peace Corps Myanmar in August 2022, where he worked as a Peace Corps Medical Officer since January 2018. Prior to that, he worked as a Panel Physician for the United Nations Migration Agency in Thailand, where he was responsible for various kinds of health screening and well-being of refugees resettling in the US, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. He is a graduate of the University of Medicine 2, Yangon, and completed a postgraduate diploma and master studies in Tropical Medicine at Mahidol University, Thailand. He also accomplished a research study on malaria in a remote and mountainous area of Rakhine state, Myanmar. After completing Tropical Medicine studies in 2013, he became a 'Medical Officer' for two hospitals at Umpiem and Nupoe refugee camps on the Thailand-Myanmar Border. He has over 12 years of professional experience in the medical field in Thailand and Myanmar, focused on primary health care, migration health, medical escort duty for air traveling, refugees' health, and disease outbreaks management. He loves traveling to new places, enjoys adventures, and tries traditional cuisine. His hobbies are swimming, jogging, and cycling.



## Wisakha Phurikrai

Medical Assistant & SARL

Wisakha Phurikrai, a Medical Assistant and SARL, prefers to be called Nan. Nan has been working with Peace Corps Thailand's Medical Unit since 2005. She has a master's degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology. When she's not in the office, she enjoys running, good books and good conversation



## Rungrudee Muthabhon

Medical Assistant

Rungrudee Muthabhon is a registered nurse with experience in emergency obstetrics and primary care with government hospitals. She was working with rehabilitating care agency and Travel Medicine and Vaccine Clinic. She has been working with the Peace Corps since 2018.



## Pannathorn Maicharoen

Program Manager of the TESS Program

Pan is currently the Peace Corps' Education Program Manager. He previously served for two years as a training assistant for USAID/Asia RDMA's Regional Training Center team, where he oversaw the professional development of all USAID personnel in the Asia region. Between 2018-2020, he also served as the education program assistant for the Peace Corps. He also served as the secretary to the office director of the General Development office for USAID/Asia RDMA from 2015 to 2018. He holds a master's degree in journalism and communication from Thammasat University and a Bachelor's degree in English-major Archeology from Silpakorn university.



## Saranporn Prongwitthayakorn

Programming Assistant of the TESS Program

Saranporn Prongwitthayakorn has been a Program Assistant of the Education Program since 2020. She started her journey with Peace Corps in 2019 working as a Language and Integration Facilitator. With her passion in languages and development works, she strives to help develop the English skills of Thai students. Prior to joining the Peace Corps, she gained experience in the areas of teaching, translation, and intergovernmental works. Her passions also include appreciating and creating artworks. You may also find her spending time alone reading a book or going out to new places with her friends!



## **Kulpipit Wongseangchundr**

### **Program Manager of the YinD Program**

Kulpipit Wongseangchundr has been Program Manager of the Youth in Development Program since 2014. She earned a B.A in Political Science from Thammasat University and an M.A. in International Development from the University of Birmingham.

Kulpipit's passion has always been in development, a field in which she has been involved for almost twenty years. Her destiny, however, is in politics where she will become the Prime Minister who sets Thailand firmly on the road to wealthy country for all. Her free time is spent sleeping, eating, and brokering peace among the five felines vying for dominance over her household.



## **Yodmanee Rojnchanathong**

### **Program Assistant of the YinD Program**

Yodmanee goes by her nick name, Pinn. She joined the P&T team in 2020. Previously she worked in the Admin unit as the Admin Assistant. She brings half a decade of administrative experience from her work with international organizations to her current role in supporting programming and logistic tasks for the YinD Team. She has an educational background in International Affairs from Thammasat University where she spent most of her time in a journal club of the Faculty of Political Science as a columnist. When she is not typing on her keyboard, she is an avid temple tourist and museum explorer.



## Laksiri Chomchuen

### Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist

Laksiri Chomchuen is an environmental social researcher as her background who specializes in evaluation of policies, programmes, and projects. Before joining the Peace Corps in 2017, she had over ten years of experience providing consultancy services to the national government, local authorities, and NGOs in countries in the Asia-Pacific region on programme evaluation and environmental related issue. She recently joined a working group with Peace Corps Washington to develop learning modules on monitoring & evaluation for Peace Corps. Laksiri is passionate about supporting local communities to implement low-carbon society and zero waste management. Voluntary service, she joined the '3Rs team' working to advocate sustainable resource consumption in Bangkok communities. Laksiri is simply inspired by hiking, museum hopping, and food travelling!



## Prawit Toworakajornkul

### Regional Coordinator (RC)

Prawit is a member of Generation Y and originally from Bangkok. Even though his background has primarily been in the travel and healthcare sectors, he is grateful for this opportunity to join and support the team here.



Bio of  
**Peace Corps**  
**Regional Staff**



# PC Regional Staff

## Regional Office

1. Jeremy Rothgerber
  2. Dr. Alexander Gonta, MD
  3. Dr. Mustafa Sulemanji, MD
  4. Dr. Aidai Sharshekeeva
  5. Dr. Erin Wilkinson
  6. Thanyalak Promsingh
  7. Teerapoj Hankulwatana
- Safety and Security Officer,  
Central and SE Asia Sub-region  
Regional Medical Officer (RMO)  
Regional Medical Officer (RMO)  
PCMO Mentor  
Regional Mental Health Officer (RMHO)  
Regional Medevac Clinical Coordinator (RMCC)  
Regional IT Specialist (RITS)



## Jeremy Rothgerber

**Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer,  
Central and SE Asia Sub-region**

Jeremy has served as a regional Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer (PCSSO) since 2010. Prior to arriving in Bangkok in July 2022, he was the PCSSO for the Southern Africa Sub-Region and was based in Pretoria, South Africa from 2017-2022, the Sahel and North Africa Sub-Region based in Rabat, Morocco from 2012-2017 and Bamako, Mali from 2010-2012. During his tenure as PCSSO, Jeremy's country responsibilities have included Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Guinea, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, The Gambia and Zambia.

Jeremy has more than 24 years of public service experience with the federal government, mostly with Peace Corps and the Government Accountability Office (GAO). He began his service as an agroforestry Peace Corps Volunteer and Volunteer Leader in The Gambia. After completing his service, he came to Peace Corps Headquarters to work in the Office of Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security as a Safety and Security Specialist. Later he accepted the position of Associate Peace Corps Director for Environment in The Gambia. Jeremy also worked for five years with GAO as a Senior Analyst on Homeland Security issues focusing on program evaluations for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.



## Teerapoj Hankulwatana

**Regional IT Specialist (RITS)**

Teerapoj Hankulwatana, TP, joined Peace Corps Thailand in 2002 as IT Specialist. He graduated with a Master of Information Technology from Griffith University, Australia. Prior to Peace Corps he worked with United Parcel Service (Thailand). In 2012, TP began working as the Regional IT Specialist where he supports eight IT Specialists in the region (Eastern EMA). He has more than 20-years of experience with Peace Corps, having been through many system upgrades. He loves sports, traveling, and enjoys family activities.



## Dr. Alexander Gonta, MD

Regional Medical Officer (RMO)

Prior to working with Peace Corps, Alexander Gonta worked on a nuclear weapons dismantlement project where he provided routine and emergency medical care to employees, expatriates, and local staff. Before that, he provided surgical and emergency medical care at the Kiev City Burn Center. Dr. Gonta graduated from National Medical University in Kyiv, Ukraine in 1993 and has been employed with the Peace Corps as the Medical Officer since 2003. Initially serving as the Peace Corps Medical Officer for Peace Corps Ukraine, in 2015 he was reassigned as the Peace Corps Regional Medical Officer in Bangkok, Thailand where he provides medical care for Volunteers serving in numerous Peace Corps countries.



## Dr. Mustafa Sulemanji, MD

Regional Medical Officer (RMO)

Dr. Mustafa graduated from Nizhny Novgorod Medical Academy in Russia 2004 and followed by residency in Family Medicine at Aga Khan University hospital in Tanzania. He developed interest in Emergency medicine and underwent short courses and had been working for a leading private facility in Tanzania as an ER physician before joining the US Peace Corps in 2011 as a PCMO in Tanzania. Mustafa has been a Regional Medical Officer with PC based in Bangkok, Thailand since September 2017. Mustafa is a second-generation PC contractor; his father having worked for PC Tanzania in the 1960's.



## Dr. Aidai Sharshekeeva

PCMO Mentor

Dr. Aidai Sharshekeeva was born in Kyrgyzstan. She earned her medical degree from the Kyrgyz State Medical Academy and completed her residency training in internal medicine at the National Center of Cardiology and Therapy. Dr. Aidai joined the Peace Corps in Kyrgyz Republic as a PCMO in February 2015. Before joining the Peace Corps, she had worked as a physician at the National Center of Cardiology and Therapy. She taught internal medicine to medical students at Kyrgyz State Medical Academy.



## **Dr. Erin Wilkinson**

### **Regional Mental Health Officer (RMHO)**

Dr. Erin Wilkinson, Clinical Psychologist, is the Regional Mental Health Officer for the Peace Corps EMA Region currently based in Thailand. Erin retired from the Army after 20 years as a Clinical Psychologist. She has held multiple positions in her military career and multiple deployments. As the Commander of the only Combat Stress Control Detachment for Europe, she deployed to Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia and NATO's Partnership for Peace program in Slovakia. After the bombing of the US Embassy in Nairobi, Dr. Wilkinson led a Rapid Response Team to provide humanitarian support through mental health services to the host nationals as well as US Embassy and military personnel. She later deployed to Iraq where she worked to repatriate female and adolescent detainees and provide behavioral health services to service members. Upon retiring out of Ft. Carson, Colorado Springs, she worked for Veteran's Homeless programs, a Traumatic Brain Injury program and other veteran-serving positions. Erin has devoted her time to Huts for Vets for the past 5 years as a board member and co-moderator. She is currently continuing to serve those who serve others through the Peace Corps. Erin enjoys trail riding (horse), dancing, hiking with her two Aussies, skiing, reading, camping and exploring and experiencing new cultures, people and places. She currently lives in Bangkok, Thailand.



## **Thanyalak Promsingh**

### **Regional Medevac Clinical Coordinator (RMCC)**

Thanyalak has been working with Bangkok Regional Medevac Hub since May 2013. Thanyalak started with PC Thailand in September 1994 as the PC nurse, then assumed progressive positions as medical assistant, PCMO and then RMCC. Prior to joining PC Thailand, Thanyalak graduated as a BSN from the American-affiliated nursing school Mission College, then worked in the Emergency Room at Bumrungrad International Hospital. She is interested in cooking and travelling with family.

