



# Broadening Minds, Redefining Manhood, Obtaining Success



## Akirah S. Crawford

University of Michigan School of Social Work

### Kingdom of Eswatini/ Mpompotha

The Kingdom of Swaziland has the world's highest adult HIV/AIDS prevalence rate at approximately 26% (persons aged 15-49 years) and one of the lowest life expectancy rates, of approximately 33 years.

The small rural community of Mpompotha where I was placed was characterized by poverty and inadequate access to health and educational services which informed a great deal of my projects.

Peace Corps was invited into Swaziland to assist with mitigating the HIV pandemic. Although many projects centered around community health, mines often focused on dismantling the patriarchal building blocks to the spread of HIV through youth development.

Working in the Kingdom of Eswatini as a Youth Development Volunteer with the US Peace Corps was extremely rewarding and challenging at times but it helped me to grow as a social worker and shift my views around international development.



### Placement/Project Information

- Co-directed BRO (Boys Reaching Out) male empowerment program. BROEswatini envisions a nation where adolescent males and men are empowered to create healthy change in their own lives and in the lives of others.
- Worked in partnership with Peace Corps volunteers to form BRO clubs within perspective communities across Eswatini in which PCVs helped facilitate sessions for male club participants with their Swazi counterparts
- Clubs helped to provide safe spaces for young boys to discuss issues around male identity, self-esteem, fatherhood, gender equality, etc.

### Agency/Community Partner

- Partnered with various Eswatini organizations to host nation wide trainings for BRO counselors and club participants. Partners included FLAS (Family Life Association of Eswatini), YEBO Artreach (arts empowerment program), Kahle Kahle wellness organization and the Ministry of Education.

### Outcomes

- In partnership with Eswatini based organizations, hosted a HIV & Self-Care Topical training for 40 counsellors in the capital of Eswatini focused on equipping counsellors with knowledge, resources and skills to discuss HIV in their clubs and communities.

### Skills Utilized/Developed

- Community Organizing
- Cultural competency
- Engagement in Youth Development

### Classroom Connections

- Interpersonal Practice with Individuals, Families and Small Groups
- Introduction to Community Organization
- Management and Policy/Evaluation Practice
- Issues in Global Social Work

These courses really helped in my service because they gave me a foundation of understanding of how to engage with youth and families and insight into international development work.

### Lessons Learned

My service was extremely valuable because it allowed me to live on a traditional homestead, work in an isolated rural community and truly integrate into the culture of Eswatini. In doing so this allowed me to work with some of the most overlooked and vulnerable members of Swazi society. It taught me to truly value the dignity of all people and it instilled in me the importance of community and collectivism.



### Career Connections

I plan to use my experience of serving as a Peace Corps volunteer to change the way I do international development in efforts to prioritize sustainability and intentional relationship building with the people I serve.

### Advice

- Be open to change and willing to face adversity
- Practice humility and patience
- Treat all people with dignity and respect

### Acknowledgments

I want to thank the magical kingdom of Eswatini for challenging me in ways that I did not know I needed, showing me the true meaning of kindness and welcoming me into your culture. I would also like to thank my family and friends for supporting me along this journey and my amazing cohort (G14 Strong) for serving by my side.