

Sue and David Castle's story in remembrance of Nick who died of medical neglect in China

We are the most unlikely advocates for the Peace Corps.

Our son Nick Castle died while in service in February of 2013 while under the care of a Peace Corps medical officer. Nick was 23 years old.

An Inspector General's report released in November 2014 revealed that cascading failures and delay in Nick's treatment contributed to his death. Very simple steps would have saved his life.

We are aware that medical care to Peace Corps volunteers while in service can vary from country to country. Many volunteers receive excellent care. In the case of my son he did not. We are hoping to see a more consistent and standardized approach so that ALL volunteers will receive quality and consistent medical care. We believe that better medical care while in-service will lead to fewer problems post service.

We have been working for over 2 ½ years to create awareness of the quality of health care for volunteers serving in the Peace Corps. Some progress has been made through diligent and persistent contact with the Peace Corps, media attention (New York Times, CBS This Morning and local television and print media), public outreach and working with the National Peace Corps Association. We speak to classes at the University of California at Berkeley about the Peace Corps. I also participated in a Story Jam sponsored by the Northern California Peace Corps Association. Alan Toth of Posh Corps did a podcast featuring Nick's story.

We have created a partnership with Health Justice because of our respect and concern for returning volunteers who are unable to obtain the follow up care they deserve.

We have been working with Congressional representatives to have legislation passed that will re-enforce what the Peace Corps promises to do. That means providing a standard of care with qualified and trained medical professionals

The Peace Corps has acknowledged there is room for improvement and that what happened to our son Nick should not have been allowed to occur.

Recently the Sam Farr Peace Corps Enhancement Act has been introduced. H.R 2259.

We believe this Bill is the first step in getting current and returned Peace Corps volunteers the medical care and treatment they deserve.

In addition to our contribution and work with Congressman Ted Poe's office that has resulted in the Sam Farr Enhancement Act we have been working with Senator Boxer's office up until her retirement, Senator Corker and now Senator Feinstein.

The effort has created a draft bill that we hope will be introduced in the Senate soon. The bill will focus on the health care provided to currently serving in the Peace Corps and establish training, evaluation and oversight of the medical officers employed by Peace Corps. It will address the needs and medical care of returning volunteers. It will give Congress a role in protecting the volunteers.

The Peace Corps is an imperfect organization like many organizations. All the more reason to be able to look critically at itself and make improvements. The Peace Corps today is a different Peace Corps than was started 55 years ago, yet the mission is the same. A very worthy mission especially in today's world. Policies and procedures need to be updated to reflect conditions for current and returned volunteers.

I'm thankful many had such a positive experience and hope their experience can be shared to improve the experience of others. Sharing that experience at home with friends, family and coworkers brings awareness to Americans regarding issues and conditions in other countries and cultures.

The health and safety of volunteers should be a priority. That if for some reason a volunteer became sick or injured that they would be taken care of. To not worry if they got sick that they might not come home. To not have to worry about treatments or a lifetime of disability if they do come home.

It's sad that change only seems to come after tragedy. It would be shameful if change does not come after the loss of my son. Another volunteer or family should not have to experience what happened to my son. There is risk in the Peace Corps just as there is in life. Minimizing those risks and taking the best possible care of our volunteers and returned volunteers is the least we can do.

Dave and Sue Castle

Links

Inspector General's report

https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/policies/PCIG_Investigative_Review_of_a_Volunteer_Death_in_Peace_Corps_China.pdf

Posh Corps podcast

<http://www.poshcorps.com/podcast-1/2015/9/26/posh-corps-podcast-ep-9-stonewall>

Beyond Borders Story Slam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YA72OJWFmIU>