



# For-profit environmental voluntourism in Costa Rica: teen volunteer, host community, and environmental outcomes

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## ABSTRACT

With its growth in popularity, voluntourism (volunteer tourism) has seen greater attention from the research community. This case study research investigates the tripartite outcomes of a for-profit environmental voluntourism program in Costa Rica, focusing on teen participants, host community, and the environment. Authors conducted field research and gathered data from online surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant observation with 108 respondents, including teen voluntourists, parents, and community influentials. Findings indicated community stakeholders perceived projects to be meaningful, with visible social and environmental benefits. In the short term, teens showed an increased concern for social and environmental problems, as well as a heightened awareness of environmental issues. Self-reported increases in time spent volunteering after students completed the program was less prevalent; however, 19% of teens stayed committed to volunteerism and civic engagement through completion of more than one voluntourism service tour. We documented longer term positive outcomes in relation to pro-environmental behavior change and attempts at intergenerational learning. Unexpected outcomes were documented in relation to bolstering of longer term academic and life/career paths after completing a service trip. We highlight best-practices for planning projects through individuals with longstanding community connections and an ability to facilitate outcome oriented, meaningful service projects.

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## Introduction

The practice of voluntourism (aka: volunteer tourism) is popular, with participants desiring to travel domestically or abroad, gain knowledge of developing nations and cultures, volunteer their time to make a difference in relation to social and environmental problems, and to meet like-minded individuals (Brown, 2005; Callanan & Thomas, 2005). Voluntourism is best understood as “those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment” (Wearing, 2001, p. 1). Voluntourism programs are offered for both teenagers and adults, with programs spanning most continents, focusing on education and teaching, health care, disaster relief, environmental restoration and protection, community and economic development, constructed capital, citizen science data collection and research, and agriculture. The three most visited countries for voluntourism programs included (in order of attendance), Peru, Costa Rica, and South Africa.

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In relation to for-profit voluntourism providers, Wearing and McGehee (2013) write:

Although no research in this area was discovered at the time of this review, these organizations which are profit-driven may have a different impact on the community than those which emerge from NGOs; they may be less established within the community and more focused on satisfying their primary customer - the volunteer - than on the host community. (p. 4)

Furthermore, anecdotal accounts regarding teen voluntourism trips/projects abound in popular media. A diversity of published empirical research addresses for-profit and NGO program outcomes for *non-teenage* participants, host communities, and the environment; however, published empirical research addressing for-profit or non-profit voluntourism programs specifically in relation to outcomes for teenage participants, is sparse. Thirty-two voluntourism providers with English language websites were contacted during the course of this research (non-profit organizations, for-profit companies, and Certified Benefit Corporations). Telephone conversations and emails showed that about 57,000 trips are sold to teen voluntourists annually<sup>1</sup>. Due to the large number of entities selling a high volume of trips to teenagers, and a corresponding lack of empirical research, the topic was deserving of greater research. As such, this research was outcomes oriented, and worked to better understand factors that may contribute to the behavioral and attitudinal outcomes of teen voluntourists

participating in a for-profit program in Costa Rica. Furthermore, this research also documented the perceptions of host country stakeholders directly in contact with the teens and the organization, as well as the multiplicity of environmental outcomes

Many teenage voluntourism participants – some of whom are as young as 14 – are relatively unskilled, and uninformed about the host communities they purport to serve, including the community's economic, social, and environmental problems. According to Caskey and Rosenthal (2005), "Adolescents who are 14 or older are as likely to be as autonomous as adults, but there may be some situations in which their ability is not fully realized" (Caskey & Rosenthal, 2005, p. 63). This raises the possibility that the for-profit voluntourism provider would (at best) be working simultaneously to enhance specific aspects of the host community, as well as provide a transformative and educational experience for the primary customer (the paying teen volunteers). And while voluntourists may be altruistic and idealistic, wanting to work for environmental protection, enhance equity, and alleviate poverty (Halpenny & Caissie, 2003; Knollenberg, McGehee, Boley, & Clemmons, 2014), they also act out of self-interest (Söderman & Snead, 2008; Wearing, 2001). It is unrealistic to expect such young voluntourists to have the capacity to provide information or skills to locals, or to be agents of change (individually) in the host communities. As such, the purpose of this case study research was to better understand and document the extent to which a for-profit environmental voluntourism program had the ability to provide a transformative behavioral and attitudinal experience for teenage voluntourism participants, while simultaneously benefitting host community stakeholders and the natural environment. Furthermore, this research critically questioned how the outcomes that were documented during this effort compared to common perceptions of for-profit voluntourism, and behavior change in teens.

Formerly published voluntourism research with teen participants was not identified in the literature, thus raising the issue of ethical implications of conducting qualitative research with teenage participants in a developing nation, who could be considered vulnerable, exploited or relatively powerless in society (Caskey & Rosenthal, 2005; Ensign, 2003). As such, this research incorporated a university ethics panel review process that involved the parents and legal guardians of the participants, the teens themselves, as well as the voluntourism providers and the community stakeholders working directly with the teens. All participation in this research was voluntary and non-coercive (no incentives were offered), and responses and data are presented in a manner to ensure confidentiality (Creswell, 2013).

This research accomplished its purposes through an holistic qualitative analysis of: immediate post-program verbal commitment to personal pro-environmental behavior change, as well as longer-term changes in teen participant pro-environmental behaviors; longer term changes in teen participant rates of volunteerism; changes in teen participant awareness of, and interest in, social and environmental

problems facing the host community, geographic region, and the planet; and community stakeholders perceptions as to how the teen volunteers affected the natural environment and host community they purported to serve. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews from five community stakeholders, 18 teenage participants that had completed more than one voluntourism service trip, and six parents of students. Six focus groups were conducted with 78 first-time teen volunteers. Online survey data were collected before the Costa Rican program began, and nine months after the program ended, and was supported by three months of participant observation (Creswell, 2013). The following is a review of the voluntourism scholarship that framed the analysis.

## **Pro-environmental behavior change within teenagers and tourists**

A meta-analysis by Ardoin, Wheaton, Bowers, Hunt, and Durham (2015) identified gaps in the empirical research base in relation to nature-based tourism studies that documented changes in tourists' environmentally related knowledge, attitudes, intentions, and actual behaviors; 30 total published studies were identified between 1995 and 2013, with authors stating "Few studies measured environmental behavior directly, and fewer still include longitudinal assessments of persistent changes in attitudes or behaviors" (p. 1). Similarly, a dearth of published research exists in relation to voluntourism's ability to affect pro-environmental behaviors, with an incomplete focus on teen volunteers. Seventeen outcome-oriented publications are discussed below, two of which incorporated outcomes for some teenage participants, but none with a sole focus on outcomes for teens. As such, the research questions examined in this study attempted to fill an important gap in the literature presented below. As several research questions were designed to focus on teen volunteers' changes in environmental issue awareness and pro-environmental behaviors, theoretical underpinnings of this change are also discussed.

With children, garnering a foundation for specific learning is required to think autonomously (Mezirow, 1997), including the ability to "(1) recognize cause-effect relationships, (2) use informal logic in making analogies and generalizations, (3) become aware of and control their own emotions, (4) become empathic of others, (5) use imagination to construct narratives, and (6) think abstractly" (p. 9). But Steinberg (2002) writes that as children proceed through a maturation process they develop an enhanced ability to understand possibilities, to think in the abstract and multi-dimensionally, and to understand social situations and societal values as relative, rather than absolute.

As voluntourism gains in popularity among teens (and is increasingly targeted/ marketed to teens), sales teams, non-profit organizations, educators, and program designers and facilitators should better understand the developmental complexities and ability of teens to comprehend the multiplicity of economic, social, cultural, and environmental components of community issues in developing nations. With an understanding of the developmental and maturation process of teen and volunteerist desires (altruism and self-development) (Brown, 2005; Wearing, 2001; Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Wearing, Benson, & McGehee, 2016; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007), the framework of transformative learning (TL) can be applied by educators and program facilitators to design better programming in support of the desired outcomes of volunteers, which also happens to be TL (Knollenberg et al., 2014). "Transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Meaningfully designed voluntourism programs have the capacity to be supportive of the TL framework, as they provide opportunities to incorporate many of the necessary components, including experiential education, discourse, discussion and critical reflection (journaling and debriefing), group problem solving and collaboration, social action, and intercultural experiences (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). In fact, Knollenberg et al. (2014), suggest that "Volunteer tourism organizations need to invest significantly in staff training in TL" (p. 1). Predating this suggestion, Coghlan and Gooch (2011) identified at least five elements of TL in the broader literature on voluntourism, including the educative components of sharing and analyzing personal discontent and similar experiences with others; exploring options for new behaviors; building competencies and self-confidence in new roles; acquiring knowledge and skills for action, and; reintegrating into society with a new perspective.

## The mixed bag of voluntourist and host community stakeholder outcomes

In addition to the multiplicity of positive outcomes of voluntourism (documented in the literature below), there remains concern regarding the possibilities for negative impacts that deserve increased attention from both researchers and providers, including: a neglect of locals' desires, a hindering of work progress and completion of unsatisfactory work, a disruption of local economies, a reinforcement of conceptualizations of the 'other' and rationalizations of poverty, and an instigation of cultural changes (Guttentag, 2009, p. 537). Halpenny and Caissie's (2003) qualitative study found that an NGO operated voluntourism experience, involving voluntourists in habitat restoration and recreation infrastructure projects, failed to change voluntourists' perceptions of nature to "a 'hard core' deep ecology or ecocentric perspective which ascribes rights to nature" (p. 30). Sin (2009) documented mixed outcomes in relation to "tensions and paradoxes" ingrained in volunteer tourism, within a small student team from the National University of Singapore working in South Africa to assist in the growth of black tourism and home entrepreneurs in creating sustainable ventures (p. 497). In a similar vein, McClellan (2014) documented instances of harmful medical voluntourism occurring in Honduras in relation to the practice "entrenching paternalism and inequitable relationships; and that many voluntourists are ignorant of the underlying power and privilege issues inherent in voluntourism" (p. 1).

Published literature that documented positive outcomes of voluntourism amongst participants (a few of which were teenage voluntourists) included McGehee (2002), whose research showed increased involvement in social movement participation after returning home from an Earthwatch Institute trip. Earthwatch Institute is a non-profit voluntourism provider, and has alone enlisted 100,000 voluntourists on scientific research expeditions since its founding in 1971 (Earthwatch Institute, 2016). Increases in participant involvement included "belonging to an organization, receiving newsletters and other publications, donating money, paying dues, and attending the organization's meetings and/or special events" (p. 134). Changes were not found in relation to voluntourists' self-efficacy. McGehee and Santos' (2005) qualitative research similarly documented longer term outcomes, explaining that "network ties developed during a volunteer tourism experience have a powerful role in influencing participants' social movement participation," and that consciousness-raising as a result of voluntourism participation served to predict intended social movement participation and support for activism (p. 774).

Positive outcomes on voluntourists were also noted by Wearing (2001) in relation to heightened environmental consciousness and personal development, to the extent that it (later) influenced participant lifestyles. Zahra and McIntosh's (2007) qualitative findings in relation to an NGO led program (of 17–26 year olds) bolstered the abovementioned finding through the documentation of longer term effects of voluntourism, and how "cathartic experiences of young volunteer tourists led to sustained ideals and meaning in life" (p. 118). Bailey and Russell (2010) (quantitatively) found positive and significant outcomes for a nine day college voluntourism trip with meaningful impacts for participants in relation to civic attitude, followed by openness and wisdom, some of which persisted longer term. Broad's (2003) study of voluntourism in Thailand documented the lived experience of the voluntourists, and reported the extent to which volunteers had the ability to transcend superficial interactions with locals and "become immersed in the Thai culture and the way of life" (p. 1). The study also discussed positive outcomes for personal growth and changes in worldview (also see Foster-Smith & Evans, 2003; Newman, Buesching, & Macdonald, 2003; Wearing, 2002).

Expanding upon Uriely, Reichel, and Ron's (2003) call to study host, community volunteers (also see Gray and Campbell (2007), Lyons & Wearing, 2008) explored the perceptions of host community stakeholders (whether or not they participate in the act of volunteering). Gray and Campbell (2007) found that southeastern Costa Rican stakeholder groups and the host community of Gondoka held positive perceptions of voluntourists working for sea turtle conservation, with a particular affection for the economic benefits derived from the long-standing sea turtle voluntourism program. Clifton and Benson's (2006) Indonesian marine national park case study of voluntourism found "the existence of intangible socio-cultural benefits" and "support for research ecotourism amongst local

residents” (p. 252). And quite pertinent to this current Costa Rican research effort, Clifton and Benson also wrote :

Negative environmental impacts are less likely to occur when the ecotourist market is geared towards carrying out research into the marine environment as opposed to expanding the industry into activities such as nature-based tourism which, if poorly managed, can lead to degeneration of environmental quality as seen in many other marine national parks. (2006, p. 252)

Stoddart and Rogerson’s (2004) qualitative study of adult voluntourists traveling with Habitat for Humanity in South Africa, found that “In terms of the South African tourism economy, whilst their overall national contribution is minimal, their local contributions to the development of ‘justice tourism’ must be noted as potentially significant” (p. 317).

Building on the empirical research findings discussed above, and the current gaps in the literature related to teen voluntourism and behavioral change, the research questions that guided this effort included the following:

- (1) What aspects of the voluntourism program did teen participants find most influential in cultivating their pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors?
- (2) To what extent are teen voluntourists’ pro-environmental behaviors affected after participation in a for-profit voluntourism program in Costa Rica?
- (3) To what extent do teen voluntourists change their rates of community and/or environmental volunteerism upon returning home?
- (4) To what extent are teen voluntourists more aware of environmental issues after participation in a voluntourism program abroad?
- (5) In terms of Costa Rican community stakeholder perceptions, what (in their opinion) are the host community and/or environmental outcomes of the voluntourism program operating in their community?

## Study methods

### ***Study site – Bahia and Uvita, Costa Rica: Marino Ballena National Park***

The communities of Bahia and Uvita are located in the province of Puntarenas on the southern Pacific coast of Costa Rica and are the gateway to Marino Ballena National Park, the first marine national park in Costa Rica (Bodhi Surf School, 2016). Marino Ballena National Park was protected in 1989 and incorporates 270 land acres and more than 20 square miles of ocean territory. This region is also known as the *Costa Ballena* as humpback whales from both the Arctic and Antarctic migrate to the coastal waters during their respective winters. In addition to the park itself, the region’s tropical climate, forest ecosystems and abundant wildlife, waterfalls, music festivals, and surfing are strong draws for tourists. Costa Rican residents are highly dependent upon the country’s tourism industry and earn wages from boat and whale watching tours, sales of souvenirs and handicrafts, restaurants and food services, hotels, eco-lodges, and hostels. However, the community has suffered from youth drug and alcohol abuse, poorly managed solid waste disposal (burning of trash, plastic litter on beaches, and litter contaminated freshwater and saltwater environments), and poorly planned upland developments resulting in aquifer depletion, soil erosion, and sedimentation of rivers and the marine environment both in the national park and surrounding waters (CAVU, 2015). Puntarenas province has the lowest human development index, highest rate of unemployment, and lowest education rate in Costa Rica (The Body, 2016).

This research worked exclusively with the service learning program provider “Global Leadership Adventures” (GLA), a for-profit Certified Benefit Corporation (B-Corp) based in San Diego, California. GLA is an established provider of Service Learning Adventures™ globally, sending over 10,000 students abroad in the past 10 years, spanning 12 countries in Africa, South and Central America, Asia, the Pacific islands, and the Caribbean; in Costa Rica alone, GLA offers nine different types of

voluntourism trips. The authors' prior evaluative research efforts and areas of expertise are related to coastal restoration and community-based marine ecosystem protection efforts, and as such, GLA's *Protecting the Pacific* program provided a good fit for this research effort. Protecting the Pacific service projects were designed and implemented by community educators (fixers) from the Bodhi Surf School, individuals who have lived in the community for more than 10 years. The projects witnessed during the course of this research were designed to address the abovementioned social and environmental ills. One NGO stakeholder from Forjando Alas (Building Wings), an organization working with community youth, discussed their relationship to GLA:

The GLA voluntourism projects have brought a lot of financial benefits to Forjando Alas, helping to buy tools that cannot otherwise be purchased, because NGOs obviously have financial constraints. And there are benefits that tourism brings to a small developing town such as this, that depend on tourism. There is a spiral upward effect of the type of person that comes here...they're going to be more of a person that wants to help out, but that also means that the town is developing in such a way that it is open to tourism and open to working in conjunction with tourists...so that creates a really nice relationship between tourists and locals. It's more of a symbiotic relationship as opposed to "one side taking more than another". (Personal communication, 2015)

### **Data collection and analysis**

Qualitative data sources and methods were triangulated (Table 1) in order to evaluate and better understand the teen participant, host community, and environmental outcomes of environmental voluntourism with teen participants (average age 16) (Creswell, 2013; Decrop, 2004). This case study research effort utilized purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013) conducting five semi-structured interviews with the community stakeholders who worked directly with the teen voluntourists on-site in Costa Rica. A total of 96 teen voluntourism respondents completed pre-programmatic open-ended surveys, either online, or via open-ended paper surveys. The teen voluntourists were broken into five separate groups of +/- 20, with each group arriving in Costa Rica at different times throughout the summer service season. At the completion of their 14-day service trip, 78 of the teens participated in six, 45 min focus groups, while 18 repeat voluntourists (teens who had participated in more than one voluntourism trip in their lives) were individually interviewed for 30 min. A total of 24 voluntourists also completed the online post-program open-ended surveys nine months after their program ended. Additionally, six parents of students participated in 30-minute telephone semi-structured interviews nine months after their teen's service trip ended.

Broadly, this qualitative research was based on the philosophical theory of interpretivism, and as such, incorporated extensive participant observation into its data collection methods in order to better evaluate and witness service projects, and the interactions between voluntourists, community members, stakeholders, and the natural environment (Creswell, 2013; Decrop, 2004). According to Decrop (2004):

**Table 1.** Overview of data collection.

Source	Type	Emphasis
Community members and stakeholders	Semi-structured interviews	Nature of coordination with teen voluntourists, opinions of voluntourists, community and environmental outcomes of service projects, desire to work with voluntourists in the future.
Teen voluntourists	Pre- and post-post surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups	Former and newfound knowledge of environmental issues in Costa Rica, former and newly adopted pro-environmental behaviors, meaningful service projects, areas for improvement, interest in future voluntourism opportunities in developing nations and domestically.
Parents of teen voluntourists	Semi-structured interviews	Long-term pro-environmental behavior change of teens and family, changes in rates of volunteerism and interest in future voluntourism opportunities, interest in environmental issues.



Interpretivism does not suggest a separation but rather an interactive and co-operative relationship between the investigator and the object of investigation. The focus is not on the quantity of information gathered but rather on its quality and richness. All aspects of observation are considered to be worthwhile: the interpretive inquirer watches, listens, feels, asks, records and examines. (p. 157)

The research team was comprised of the first author and a summer collaborative research college student. While the research team spoke proficient Spanish, a translator was retained for semi-structured interviews with community members and stakeholders. The team resided in the community of Bahia, a short distance from where the teen voluntourists were headquartered.

Pre-service survey data were evaluated using data analysis tools in Qualtrics software. Semi-structured interview data were transcribed from digital voice recorders to word processing software and coded to identify the emerging thematic trends (Creswell, 2013). Creswell's (2013), approach is interrelated and not necessarily linear/hierarchical, and incorporates organization and preparation of the data for analysis (transcribing interviews and sorting data); reading through transcriptions for meaning; coding of the data (identifying and detailing thematic trends and representative words and categories); describing settings, participants and themes for analysis; presenting the results of the analysis (a detailed discussion of several and/or interconnected themes); interpretation and analysis (answer the following question: "What were the lessons learned?"). As such, the findings below are presented through representative quote charts as well as descriptive narratives of participant responses. Presenting and evaluating descriptive narratives has proven useful in prior research as a low-inference data analysis technique for identifying themes espoused by respondents, and to describe the multiple research findings (Schneller, 2008b). Findings were validated by identifying accounts of deviant cases and discrepant information (Creswell, 2003). By including these outlying respondent perspectives, the research presents a more holistic understanding of the multiplicity of responses while also allowing for a more contextualized and descriptive participant response framework. "The prevalence or lack of discrepant information therefore allows for greater insights into the credibility of perceived patterns of phenomena identified" (Schneller, 2008b, p. 297). Data analysis also incorporated Type 1 tabulations as prescribed by Silverman (2006); percentages were assigned to some of the surveys, semi-structured interview, and focus group data to more accurately report the frequencies of responses and phenomenon.

## Results

### ***Background of teen voluntourists and motivations for participation***

Attributes of the teen respondents are first presented, followed by a discussion of the aspects of the voluntourism program teens found most influential in cultivating their pro-environmental attitudes, pro-environmental behavior change, change in rates of community and/or environmental volunteerism upon returning home, and awareness of environmental issues after participation in the voluntourism program abroad. Pre-trip surveys showed that the sample population of 96 teenagers were predisposed to civic and environmental engagement. Seventy-eight percent of respondents considered themselves to be "environmentalists." Similar to Brown and Morrison (2003) – those who volunteer in their home communities are more likely to be voluntourists – 82% of respondents were regular volunteers in their hometown communities, volunteering their time, on average, 11 h each month for civic and/or environmental causes. Eighty-nine percent of respondents had previously left the United States, while 27% had previously volunteered for civic and/or environmental causes abroad. Interestingly, 19% (18 students) were return GLA voluntourists, with 5 students having previously volunteered with GLA in Costa Rica. Additionally, 93% of respondents described that they already practiced pro-environmental behaviors, with most describing their efforts to recycle (69%), conserve water (39%), conserve energy (22%), and composting (16%). About half of the students already promoted pro-environmental behaviors amongst family members, with varying degrees of success. While 50% of the students had studied the environment at their hometown schools, only 18% of this environmental education was experiential and/or outdoors.

In the pre-trip survey, 66% (63/96) of the voluntourists stated "I am not familiar with the environmental and community issues/problems facing Costa Rica." Those who were aware of community and environmental issues generally discussed the negative effects of commercial tourism, deforestation, sea level rise, coastal erosion, loss of biological diversity, and the negative effects of plastic pollution and poor solid waste management. However, in their discussion of *reasons* for choosing to volunteer in Costa Rica, respondents broadly discussed the following factors, similar to those identified by Brown (2005) and Callanan and Thomas (2005): Costa Rica is generally safe for foreign travelers and volunteers, and was recommended by friends and/or former volunteers; the attractiveness of the culture, physical environment, and rich biological diversity of the country; the desire to learn more about marine environments and community and environmental issues in Costa Rica, and a desire to volunteer to take action to help remedy these issues; and a self-development desire to surf, swim, snorkel, and view wildlife in the Pacific Ocean (outdoor adventure pursuits, broadly).

On the last day of their two-week service trip, six 45-minute long focus group interviews were conducted with 78 teens for whom this was their first voluntourism trip, and 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students that were prior voluntourists. Prior to the research commencing it was unknown that almost 20% of the voluntourists had already completed prior voluntourism and service abroad. As such, the 18 semi-structured interviews revealed that for many of these repeat international voluntourists, despite the fact that most volunteer regularly in their home countries, the longer and more dedicated voluntourism opportunities (abroad) were attractive as an avenue (and longer time frame) to expand their dedication to the environment and civic engagement – and to travel without familial duties and the distractions of school, and any associated academic or social pressures. One student stated that "My family would probably stay at a hotel and go somewhere and sightsee. We wouldn't be volunteering with different organizations," while another expressed that "I like to volunteer a lot at my school...we have to do 15 h each year, but I did around 65 or 70 h last year...and 30 of those hours were with GLA."

Other repeat voluntourists described their interest in volunteering abroad as a means to meet like-minded youth who share similar interests in adventure, environmental protection, and civic engagement, and working to take action to remedy social and environmental problems: "At home I feel like I'm the only person that cares about volunteering, so you come here to meet everyone that wants to get together to help people and the environment – working with other volunteers, and the locals too." Another student stated: "With parents, it's just a vacation. I just want to be with other people my age that also have the same passion towards not only traveling, but also towards helping – so I think that's definitely a big factor."

### ***Influential programmatic components, change in pro-environmental behaviors and rate of community volunteerism, and awareness of environmental issues***

Individual semi-structured interviews with teen voluntourists that had completed more than one voluntourism trip showed (broadly) a new-found interest in environmental issues. Thirty-one percent (5/16) volunteered more upon returning home, and 87% (14/16) began practicing new pro-environmental behaviors upon returning home (Table 2). Self-reported changes in time spent volunteering after students left their country of service was less prevalent (than pro-environmental behavior change) due to time constraints of school and family; however, their desire to attend another GLA voluntourism program, and to volunteer abroad again, was bolstered. As opposed to volunteering more, voluntourists were much more successful at practicing new pro-environmental behaviors after they returned home. Among the 18 teens that had already completed at least one voluntourism program, the semi-structured interview data below was obtained from a female student that had completed one GLA voluntourism trip in the north of Costa Rica, one year prior to this interview.



**Table 2.** Repeat teen voluntourist outcomes: representative quotes.

Pro-environmental behavior change	Change in time spent volunteering	Newfound interest in environmental issues
<p>I was more focused on using less because that is something we really focused on.</p> <p>I was more conscious of small things like not leaving the water running and not taking super long showers.</p> <p>I have been more conscious when I take showers...shorter. And when I see trash, I am more likely to pick it up. I definitely did change my behavior. I would pick up a little bit more of the trash that was on the ground, I'd tell my friends to recycle and stuff like that, but my family was already really environmentally conscious.</p>	<p>I joined the green club at my school and I am actually going to be President next year, which I wasn't involved in before because I wasn't really focused on that...probably due to my GLA trip last year to the Dominican Republic. I know there are issues with the environment, but I never saw how it affected other people.</p> <p>At school I started a club with a couple friends and we go to "Dog and Kitty City" to volunteer. We go for at least two hours each week. I honestly think that if I didn't go volunteer in the Dominican Republic then we wouldn't have started the club...I think it's a really big component.</p>	<p>I talked to GeoPorter and asked if I can set up Geoporter at my school in Israel. Also with the Coast to Coast [conservation] project, there's a curriculum that could be introduced in my school. I wouldn't have known about that unless I came on GLA.</p> <p>The relationship that the locals have with the government. The local fisheries, they want to be in charge of their own companies and industries. Locals and tourists.</p> <p>I think it's interesting how much we really affect the ocean, even with how far we could be from the ocean.</p> <p>People put trash in the ocean. That giant island of plastic in the middle of the Pacific. I am aware of that after coming back from different GLA trips. I have become more aware of what people are doing to these places.</p> <p>Everything in the ocean affects us and I didn't really make that connection before. And what we do here affects the ocean. Giant garbage patches in the oceans, those are going to be there forever.</p> <p>The community issue that most struck me was that companies from America taking over the resources from the Costa Rican people without any rewards to them. It's kind of like exploiting them.</p> <p>I never knew about the Pacific garbage patch and I didn't know it was getting bad. After [creating] our Public Service Announcements about the mangroves, I learned about ecosystems and effects on the economy. It would be \$6 million dollars to make a new [water] purification plant, which is crazy. So, it really just shows the importance to protecting what we have.</p>

Interviewer: After you returned home from the GLA program last summer, to what extent did you change your pro-environmental behaviors, and to what extent do you attribute this to your participation in GLA?

Student: I started recycling more, I would pick up a lot of trash, and I volunteered at the food bank.

Interviewer: You think that's because you went to Costa Rica to volunteer?

Student: Yes. I also am conserving a lot of water...it's really dry.

Interviewer: Explain how you conserved water when you went home?

Student: I would take shorter showers...and military showers!

Interviewer: You still do that now when you're home in the southwest?

Student: Yes, immediately after I got informed, and it's just a habit now, and I still do it.<sup>2</sup>

Interviews showed that repeat students also had the ability to compare their multiple experiences, and offered ideas for improving the relationship between voluntourists and community stakeholders. A repeat voluntourist from Israel compared her voluntourism experiences in the Dominican Republic to that of her experiences in Costa Rica:

In the Dominican Republic we ate with locals, and we talked with them, they showed us around the community, and we really, really connected with them. And I understand that if the locals here [in Costa Rica] didn't want

that, because they might feel uncomfortable with us intruding, they might feel like it's a *show*, and not a *visit*...if that's the case then my concern is for them, but if not, I think it would be cool to maybe add that to the Costa Rican program.

During post-program focus groups the majority of the first time voluntourists described their new-found interest in environmental issues. These students came away from the program with a heightened interest in – and were most frequently influenced by their direct exposure to – issues related to solid waste management (marine-based plastic pollution), sea level rise, unsustainable tourism development and activities, water conservation, sustainable food systems, loss of species habitat and biological diversity, and fisheries by-catch (shark, dolphin, and sea turtles). As a result, first time voluntourists verbally stated their intention to (1) start practicing new pro-environmental behaviors, (2) promote pro-environmental behaviors amongst friends and family members, and to (3) volunteer in their home communities (Table 3).

Follow-up online surveys were distributed nine months after the summer voluntourism program ended; 27% (24/89) of former voluntourists responded to, and fully completed the post-post program survey.<sup>3</sup> Almost all (23/24) of the respondents explained that they had begun to practice new pro-environmental behaviors (to varying extents) after they returned home from their service trip to Costa Rica. When asked “Please explain how your pro-environmental behaviors have changed as a result of your participation in GLA Protecting the Pacific Program,” respondents explained the following:

- Student: Because of my participation in the GLA program I'm more conscious of how much plastic I use. For instance, instead of reaching for another plastic water bottle, I purchased an environmental friendly water bottle and reuse it. I've also become more aware of the environment, and use more environmentally friendly products, and try to spread the word about ocean pollution as much as I can to make people realize what is happening in our oceans.
- Student: Overall I'm more aware of the actions of myself and others. I am more cautious of my actions now that I am better educated on the consequences. I no longer just toss a plastic bottle in the trash without considering where it may end up. I am more careful to reuse things and always carry a reusable water bottle to prevent the waste created by disposables. I am also more aware of the amount of plastic packaging on food I eat everyday. With this awareness, I have decided to cut back my intake of plastic packaged products and, in turn, I have started to eat, and live healthier.
- Student: I have started to implement more “earth friendly” alternatives to my everyday routines. For instance, I take shorter showers, use less water when I brush my teeth, recycle paper and other materials that people don't think of, and I also take my bike to school instead of driving
- Student: I am more aware on my actions, and whether or not they help give a positive impact towards the environment, and I have a deeper appreciation towards nature overall. Also, I have become more “eco-friendly” in a sense, and re-using things that can be reused.

In post programmatic surveys 45% (11/24) of respondents stated that as a result of their Costa Rican volunteerism they had increased their rates of volunteerism in their home communities<sup>4</sup>.

- Student: I have always been concerned about environmental issues and I try to involve myself in activism, but I think I am more likely to be aware of what's around me, and if I see plastic on the ground I'll be more likely to pick it up. My participation in environmental activism in particular has increased. I've joined several new groups and I want to work with more people my age and encourage them to get involved.
- Student: I have participated in extensive community outreach, including volunteering at women's shelters and with at-risk youth. I also plan on returning to South America in July. I will be traveling with GLA to Peru and Guatemala.
- Student: I am involved with more environmental programs than I was before, and I have done beach and riverside clean-up projects—both on my own and with others—and do more volunteer work in other areas as well.
- Student: After my participation in the GLA program I realized the importance of volunteering and have continued to volunteer more, in ways that help society and the environment positively.

In post programmatic surveys 83% (20/24) of respondents asked their family members to adopt or change their environmental behaviors, or to support environmental causes, after they had returned home from their service trip in Costa Rica.

**Table 3.** First time teen voluntourist outcomes: focus group representative quotes.

Intention to change pro-environmental behaviors	Intention to change rates of volunteerism	Newfound interest in environmental issues
<p>I definitely won't litter as much. It's not like I littered much...but every so often I would throw a bottle cap somewhere or something. I definitely won't do that at all.</p> <p>I'll be more conscious about the trash that I see when I'm walking and I'll pick it up instead of just ignoring it.</p> <p>At our house we have reusable bags and every time my mom goes to the grocery store, she always forgets them at home, so I am really going to get on her about that. It irritated me but I never really said anything.</p> <p>I am going to try to keep with the cold showers. Shorter showers.</p> <p>Cutting down on the use of water and showers and brushing your teeth because sometimes my family isn't very conscious about it. We leave the A/C on sometimes during the day because my mom will just forget, and lights, sometimes we just forget to turn them off and yeah, I think definitely cut down on those.</p> <p>I've become hyper aware of all the plastic I have and what I throw away, so I've started to try to get in the mindset of reusing it as much as I can, and I will definitely do that at home.</p> <p>Obviously it's not my first impulse to reuse a plastic bottle, or to <i>not</i> get a plastic bag, I still do it because it's human nature, and that's just how I grew up. I can't say those habits will completely go away after two weeks, but I'm a step closer to getting there.</p> <p>There's a representative from Geoporter that wants to bring it into Montgomery county, so I am going to ask my AP Chem teacher if he'll help us run this program, and I'll ask some of my friends to join, because I really like the idea of putting trash cans up because walking around Maryland, there is trash everywhere.</p> <p>Putting the phone down for a little bit!</p>	<p>I'm from Yemen and the war is ending right now, so a lot of messed up streets and houses, and the country can't afford to fix that by itself. So maybe I'll start an organization to clean up the community by their own people.</p> <p>I'm an animal person and I feel like helping environmental issues and protecting animals is a lot easier to achieve than helping with Medicare issues, so I wouldn't mind going and helping Ecuador with their environment. I've always wanted to save animals but GLA has helped me widen that.</p> <p>I am definitely more interested in volunteering than I was mainly because coming here gave me a bunch of ideas about what I could do, and I am actually talking about doing a partnership with Coast to Coast and my school. I already volunteer at The New England Aquarium, but at my school you can start clubs and campaigns. So that's what I want to start with, the issues I learned here.</p> <p>I want to work more on volunteering near the beach because I am lucky enough to live on the coast. Before this trip I saw it more as 'you go there for fun' but you're not really taking into consideration what's going on under the water, and everything that's affecting it. I definitely want to do beach clean ups.</p> <p>I've done two medical missions. I have gone to Kenya and I thought that health was the biggest global issue. And I didn't know that environmental issues were such a big deal, and I didn't know that this trip would make such a big impact on my life. I think that it has changed me in ways that make me want to go back and do more, and help other countries with environmental issues. I have just been so focused on medical issues and I have never broadened my horizons, and helped in other ways.</p> <p>I would like to help out communities like this where there are a bunch of stray dogs that need homes...and help them find homes.</p> <p>I would like to do more around where I live...doing beach clean ups and volunteering with organizations and community campaigns in Florida.</p>	<p>I am totally intrigued by the huge Pacific garbage patch. I am interested in that now because I want to help out the environment more and I want to clean that up. I had heard about it but I didn't know that much about it.</p> <p>Before I came here I thought that I wanted to be a doctor in Doctors Without Borders, but now I want to work with environmental issues which I had always been passionate about, but now I'm really interested in those as a career. I think a lot about the ocean and how everything that we do affects that. That wasn't really on my radar before, but now it definitely is.</p> <p>Sustainable food growing. I never really focused on that, but it was really cool because we did the hanging gardens and I really want to take that home with me. I've always heard people say 'buy local or organic' but I never really paid attention to it. I want to try to start a garden when I get home.</p> <p>Sharks, and how they are being caught in nets and thrown back into the water dead. I didn't realize how many sharks are being killed for shark fin soup... they are just having their fins cut off and thrown back into the water to die.</p> <p>Coastal erosion – how it's disintegrating. When we went to the beach and the ranger station that was abandoned... it used to be 50 meters from the highest tides, and now is really close to the beach. I didn't know the sea levels were already rising noticeably in Costa Rica.</p> <p>I didn't know that there were such things as squirrel monkeys and spider monkeys, and I didn't know that some of these species are endangered. That's not good! I love monkeys! I don't want to see them having their homes torn down. I want to make a difference. I don't want to just sit around and hope that the world gets better because it's not going to get better on its own.</p>

- Student I ask them to use less non-reusable plastic, to use less water, to collect garbage when they see some etc. They are starting to do it with me.
- Student I asked my family to start buying locally grown products and food and to switch off the lights when they are not in the room. My trip also encouraged my sister to go on a GLA trip this upcoming summer (Peru), where she is hoping to make a change.
- Student Right now, my family often purchases big packs of individual water bottles instead of investing in a water filter, so it's incredibly scary in my eyes how much of those water bottles will end up in the ocean or our rivers, so I encouraged my mom to invest in a water filter, but that didn't work out to well, so instead, my family is more aware to recycle the water bottles rather than throw it in the trash, which is a small step to a more environmentally friendly world.
- Student We've been recycling a lot more. However, after preaching the evils of plastics and their negative impacts on our world, bodies, ecosystems, etc. I'm not quite sure they're sold on attempting to minimize their use of plastics yet.
- Student I've asked my family to be more aware of their actions towards the environment and how they can help impact the world positively. They were very accepting towards the idea of changing their environmental behaviors and whatnot. However, due to it being a work in progress, it's hard to tell whether they succeeded or not...but hopefully they will.

Teen interview and survey responses were verified through six semi-structured telephone interviews with parents, nine months after the voluntourism program ended. Despite the small sample size of parents who volunteered to be interviewed, this *source triangulation* provided insights into the longer term outcomes of teen voluntourism, in relation to pro-environmental behavior change, rates of volunteerism, interest in environmental issues, and intergenerational learning. While two parents reported seeing no evidence of long-term changes in their student's pro-environmental behaviors, four parents described the following behavior changes, as well as efforts to change the pro-environmental behaviors of the family (intergenerational learning):

- Parent He will not use a plastic straw or plastic bags. He will not use plastic bottles, and he was so upset about plastic bottles, he won't even touch them. He probably wouldn't even go out with a girl who drank plastic bottled water...I'm serious!
- Parent She has an awareness now, she will never use water bottles, she is horrified by water bottles and carries her reusable bottle every day.
- Parent He came back with a whole list of things that he wanted us to do...shorter showers, not to throw out trash bags until they're full, he didn't want us to use the dishwasher as much. We tried to change...the shorter showering is difficult.
- Parent She has some new ideas about travel and ecological ways to travel, like being in less developed parts of the country, to get further away, and to experience culture. In so much as it affects the people that live there, she felt like it was better to give those smaller towns the influx of tourism dollars instead of a corporate hotel. Her words about tourism and local economies did have an effect on me. I went to Hawaii last year and made it a point to seek out less commercialized venues, and local restaurants and vendors. She is still pretty aware and has continued to have renewed enthusiasm.
- Parent The deepest impression was that the leaders there [GLA] were impressive people to her, because they made certain choices in their lives, to live in Costa Rica and teach surfing and about the environment. Those people made an impact. But she did not come back with a fervent zeal for the environment...but she is not an issue or political type of kid.
- Parent She points out things around the house that we can do differently. We totally stopped buying water bottles now. She recently asked her father to look into solar as a resource. She's definitely tuned in and the environment is a constant conversation in our house.
- Parent Oh yes definitely! We weren't allowed to use straws and we weren't allowed to put lids on our cups. No more water bottles in the house. We did do some of the stuff she asked us to do. We're hardly using water bottles or straws. We're more conscious of it because of her urging.

Data collected from parents about increases in student rates of volunteerism after the program ended, paralleled the self-reported data that were collected from students: increases in rates of volunteerism after the program ended were notably lower than increases in pro-environmental behavior change. The two parent responses below did however explain instances of students increasing their rates of volunteerism after the program ended.

- Parent She completed a service project that reflected her interest in the environment. She sent out a letter to all of the neighbors and collected light bulbs, batteries, and paint, and did the research about where to recycle all these things...and she wants to continue doing this. She has helped to place bins at tennis clubs to collect used tennis

(continued)

shoes to distribute to the homeless, so it's a recycle and reuse [project]. And she has continued to do this to help homeless people. My [other] oldest daughter who also went on GLA really now wants to do the Peace Corps in Africa.

Parent She started a new club at school to clean up trash...she got a much better understanding after [the program], and is taking a more active role in it.

Similar to the findings of Starr (1994), interviews and surveys with both the students and their parents resulted in unexpected robust findings in relation to changes (or bolstering) of longer term academic and life/career paths, after completion of their service trip in Costa Rica. While this was not an explicit line of questioning in the surveys, interviews, or focus groups, respondents freely volunteered this information. The descriptive narratives below provided evidence that for some of the teens who had a pre-existing interest in environmental protection and/or service, their voluntourism experiences expanded this knowledge base and solidified their determination to work for environmental and civic causes. Furthermore, those who stated a pre-existing interest in environmental studies and sciences (academically) described a solidified commitment to this path, while others described acquiring a new-found interest in environmental academic studies.

- Parent After she returned she decided to take AP environmental science. She is very interested in majoring in environmental sciences. I can't say that it's a direct reflection of GLA, but it's something that has been growing.
- Parent She's always wanted to go to law school, but now she wants to study environmental law. The trip was definitely a big eye opener for her. She went to see the trash. Sometimes when you read about it, it's really different than if you actually see everything
- Parent When she went to apply to colleges she changed her focus from the big city colleges, to the University of Oregon in no small part because there is a little more environmental awareness, more hiking, and it's not in a big city. Being in Costa Rica and being outside, and being so close to the environment had a big effect on her, and she enjoyed that, and wants to do more of that. She deliberately chose a university that has more of those opportunities.
- Student I am even more solidified in my aspirations to join the Peace Corps
- Student I'm actually going to major in biology in college...I have kind of been unsure about it but I am realizing on this trip that I really, really like it...that I'm not going to get bored in biology or talking about plants.
- Student I really want to work for GLA and be a mentor, and I also want to be in the Peace Corps...really, really badly.
- Student I've always wanted to volunteer abroad and major in environmental studies. I think this trip really confirmed what I'd like to do for the rest of my life.
- Student I want to work for the environment and communities. I'm really grateful that this trip has given me more insight into what I really like.
- Student: Before I went on this trip I had my mind set on history and creative writing for college, and now it's entirely environmental.
- Interviewer Do you think your voluntourism experience had an effect on that?
- Student Oh entirely, entirely. Because I just didn't know about these problems then.

### ***Stakeholder and community member perceptions of voluntourists and project outcomes***

Semi-structured interviews with the five stakeholders and one community member whose organizations coordinated and *directly benefitted* from voluntourism projects during the summer of 2015 provided a better understanding of the host community and environmental outcomes of the projects, as well as respondent perceptions of teen voluntourists working in their community. The community and environmental projects undertaken were diverse enough to provide benefits in relation to the three overarching components of sustainable development: social, economic, and environmental. Stakeholder respondents detailed predominantly positive outcomes of specific projects (Table 4), which included community and school beautification; litter mapping studies and abatement; repurposing refuse; working with community youth (education and outreach); mangrove nursery construction and habitat restoration; and gardening (non-profit) and nursery construction (small scale commercial harvests of produce, for-profit). Interview respondents overwhelmingly perceived these projects as meaningful, with immediate benefits, noting "The way that they [voluntourists] work with the locals...it's not just a display or a showcase" (Geoporter researcher, personal communication, 2015).

**Table 4.** Stakeholder and community member perceptions of voluntourism projects.

Projects undertaken	Environmental and community outcomes	Perceptions of teen voluntourists
<p>They have painted the school and trash cans, worked with our students, and they built bio gardens for the kitchen sinks. It's a great project and it works excellent. The parents, student, and staff are very happy that the school is starting to look better (Director of Elementary School)</p> <p>They have painted the salon and built the tree nursery on my property. (Farm/property owner, 34 yr. resident).</p> <p>I have worked with 200 of these students on our Clean Streets Clean Waters Project, understanding the trash problem in Bahia Ballena [NP]. They have been involved in the methodology of the programs within the community, using GPS to map garbage and validating data. (Geoporter researcher)</p> <p>They worked with the children of Forjando Alas, have integrated themselves, and brought project ideas to the table...for painting, maintenance, gardening, and visiting several homes to do such things as hanging gardens. Three major benefits that I have seen is that they really want to work with the kids, they love the work, and they help motivate the kids and make them feel really good about themselves. (NGO Project Manager, Forjando Alas)</p> <p>They came to my house to install the hanging gardens along with gutters. (community member)</p>	<p>The biogardens have been a huge benefit environmentally, cleaning the dirty water from the schools...and the addition of the garbage cans have greatly improved the trash situation in the community. (Director of Elementary School)</p> <p>I have seen this group picking up garbage, which is good, and also working with trees, for environmental protection, which will also help with the water situation. (Farm/property owner, 34 yr. resident).</p> <p>They helped to provide rain gardens for the national park, something that's extremely valuable to the community. To really be able to provide mechanisms to help control impacts from the constant tourism. With change and development comes environmental impacts too...and with rain gardens, and painting the facilities...that makes a huge impact on the community. (Geoporter researcher)</p> <p>They have brought a mentality of environmentalism. Going into people's homes brings a certain kind of consciousness to the people...of having gardens, being able to grow food, and eat healthier...that is going to be better for the environment and generally, the consciousness they bring to the people of our community. (NGO Project Manager, Forjando Alas)</p> <p>The work they do at the beach is very important...cleaning up garbage is a daily job. Also replanting trees from their mangrove nursery is very important work. The work they do with the kids is also really important, for the locals to have exposure to people from around the world, helping teach English. (community member)</p>	<p>My impression is that the teens are dedicated and responsible, and this experience has been completely positive. I would work with them again. (Director of Elementary School)</p> <p>From working with them I have learned the importance of taking care of the environment...this is what people down here can learn from working with people from the outside. I'm part of a community group that is looking for opportunities taking care of the environment, like cleaning the beach, picking up garbage, and reforestation. I would be interested in working with these students again (Farm/property owner, 34 yr. resident).</p> <p>Seeing people become involved is great, and it gives local students in this community a different perspective. The way that they [voluntourists] work with the locals... it's not just a display or a showcase. We have a three- month period where we get to meet with several groups, and it becomes a longer lasting impact. (Geoporter researcher)</p> <p>The foundation is very open to working with these students in the future. They have a very strong will to help and it's a motivating factor for the people from here when they have outsiders come in. They could be spokespeople for the community on how to take care of the environment better, recycle their bottles, and they could be spokespeople for the community to future tourists. They could expand their good work into other communities. (NGO Project Manager, Forjando Alas)</p> <p>I thought that I was going to have to tell them what to do, but they were organized. On one occasion after they left, the smaller kids were saying how nice it was, and they didn't think it was going to be so fun to play with the tourists, but that it was really cool...they had a great time. (community member)</p>

However, while respondents described that this group of teen voluntourists were mostly “dedicated and responsible,” positively affecting community pro-environmental behaviors and the “mentality of environmentalism” in the community – there were two discrepant accounts. A community member described a minor situation at the youth community center in a negative light: “Some of the students aren't very into it, or motivated from it. On Wednesday when they came here I felt that some of them were just trying to finish really quickly” (community member, personal communication,



2015). The coordinator of Forjando Alas mentioned another minor situation that ironically resulted in a positive outcome:

One negative consequence I have noticed is that the students are not accustomed to the climate of this area and sometimes they do things such as purchase large amounts of bottled water when they come to Forjando Alas. Sometimes they leave these bottles here when they leave, although we have been able to use them here for things such as the hanging gardens! (Personal communication, 2015)

And while observations of the multiple community and environmental projects were predominantly positive, a Geoporter representative provided insight into prior year's instances [with a different voluntourism company] where the experiences and work of the teen voluntourists were not as impactful for the community, environment, and the volunteers themselves:

I have worked with other organizations in other communities, where they're focused on numbers and turn-around...it's a numbers game. But with this group [Global Leadership Adventures], they are focused on the quality of the students, what is best for the community members, as well as the students. And so it's this balance that makes it beneficial as a whole. (Personal communication, 2015)

## Discussion

Influencing the pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors of learners is one of the most important components of effective teen voluntourism programs. Measured changes in environmental behaviors, well thought out and meaningful experiential components, as well as deliberately designed programs that teach behavior change methods (Ramsey, Hungerford, & Tomera, 1989), are paramount for instigating and sustaining long-term pro-environmental behaviors, intergenerational learning, and encouraging collateral learning (Dewey, 1938). John Dewey (1938) described (and promoted) *collateral learning* whereby educators should strive to not just relay information, but to facilitate meaningful experiences for participants that result in the desire for more educative experiences. This is especially important for teen voluntourists proceeding through their maturation process (Steinberg, 2002), and who may be developing plans for their longer term academic and life/career paths (Starr, 1994). Program designers should have a heightened understanding of the developmental and maturation process of teens and voluntourist desires. In poorly designed and extremely informal educational programs, Ramsey et al. (1989) point out issues related to sustainability of pro-environmental behaviors as well as a lack of collateral learning. And according to Schneller (2008a), "Teaching explicitly for pro-environmental behavior without addressing the affective domain or broader environmental and social issues has potential short-term benefits but engenders longer term deficiencies such as loss of pro-environmental behaviors, lack of environmental consciousness expansion, and personal meaning" (p. 39). In this sense, the GLA program in Costa Rica was designed to be programmatic (from a service learning perspective), in that it was sequential in nature (not a one-time infusion lesson), and first introduced students to issues, theory, and concepts, and later incorporated pertinent experiential hands-on service learning components.

Of note concerning the positive perceptions of the community stakeholders (towards voluntourists and the service projects) was the increased attention and planning given to the community and environmental service projects undertaken in Bahia and Uvita. Also key were the discussions, debriefings, and environmental education taught to the teen voluntourists. Protecting the Pacific was implemented by community educators (fixers) from the Bodhi Surf School: one native Costa Rican, a Canadian, and two Americans, one of whom is a former Peace Corps volunteer and environmental educator. These individuals fully embrace and promote an ethic of sustainability in their teaching and community organizing efforts.

From a behavioral perspective, the voluntourism experiences and the associated environmental lessons were meaningful enough that by the end of the program, most first-time voluntourists were willing to make verbal commitments (during focus groups) to begin practicing pro-environmental behaviors upon returning home from their service trip. Follow-up online surveys conducted nine

months after first-time voluntourists' service trip ended documented high success rates as well as the pro-environmental behaviors that were adopted. Additionally, 83% (20/24) of the first time respondents also asked their family members to adopt or change their environmental behaviors, or to support environmental causes, after they had returned home from their service trip (with varying degrees of success). Parents confirmed these changes in student pro-environmental behaviors, as well as the efforts on the part of the students to change the pro-environmental behaviors of family members. For voluntourists that had completed more than one service trip, interviews showed that 87% (14/16) began practicing pro-environmental behaviors upon returning home from their first voluntourism foray abroad.

In response to Ardoin et al. (2015), the Costa Rican case presents one avenue through which pro-environmental behaviors can be extended once voluntourists return home. Managers should note and build upon the commitment of the GLA community fixers in their ability to work with the departing teens to develop future behavioral action plans, which included the distribution of follow-up online communications (including the signing of Bodhi Surf School's *Ocean Guardian Pledge* and monthly email "action alerts"). Such post-programmatic communications may help to instigate and sustain longer term pro-environmental behavior change and issue awareness (Bodhi Surf School, 2016). This is consistent with Lave and Wenger's (1991) discussion of the importance of "learning curriculums" which have the potential to offer opportunities for *membership* and the development of practice which "is thus characteristic of a community" (p. 97). Therefore, as teen voluntourists stay engaged as certified *Ocean Guardians* (beyond the GLA experience) they might be more committed to new and longer term pro-environmental behavior change, community and environmental issue engagement, and intergenerational learning.

After leaving Costa Rica the longer term data showed much lower instances of students increasing their rates of volunteerism. Among first time voluntourists, 45% (11/24) stated that as a result of their Costa Rican voluntourism trip they had increased their rates of volunteerism. And among repeat voluntourists, only 31% (5/16) stated that they had volunteered more upon returning home from their first voluntourism experience. Parents too, corroborated this low frequency. Despite the low frequency of increases in rates of volunteerism, a 31% increase is still a reportable gain. It is understandable that many of the teens lead busy lives with school and family, and that for many, the existing average of 11 volunteer hours per month is difficult to increase. Furthermore, for many students, the time spent volunteering on the actual voluntourism trip represented their greatest contribution during the year. Finally, the phenomenon of students completing more than one voluntourism service trip sequentially in the same summer, or over the course of two to three years, was also an encouraging finding in terms of students' continued interest in civic and environmental engagement, and travel abroad.

Managers should consider designing a suite of educational, community interaction, and environmental service experiences. For instance, at pre-program only 44% of student respondents could identify environmental or community issues facing Costa Rica.; however, as a result of the abovementioned components, all respondents eventually had the ability to discuss, and had an awareness of, environmental issues facing the community and country. Additional components for consideration should include daily site visits, interactions with stakeholders and locals, nightly discussions and service debriefings, lectures, videos, and experiential environmental education programs. Confirming the importance of this suite of activities were the post program focus groups, online surveys, and semi-structured interviews.

Costa Rican community stakeholders had favorable opinions about teen voluntourists working in their community, as well as favorable opinions regarding the service outcomes for the host community and the environment. All of the community stakeholders were interested in working with the GLA voluntourists in the future, and described most of the teens as motivated, responsible, and influential in terms of promoting and modeling civic and environmental responsibility. The civic and environmental service projects that were conducted during the course of this research were authentic and meaningful. Students worked hard in extreme conditions and there were measurable outcomes:

number of mangrove propagules planted in Marino Ballena National Park; functionality of biogardens; pounds of garbage and debris removed from streets and beaches; data collection; informational signs painted and installed; and plant nursery construction. In no way were these service projects novel, symbolic, or orchestrated for the sole purposes of facilitating a for-profit business model focused on “adventure and service teen tours to exotic locations.” Managers should note that the most commonly stated recommendation from the teen voluntourists was to incorporate more direct interaction and time spent with community members.

The only negative or discrepant findings related to community stakeholder opinions of the student voluntourists, were in relation to one account of a few unmotivated students, their lack of experience with extreme weather, and ironically, the practice of purchasing disposable water bottles that were later repurposed (upcycled) for the construction of hanging gardens. Despite the fact that program coordinators encouraged students to purchase reusable/refillable water containers before arriving in country, and encouraged students (daily) to refill the bottles, it is possible that a small number of students purchased plastic (disposable) water bottles.

## Conclusion

This study documented that voluntourists had the ability to take their in-country experiences, new-found information (and subsequent concern), and translate it into actions, through pro-environmental behavior change, and in a few instances, heightened rates of volunteerism in their home country. In a similar vein to the elements of TL identified by Coghlan and Gooch (2011), McGehee (2012), and – who mentioned that “Volunteer tourism organizations need to invest significantly in staff training in TL” (p. 1) – the authors also discussed that the consciousness raising/frame of reference that occurs during voluntourism experiences might lead to future participation in voluntourism. This case study research found evidence of students’ (1) desire to return for a second or third voluntourism experience abroad, (2) interest in pursuing further environmental studies, academically, in high school and college, (Dewey, 1938), (3) ability to translate experiences, information, and concern, into pro-environmental behaviors, (4) new perspective on, and future interest (life path) in a career working to protect the natural environment and/or to promote healthy and vibrant communities (Starr, 1994), and (5) desire to continue traveling, exploring, and recreating abroad, and in nature.

Wearing and McGehee (2013) posited concerns that profit-driven programs may be less established within the community, and less focused on satisfying the host community. As this research relates only to data that were gathered from community stakeholders working directly with GLA and the teen voluntourists, and is not representative of a broader sampling of Uvita community members and their perceptions, this single case study is not sufficient to assess this contention. While GLA and other for-profit voluntourism companies facilitate dozens of teen voluntourism service trips throughout the country of Costa Rica, it is quite possible that many of the outcomes documented through this case study can be attributed to the fixers’ longstanding deep community connections. These individuals had the ability to design outcome oriented, meaningful, experiential education and service learning projects for voluntourists, community members, and the natural environment. While the data from this case study may not generalize to every for-profit teen voluntourism program globally, it does provide (in part) a better understanding of the key process and programmatic variables for facilitating more meaningful outcome oriented programs (Bailey & Fernando, 2011). Future research should consider the programmatic richness, quality, and outcome differences between non-profit and for-profit programs for teen voluntourists

## Notes

1. This research did not include Gap Year teenagers over 18 years of age that had already graduated from High School. Furthermore, non-English speaking voluntourism providers were not contacted, and as such, the 57,000 quoted above is likely a low estimate of global teenage voluntourism participants.

2. Northern Costa Rica is relatively arid compared to southern Costa Rica, but both experience water shortages. As such, water conservation techniques are taught in both GLA voluntourism programs.
3. Eight students left the *Protecting the Pacific* voluntourism program before its completion for various reasons, thus only 89 post-post program surveys were distributed.
4. One case that was not documented in post-program surveys included one student who returned home to Quebec, Canada to start *Bracelets for Belugas*, which utilized a small business model to purchase handmade Costa Rican "Pura Vida Bracelets," for resale. This student, along with a friend, later donated \$308 USD to the St. Lawrence Beluga Project (Whales Online, 2015).

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