Empowering Youth to Serve as Agents of Change in Diabetes Communities Abroad

Established in 1997, AYUDA (American Youth Understanding Diabetes Abroad, Inc.) is a non-profit volunteer-based organization that empowers youth to serve as agents of social change in diabetes communities throughout the world.

Our objectives

- Empower passionate youth to become leaders of social change.
- Motivate young people with diabetes to lead happier and healthier lives.
- Strengthen local diabetes communities by promoting youth leadership.

AYUDA (American Youth Understanding Diabetes Abroad, Inc.) was established in 1997 with the vision that youth can serve as agents of change in diabetes communities around the globe. AYUDA is dedicated to working with local diabetes communities to develop and implement sustainable diabetes projects throughout the world. AYUDA’s innovative peer learning model uses international volunteers as catalysts to empower young people living with diabetes around the world to form healthy habits that allow them to improve the management of their diabetes. AYUDA has established an international volunteer program that mobilizes individuals, ranging from high school students to world-class medical professionals, to support diabetes leadership programs around the globe.
Starting with programs in Ecuador in 1997, AYUDA has expanded to train over 400 volunteers who have served in over 20 countries over the last 16 years. In 2013, AYUDA is focused on programs in the Dominican Republic (DR). The two summer programs this year (2014) are Campo Amigo Dominicano and Ganémosle. During Campo Amigo Dominicano volunteers spend three weeks working together with AYUDA’s in-country partner organization and youth leaders to plan outreach and education camp activities for young people with diabetes. The Ganémosle Program, first piloted in 2012, is a nine-day opportunity for volunteers to support a national grassroots public awareness campaign and fitness events in Santo Domingo. In April 2014, AYUDA will be piloting its first-ever 9 day program in Haiti.

In 2013, AYUDA also supported other diabetes communities including Ecuador, Haiti and the Pascua Yaqui tribe in Arizona via leadership training and promotion of best practices sharing amongst AYUDA volunteers, alumni, local partners, and select diabetes communities abroad.

**Guiding Principles**

*A lack of education is as dangerous as a lack of insulin.* AYUDA was founded in reaction to seeing children with diabetes who had access to insulin and medical treatment, but still suffered complications and early death because they did know how to manage their condition. AYUDA programs address the severe lack of education by implementing our innovative youth-to-youth education model.

*Youth can serve as powerful agents of change.* Youth empowerment is the fundamental principle for AYUDA, and is also exemplified by the members on the AYUDA team. Our educational and youth leadership programs increase interaction among youth, develop awareness of their ability to impact change in their communities, and provide them with the tools and skills to do so.

*Understanding is just as important as doing.* AYUDA partners with local communities and organizations in order to better understand their issues and to help create innovative solutions. Learning and understanding cultural context is critical to developing solutions prior to taking action.
What is unique about AYUDA?

AYUDA’s model is unique because we place an awesome responsibility on our volunteers. By involving volunteers in multiple elements of our programs, we provide hands-on experiences that inspire and empower volunteers to serve as agents of social change, not only at the local level in diabetes communities abroad but in other areas of their lives as well. Our volunteers and staff work together with local youth to deliver culturally appropriate and effective programs that are specifically based on the needs of the community.

Volunteers contribute a major part of the running costs of AYUDA’s programs, including the sponsorship of local diabetes projects. Without the dedication of individual volunteers, AYUDA would not be able to implement our programs to support local diabetes communities.
Frequently Used Terminology

AAV – Stands for “Aprendiendo A Vivir” and is AYUDA’s Local Partner in the Dominican Republic

AYUDA - American Youth Understanding Diabetes Abroad, Inc.

Experienced Volunteers – AYUDA volunteers who apply to return to volunteer with AYUDA abroad. Experienced Volunteers take on additional leadership roles primarily by supporting volunteer recruitment activities in the U.S. and volunteer orientation activities abroad.

¡Juntos Somos Mas Fuertes ! – Together We Are Stronger!

Local Partners - AYUDA’s partner organizations with transparent operations and clear objectives congruent with our philosophy that provide assistance in the countries where AYUDA operates.

Professional volunteers – Health care professionals, social scientists or other professionals that provide a specialized service in cooperation with AYUDA and local partners.

Type 1 Diabetes – Absolute insulin deficiency secondary to beta cell destruction. Type 1 diabetes is also known as “juvenile diabetes” and “insulin-dependent” diabetes. AYUDA uses the term “Type 1 diabetes.”

Type 2 Diabetes – Insulin resistance secondary to progressive insulin secretory defect. Type 2 diabetes is a condition sometimes known as insulin “resistant” diabetes.

Volunteer Mentors - Experienced AYUDA volunteers who apply to take on additional programmatic roles throughout the year. Volunteer Mentors participating in site visits abroad, and play an active role in the program planning, volunteer recruitment, and volunteer training committees. Volunteer Mentors receive a stipend for their time.

Youth Volunteers – Those volunteers ranging in age from high school students to graduate students who have defined roles based on the volunteer program.

On Youth Empowerment
AYUDA’s education and programs rely on the “youth-to-youth” model - AYUDA is committed to ensuring that youth are empowered by one another to become agents of social change and live happier healthier lives with diabetes. We also believe in empowering those living with diabetes through inspiring and positive messages and actions. In keeping with this, there are several terms that we prefer when discussing diabetes and people living with diabetes.

“Condition” not “Disease” – AYUDA refers to diabetes as a “condition” rather than a disease. A “condition” can be defined, as a “state of health” a neutral term which can be then defined by the user, where as a “disease” is often defined as an illness or sickness. Diabetes as a “condition” does not have to be something that is negative or detrimental.
“Living with Diabetes,” not “Diabetic” – AYUDA fully believes diabetes is an impactful part of a person’s live, but it is not the only defining element. This is why we prefer the term “living with diabetes” rather than “diabetic”.

“Living with” not “Suffering from” - We believe that diabetes is a condition to live a long, happy and healthy life with, not something to suffer from, or be “sick” from.

**Youth** - Typically refers to young people between the ages 16 - 29

**Young people** - Includes both children and youth