

# 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 dedicated to working with local diabetes communities in countries around the world to develop and implement sustainable diabetes projects.

## OUR APPROACH & OBJECTIVES

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. AYUDA aims to:

- ❖ 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.

Starting with programs in Ecuador in 1997, AYUDA has expanded to train over 750 volunteers who have served in over 20 countries throughout the last 26 years. AYUDA volunteers receive intensive preparation in AYUDA Background & Guiding Principles, Team-building & Mentorship, Fundraising & Social Entrepreneurship, Living with Diabetes, and Cultural Training & Country Program to be intentional, active practitioners in their work abroad. In 2024, AYUDA is focused on its flagship Campo Amigo program in the Dominican Republic (DR). During Campo Amigo, volunteers will spend two and a half weeks working together with AYUDA's Local Partner organization, Aprendiendo a Vivir (AAV), and its Dominican youth leaders to plan outreach and educational camp activities for young people with diabetes in Santo Domingo. Volunteers will additionally have the opportunity to conduct workshops with adults living with types 1 and 2 diabetes in provinces outside of Santo Domingo, such as San Pedro de Macorís and San Cristóbal.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*A lack of education is just 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 not know how to manage their condition. AYUDA programs address the severe lack of education by implementing our innovative youth-to-youth teaching-learning model.

*Youth can serve as powerful agents of change.* Youth empowerment is the fundamental principle of AYUDA and is also exemplified by the members of 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 around the world in order to better understand their issues and to help create innovative solutions. Learning and understanding cultural context is critical to developing sustainable solutions prior to taking action.

## WHAT MAKES AYUDA UNIQUE

AYUDA places an awesome responsibility on our volunteers. By involving volunteers in multiple elements of our programs, we provide hands-on experiences that inspire and empower them 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 in the countries where we run programs to deliver culturally appropriate and effective programs that are specifically based on the needs of the community with an eye toward long-term sustainability.

Volunteers contribute a major part of the costs to run 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.

## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT & ORGANIZATIONAL TERMINOLOGY

AYUDA's programs rely on a "youth-to-youth" educational model. AYUDA is committed to ensuring that young people are motivated and prepared 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, positive messages and actions that elevate the dignity and worth of each and every person with whom we collaborate and interact during our diabetes education camps and workshops. In keeping with this, there are several terms that we use when discussing diabetes and people living with diabetes.

### WHO WE ARE

- **AYUDA** – American Youth Understanding Diabetes Abroad, Inc.
- **AAV** – Aprendiendo A Vivir, AYUDA's Local Partner in the DR
- **¡Juntos Somos Más Fuertes!** – Together We Are Stronger!

### DIABETES

- **Type 1 Diabetes** – Absolute insulin deficiency secondary to beta cell destruction, also known as "insulin-dependent" diabetes. AYUDA uses the term "type 1 diabetes."
- **Type 2 Diabetes** – Insulin resistance secondary to progressive insulin secretory defect, also known as "insulin-resistant" diabetes. AYUDA uses the term "type 2 diabetes."
- **"Condition" not "Disease"** – A "condition" can be defined as a "state of health," a neutral term that can then be defined by the user. However, a "disease" is often defined as an illness or sickness. AYUDA refers to diabetes as a "condition" rather than a disease. 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 life, 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 with which you can live a long, happy, and healthy life, not something from which one suffers or is sick.

### OUR PEOPLE

- **Youth** – Typically refers to individuals between the ages of 16 and 29.
- **Young People** – Includes both children and youth.
- **Youth Volunteers** – Those volunteers ranging in age from high school students to young professionals who have defined roles based on the volunteer program.
- **Local Partners** – AYUDA's partner organizations with transparent operations and clear objectives

congruent with our philosophy that provide assistance to local diabetes communities year-round in the countries where AYUDA operates.

- **Experienced Volunteers** – AYUDA volunteers who apply to go abroad again with AYUDA. They do not assume additional responsibilities beyond those of being a volunteer.
- **Volunteer Mentors-in-Training (VMiTs)** – Experienced AYUDA volunteers who have participated in at least one AYUDA program who apply to go abroad again with AYUDA in a leadership training position. VMiTs take on additional leadership roles primarily by supporting volunteer recruitment activities in the US and volunteer orientation activities in the US and abroad. VMiTs receive a stipend and leadership and fundraising credits for their time.
- **Volunteer Mentors (VMs)** – Experienced AYUDA volunteers who have participated in at least two AYUDA programs who apply to take on additional programmatic leadership roles throughout the year. VMs play an active role in the program planning, volunteer recruitment, and volunteer training committees in the US and abroad. They oversee groups of five to 10 new volunteers and train VMiTs. They also act as liaison with the local youth volunteers. VMs receive a stipend and leadership and fundraising credits for their time.
- **Program Leaders (PLs)** – Experienced AYUDA volunteers who have participated in at least three AYUDA programs and are 21 years of age or older who are asked to come on as junior staff members to play an active role in the strategy and execution of volunteer recruitment, volunteer training, in-country programming, and monitoring & evaluation. PLs support pre-program coordination with Local Partners and manage in-country collaboration with Local Partner team. PLs receive a stipend and leadership and fundraising credits for their time.
- **Health Care Professional Volunteers (HCPs)** – HCPs are nurses, nurse practitioners, dietitians, doctors, certified diabetes educators, or other qualified medical professionals that provide a specialized service in cooperation with AYUDA and Local Partners. HCPs act as medial liaison for the AYUDA volunteer team should there be a medical concern and provide knowledge and expertise to the activity-planning process for the diabetes camps and workshops.