

Toni Sander, PT, DPT, MS, CLT-LANA

Health Volunteers Overseas (HVO) is a unique organization that attracts unique people. When I am with other HVO volunteers I feel an immediate sense of family, even if we are meeting for the first time. The chatter quickly goes to 'where have you been' and 'what have you done' through your HVO trips. But the connection is much deeper than that. There are shared, often unspoken, values in the work that we do in developing countries which bond volunteers together.

With other volunteers I don't have to explain why I love this work – the allure of travel to places that are not on the 'tourist routes,' and the opportunity to teach and share my skills to improve international health care. HVO volunteers understand that they are building on what others have done before them so that the total effort is sustainable and meets the needs of the host country. Other volunteers share my respect for local health care providers world-wide who often work in sub-optimal conditions. All of us have developed friendships through our trips that extend far beyond our travels.

I don't have to assure other volunteers that each trip I take is safe and well-planned. While I may travel alone to a site, I am never alone because of the support of HVO. The nuances of living in another culture and without our modern conveniences can be easily shared with other volunteers. These conversations broaden my perspective and give me tools for working through cultural differences that will surely be part of my next trip.

My friends and family often see my HVO work as 'noble' and full of hardships that exceed any benefits to me personally. Simply, they don't understand why I do what I do. When I am with other HVO volunteers there is a connection. We don't put each other on pedestals because of the work that we do. We just do the work that needs to be done. In the community of other volunteers I am not questioned, I don't have to explain. I am understood. I belong. I am at home.

Antoinette Sander, PT, DPT, MS, CLT-LANA has been a member of Health Volunteers Overseas since 2005. Since her first physical therapy assignment in Peru, Dr. Sander has contributed significantly to the continued development and implementation of HVO programs in developing countries. In 2007, she joined the Physical Therapy Steering Committee and became the Physical Therapy: Vellore, India program direction in September of 2011. She has traveled to India, Peru and Haiti on four separate overseas assignments. Dr. Sander received her DPT from Arizona State University, Physical Therapy in 2005 and is an Associate Professor Emerita in Physical Therapy and Human Movement Sciences at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.