

Career Day @ Mercy Corps

When: Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2015 from 9 am to 2 pm
Where: Mercy Corps Action Center, 28 SW 1st Ave, downtown Portland
Industry: Humanitarian aid
Careers: Nonprofit management, crisis management, communications, intl. development
Deadline: First-come, first-serve. Registration closes Friday, Nov. 13.
Notes: Check-in starts at 8:45 am. Students should bring own lunch or expect to buy one.

What is Mercy Corps, anyway? It's an international humanitarian aid organization based in Portland. It specializes in community-based development projects in more than 40 countries.

How did it get started? How did it grow? The organization began as the Save the Refugees Fund, a task force to help Cambodian refugees fleeing famine and war. It evolved into Mercy Corps and, in 1984, moved its headquarters from Seattle to Portland. Over the next decade, the organization fought war, poverty and hunger in Sudan, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Bosnia and Kosovo. By the mid-1990s, the organization began talking more about human rights and civil society. It continued to grow, working everywhere from India to Guatemala (and even in the Northwest, through a program that helps low-income people find self-sufficiency).

What about Mercy Corps' work in the past several years? Their highest-profile work has involved a massive earthquake in Haiti, a terrible drought in Africa and a humanitarian crisis in Syria.

What makes Mercy Corps special? It's proud of relying on local people to solve problems, rather than swooping in as outsiders with grand solutions. It says: "95 percent of our employees are nationals of the countries where they work. They personify our core belief in local solutions to local problems. Our programs are led by people of the region who speak its language, know its history, and actively invest in developing its human network. Our field teams work with local residents – who deeply comprehend the challenges and have the greatest stake in how they are solved – in designing and pursuing the best strategies for their communities."

What's the big deal about having Mercy Corps headquartered in Portland? Oregon isn't known for having a lot of global headquarters, so it's noteworthy to have one of the world's most ambitious aid organizations right here in our midst.

Favorite fact: In 2000, Mercy Corps shipped 71,000 apple trees from Oregon to North Korea.

What will students do at their career day? They will learn about careers in international development for long-term solutions to poverty. They will work in groups on a hypothetical case study in Indonesia, where they will develop a needs assessment and role-play what it would be like to work at Mercy Corps in fields such as communications, development and technical assistance. Students will meet staff working on those teams to hear about their career paths.

*Check out Portland Workforce Alliance's full calendar of career days for 2015-16:
www.portlandworkforcealliance.org/events*