



# The Volunteer

Sharing God's love through acts of service

## AS THE WORLD CHANGES...

### ...We find joy in the now

By Kara Miller



In the small town of Elgin, Illinois, life moves rather slowly. When I first moved to Elgin, I was like many of the other volunteers from my unit; I was dreaming of the things that would come from my year of service. Already knowing my colleague and friend, Liana Smith, helped with the transition. Work in the office was steady and busy in the time of preparation for summer workcamps. We delighted in coming up with workcamp locations, going on site visits, and constructing the theme for the summer: 'Voices for Peace'. Like many, we remained hopeful that despite the news of COVID-19, we would be able to run workcamps in June or July. But as news continued about the health and safety of others, our plans for what the summer would look like changed drastically. Working from home would soon be the new normal.

In the small town of Lititz, Pennsylvania, life feels calm. I moved home in mid-March when our office temporarily closed. While the fast pace of office work continues, the small bubble I work in stays the same with my two furry pups and a large cup of coffee. As the news of COVID-19 evolves, so, too, do the exciting creations that are coming from the workcamp office. Social media live streams, singalongs, and plans for virtual workcamps are underway. While the world changes, the best thing to do is find highlights in the life that is happening now. There has never been a better time to try new things out of your comfort zone. So, we cuddle up with our loved ones and continue to work with just as much drive! 🌿

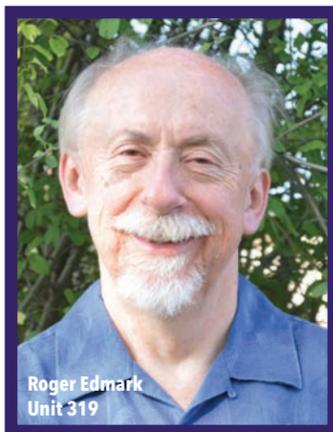


Workcamp Registrations- BVS Staff

The following contributions come from current BVS volunteers and staff. Hear stories of laughter, connection, appreciation, and blessing as staff and volunteers' worlds alike have changed in this time of uncertainty.

### ...We continue to find "Mountain Top" experiences

By Roger Edmark



I have heard the phrase "expect the unexpected", but we generally do not. Most things happen as they should. Small variations might occur, but we are built to handle the majority. Occasionally, a big event throws us for a loop, but we regroup and move on. Kathy and I moved in August 2019 to come to Hiroshima, Japan's World Friendship Center (WFC). We knew approximately what we were going to do, but within four days of instruction, we were immersed in the many duties



Kathy and Roger, Silver Ball near Honkawa River

we were expected to carry out. It was tiring at times but rewarding.

The primary mission of the World Friendship Center is to connect people from all over the world; "foster peace, one friend at a time", and it is a center for peace studies.

We also spend many hours interacting with locals either as volunteers and staff, or as students in the ten conversational English classes we lead. For locals, there are few opportunities to practice and improve their command of the English language. The classes help. The interactions, friendships, and fun have been the most rewarding.

Boy did everything change! In mid-February, we began receiving cancellations. Six months of reservations were cancelled. By mid-April, Japan declared a state of emergency. Everyone was to stay home – no classes. The world changed within a short time. Everything we had expected was no more. The mountain top experiences we expected were replaced by the unknown valley of the coronavirus.

What next? Classes were restructured to occur on Skype and Zoom. Students were happy to see each other again, virtually. Leadership meetings were on Zoom. Projects we did not have time to do, were now possible. Financial concerns were eased by the generous support of WFC friends.

Kathy and I began daily walks to get exercise and to get to know the city better by exploring every corner of Hiroshima. Often, even the locals have never ventured where we have gone. A favorite adventure is climbing to the top of one of the many hills that surround Hiroshima to see incredible views - a literal "mountain top" experience.

Classes are now meeting again, and we just received our first reservation for the fall. Life goes on! 🌿



View from Ryuo Park, Hiroshima

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## Upcoming Orientations:

- **Summer Unit #325**  
July 19-August 7, 2020  
Location: Virtual Orientation
- **BRF Unit #326**  
August 16-August 24, 2020  
Location: TBD
- **Fall Unit #327**  
September 20-October 9, 2020  
Location: Camp Brethren Heights  
— Rodney, MI

## By the Numbers:

- **Active Volunteers – 22**  
15 in the United States  
2 in Europe  
1 in Latin America  
4 in Japan
- **Active Projects – 63**  
44 in the United States  
7 in Europe  
4 in Latin America  
1 in South America  
2 in Japan  
4 in Africa  
1 in China

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## ...I change with it

By Colin Keiper

I joined BVS for a few reasons, but the most prominent was the desire to test my limits and try new things. I am not naturally one to leave my comfort zone, at least not without good reason. While I appreciate that it is necessary to focus on your strengths, I also know it is important to not box yourself into one area of experience. I know that I will likely not be a world traveler, and there are several fields of work that I will almost certainly not enter. However, these experiences are important to leading a fulfilling life, so I decided to devote time to them while I could.

In that sense, the chaos and uncertainty of the pandemic response fit perfectly with my goal. With the help of the BVS staff, I adapted to the sudden loss of my role in my old project and found a new role at a new project. There was a lot of uncertainty and unexpected challenges, but in some ways, that is exactly what I was searching for in BVS. I did not enjoy it in the moment, but I knew I needed it to test my resiliency.

With each new change, I did my best to adapt to new circumstances and find support when I needed it. The entire world is too wide for me to understand, but my own little world has changed more than ever.

From my orientation, travel, and work at my first project, to the sudden transitions that followed, I have been carried from one new experience to another. I adapted my focus, lifestyle, perspective, and temperament; at first to survive the changes, and then to grow within them. I have grown during this complex time, and I persevered because of the love of everyone around me. As the world changes, I do my best to change with it by holding on to the people around me. 🌿



## ...BVS volunteers on

By Sara Cook



When it became clear that COVID-19 was becoming a global pandemic with wide-reaching consequences, BVS had a critical decision to make. Would we recall volunteers or allow BVSers to decide whether they would continue their service? After much prayer and reflection, BVS and Church of the Brethren staff decided to allow volunteers the option to stay at their project or return home because of COVID-19.

Most BVSers chose to stay at their projects, including those serving outside of the United States. However, EIRENE volunteers were pulled back to Germany at the strong urging of the German government. Many projects need volunteer support more than ever, and BVS projects have been very grateful to have volunteers on hand to meet the increased needs posed by COVID-19.

BVS staff have been working from home and working hard to reimagine how to best adapt key elements of BVS to the unique circumstances created by COVID-19. This year's BVS retreat was virtual. Volunteers and staff connected via Zoom for a full day together. Orientation will also be going virtual this summer, and a specially formed BVS Orientation Think Tank has been providing creative insight into how this might take place. Workcamps will not happen this summer, but BVS will be offering a way to engage with the workcamp experience and curriculum virtually. All these pivots have brought fresh thinking and new possibilities to BVS. Some of the changes being made now may become part of the valued traditions of BVS.

One key aspect of BVS that has not changed during these unprecedented times is the commitment to supporting volunteers and projects. BVS staff have increased contact with BVSers in the field to provide opportunities for virtual social connection and to ensure that volunteers have the support they need to remain positive and upbeat. Applications continue to be processed for upcoming orientations, and staff are gratified to see the number of people who continue to come forward for volunteering during this unusual time. Staff also continue outreach to potential BVS volunteers— a recent virtual BVS information session with Manchester University staff and students created an exciting template for how staff can continue to connect virtually with campus partners. BVS staff continue to stay in close touch with projects to assess how we can be most helpful during the pandemic.

BVS staff are seeing many signs of hope and new possibilities during the pandemic. Other faith-based service programs have reached out to collaborate and brainstorm to find new ways of moving forward together. Volunteers are still coming forward for placements in Europe and Asia, and international members of the Church of the Brethren are continuing to volunteer for placements all over the world. Indeed, the global nature of BVS allows staff to place volunteers in projects in parts of the world where visas can be obtained as regulations shift and change from region to region.

While the commitment to service has not changed, BVS staff members are embracing the opportunities created by this challenging time to shape BVS for the future. 🌿



## ...Our goals stay the same

By Alexander McBride

Life at my project at Snowcap Community Charities has drastically changed in the past couple of months. Back in March we were able to bring clients into the pantry where they could select what food they wanted. However, within a couple of weeks our operations completely changed because of the threat from the COVID-19 pandemic. To keep our clients safe, we began distributing food boxes to them outside of the building and added changes to volunteer scheduling meant that there were some friends I did not see for several weeks. All of this coincided with a major adjustment to my living arrangement as my housemates were all recalled home early to Germany because of the virus, leaving me by myself. In a matter of a couple of weeks, the world around me had completely changed. How things were in February started to become like a distant memory.

Regardless of these changes, the core mission of SnowCap remains the same: providing food to those in need. Now more than ever, people need help to have enough food to make it through the week. It is wonderful to provide some food security during these tough times. The pandemic has even opened some new opportunities to provide food aid to more people. Earlier in May, Snowcap teamed up with the city of Gershan to hold a distribution drive, handing out food boxes to locals who needed them. Even during a time of great turmoil and change, my project's mission has not changed, providing some form of stability in my changing life. Our lives may be going through a period of great change, but we must never lose focus of our goals in life. We must always strive to humbly serve those in need and bridge the gaps of inequities. 🌿

