

sharing BVS

October 2012

Dear friends,

Former and current volunteers celebrated our forty years of service in Northern Ireland and Ireland at a gathering in Belfast in mid September. More about that on the back pages here. Twenty years ago this year, we started sending BVSers to peace groups in ex-Yugoslavia.

Our condolences to the L'Arche Community in Cork, Ireland, upon the death of one of their longest term community members, Helen, in early October.

This newsletter contains excerpts from volunteers' recent reporting about their placements. If you get the impression that we have projects in either very rainy, inclement parts of Europe, or in unbearably- hot-in-the-summer regions, that might be right.

Greetings from Geneva,
Kristin Flory

TRANSITIONS

Warm welcomes to Margaret Hughes who joined the L'Arche Community in Cork, Ireland! Soon to arrive in November – after their visas were issued in the USA - are **Hannah Monroe** who'll be working with the L'Arche Community in Belfast, and **Kirsten Stopher** who will be our first volunteer with the Abbé Pierre Museum/Emmaus Center in Esteville, France!

Sad farewells to Cori Miner and Adam Stokes who departed from Greenhill YMCA in Newcastle, N.Ireland in July; to **Tania Monroy** at the German branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in Minden, Germany; and to **Michelle Cernoch** from the L'Arche Cork Community, Ireland.

And transitions... In early July, **Gloria Oseguera-Verdugo** transferred from Holywell Trust in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, to the L'Arche Community in Co. Kilkenny, Ireland. **Julianne Funk** recently finished service with Mali Koraci (Small Steps) in Sarajevo and is beginning as a consultant with the Ecumenical Women's Initiative in Omis, Croatia. Three of the Belfast BVSers who have completed their first year of service have recently travelled to the USA to obtain their 2nd year visas for the UK before returning to Northern Ireland. One of them has recently experienced a delay.

VOLUNTEERS in EUROPE are at these LOCATIONS:

In BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

SAMANTHA LYON-HILL works in Mostar with the OKC Abrasevic Youth Cultural Center.

JULIANNE FUNK is in Sarajevo working as a consultant with the Ecumenical Women's Initiative which is based in Omis, Croatia.

In GERMANY

MARIE SCHUSTER lives and works in Tecklenburg at the Arche community there.

KATARINA ELLER lives and works at the Brot und Rosen community in Hamburg.

In FRANCE

KIRSTEN STOPHER will be living and working at the Abbé Pierre Emmaüs Center in Esteville.

In IRELAND

GLORIA OSEGUERA-VERDUGO works in one of the houses of the L'Arche Community, near Callan, Co. Kilkenny,

...and MARGARET HUGHES lives and works in Cork with the L'Arche Community there.

In NORTHERN IRELAND

COURTNEY KLOSTERMAN and SAMANTHA CARWILE work in Belfast at the Quaker Cottage family center.

TIFFANY MONARCH lives and works with the L'Arche Belfast Community. HANNAH MONROE will join her there in mid November.

MEGAN MILLER is with the East Belfast Mission, a project of the Methodist church.

VOLUNTEERS SHARE

JULIANNE FUNK (Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina) reports about the summer Peace Camp she attended.

For many years, the Center for Peacebuilding (CIM, in Sanski Most) has been organizing 'Peace Camp' in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a time and space for youth from all regions of the country, all ethnic groups, religions and none to spend time together in a remote place and learn about transforming conflict. This year I was able to participate.

Peace Camp in Bosnia-Herzegovina arose from a very similar annual event in Switzerland. Vahidin and Mevludin (CIM directors) were part of its planting in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late 1990s and eventually came to organize it themselves.

Each day began with morning prayer, but each day different traditions led this short ritual. To begin, I presented an Anglican meditation from the Book of Common Prayer, then the next day, the few Catholics led us in prayer, then Orthodox, Muslim and finally, non-religious persons. After each short tradition's prayer/reflection there was a time of silence for all to pray in her own way, then we sang a simple song to orient ourselves for the day with our common purpose:

Great, great power of peace

You are our only aim.

Let love grow and borders disappear.

Mir, mir oh mir (mir = peace)

At the beginning of Peace Camp, there was evident skepticism and discomfort with the prayers as well as this song, but quickly both were accepted with deepening appreciation. The song became our mantra.

Each day proceeded with a shared buffet breakfast at our accommodation near Bihać and then 'large group work' which usually included some teaching from Vahidin and Mevludin plus a task to do or a theme to discuss in our small groups. The themes were such things as stereotypes and dialogue versus debate. In the latter large group session we first did an exercise where the group was split into vegetarians and omnivores to first debate then dialogue about the benefits of our positions. Afterward we considered the differences. While the debate was utterly exciting and even funny – evolving into two sides simply shouting animatedly at each other with indecipherable claims – the dialogue was less interesting but actually included reasonable consideration. One question raised was what is the goal? If communication is the goal, the latter worked better. In my small group of six thereafter, we delved into the nature of communication – what is it and how to achieve it.

In general, there was a real sense that Peace Camp participants were serious about engaging deeply, listening and learning from each other, and self-development. According to Vahidin and Mevludin, this was one of the more mature groups of Peace Campers – from the beginning, participants were committed to peacebuilding and needed no convincing. They threw themselves in with their whole selves.

Long lunch breaks allowed us to get to know each other in an unstructured way. I spent most of my afternoons by and in the Una river with other water and sun lovers. Some others spent the afternoons making music or hiking to the Stari Grad Ostrazac. One social rule of Peace Camp is to hang out with others rather than do things alone. This is great for inclusivity but also made the time quite intensive.

Late afternoon sessions were dedicated to a type of “practicum” – each participant with a small team prepared and taught an aspect of nonviolent communication to the rest of the group using the workbook methods and materials provided. These sessions were highly interactive, in workshop style and covering topics like: affirmation, active listening, loss and sorrow, anger, letting go of the past, sameness and difference, etc.

These sessions were typically organized exceptionally well in groups of four and addressed us as if we were children. As such, we typically enjoyed the creative nature of the activities while learning about deep and often hidden aspects about ourselves. The purpose of this task was naturally to equip all participants with the knowledge and capacity to teach nonviolent communication to at least children.

Late evenings were times for dialogue on various subjects. I found the discussion about where things stand regarding the process of reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina quite interesting. Also, sharing about the concrete problems in each person's own hometown and what activism is present according to personal experience (in Novi Grad, Kozarac, Visoko, Tuzla, Sarajevo, Prijedor, Zenica, Pale, Bihać, and Bratunac). Another evening, Miki Jacevic, a peace builder with one foot in Bosnia-Herzegovina and another in the US, talked about how conflict is like an iceberg, with hidden issues below the surface that need addressing if we are to truly transform conflict.

For me, the most powerful transformative moment and memorable time was the session together as a big group considering Botcharova's model of the cycle of conflict versus the cycle of reconciliation. We each chose one conflict we know personally and placed ourselves upon the accurate spot on either of these cycles which best expresses where that situation is. Going around the room, we were each free to share as we wanted to or not. Very tough stories arose from the war, as the theme of the session. One Muslim woman's father had been killed or betrayed by his best friend when she was just an infant and as a result, she had closed herself to developing close friendships – she expressed herself at the stage of hurt and sorrow. A young Serb man told about his young childhood experience of his father's return from the army looking and acting differently, wearing a big beard, for example. This picture had stuck in his mind and troubled him. Another woman, a Serb who had been only a young girl during the war, had experienced rape alongside her mother and even younger sister. These stories elicited much pain and all of us seemed to mourn together these hurts. Not understanding all that was being shared, I was most in sync with the general sense of a special safe zone to speak and be heard. People were sharing in order to vocalize their suffering but I also felt each story as a gift from the teller, who made him or herself utterly vulnerable to recount things that remained buried so long.

The Peace Camp of 2012 was unique in its makeup: this year's group consisted of many Serbs, perhaps half of the group. For me, seeing them deeply engage and strive to bring peace in their own environments was inspiring. An image which remains with me is the friendship that emerged between two participants, a self-confident Serb man who studies in Pale and a newly covered Bosniak woman who studies in Sarajevo; both were once from Foča, a town in eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina.

SAMANTHA LYON-HILL is at the Youth Cultural Center “Abrasevic” in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina (which as you know from past Sharing newsletters, is a safe place where everyone can drink coffee, see films, attend concerts together regardless of ethnicity). Here are some updates and observations from Sam's recent report:

I translate articles written by AbrasMedia columnists from Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian into English. On days when we have concerts or other events, I help set up and clean Abrasevic. During the concert, I usually sell tickets or help make sure everything runs smoothly.

A really good sense of humor is absolutely useful here. Assuming a volunteer doesn't know B/S/C already, some knowledge of German or French can be useful because not everyone here knows English.

It's important to spend time at Abrasevic almost every day even if it is just to drink a coffee. I try to keep the same working hours as I see others doing. The time commitment depends on what volunteers get involved in at Abrasevic and in Mostar.

... The summer is really hot in Mostar, so there are not as many activities. Nothing really happens in August... This past summer there were four heat waves and it was so hot at night that it was difficult to sleep. The winter is cold and rainy. Since most of the heating comes from small heaters you plug in, it is almost always cold. Last year, there was a huge snow storm, which was unexpected because supposedly Mostar generally doesn't get more than 1 inch of snow. They got around five feet, the city was closed off, and half the city lost its power for three days.

A lot of people smoke in Mostar and BiH and they will do it indoors and outdoors without thinking. There are no smoke free zones... It's likely that there will always be someone smoking around you.

... There recently was one event throughout the region that encouraged people to go out on a specific day to pick up litter. One of the places in Mostar was the Partisan's Monument. Litter is a big issue in Mostar. A lot of people just don't see the point of putting their trash in a trash can because there is so much litter around. I have repeatedly seen people throw bags of trash into the Neretva River when there is a dumpster a block away from them. A lot of young people are trying to do something about it, which is great.

In the past, I have helped with an animal group that is trying to stop people from killing stray dogs by getting them neutered or spayed and the tagged. Many people think it is wrong to spay or neuter dogs and cats, so as a result there are a lot of strays in BiH. People have responded to the increase of the stray population by putting food out with poison. In one case, which caused a lot of outrage, someone shot a stray in one of the main public spaces in Mostar. Abrasevic used to take care of a lot of strays and provide a home of sort, but those dogs were killed. Since I've been here, we've adopted two dogs and are ensuring that they are taken care of and healthy.

In August, I helped backstage with a theater organization that comes to Mostar every summer to put on a Shakespearean play with local youth as the actors. It's a great project because it brings youth from various ethnic backgrounds together and puts them in a situation where they have to spend time together and end up becoming friends. They also perform in various cities around BiH, which means many of them get the opportunity to see regions of BiH they might never have seen otherwise because BiH is still ethnically divided.

This is not an easy or a typical project placement, but it is a life changing experience. I am so glad I came here and have yet to meet a volunteer who has felt differently.

OVER TO IRELAND: ***MARGARET HUGHES is our new volunteer with the L'Arche Community in Cork, Ireland.** We knew she was going to be placed in the house of a core member who was terminally ill. (See first page of newsletter.) Margaret was able to accompany Helen as well as those at L'Arche who knew Helen many years. Right after Helen's death, Margaret wrote:*

The hardest part is comforting the core members, many of whom don't really understand death and are very afraid. The next days will be trying but I'm sure we will have the strength to get through it. *Later:* The funeral was beautiful and very appropriate albeit sad. I think everyone will be glad to get back to normal.

... I just had a nice talk with the House Leader and he says that I'm doing fine, which is reassuring. It was really hard for me to know my place during all this. I wanted to make myself available if I was needed to do anything for Helen but I didn't want to get in the way of those who had been with her for almost 30 years and needed their space to do their grieving both before and after her death. He said I did just fine with that.

From a recent email: Tomorrow I'm going down to Penny Dinner to volunteer for a few hours - Penny Dinner feeds the poor, there are several core members who have expressed a desire to do something like this so I'm checking it out - then on Sunday I'm going to Killarney with a friend to walk around the lake and enjoy the fall leaves.

As noted on the first page, **GLORIA OSEGUERA-VERDUGO moved to the L'Arche Community in Callan, County Kilkenny in Ireland.**

“At the core of L'Arche is the relationship between persons who have an intellectual disability and those who choose to support them in community. We believe that this relationship is one that is mutually transformative, a sign of hope and a powerful witness in our world.”

Gloria reports with more detail: I do EVERYTHING! You do everything needed to ensure that Core Members live a happy and full life as adults. Many Core Members, though fairly self-sufficient, need help with things such as doing laundry or bathing; most do not cook at all so you help with making meals, taking medicine, making doctors' appointments, etc. Those things we take for granted as adults much of the time our Core Members need support with, that's where we come in! But we also make sure that the Core Members feel loved and respected, we foster a feeling of family and community, which is pivotal in the lives of all people.

You would think you need a lot of patience before you come, but I'm not sure I have that and I manage well, most of the time. If you don't have, you will definitely learn while you are here! ☺ You need a loving heart, definitely! A sense of selflessness and a desire to help others live a life full of love and happiness and integrity. I don't think those individuals who are really focused on themselves would do well here because, though you and your health as an individual are very important, the Core Members are absolutely the most important thing in a L'Arche Community. The ability to be comfortable with meeting a lot of new people all the time and the flexibility to work with ALL kinds of different people, since we get volunteers from all over the world (I currently work with a German guy and a lady from Korea) is very important. You're going to butt heads with people who are different than you, in the way they think, act, feel, etc. so it is important to have a fairly well developed communication style so as to be able to talk things out and reach resolution because, invariably, you will have a problem with someone and if you can't work it out, it festers and tends to create more drama in the familial, semi-incestuous community that is L'Arche!

And she emphasizes in her report: A BVSer needs to know that it's going to be hard. Plain, simple, flat out. And I don't think you can really understand what I mean by hard until you get here. Yes, it can be frustrating working with Core Members but it is also difficult having to deal with your fellow assistants (volunteers) or the L'Arche lifestyle, community, office, etc. But that's just living in community anywhere. It is important that the BVSer takes time for him/herself when s/he can get it! BUT I want to emphasize that there is a tremendous amount of love that you receive when you become part of the community here. And you will learn so much, it's incredible. Be prepared to get up early, work hard at cleaning, learn to cook, and most of all to LEARN PATIENCE! With yourself, your fellow coworkers and the core members. But be prepared to be surprised at the little moments that give you so much joy, happiness, and love. ☺ They seem to come out of the most innocuous and unexpected moments.

In answer to the question about doing extra volunteering : Anybody who has ever met me and talked to me for more than five minutes knows I absolutely LOVE animals and being in contact with them is an important part of my life and my emotional well-being. So on my off-time, when I can manage to motivate myself to bike down to the place, I go to the PAWS dog rescue facility down the road and walk dogs. They always need volunteers and though it may seem like I'm helping them, they are helping ME more than they'll ever know or understand. It's great for me as an animal person, because otherwise the only interaction with animals I would have would be the cows on the farms & the occasional stray cat or dog! Not enough for this crazy animal lady.

As an Alaskan I'd say the weather here in Co. Kilkenny is pretty mild, but I can see how others would say they find it cold; in fact, I often hear from the other assistants how cold it is, but I like it, I refer to it as refreshing! It rained quite a lot this summer, more than usual which is a surprising statement to make in Ireland, so I can't expect it will get much wetter than I've seen it. Overall, I think it's absolutely gorgeous here. When it's a nice day it's a GORGEOUS day! I love living out in the country and being able to walk down the road and see cattle and sheep and horses everywhere. ...So I'd say it is cool and can be quite wet, but it also has its lovely sunny days too.

ON TO NORTHERN IRELAND:

East Belfast Mission, says MEGAN MILLER, aims to improve life for everyone in East Belfast, regardless of background or belief. It's about working with people wherever they're at and trying to meet their emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. The Skainos project brings the added element of creating transformative space, which can be shared by ALL in inner East Belfast, an area that suffers from a lot of social and economic problems.

The organization includes a homeless hostel, employability mentoring, charity shops & other social economy projects, an active church congregation, and family and community work. That f & c work includes youth and children's programs, peace and reconciliation work with residents and ex-combatants, women's/men's groups, Irish classes, a walking group, and other health initiatives.

The BVS placement is with the Family and Community department (now coined "Compass"). During my first year, I've attended forums and community events, attempted to build and continue relationships with other organizations in Belfast, helped with the planning and implementation of a variety of community engagement programmes (the cross-community women's group, Irish language classes, Peace Through Music, the occasional youth + children's thing), helped with various administrative tasks (PR materials, minutes, travel bookings, funding applications), attempted to facilitate and expand EBM's Walking Group, and helped with EBM's Neighbours in Need project, which delivers food to vulnerable individuals and families throughout the city at Christmastime.

Inner East Belfast is one of the most deprived areas in all of Northern Ireland, and though there has been great progress, it is still a divided community. It faces the economic and social problems common to many inner city areas, but was greatly affected by the conflict, which adds another layer to the difficulties faced by its residents.

What's the climate like? Northern Ireland weather is consistently rainy, and there aren't many temperature extremes throughout the year.

What might always be vague about this project? Defining what is work and what isn't can be difficult when living and working in the EBM environment. You run into people from work on the street, you may receive texts/calls from work folks, there are always EBM-run events going on that, even if not strictly *your* work, still feel work-related, and church on Sunday is full of coworkers, volunteers, and local people who attend EBM programs. I found that trying too hard to separate my "work self" from my "regular self" made life difficult, and I was happier once I stopped emphasizing the separation so much. That being said, I still find it absolutely necessary to spend at least one day/week *completely* away from EBM people and activities!

What do you like most? Working with so many accomplished, dedicated people and having opportunities to learn from them; the balance between office work and community work; the really amazing experiences that working for EBM allows one to have (I've been able to visit Stormont, shake hands with the Taoiseach, meet visiting groups from various parts of the world, and take part in projects like EBM's Irish classes, and bringing families from Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist East Belfast to march in the St. Patrick's Day parade).

I'm not usually a fan of adjectives like "amazing, wonderful, awesome," but East Belfast Mission is all of those things. The place isn't perfect, of course, but it is humbling to work for an organization that has done so much, and kept the people it serves at the heart of it all.

L'Arche Communities are places where people with and without learning disabilities choose to live and work together. TIFFANY MONARCH describes L'Arche Belfast as a place where everyone can feel welcome and be who they are. This main aim starts with making a safe loving home for the core members where they can live, grow and share their talents. This goal then branches out to the community with our projects Root Soup, Gardens, Art Group, the Loom, and summer schemes. ... I am a volunteer assistant and garden volunteer. As an assistant, I help the core members with day to day living such as brushing teeth, cooking dinner, getting to appointments, etc. As a garden volunteer, I go to L'Arche's allotments at least once a week and help those who work there in tending and caring for our vegetables. Lastly, occasionally I attend Root Soup where I work in the kitchen assisting with the preparation of meals for events.

The great thing about L'Arche is that there is time to learn. So if you feel you come in with little or no skills it may seem confusing at first but you soon catch on.

What's useful to know in advance is that we, as assistants, are not here to do things for our core members but rather live/work alongside them, to be friends, and learn from each other. It's not just a put in your time job but also your heart and mind, as cheesy as that sounds.

Tiff suggests these books or resources to look at in preparation: "Community and Growth" by Jean Vanier is one book I would have liked to have read before coming here. Not all of it can be applied to L'Arche Belfast but it helps with community living and understanding. Also any books about Vanier himself are good. I read "The Miracle, The Message, The Story" but I think there are better ones out there. In general books by Henri Nouwen are good and the ones he wrote about L'Arche many have read.

As for books on the Troubles, Kristin covers those well. For L'Arche you don't need a whole lot of knowledge (we don't talk about it much) but some knowledge does go a long way. Those who don't have it are usually the ones who ask if Danny Boy is the national anthem and get freaked out by riots in the North.

Two things that are difficult at L'Arche Belfast is the learning to take things slow, and remembering that community starts with the core members and the volunteers.

...If I could change anything I would change that volunteers need to facilitate the sense of community and staff would be more active in it.

Yes, having staff and volunteers together works great but there are times, especially after difficult years, that the staff get into a mode of this is their job, they've put in their time, they have a life beyond this at the end of their scheduled hours.

Community then becomes a talk only for working hours or eyes are rolled at it during meetings. When this unhealthy community, as Vanier calls it, forms, volunteers and core members are considered "work" and there is no interaction beyond that. This leads to volunteers getting into a phase of just staying in their rooms when they are not out or "working" and L'Arche has less of a home feel. It is really up to the volunteers to get out, have conversations in the kitchen on their days off, live in all parts of the house, be flexible with the 40 hour rule, and encourage outings and get-togethers for all assistants and/ or core members. It's up to every volunteer to keep pushing for it and reminding that it is essential for L'Arche because otherwise at times it can be disheartening and lonely after coming to a new place far from home.

... L'Arche Belfast is a great place to volunteer. It encourages "servant" living, environmental responsibility, respect for life, and active community building.

What else should one know?

Belfast is a cold rainy city and many people talk about how at first it stops you from going out. Don't let it!

What COURTNEY KLOSTERMAN says about working with Quaker Cottage in Belfast: I really like how much the moms' and kids' experience is looked after. It can be hard work trying to make everything as perfect for the families as possible, but it is worth it when you see how much it means to them. I think that the care that Quakers gives to its families is really special. Yes [I would recommend this project because] it is good work and you can see you are making a difference. Plus, you get to know the extraordinary staff at Quakers, which is a plus!

Lows and highs include feeling like I am not being listened to at work when I want to address rather than avoid conflict *and* making good friends and being called a "domestic goddess" by one of the summer volunteers...

What's the climate like? It's cold! You'll need layers of warm clothing and RAINWEAR!

SAMANTHA CARWILE is also a childcare worker at Quaker Cottage and summarizes one aspect of the work there: The summer program at Quakers highlights fun, discovery, and adventure for the kids we serve. I would venture to say one of our main goals of the summer program is to build relationships with kids by having fun! Our summer program is more loosely structured, allowing the kids to better enjoy their summer holidays out of school, to relax a little, and play.

The summer program is much different in structure to our school-season program. Instead of picking the families up from their homes and bringing them to the cottage, we spend the majority of our days on outings, going to beaches, playgrounds, forests, heritage sites, museums, and much more. In the mornings, we divide the babies/toddlers/preschoolers (ages 0-4) from the school-aged children (ages 5-11), and our childcare staff is divided into the "baby group" or "afterschool group" each day. We will have about 10 children in both the "baby group" and the "afterschool" group. We are with the children for a full day, from about 10am-4:30pm.

In the baby group, we might spend our time by going up to the Cottage for half of the day, going through the same routine as the school-time program, and then the other half of the day going to a park or playground to see wildlife, exercise, and play. The afterschools typically spend their entire day outside! We will go to parks, beaches, forests, and more. On rainy days we might go to a museum or just tough it and get wet! A few weeks during the summer the afterschool coordinator, Phil, will arrange tours at nearby heritage sites like castles and mansions. One week during the summer Phil will call a fire brigade to bring up a truck and let the kids have a fire safety talk, crawl into the fire trucks, use the fire hose, and more.

I love the summer program for many reasons. One is that it's a nice change from our school-time program. Just the variety of a different routine is nice. Two, I am a child at heart, and I love exploring, getting outside, going down slides, and learning about science and history at museums just as much as the kids! Three, I love that the summer program shows the children fun, cheap, and free activities to do in and around their own city of Belfast. Belfast really does offer a lot for people to do, and it's great to encourage the kids that they too can get out and do a lot of fun things for cheap. I started my service at Quaker Cottage August 2011, and I had two weeks of the summer program before we transitioned into the school-season program. Within those two weeks in the summer, I had seen a great amount of Belfast & I got to know the city pretty well from all of our outings.

We also have short-term volunteers who will volunteer for a week or two during the summer. Some of them will stay on-site in our caravan next to the volunteer house. This summer we had many people coming in and out of work at Quakers and in and out of our house. I loved meeting new people and working with some really great folks. I also made a valuable friendship with a volunteer who stayed the entire summer. She stayed in our fourth bedroom in the volunteer house and was a great roommate to us this summer.

All in all, I had a great summer!

AND FINALLY, FROM GERMANY:

The Arche is about living in community with people with and without disabilities while celebrating our God-given individuality and encouraging one another to reach our goals / potential, says **MARIE SCHUSTER at the Arche Community in Tecklenburg**. *What I do here involves* care of the Core Members (getting folks up and dressed for work, bathroom routines, etc.)... Living in community also includes other “duties,” for example helping with the planning and execution of community events, prayer services, and holidays.

Prerequisites for this place include Advanced Basic German. It’s difficult to integrate in the community if you don’t have *any* knowledge of Deutsch. The Arche welcomes & works with everyone but in order to understand what you have to do & just to get to know your colleagues & Core Members you have to be able to understand German at a basic level. It’s a “multikulti” community and the lingua Franca is German, not English.

...And *Geduld!* (Patience!) It’s frustrating when you are getting orientated and you can’t always understand what your Core Members are trying to tell you (or your colleagues that talk too fast) or it feels like no one understands what you are trying to say. Things take time and this can be frustrating.

...Adaptability. Things don’t always work out as planned. I always thought I was someone who could go with the flow really well but oh boy did I get a lesson in being able to roll with it here in Tecklenburg.

You MUST be able to laugh at yourself and be silly.

What would be useful but not absolutely necessary? Being able to cook or willingness to learn / try. And basic Hungarian...the unofficial language of our Arche Tecklenburg is Hungarian due to all the volunteers we get from Hungary and Romania. No worries though...they are super friendly and mostly speak good German and a bit of English ☺

What’s the climate like? It’s generally on the chilly side but in the summer Tecklenburg can get hot (but it only lasts about two weeks max). It can be pretty rainy so some nice rain gear would be smart to bring with.

Did you have to find your own housing? Nope...I live above the shop ☺

Do you do any other volunteering? Yes, every other Monday or so I go to the Ledder Werkstatt (where our Core Members work) with another assistant to play basketball with a group of 4-5 men who are in wheelchairs. It’s a group that got started with the help of previous BVSers, Joel.

What will always be vague? What happens week to week. It’s funny because sometimes everything here feels like the same routine day in and out, but the reality is that you never know what might come up. Hence the need for flexibility. This is constant challenge but it also opens up more opportunities to try new things with the residents. Living where you work, with your co-workers and boss, will always have the potential to be difficult and awkward at times but I’m quite enjoying it at the moment.

Like most? The Core Members are the best. They make everything worthwhile. I like the other assistants that I work with. My favorite thing in the world is to have a “*Haus Urlaub*” (house vacation) that’s when I have the day off but come to the coffee break and/or *Abendgebet* (evening prayers). I get to enjoy the Core Members without it being “work” - that means not worrying about who’s next for the shower, preparing dinner and lunch boxes for the next day etc. It reminds me of all the good things living in community means.

I think about how rewarding my first year has been despite all the bumps in the road and such and I am really excited about my second year. Living in a community, THIS community, is not for everyone and I was initially worried that it wasn’t for me. But sometimes I am so happy here... I can’t properly explain it, but I am glad I landed here. I sincerely hope that future BVSers seriously consider this placement; they will not regret it.

KATARINA ELLER in Hamburg writes that the Brot und Rosen Community gives homeless refugees and migrants who have no right to any housing assistance or shelter from the state, a place to live, food to eat, and a little bit of financial assistance if necessary. They also help these people get in touch with organizations that can help them improve their legal situation. The idea is to take away the worry of not being able to meet immediate needs, so the individual/family can concentrate on improving their legal or financial situation, and find a new place to live.

Aim number two is to affect change in the German political climate (ice cold) toward refugees and migrants. This is done by supporting other nonprofits (financially, or through volunteer work) that work for refugee rights, sending out a quarterly newsletter about the work of the house and issues of the day, and by holding a vigil against deportation every week in front of the foreigners bureau.

Aim number three (for the core community of German residents) is to live together as an Intentional Christian Community that is part of the Catholic Worker movement, sharing all income and donations, work and life with one another. They live and work in one household, and make all important decisions together. They also have a time of devotions in the morning of every weekday with one another, and with communion once a week. Another way they live out their beliefs is in being good stewards of the Earth, for example, investing in organic products, using renewable resources for electricity and protesting against atomic energy.

My work includes cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping/picking up organic food donations, sorting said donations, setup and teardown for Open Evenings and other special events, removing all trash items from the house, checking emails, answering the telephone, doing dishes, babysitting, doing English translations and giving English lessons, participating in the *Mahnwache* (vigil), helping at Café Exil, participating in biweekly organizational meetings, and sometimes leading them, as well as sometimes leading the communion. An important job is helping to fold, envelope and label thousands of newsletters four times a year.

Here's the thing. I do most of these jobs, and more, but not all of them....and not all of the time. At Brot und Rosen you find where you fit in best, and what jobs you do best, your niche, so to speak. Some jobs, however, like *Hausdienst* shifts, newsletter folding and labeling, the *Mahnwache*, and participation in meetings, are stable and routine.

What prerequisites? GERMAN. You need to speak German, although everyone in the core community can speak English. This is especially so because the guests also need to be learning German. You also need to be open-minded as far as other cultures are concerned (German and otherwise) and interested in meeting people from many different backgrounds and countries. You also need to be very open and interested in living in a community/household made up of around 20 people. You will be living in a sort of massive extended family for two years with all the joys and complications that come with that type of living situation. They live with a sort of open-door policy, where the back terrace door isn't locked until late at night, and more often than not, people known, or not so known, to the community walk in with no forewarning. You never know who the day will bring.

Being able to ride a bike well while dragging an *Anhänger* (trailer) on the back piled high with vegetables would also be useful. Also being multi-lingual is helpful. Being good at housekeeping is very beneficial.

Be prepared for Hamburg, and that you may have to get acquainted with the idea of *Regenhosen* (rain pants). It is often wet and cold, and they do the vigil in all weather, no matter how cold it is. The more German you speak, the better, although you will get to take a language course near the beginning of your stay. Helping at Café Exil (a counseling service for migrants and refugees) will probably be lumped into your duties, but be prepared for the fact that you probably won't be able to help very much. ...

Very important, is to be aware that for the most part, you will be doing housework. You are kind of like an *aupair*, but with refugees instead of children. Well, okay, sometimes children too.

The project structure, *writes Kat, will always be vague*, with some people seeming to put more time into looking after the house and getting to know the guests, than others. You also get to know everyone on different levels, because although they are all part of the project, some you will rarely see between *Andacht* (morning devotions) and dinner. There is also a communication gap sometimes, which is understandable when you live with 20 people. Multiple methods have been tried to remedy this, and none has been too successful thus far.

Like most? Getting to know so many people from so many places, and sharing, laughing and drinking tea together. I like how cozy the household atmosphere is, and how every little reason to celebrate is celebrated! I like learning how to live in a way different from the demands of a fast-paced society.

Learning to live in community can be frustrating, but it is extremely rewarding as well. You get to work with really great people (core members and guests) for an important cause in a lovely city.

Forty Years of BVSers in Northern Ireland and Ireland!

Twenty-four of us - current volunteers, former volunteers, friends and families - gathered at Quaker Cottage in Belfast in mid September to celebrate the 40 years over soup and stories. I'm not great at recounting all that was shared, so I decide to pull together an overview of my own.



When we met 10 years ago for the 30th anniversary event of BVS in Northern Ireland, Rev. Harold Good, the Methodist pastor who invited us in 1972 to send volunteer youth workers to the Shankill area of Belfast, said: "When the full story of all these years in Northern Ireland is written, sadly you probably won't be recorded or mentioned - not BVS or you individually. Sorry about that. But more important, in ways that can never be measured, is that you've made a huge contribution to the lives of so many people here and to our overall situation - by your coming here you have encouraged us, by helping us to realize we are part of a great world family who are concerned about justice, peace, and people. It's important that we're not alone in that. ... You've come to share that. You've touched the lives of so many people. Thank you for that, and we want to encourage you in return."

We didn't stop with sending a first BVSer to that community center. BVSers were placed in different corners of Belfast and beyond. Back in the day, we were generous with more than sending volunteers, too, by giving a minivan to a group in Ligoniel, and even a house to another volunteer service organization. (I would love to still have that house!) One interesting placement was in the mid 1970s when the general secretary of the Irish Council of Churches, who talked to paramilitary groups on all sides, arranged to bring one of our previous BVSers back to Belfast to work as a receptionist in the office of the think tank group of some Protestant paramilitaries on cease fire. David Stevens, a more recent ICC general secretary, told us at the 30th anniversary: "That was an imaginative thing to do. Peace requires you to work with people who you might not like to associate with."

Forty years later, we've sent about 160 volunteers to over 40 different organizations in Northern Ireland and Ireland. Some are still going strong – Quaker Cottage has had 24 of our volunteers throughout the years –but other groups have changed, folded, or no longer work with international volunteers.

Along with the memories from the 30th anniversary event in Belfast in 2002, I've rummaged through the Geneva office files, amidst early BVSers' project reports and photos, and found other gems of information. I kept travel notes in the past 25 years and re-discovered some interesting things in those. Here is a small sampling:

My early annual meetings with David Stevens (then assistant general secretary of the Irish Council of Churches in Belfast) often gave me insights about the ongoing situation. In the late 1980s he was fond of saying that "the situation is desperate but not serious." We got news that one of the BVSers who worked as an administrative assistant at the ICC had tried to attend the Milltown Cemetery funeral in 1988 for the IRA trio who were killed in Gibraltar, and a guy named Michael Stone started shooting at the Belfast funeral-goers. David S. and I both agreed after that, I needed to have some serious talks with some of the BVSers.

Occasionally we held joint meetings of the BVS and the EIRENE volunteers from Germany, not only discussing heavy issues like The Troubles, but also topics like "the role of foreigners in Northern Ireland."

Year after year, I arrived at the international airport and took the bus in to Belfast, always seeing a banner along the motorway admonishing that "Ulster still needs Jesus." It disappeared a while ago. As did the "Belfast says no" banner on the top of City Hall. Did Ulster find Jesus? Belfast did eventually say yes to the peace agreements.

In 1992 we held a BVS day for the volunteers in Belfast and invited Mairead Corrigan-Maguire of Peace People fame to speak with us. She told the BVSers to not get lost in the issues in Northern Ireland, but to concentrate on one-to-one relationships, to help people feel important about themselves, and to "be happy."

One newly arrived BVSer in 1993 told me that he had "not been prepared for these kinds of kids" he was working with in a local youth center in north Belfast. Hmmm.

And the peace lines separating the two communities grew higher and looked ever more permanent.

I'll never forget the summer 1994 phone call from Vincent Bent, director of the Ulster Quaker Service Committee, who shouted "Kristin, we have a cease fire!" That was the first of the IRA cease fires, leading up to the peace agreement.

After that a church executive asked me if we would leave Northern Ireland because peace had come. Do cease fires really mean that everything's changed? By then we had worked with youth groups, with community organizations, with individual congregations, with the Irish Council of Churches, with children and their families, with prisoners, with the Peace People, with other peace or mediation or cross community initiatives and organizations and centers and farms. Not only focusing on the causes and effects of the Troubles, we had also had volunteers in Women's Aid refuges and with briefly with the Travelling Community. In 1996 we took on a placement at the Multi Cultural Resource Center. In 1997 the first BVSer headed to a L'Arche community in the Republic of Ireland. To this date, 20 BVSers have served at the L'Arche communities in the Republic and in Belfast.

We started holding annual weekend retreats for the Northern Irish and Irish BVSers in the mid 1990's at various places around Northern Ireland. One highlight was when our BVS group climbed Slieve Donard in the Mourne Mountains.

After the on- and off- and on-again ceasefires, the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998. By 2002 I noticed that taxi companies had suddenly flourished and some cab drivers would venture all across Belfast. Taxis as a sign of peace? And sadly more peace walls.

We were caught off guard by stricter UK visa requirements in early 2004 and had to send two newly arrived BVSers home to the USA to get those pesky visas, without which they could not enter the UK as long term volunteers. We'd previously always successfully avoided visas because of a handy letter from the Home Office that allowed BVSers to sail through UK Immigration – which was the work of MP Enoch Powell, but that's another weird odd story. It's been an adventure keeping up with the new demands and requirements. In 2006 one BVSer could tragically only spend a weekend at her project because her visa had been rejected by UK immigration. And we still today encounter unexpected glitches in the UK visa process! Fortunately it's much easier for us North Americans to get volunteer status in the Republic of Ireland.

My first ever visit to Northern Ireland was to attend my very first European BVS retreat in September 1978 before starting my BVS project in Austria. I flew from the USA directly to Northern Ireland and joined the other European BVSers at the Corrymeela Community retreat center on the northeast coast; we visited Belfast and other areas, too. I never imagined then that I would later get the opportunity to see so much history up close – well, from the vantage point of accompanying all the BVSers and annual visits with friends and projects over the last 25 years.

While I have often been preoccupied in recent years with visas and other volunteer adventures, you BVSers have done so many great things in Ireland and Northern Ireland (and everywhere else!), and like Harold Good said: "you've come here to share and have touched the lives of so many people." Thank you! - Kristin

And finally, here are some greetings from past N/Irish BVSers and some Northern Irish friends when I announced our gathering in mid September celebrating the 40th anniversary:

Linda Fritz Pieri: It is amazing how much work has been done in Northern Ireland. It has really changed since I was there in 1988 and 1989! Happy Anniversary, Northern Ireland projects. Many have come and many have gone but the work continues!

Hannah Day Wilson: Happy Anniversary Northern Ireland! It's been a long time for me since 1990-92 at Quaker Cottage. Quaker Cottage was an eye opener for me in so many ways. I learned about injustice, poverty, beauty, love, life, joy, and creativity (not necessarily in that order). I loved the BVS gatherings in Germany; they were a highlight for me. I loved traveling and our cultural celebrations. Mostly I loved learning more about humanity than any book could ever teach.

Nancy Chappell: I was a volunteer in Ardoyne (West Belfast) in 1976-77 and recently returned to see the "kids" from my youth club. Thirty-two years later, I found quite a few of the old crowd and my picture still hangs on the bulletin board at the youth club! It helps to have been the only BVSer ever at that project and the only foreigner who stayed more than 3 months. So, I sort of cherish the feel of being on the "BVS Walk of Fame" in Ardoyne. I can still sing all the verses to "The Town I Loved So Well", so they influenced me greatly too. Thanks BVS...

Greetings and Congratulations also from ex BVSers **John Joseph Adams, Kylee K. North, Joseph Huffman, AJ Detwiler, Gil Hough, Gordon Smith, Sharon Snyder, Patricia Pyle, Missy Clements Ross, Caroline Oceana Ryan,** and **Anya Neher** and others!

And from two former project partners:

Andrew McCracken: So many good, energetic and (mostly) humble people have traveled here and given so much of themselves as a contribution to our peace process. Thank-you to you all and to BVS.

Gillian Coward: ...And the work of all the BVS volunteers and staff has continued to be a wonderful and inspiring gift to Ireland...and a great example to those striving for peace and justice everywhere. Thank you.