



# The Volunteer

Sharing God's love through acts of service

## THE IN-BETWEEN

### Looking Forward, Looking Back

By Cameron Clark, Unit #321



After three weeks of orientation, most of the members of BVS Unit 321 left for the projects where they would be spending the next year or more of their lives. But not me. I was called, rather unexpectedly, to an international project in El Salvador, and there were arrangements to be made. So instead of rushing out to meet my future, I was told to return home and wait—the last thing I wanted to do. Nevertheless, I went home, and I waited.

In the seemingly endless space between my orientation and my project, I found myself looking around and thinking seriously for the first time about what I was leaving behind—both good and bad. I realized that, in a way, what I left behind, I left behind forever. Yes, one day I will return to the basement where I spent entire nights discussing politics, religion, and the theoretical mechanics of fictional magic systems.

Yes, I will return one day to stand on the spot where I learned to fall in love. But, when I return, those places will not be the same, and neither will I. I have closed a long chapter of my life forever, and soon all that will remain of those times is memory.

Nevertheless, I have no regrets. As I sit now in this charmingly simple bedroom with its lime green walls and as I listen to the sounds of San Salvador, my new home, I can think only, "I finally made it." I feel more alive now than I have in a long time. I finally feel that I am moving forward. After all, it is in these times of transition, when we leave our pasts behind us, that we truly live. This afternoon, I start work at Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad—the next transition in my life as part of Brethren Volunteer Service in El Salvador.



In Between: The following contributions come from BVSers and BVS alumni across the globe. Hear stories from volunteers as they recount how they transitioned from letting go of one stage of life to embracing new beginnings.

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### Upcoming Orientations:

• **Summer Unit #322**

July 21 - August 9, 2019

• **BRF Unit #323**

August 18 - August 26, 2019

• **Fall Unit #324**

September 22 - October 11, 2019

### By the Numbers:

**Active Volunteers - 44**

30 in United States

7 in Europe

4 in Japan

2 in Latin America

1 in Africa

**Active Projects - 65**

44 in United States

7 in Europe

6 in Latin America

4 in Africa

2 in Japan

1 in China

1 in South America

### From One Bumpy Road to the Next

By Judy Minnich Stout, Unit #319



Being dropped off in Abuja, Nigeria, I was not really certain what was in store for me as a volunteer. It had been just two weeks since I had ridden over what seemed like endless miles of very bumpy road near Camp Colorado during my BVS orientation. And now, before I knew it, I had been whisked off to yet another bumpy road that took me to Gurku to live in the teacher's house at the Montessori Preschool for Peace which is attached to the interfaith Internally Displaced Persons camp.

Suddenly, I was studying like crazy to become a Montessori teacher and to at least understand what was going to be expected of me. There were 30-year-old training videos to watch when the solar power provided enough energy or the generator was grinding away.

After that, I got to spend two days with the teachers and the children before I was driven north to Jos, where I would begin finding my niche as a teacher of older students. Soon, Bethany Seminary will be launching a joint graduate program with Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, so my services will be needed to provide support for program candidates who take the Test of English as a Foreign Language. My work is taking shape, and actually changes shape almost daily. I am just taking my life here in Africa one bumpy road at a time.



"My work is taking shape, and actually changes shape almost daily."



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## Moving On, But Not Letting Go?

By Lisa-Marie Mayerle, Unit #319

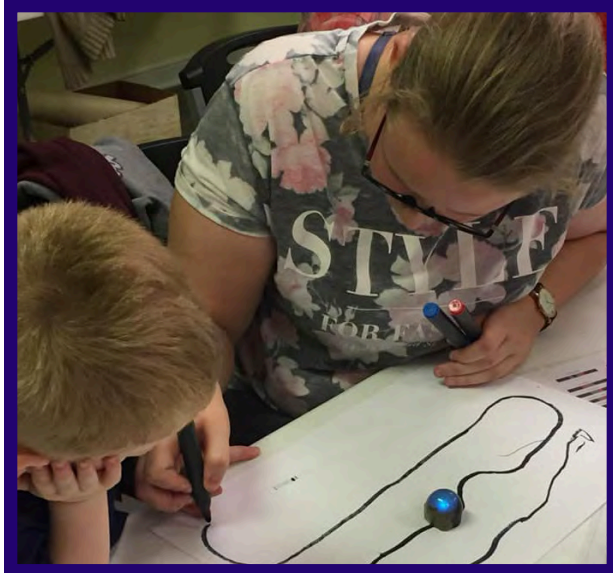


This year, I decided to be a part of Brethren Volunteer Service, and trust me...it was not easy to make that decision. For me, joining BVS meant not knowing where I would end up, which project I would be going to, or how I would be living for the next year. But, it was the best decision I have ever made. Of course, I had a lot of insecurities during the process, but in the end, I knew that this was my best opportunity to serve for a year, to explore another culture, and to make a difference. I would say that the worst part of the transition was saying goodbye—leaving everyone I love behind. All my friends and family in Germany would continue their lives without me, but my life would continue on as well. It felt like I needed to move on and let go. So, I left with a face full of tears and a heart full of sadness and

happiness mixing together. I knew it was time for a new chapter of my life.

The moment I arrived at my project in Hagerstown, Md., everyone welcomed me with open arms and a big smile on their face. In that exact moment, all my concerns and doubts were gone, and I knew that it was the right decision. I also realized that I had never left someone or something behind. Despite missing Germany, and even though I could not see or hear my family and friends every day, I can remember that they are always with me.

I enjoy every minute at my project and I love to share about it with my loved ones. The people I work with are amazing and support me. I feel like I am a part of a bigger family, and the thought of leaving them one day brings tears to my eyes. Every single minute with the kids, my co-workers, and my friends is precious, and I am so glad that I can be here. I am thankful for this journey and the relationships I am creating.



## Not So Lost in Translation

By Elly Green, Unit #319

I've spent my time at Corrymeela tracking days through the space between. The time it takes to brew a cup of tea in between conversations, the mere seconds between a freshly mopped floor and a crisp footprint, looking for the blur between blue sky and a rainbow, and organizing my calendar not with dates but with rewarding interactions or working alongside a more "challenging" group. I've come to expect the days like the waves upon the shore—a different ebb and flow, but always breaking.

Recently I was told I had hit my eight-week mark as a long-term volunteer. When asked if I was satisfied with my progress and work (which I was), I found I was more interested in discussing the spent time as something more tangible. In the grand scheme of a year of service, two months is the blinking of an eye. But within these passing weeks, I've found my space in the everyday chaos of Corrymeela and a home with my fellow volunteers. Through this volunteer program, 11 strangers have come together and found ownership within a completely foreign space.

We've learned how to support one another through laughter and tears. We have been asked to say difficult goodbyes and to open our arms to constant change. We've navigated relationships that are in constant flux and have realized that no bond during our year will be more important than the one we string together for ourselves.

Prior to my journey to Northern Ireland, I was warned of the emotional baggage that would accompany my transition with words like, "homesickness" and "culture shock." And yet, through the muddled days and long work hours, I've drawn serenity and strength from the cohort who keep me grounded. They remind me that if we're only eight weeks in with this much success, what good "craic" will our next 44 hold?

## ALUMNI CORNER

### A New Chapter

By Kelsey Murray, Unit #316

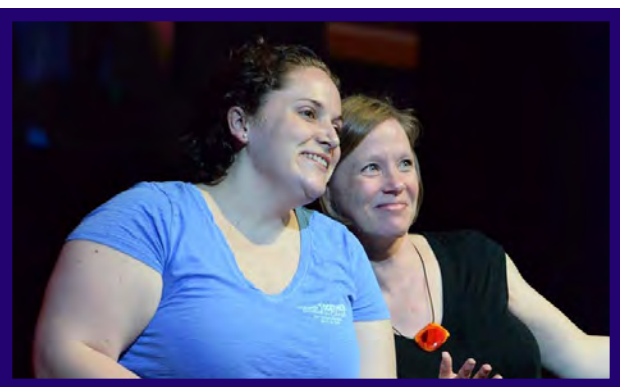


As I write this, I am wrapping up my first work week at the first full-time job I have held since being a member of Brethren Volunteer Service. After I moved home from Elgin, Ill., where I filled the role of National Youth Conference coordinator, I began searching for a job in the area. For over 3 months, I submitted applications and went through the interview process, speaking with potential employers and waiting for a call back over 10 times. I began to feel discouraged, unconfident, and useless. I was frustrated, feeling like I was unable to find where God was calling me. I had just experienced the planning and coordinating of the 2018 National Youth Conference and it had been a mountaintop experience of over 15 months. And now, I was at home, struggling to find a job and the next step in my journey. As much as I loved being back home with my family, it was quite a

change for me, and in the midst of this transition, I found myself having a hard time adjusting.

Then, things seemed to fall into place. Finally, after all those applications, I accepted a position as an activities assistant in a nursing home's locked dementia unit. Since I had never worked in a nursing home or with dementia patients, I felt like I was about to walk into a whole new world. But, as I stepped into the nursing home on my first day, I knew my previous experiences of planning and ministry during BVS would be moments that I could draw from and that I could use to positively impact my patients and co-workers.

I am still learning the names, quirks, and routines of my patients, but I can honestly say that I think God made me wait for a job for a reason. I believe that God wanted me in a position where I could share my skills and creativity to make a difference in my community. I know that I'm helping to make the lives of my residents a little brighter as I add more fun to their day and build relationships with them. I see the work I am doing as a ministry, and when we sit around singing "Joy to the World" and I notice that residents who do not typically talk very much are singing every word, I know that the spirit is moving and that God is working. I look forward to continuing to brighten the lives of my residents and I am so excited to see where this call leads me!



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