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How has BVS shaped your
future?

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Upcoming orientations:

- Unit #337
July 27-August 4, 2025
Camp Colorado, Sedalia, CO
- Unit #338
September 10-18, 2025
Camp Mardela, Denton, MD

By the numbers:

- Active volunteers: 22
16 in the United States
3 in Europe
3 in Asia
- Active projects: 58
37 in the United States
8 in Europe
6 in Latin America
3 in Asia
4 in Africa

The Volunteer

Sharing God's love through acts of service

From Service to Purpose

Katelyn Hoffman, Unit 335 – Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center

The last 9 months volunteering through the Brethren Volunteer Service program have been the most formative months of my life so far. Having just graduated from high school, leaving my home country of Germany to serve at Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center was the best decision I could have made for myself. In this time, I have already grown and learned so much in many ways.

“The most formative months of my life”

One of the most important ways BVS has shaped my future is by helping me find my passion. A topic we discussed during orientation that really stuck with me was the idea of “finding your calling.” Throughout high school, I often felt overwhelmed and nervous about not knowing exactly what I wanted to do with my life. However, working at Ferncliff’s Nature Preschool has given me a sense of clarity and direction.



Working with kids has always been an interest of mine, and because I love the outdoors, Ferncliff’s nature preschool program was a perfect match. In my first few weeks at the camp, I had the opportunity to develop a variety of skills related to early childhood education, as well as gain experience teaching and guiding children in an outdoor setting.

This experience has helped me grow not only in my skills, but also personally. I’ve learned so much about myself and what it means to live in a community. Although the principles of living simply were an adjustment at first, it has deepened my appreciation and gratitude for everything I have. I am more aware and mindful of how rich I really am in life. This principle will shape the way I live for the rest of my life, and I am very glad to have this experience now.

Serving through BVS at Ferncliff has not only strengthened my love for working with children, but it has also helped me realize that this is the career path I want to pursue. I’m truly grateful for the opportunity to grow within such a supportive community, and for the chance to discover both my strengths and my passion.



Calvin Brown, Unit 335 - Corrymeela

Spending any significant amount of time in service has a wonderfully seismic quality about it, one that truly breaks and shifts all of one’s being and what one might know to be true. This confusing and exciting sensation was alien to me, even as I considered myself a fairly charitable person, and only emerged after some time in my BVS placement at the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland.

Corrymeela is a peacebuilding and reconciliation center, where most of the volunteer work is hospitality oriented. During my time here, I have become well acquainted with the dishwasher and mops, far more than I have with peacemaking dialogue and mediation. Often, this is a source of great frustration, the feeling that I should or could be doing more. I still feel this way. However, these are not the feelings of one who wishes to experience transformative service. These feelings are those of the pedestrian servant, putting one’s own desires before the work that needs to be done. This is also the kind of servitude that we enact in our own private lives. We often ask ourselves: What can I do? We might donate to charity, sign a petition, or even volunteer some of our time at a food bank. These are good actions, made by good people. But I would argue that we are asking the wrong questions. What I have taken most from this year in BVS is the question: Who can I be? For transformative service, there can be no clocking in and clocking out. I have learned that service must be embodied, not performed, and that every day one must ask oneself: How can I make myself useful? This is the greatest gift that my time in BVS has given me, and one that I hope to take into the future as well.

“I have learned that service must be embodied, not performed, and that every day one must ask oneself, ‘How can I make myself useful?’”

Carla Sornig, Unit 335 - ABODE



Greetings from Fremont, California! I am one of the German BVS volunteers and am currently serving the community living at Sunrise Village Homeless Shelter in the Bay Area.

Since the beginning of my year, I have worked closely together with the unhoused population at Abode's shelter, and it has been a very humbling experience. I have listened to stories of people who have had to start over again many times, and I have seen what substance abuse can do to people, their families, and their relationships.

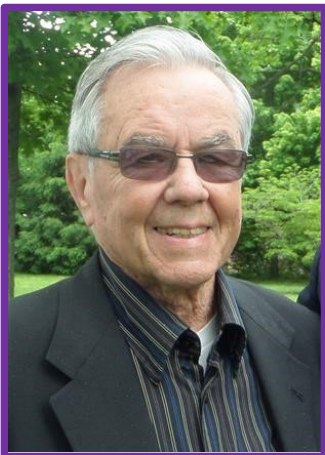
If there is one thing I have learned, it is to be grateful. I am grateful for the chances I was given in my childhood and for the privileges I had growing up. During my BVS year, I have learned that tragedies can strike everyone and that sometimes it is pure luck that one is not in the same position as the residents in the shelter. Some of the best people are part of this community, yet they have been ignored and pushed to the side by the rest of society and fallen victim to harmful stereotypes.

"If there is one thing I have learned, it is to be grateful."

My life will forever be influenced by my time serving here in California, and I will be walking through life even more open-minded than before. I will keep all the little moments of gratitude, tragedy, and happiness in remembrance of this time, and will continue to help give a voice to people that deserve to be listened to.

My year as a Church of the Brethren volunteer helped me become more conscious, grateful, and patient in life, and has shaped me into the person I am today. In addition to the amazing people that I've gotten to know, this experience has helped me gain independence and has influenced decisions for my future, like what to choose for my major, and I'll always be grateful for that.

Ken Kreider, Unit 25



I entered the BVS 25th unit on December 1, 1954. After 2 months of orientation, we were asked to list our 3 preferences for assignment. I listed BVS projects in Europe, Falfurrias, Texas, and California. I was assigned to be a guinea pig for medical research at NIH in Bethesda, MD, and later to the Metabolic Research Unit of the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor. Because I was a "farm boy" I was then assigned to represent Heifer Project in Germany. When the Hungarian Revolution broke out in 1956, I was transferred to coordinate work of BVSers in Hungarian refugee camps in Austria. My final assignment was to work with former BVSer Don Murray (Hollywood movie star who co-starred with Marylyn Monroe in "Bus Stop.") in establishing a home for "hard core" refugees from World War II on the island of Sardinia, Italy.

My nearly three years of BVS experience opened my eyes to the validity of various cultures and opinions. It also taught me to be flexible and adapt to unexpected issues. I could write an essay describing interesting experiences in all of these assignments.

I will only discuss my work as director of the establishing of a new home for World War II refugees in Sardinia. Three refugees from the camp at Aversa, Gregory Roubal from the Soviet Union, Premysl Nyc from Bohemia, and Anthony Saez Perez from the Spanish Civil War, and I set up housekeeping in a small 2-room cement structure on land which Don's representative and I had purchased (with Don Murray's money) from the Italian government. Our job was to prepare the land for irrigation – for farming. Our two rooms (each approx. 9x12 ft) were designated as kitchen (we purchased a two-burner gas hotplate, which we sat on Roubal's suitcase to cook our spaghetti) and bedroom.

Since we had no electricity we retired at nightfall, sleeping on the concrete floor. I was in the middle, with Roubal to my right and Nyc to my left. Tony slept outside. As we lay there in the darkness one night I kept verbally pushing Nyc as to his background. He had been a cinematographer in his native Bohemia until the Nazis occupied his homeland. "Yes" he finally blurted, "I was a member of the Gestapo. That's why I always wear a long sleeve shirt – to cover over the identifying tattoo the Nazis burned into my arm." The small hairs on the back of my head must have stood straight up (laying there in the dark with a Russian to my right and a former Nazi to my left) as I tried to keep a calm voice and ask how that occurred. Imprisoned and tortured, he was given the choice of joining the Nazis or be killed.

This and many other experiences in BVS caused me to decide that instead of returning to our farm, I would go to college – to find out what caused World War II and all that suffering. It eventually led to earning my PhD and retirement after 35 years as a Professor of European History at Elizabethtown College.

BVS Visionary Voices

Did you know? BVS has a new quarterly speaker series! Join us to hear from professionals in our community as they share their activism



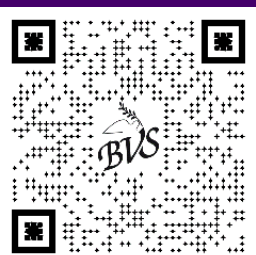
surrounding relevant topics that are linked to the four BVS goals: advocating justice, working for peace, caring for creating, and serving human need.

Our most recent speaker was Rev. Jenn Hosler, PhD., who spoke about her experience in the Middle East and being a peacebuilder in Washington DC.



This summer, nine FaithX service trips are underway. There are 160 participants joining us for a Junior or Senior High trip in various locations across the United States. In addition, four adults are headed to Uganda in mid-July.

"My nearly three years of BVS experience opened my eyes to the validity of various cultures and opinions."



INTERESTED IN:

- Volunteering with BVS or FaithX
- Receiving monthly BVS updates
- Connecting with BVS alumni or supporters

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<https://linktr.ee/brethrenvolunteerservice>



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