



SERVING FLORIDA FAITHFULLY

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"A Change in Perspective" A Reflection by Christina Jindra



When I was told CVIF had a found potential site placement for me, I was ecstatic. I was getting ready to graduate from the University of Akron and was ready to use my newfound degree and freedom to save the world. I just wanted to serve people and I was ready to go anywhere to do this. I thought that I was prepared for anything.

"The site we are considering for you is a place called L'Arche. It is a community for adults with developmental disabilities." I had never worked with this population before and I had never really desired to do so. I was partially horrified and terrified, and even a little disappointed. I look back and laugh at myself now. It is amazing how fast my perspective completely changed.

Within my first week of coming to L'Arche, I knew that God had brought me here and that I was right where I belonged. L'Arche itself is a unique community. It is not an "institution" as I had imagined. It is a community of actual houses where adults with *and* without disabilities live *together*. Here, I am not just a caregiver; I am a friend, a spiritual advisor, and a confidant. The core members are not just my charges; they are my friends and my family. The things that I have learned this year have shocked me. I understand better now that every human being deserves to be treated like a human- regardless of race, gender, language, religion, IQ, or history. I have learned the virtue of patience and the value of living in the moment.

I have learned to search for the unique gifts in every individual. Everyone around me has value. Although easy to say, witnessing this ideal being put into practice in this community and home has helped me see things differently. This lesson is something that I hope to carry into my future in ministry. I hope to always look at those around me as valuable individuals with gifts that are worth sharing.

Each CVIF retreat reminds me of how much I have grown. I see the changes in the attitudes and demeanors of the other volunteers. In their eyes, I see the reflection of my own experiences and growth. We have come a long way in a short amount of time. Everyone and everything came together to help me grow and to form an experience and that I will never forget. I am grateful to the people I have met along the way- core members, L'Arche, CVIF, and other volunteers serving in their respective service sites. Most of all, I thank God for everything. This year came from Him and I am so blessed to have been here.

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Reflections from 30 Year Event

O'Neil Service Award Recipient - Kevin Johnson



Kevin and Amanda Johnson

The opportunity to serve with CVIF changed my life.

After college, my wife and I felt drawn to serve for a year as full-time volunteers. We wanted the opportunity to serve the Church as laypeople through direct service to others. After researching various places, we decided to serve in South Florida in group homes for people with developmental disabilities.

As we crossed the border, doubt began to creep in. What were we doing? Why weren't we pursuing graduate studies or jumping into our careers? We had no direct experience working in this field, what were we thinking? Could we handle this for a year? Fortunately, we were able to

convince each other to keep driving south.

Our first activity was to join the group homes in a trip to Lion Country Safari. Our fears immediately disappeared. In South Florida we had the opportunity to experience a true community. The individuals there touched our hearts and changed us forever. Even in our careers today, we continue to serve people with developmental disabilities and are honored to share our lives with so many amazing people.

As Executive Director of Bishop Grady Villas, I have been blessed with the opportunity to partner with CVIF as a service site. Each year, new volunteers are placed and always bring energy and enthusiasm to share with our residents. At Bishop Grady Villas, volunteers help our residents become as independent as possible. In turn, they have the opportunity to learn from our residents. I warn new volunteers to be careful because the year after college can quickly change their plans, just like it did for my wife and I. I am humbled to be honored with the O'Neill Service Award. The CVIF 30th Anniversary Event sponsored by Glynn Consulting, Thrivent Financial and the New Hope Foundation was a great way to celebrate three decades of changing the lives of volunteers and serving Florida (and beyond). Please consider supporting CVIF through your prayers, by sharing our mission with your family, friends or coworkers and through financial support. Please help future generations experience this amazing ministry.

Geiger Lifetime Achievement Award - Dr. Michael McCarron



Left to Right: Dr. Michael McCarron, Carol Brinati, and Cheryl McCarron

"BECOME WHO YOU ARE." Recently I was reflecting on the motto of CVIF: Become Who You Are. It is quite a power packed phrase. I have always felt that things that we are good at and things that we like to do are indications from God as to what we should pursue in life. Few will argue with the notion that each of us are given special gifts, talents and abilities. What is also clear is that these blessings bestowed on us are meant not only for ourselves, but for the betterment of all around us. Or as St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians, "There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all." (cf. 1Cor. 12: 6-8).

Saint Francis de Sales had a handle on all of this. He well understood the uniqueness with which each individual has been blessed. One of his most famous quotes is, "Be who you are, and be that perfectly well."

As we progress through this life, we hopefully become more aware of the special gifts we have been given. Realizing our particular gifts is an area worthy of reflection. And as we become more aware of our unique abilities, it is helpful to keep in mind the clear counsel of Saint Luke: "To whom much is given, much is required."

(cf. Luke 12:48).

Implied in all of this is that each of us has a responsibility to develop the gifts we have been given. The great Swiss theologian and Catholic priest, Hans Urs von Balthasar, took these ideas to a higher level. He is credited with saying, "What you are, is God's gift to you; what you become, is your gift to him." These words are inspiring for us not only at that stage of life when we are beginning adulthood or professional endeavors. They are equally applicable at the different stages of life, at midcareer, and even as one embarks on retirement, where looking back one can see that each stage of life's journey has many special opportunities to better understand and gradually become who you are.

Winter Retreat Highlights



This retreat offered me a renewed sense of community. We all came together and connected at a deeper level at this retreat. I was able to share my pain and dreams with Briana. Julio, inspired me to trust myself. Megan, made me laugh more than I thought possible. Vanessa, showed me how to be a friend to the unlovely. Charles, reminded me that humility is the essence of love. I got to see first-hand Rebecca's passion and love for the victims of sex trafficking. Mycia, taught me the value of listening. Kristin and Rachel showed me that friendship is the most beautiful type of love. Greg, challenged me to not judge before understanding. Walter, that age is not limiting but only an addition of wisdom. Jenna, teaches me that smiling is infectious. Manny, that science does care. Renika, that you can still look good while serving. And finally in Christina I see Christ at work every day.



We were all apart of different communities when we came to Florida, and each of us brought a part of that community with us. Our bubbles are connecting and becoming one and we are making this world a smaller and better place to be. - Katie Schulte



Spring Retreat Highlights

Going into the day of silence I was a bit nervous. There were almost 24 hours of no talking, which I love to do. But it turned out that I really enjoyed my day. After taking some time to think deeply about some of the many questions I had, I finally came to answers!

My favorite part of this last retreat was the talent show! It was so much fun to see how creative each of the performances, as well as audience involvement! It was really a wonderful night! - Jenna Gmeinder



Spring Project: Camillus House



During Spring Retreat, we spent a morning volunteering at Camillus House – a shelter that shows a tremendous example of social justice versus social service. They help those in immediate need with meals but they also have long-term living and various other services for people wanting to get out of the cycle of homelessness.

It's incredible how people will open up in joy that someone is genuinely listening to their story. One of the long term residents who particularly touched my heart was in the midst of a custody battle for his four children who had previously lived with their grandmother. She passed away a week prior to our conversation and he shared with me his fear that the children would be traumatized, how does one explain death to young children? I'm obviously no expert, but I shared what advice I thought appropriate and offered to pray for him and his family. By the end of the conversation he was in tears, I hadn't realized until then that our eyes had been locked on each other the entire time but he did and he thanked me for sharing a mostly uninterrupted moment with him. He said he had been praying for help and he felt I was a Godsend, listening ears for he who needed just to get some anxieties off his chest. I realized in that moment how important it is just to have genuine concern for one another. It isn't about giving the most professional, profound advice it was about a simple smile in his direction, focused eyes that told him I was listening, a hug to show him we are all in this together. - Vanessa Hornedo



(This is an excerpt from Vanessa's blog found at: my-grassisalwaygreen.wordpress.com)

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Service Site Spotlight



Starting Right, Now aims to end the generational cycle of homelessness. Homelessness in Hillsborough County nearly doubled last year with 3,100 homeless students counted. Without a high school diploma, many fall into crime. When just surviving becomes your focus, education loses importance. Without support, students fall through the cracks and into the tragic cycle of homelessness. The need for our program is best described through the eyes of one of the participants. Here is Jackson's story:

At age 15, I was kicked out of my house. My mother said she hated me. She was angry at the world, an effect of her brain surgery, refusing to speak to anyone. She disconnected our phones and would not allow me to speak to family. Cops and CPS came to our house because my sister cut herself due to my mother's abuse. One day, I came home to my mom in a fit of rage. She was yelling and smacking me. She told me to get out of her house. So I did. At 15, I began caring for myself. I did not want to end up like my brothers, locked in a cell. I was determined to attend school but did not factor in how I would get there, where I would stay or how I would eat. I began couch surfing and missing a lot of school. I was working 40 hours a week, living in a trailer with a friend. I can't even count the days we went without electricity or food. Things got really tough, so I reached out to my school social worker.



She introduced me to Starting Right, Now. They helped me with a stable place to live, food and transportation to school. They matched me with a mentor (like CV- Kristen Brahier) who became my advocate. They worked with me to realize my dream of college could be real. The magic for me happened in their GRAD program, which consisted of: Dale Carnegie, emotional intelligence, anger management, mental mapping and financial literacy. Through their help, I realized I had control over my life. I now attend college at Florida International University and take advantage of every opportunity that comes my way. Last year, I had a 3.6 GPA and endless possibilities.



While the scope of SRN can't possibly reach everyone and be world changing, our impact is world changing for individuals who enter our program. Students learn life skills and values transcending homelessness, passed on to generations, ending the cycle. SRN is ending homelessness, one child at a time. The value of each student who reaches their potential is priceless. - Vicki Sokolik, Founder and Executive Director

My Year Thus Far by Kristen Brahier



I was matched with a program called "Starting Right, Now", a non-profit organization that assists homeless and unaccompanied teens in the Tampa Bay area. The mission of the program is to assist students in graduating from high school and entering into college. As I began my year, I realized that Starting Right, Now does so much more than I could have imagined. It provides a unique one-on-one mentoring program, assistance with social services needs such as food stamps and health care, tutoring for classes as well as standardized tests, and transitional housing. When I first started in August, there were six high school students that were preparing to enter into their senior year, and at this moment we have fifteen seniors preparing to graduate along with five juniors who will be seniors in the fall. The program has grown immensely throughout my year, and I am so blessed to have been a part of it.

I am so grateful for the opportunity to serve with Starting Right, Now. It has been a truly transformational experience for me. I was not expecting to fall in love with the program but once you meet the students, you cannot help but love and admire all that they have gone through. I cannot wait to see the great things each of them will accomplish.

Joining CVIF has brought me to a wonderful place in my life. I have met so many wonderful people in Tampa and cannot imagine my life without them. Each day brings new challenges, but I have learned the skills to overcome them.

I am so thankful for the opportunities that both CVIF and Starting Right, Now have offered me. Looking back, my time has been filled with laughter, smiles, tears (both happy and sad), but above all, it has been filled with love. My fellow volunteers and the students I serve have become part of my ever growing extended family. I am so fortunate and blessed to have been given this opportunity and know that great things are yet to come.

"Through the Thou, a Person Becomes I" - By Julio Sharp



We all have brief experiences, sometimes as short-lived as the length of a conversation or of an instantaneous insight gleaned from an expression on another person's face, that permanently affect our personalities and values. My year of service was itself one of those experiences and was composed of many shorter moments of like depth and gravity, which shared both with people with disabilities at my service site and with other Catholic Volunteers. These shorter moments offered glimpses into a uniquely powerful kind of happiness experienced in the act of assisting others with love; and the aggregate of these experiences embodies for me the foundation of a life guided by the pursuit of such a form of happiness, should I choose to build upon this foundation with future effort.



The opportunity to help others for no reason other than the intrinsic fulfillment of the activity—and not, for instance, out of a need for income to support a family, or in pursuit of credentials for one's career—is a rare gift. Although some of my fellow volunteers were inspired to a particular professional vocation by their service here, in my case, as with many others, my work in this year of service will most likely prove to be essential only to my vocation in the more general sense of the word. When I began this year, I felt drained by the selfishness and superficiality of much of college life, and I was left feeling uncertain about the

value and purpose of my upcoming life journey. My decision to spend this year devoted to a combination of sincere contemplation of that question and honest work towards creating its answer, is the best decision I have ever made. In the words of the Jewish mystic Martin Buber, in which he addressed the centrality of loving contact with others to the development human purpose, "Through the thou a person becomes I." I wish for the strength to do all that I do from now on, from the small things to the big things, with love for others contained within and guiding my actions, because such is the only way to live sincerely and meaningfully.

Alumni Spotlight

Cristina Ferrara (CVIF '11-'12)



Josh and Cristina met November 2012 in Maryland, shortly after her first year of service with CVIF. Josh proposed December 2013 and their wedding date is August 23, 2014.

She is also currently working as a Personal Trainer at a large fitness club right outside of the city. With the new job and wedding planning, this year has been exciting and ever changing!

Roger Farinha (CVIF '05-06)

Immediately after his year of service, Roger embarked on an exciting chapter in his life. He traveled throughout the USA and spoke with fellow Americans on living an intentional life.

Out of his experience, a book has been generated, chronicling how he has found his sense of self, and mission in life going forward. An inspirational piece for all the lost talents of the world still groping for their identities...

Kelly Soberay (Moroney) (CVIF '05-06)



Kelly Soberay and husband Adam welcomed their son, Colin William on December 18, 2013. Colin loves the outdoors and can live without meeting the Easter Bunny ever again.

They live in Denver, CO where Kelly works at the Denver VA Medical Center for the Military Suicide Research Consortium.

Kate Hibbard-Gibbons (CVIF '08-'09)

Kate Hibbard-Gibbons will be getting married to Derek on May 10th, 2014.

She was also accepted to Western Michigan University and looks forward to starting her PHD program in Counseling Psychology this fall!





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Recruiting for 2015 Service Year

Application Deadline Approaching

We are still interviewing for 5 volunteer positions for our 2015 service year which begins July 27 with Orientation in Orlando. **APPLY NOW at www.cvif.org if you are ready for a year that will change your life!** Applicants should have a college degree and a heart for serving the following positions and/or these populations:

- *Adults and children with developmental disabilities*
- *Social services case manager*
- *Advocate for children and teens in the dependency system*
- *Families in transition seeking emergency financial services*
- *Youth ministry*



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