



L'Arche Greater Washington, D.C.
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FALL 2021

HOME *matters*

BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF FAITH AND
LIFELONG HOMES FOR PEOPLE WITH AND
WITHOUT INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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Michael Schaff and
Laura Heiman enjoy
Tie Dye Day at
Ontario House.

The Joy of Effort

By Luke Smith,
Community Leader | Executive Director

This summer, I reflected upon how there has been so much change.

As I sat watching Olympic events I thought to myself what a strange world we're living in... A world where we are cheering on swimmers, archers, and speed walkers, athletes at the top of the field, while also facing a pandemic that has shown us the reality that we as humanity are so vulnerable.

This vulnerability isn't anything new. We can acknowledge our vulnerability, we may face it daily, we might even make time to celebrate it in certain contexts, but we do far more to hide it and put much effort into protecting ourselves from it, insulating ourselves and those around us.

One of the elements that makes L'Arche who we are is that we acknowledge and welcome our shared vulnerability, our individual vulnerabilities, and the recognition that we need and accept one another.

This doesn't just happen — to go back to the Olympics, one of the values of the Olympics is the joy of effort. The joy of effort!

It feels that so many things that we have previously taken for granted, now take so much effort. Hosting events, seeing friends safely, planning even short vacations, everything takes more effort during COVID-19.

THE PANDEMIC HAS TAKEN SO MUCH EFFORT AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO, AND THROUGHOUT ALL THIS EFFORT IS THE SAME THEME OF JOY.

Joy in the midst of grief and mourning. Joy in being able to celebrate the daily moments and to take time to celebrate the significant moments like anniversaries in the lives of our homes and our people. The joy of being welcomed into our churches, welcomed back to our jobs, starting new jobs, the joy of receiving an invitation, the joy of being able to offer invitations.

I am immensely grateful for all of the efforts that our assistants and core members make daily, in choosing to recognize that we as L'Arche GWDC, in our vulnerabilities, are living a way of life that can and does change our world to be a more human place, a place where I hope we can recognise and accept our need of each other.

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Behind the scenes of the claymation videos Joseph directed. Credit: Anna Fox



Lauren and Eric pose for a photo on the Highland House porch. Credit: Lauren Palmer



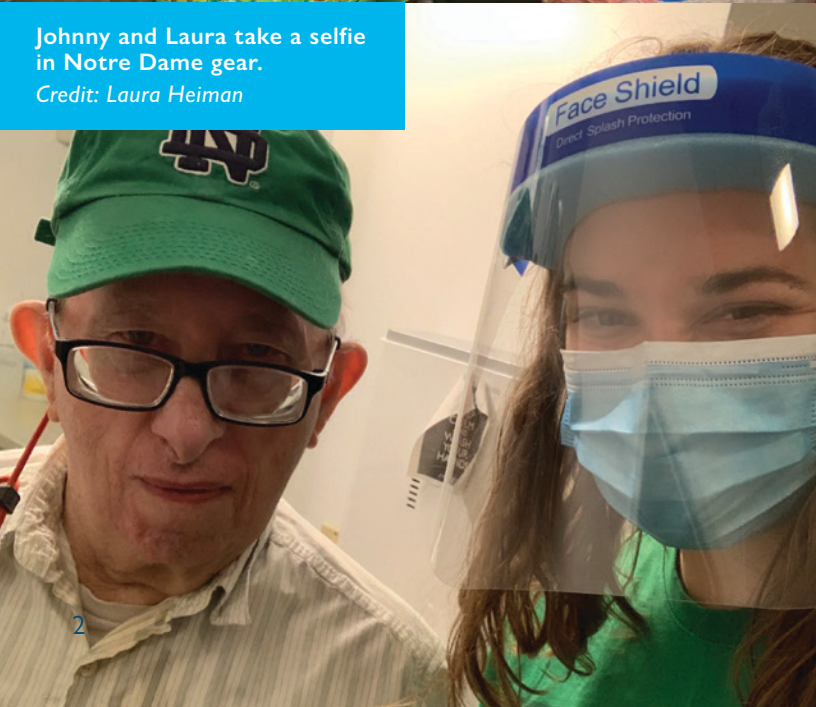
Eileen and Sera pose with their papier-mâché Easter egg! Credit: Laura Heiman



Francene and Alice went on a short vacation to a train town! Credit: Alice Felker



Johnny and Laura take a selfie in Notre Dame gear. Credit: Laura Heiman



Fritz picks tulips! Credit: Lauren Palmer



Summer Volunteer Spotlight: Kinsey Jarboe

By Kinsey Jarboe

I had the pleasure of living in Arlington at one of the L'Arche GWDC houses. When I arrived on May 10, I had no clue what to expect. I had just finished my junior year of college two days earlier and was nervous about such a sudden change of scenery. I distinctly remember waking up at 6 am the morning I was expected to move in, restless and unable to sleep. I was so sure that I would not be helpful to the core members and the rest of the community, and that they would be better off if I didn't show up at all. Of course, this was a bit dramatic of me, and I got myself and all of my belongings together for my 11am move to 6th Street.

I remember my very first encounter so vividly. Another assistant welcomed me at the door, and within seconds I was greeted by Charles. Instantly, Charles made me feel at home, explaining how he was going to make me a "L'Arche family member for life." I was so touched. I had been in the house no more than five minutes and I was already being told to stay. Instantly my nerves went away.

Unfortunately, I had to wait about 24 hours until I was able to further my interactions with other core members since I was still waiting on the results from a recent COVID test. That next Tuesday evening was my first official day as a summer volunteer. I soon found out that Tuesdays were very special to the L'Arche VA community; it was their celebration night. For the next few hours, I experienced such an overwhelming sense of love and acceptance. I was blessed to meet almost all of the community members with whom I would spend the next eight weeks.

Throughout my time at 6th Street, the biggest thing I learned was the gift of patience. At L'Arche, and in life really, people communicate in their own unique ways. It can take some time to figure out the best ways to communicate with one another. Mutual patience was a key aspect to communicating and building a relationship and a lesson that I will carry with me in other aspects of my life. I am incredibly grateful for the relationships I was able to establish in such a short time there, however long it took for those relationships to blossom.

I would have to say that my biggest challenge as a volunteer was learning where my responsibilities ended. For example, learning that I did not need to intervene in every argument that took place between core members was difficult for me. At first, I would have to catch myself stepping into situations in which I did not need to. Through conversations with other family members, it became clear to me that there

was dignity behind giving core members the chance to have their own arguments.

WITH THESE CONFLICTS, I ALSO EXPERIENCED INCREDIBLE "FAMILY STYLE" PROBLEM-SOLVING THAT TOOK PLACE WITHIN THE HOUSE. AT THE END OF THE DAY, THERE WAS ALWAYS LOVE PRESENT.

If it isn't clear by now, I loved my entire experience at L'Arche; so much so that I will be returning part-time in September as an assistant! If I had to pick one part of my eight weeks as a volunteer that I most loved, I would have to say it is the bonds I formed. From playing games with Charles, to shopping with Laurie, Target trips with Bruce, and outdoor walks with Francene, I formed beautiful and unique friendships within my house. Even outside my own house, with the greater community, I had the pleasure of having individual outings with Eric, Kelly, and Hazel. I look forward to seeing everyone again very soon. I am so blessed to have shared such a great couple of weeks at 6th Street, and thank everyone who helped me while I was new and adjusting.



Kinsey, Bruce, and Laurie smile together in 6th Street.



Remembering Andrew

Our brother Andrew, a core member at Euclid Apartment at L'Arche GWDC, passed away this year.

By Meredith Gursky, DC Service Team Leader

When I was welcomed to L'Arche GWDC I wasn't initially sharing time at Euclid Apartment, where Andrew lived, but one couldn't go long without meeting him, or rather, having Andrew help you to meet everyone else. I remember being struck by his ability to not only connect people but get them to fully acknowledge one another. It didn't matter if we had already passed by one another a number of times in the day, Andrew encouraged us to shake hands again, and again, and again – inviting us to see the goodness in one another and the gift of being able to share time and space. Quickly, Andrew taught me the value of pausing to greet, acknowledge, and validate the little joys, gifts, and quirks others brought to our community. I was better for it.

In these instances of encounter, I also began to recognize my own goodness and worthiness. I am a person worthy of being met.

ANDREW SAW THAT EVEN ON MY WORST DAY, I HAD SOMETHING TO OFFER AND HE HAD A WAY OF WELCOMING ME AND OTHERS IN OUR WHOLENESS, DEMANDING EACH GOOFY BIT OF OUR BEING BE BROUGHT INTO THE LIGHT.

We were invited to fake cry, or sing loudly, or utilize accents or silly voices to narrate daily activities. Life is never, nor should it be, dull. There is a place for us in our vibrancy and wholeness. Andrew also modeled this in the way he was unafraid to take up space and be seen. Andrew loved deeply what and whom he loved and took a leadership role in making sure his priorities were known and honored. Andrew was so comfortable in his skin, and because of how supporting Andrew required you to walk hand in hand through life, you often had no choice but to be comfortable too.

Though I can tell many tales of being led by Andrew across a stage or altar or in front of a crowd at what I deemed an undesirable and attention-drawing time, some of my favorite moments of Andrew forcing me to be unafraid to be seen happened in Scranton, PA. During Regional Gathering 2019, a "L'Arche Family Reunion" of sorts, Andrew and I got to spend a lot of time together. Much of that time was during the portion of the day dedicated to community skits. While everyone sat and watched or listened intently to each community's creative way of sharing, Andrew and I could be heard, and then seen, rhythmically stepping closer and closer to the stage. Despite my attempts to whisper redirections in Andrew's ear, he was much too confident in himself, his place, and his value for my lack of comfort. Our stepping culminated in us joining a choreographed dance with L'Arche Syracuse as if we had rehearsed with them for weeks! As the dance ended and Andrew had the audacity to take a bow with the members of Syracuse, I'm sure my face was a nice tomato red, but I couldn't help but smile. What a lovely example of confidence and conviction.

It's a human desire to be known, seen, and appreciated, but often difficult to be vulnerable enough to reach a depth of relationship in which we are able to be fully known. It is a paradox of sorts where we have a deep need to be known but lack the skills or confidence to put ourselves in a position to be appreciated in our fullness. Andrew was and continues to be a great example of this – bold enough to model how to take up space well, and gentle enough to call others to encounter and celebrate all sides of themselves and one another. L'Arche GWDC and all who know Andrew are better for it.



Amplifying the Voices of People with Intellectual Disabilities In the Medical System

By Mary Ellen Dingley

Charles Clark has, at times, needed to remind people that he's an adult, and not "a five year old boy." Charles is a core family member at L'Arche and an experienced advocate. With his voice, along with the voice of Eileen and other community members, we created the film "My Voice" which aims to amplify the voices of people with intellectual disabilities in the medical field.

CHARLES HAS UNFORTUNATELY EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION IN THE MEDICAL FIELD, AND HE'S NOT ALONE IN THAT. THE FILM IS BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE OF MANY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

My Voice is an educational tool that elevates the voices and experiences of people with intellectual disabilities in the medical system. It provides tangible tools and recommendations for healthcare professionals to improve their ability to provide appropriate care. It was created in partnership with the DC Developmental Disabilities Council and with support from the NBCUniversal Foundation, Project Innovation.

The film opens with a look back on the horrific conditions found in many institutions where people with disabilities were forced to live. It moves into interviews with core members and medical professionals, and a comprehensive presentation of practical advice for ensuring that medical settings are accessible and welcoming to people with disabilities.

Since launching the film last March, we've been able to present it to various groups, including medical students at Georgetown University and direct support providers in training at the University of DC. Charles said that presenting to Georgetown students was "real good, I enjoyed it."

Head to www.larche-gwdc.org/myvoice to check out the film! Get in touch if you'd like us to lead a presentation about it at your school, workplace, or church.



A sunny behind the scenes shot of Charles and Eva-Elizabeth working on filming



Inclusion Party Team has a COVID safe meeting with Joseph, Kelly and Meredith! Credit: Lauren Palmer



Above: 6th Street House in Luray, Virginia. Credit: Ava Whitlark

Top right: Laurie and Kinsey have fun exploring the town. Credit: Mary Forbes

Right: Hazel, Justin, and Gerhard went kayaking too. Credit: John O'Connor



Above: Eric, Lauren, and Maggie kayaking. Credit: John O'Connor

Below: Fritz enjoys the sunset by the water. Credit: John O'Connor

Open to the Party

By Mary Ellen Dingley

If you ask Kelly about the Inclusion Party Team she often mentions voting. Kelly is co-leader of the Inclusion Party Team along with Lauren, and how they do their work - voting as a group to make decisions - is important to her. It's a way to make her voice heard.

The Inclusion Party Team (IPT) exists to teach people about inclusion and help hold GWDC accountable to being led by core members. As Lauren puts it, they exist to help people know they can make mistakes in the world of inclusion. And that it takes time and relationship to live inclusively. For GWDC specifically: "we are here to focus on core member leadership, and kinda instill that sense of, you know, every role in L'Arche is responsible for practicing inclusion and by that in L'Arche we mean being led by core members." Kelly mentioned how "we belong together."

Kelly chose the name "Inclusion Party Team." "You have to be open to the party," laughed Lauren. You can't take yourself too seriously when attempting to grow in inclusion, she explained.

The IPT leads trainings, including for the GWDC community and for L'Arche USA. In the training, Kelly described how they role-play, draw, and play games like the "mirror game" and Simon says, all as a way to teach core concepts about inclusion. They also spoke at L'Arche Assemblies in places like Chicago and Takoma.

At these trainings, they teach participants to be aware that "we can do better" when it comes to inclusion, according to Lauren. A lot of the training is about awareness - awareness that being led by core members can be different based on that core member's needs and gifts. Awareness of the pitfalls of tokenism. Questions are asked such as "What do people need to meaningfully participate?" "How can everyone use accessibility tools to be more connected?"

With all the fun they have, the IPT also faces challenges. This work "can mean a lot of different things and be all-encompassing," says Lauren. This makes it hard to focus on any one area, especially when the wider society does not prioritize people with disabilities. When COVID hit, how they met and trained others changed, with everything shifting to virtual. As staff hours also increased, other duties often took priority as well.

Through it all, the Inclusion Party Team keeps up with the learning and laughter, committed to growing together. As Lauren says, "it's ok if you make mistakes. This is an invitation to try."

Summer Fun

Everyone needs time to get away, adventure, and relax, especially after a difficult year of pandemic living. Thanks to wonderful donors, our houses can go on annual vacations together! They look forward to these vacations and talk about them for months after. Check out photos from recent vacations that Virginia homes went on.

Eric says he loves having a "good time swimming the waves. I'm a swimmer!" Kelly and Fritz enjoy going out to eat. For Lauren, she likes how it's a "different way of being together" and "trying new things." This past summer, Kelly and Hazel tried a new thing - kayaking in the ocean!

For Mary, an assistant at Virginia homes, she said vacation "really does bond everyone together," especially since "the rest of the year we can reminisce and remember." Laurie likes "everything" about house vacation. Charles enjoys fishing and eating out, while Fran liked seeing baby cows on their trip this past summer!

Photo Album



Ontario House gets dressed up for a tea party!
Credit: Laura Heiman



Charles had a birthday with a car parade!
Charles and Alice enjoy the festivities.
Credit: Lauren Palmer



Bruce, Gerhard, and Charles worked on a Little Free Library they are building
Credit: Alice Felker



Ontario enjoys meeting outside, even on rainy days.
Credit: Anna Fox



Joseph and Anna visited Hazel at Highland House!
Credit: Anna Fox



Debora and Michael enjoy their at-home "gala" at Ontario House.
Credit: Laura Heiman



Kelly voted in the primaries.
Credit: Liddy Grantland



Johnny and Cruz plant flowers on the Ontario House balcony.
Credit: Laura Heiman



Rachel, Amy, and Caitlin are prepared to provide COVID testing for staff.
Credit: Luke Smith



Cruz, Michael, Allison, and Laurie order ice cream during a community outing at Bull Run.
Credit: Sara Kellenberg

Blessed the Old Lungs

By Alfonso “Sito” Sasieta

In Memory of Mo Higgs , a founding core member at L’Arche GWDC who passed away in 2019.



Painting by Brooke Lacock-Nisly, Title: Old Turkey

Blessed are you

who dipped
the dry bucket of my Spirit
as deep as it would go,

and lowered me, gently,
into the caverns
of our abyss.

During the dark weeks
of bed bugs
and departures,

a wellspring
began to pool
at the bottom of my life

in a place so deep
that I had feared it for years
and never visited.

So, I went there, but not alone.
So, blessed are the hand tremors
that held my own.

Blessed the old lungs
that labored in the dark

and invited me to sleep
on the floor of your room—
that asked me in the morning,

Where were you, Sicko?
I thought I was gonna die.

Blessed the fear that is named.
Blessed the dark edges of the heart
and the imperceptible sources of love.

Blessed are you. Blessed are you.



Mary Ellen and Eileen discuss the impact of L’Arche

Project Impact: Our Experience

By Mary Ellen Dingley

During a snowy week in January 2020, a group of people from six different L’Arche communities gathered near Kansas City to kick off Project Impact. The project had two goals: building the capacity of communities to conduct evaluations and finding out whether or not L’Arche had impacted members in the ways we expected. For 3 days, project leaders got to know each other, hashed out the intended impacts of L’Arche, and trained on data collection. We came up with impact questions such as: are L’Arche community members developing awareness, sensitivity, and curiosity for others? Are core members able to make and implement choices in their lives? Do community members find belonging in L’Arche?

After many discussions (and some evenings of Bananagrams!), project leaders dispersed back to their communities to build teams and start interviewing.

At L’Arche GWDC, we interviewed a sampling of core members, assistants, family members of core members, volunteers, board members, and friends of L’Arche. The stories they told us were insightful, challenging, and inspiring. There was the former assistant who told us how L’Arche taught him so much about love and relationships. The core member who said L’Arche allowed her to be a “grown woman,” handling her own finances and holding down a job. There were the friends of L’Arche who saw the love of Jesus in our community. The parents of core members who watched their child blossom through the opportunities at L’Arche.

There were also the people who found life at L’Arche sometimes exhausting and stressful. There were those who felt they still had knowledge gaps when it came to supporting the wider cause of disability rights.

The six different communities came back together (virtually) to share their experiences and findings and to create the second step of evaluation: a quantitative survey. When that data came back, we gathered to see where findings contradicted each other and where they overlapped. We asked questions about our analyses and methods and reviewed each other’s draft reports. Finally, last June, we gathered online to present our findings to the wider L’Arche community and to scholars and academics interested in our work.

Some of the interesting findings included:

- Community members learned how to be vulnerable, and this changed who they are and how they love
- Core members had the opportunity to make more choices, communicate more freely, and serve as leaders
- Members of L’Arche came to appreciate and connect with people of different ability levels, cultures, ethnicities, and religious preferences
- There were mixed responses on whether or not someone would engage in advocacy or speak up for someone with disabilities after spending time at L’Arche. A number of people said they didn’t feel they knew how to do this. This could be interesting to dig into more and perhaps provide advocacy education.

From there, we are finalizing the report and creative videos to highlight some findings. Stay tuned for more!