



L'ARCHE®
Portland

People with and without intellectual disabilities sharing life together

Nehalem News

Winter 2016

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— GRAINS OF TRUTH —

by Keeley Terpstra, Assistant at L'Arche Portland

I came to L'Arche Portland in 2013 after talking at length about my future with Beth Barsotti at the University of Portland. Beth told me I had a "tenderness" and planted the seed for L'Arche. I read up on Jean Vanier and visited the Portland community. Bernie and Kat and Marilyn, among others, welcomed me. I was drawn out of curiosity and wanting to witness a more varied experience of faith and religion than I had witnessed growing up.

I didn't know what to expect. My biggest fear was that I wouldn't be able to interact with core members. I worried about being a good team member and knowing how to help. The day I moved in, Adam helped me load in my stuff and Erin sat on my bed and admired my clothes. I discovered that the house was dealing with several transitions, and Marilyn broke her ankle the night I arrived, so the first few weeks were exhausting.

What I found most difficult at first was dealing with different personalities. But I've learned to be a better communicator because of my time in community. L'Arche Portland has taught me to be more open and accept my vulnerability. I try to look into myself and find the parts that can express that. We have a practice of sharing "grains of truth" to work through issues, which has helped me see other points of view and be honest with myself about the positives and negatives of any situation.

I fell in love with the way people live at L'Arche Portland. It is amazingly beautiful in its own way. I love seeing how people access their spirituality – Erin likes to sing, Adam engages with people wherever he goes, and Marilyn lights candles and prays. One thing I didn't expect was how I would identify with everyone. I have never felt such kinship; my friendship with Corrine, for example, is one of trust, and struggle and fun and silliness and real and raw things. I look at Joni sometimes and want to cry, not out of compassion or sympathy, but because I want to live into what I feel the way she does. Joni doesn't hide herself or her emotions, and her expressions clearly show her experience in any moment.

L'Arche attracts beautiful people. I think about how Joni met Alba at church. She was crying over the loss of her brother, and Joni just reached out and gave her a big hug. Adam has taught me to reach out when I need support. I remember one conversation particularly that will always stay with me. Adam came into my room with his head in his hands and told me Grandma Bobbie "got sick." I knew this might mean she had passed away, which it turns out she had. Adam told me how he loved and missed Grandma Bobbie but that he'd had a nice walk on the beach with his mom. Adam sought me out to process his grief and share it with me, and it helped me realize that I wasn't the only one who had sadness. We were just holding our sadness and sharing it together.

I recently transitioned into a live-out role. It's been weirdly upsetting to have my routine changed. I held, and still hold, fears around separation from the rest of the team, and I'm trying to figure out that balance. I hear "I miss you" from Marilyn and Adam a lot, even though they still see me most days. I love this community.



"Adam taught me to reach out when I need support. We were just holding our sadness and sharing it together."



Keeley with Erin on vacation at the Oregon Coast in October

— SHARING THE JOURNEY —

by Amy Geoffroy, Director of Development & Communications



Ben and Meredith traveled together to Vancouver, BC in December to present on the use of assistive technology at a disability conference

Entering into our 29th year in community, our theme in 2016 is “Sharing the Journey.” L’Arche Portland exists to create home and build community as people with and without intellectual disabilities sharing life. We offer a chance to form new friendships, open ourselves to mutual relationships, and learn to accept our own gifts and vulnerabilities. We share in each other’s triumphs and joys, disappointments and sorrows. As Keeley so eloquently expresses it in her testimony, “We were just holding our sadness and sharing it together.”

As we reflect on what it means to share daily life, we want your input. Let us share in your personal transformations just as you share in those of our assistants and core members. Do you have photos, anecdotes, or life lessons to share from your own journey with L’Arche Portland or with someone in your circle who has an intellectual disability? What do you learn from that relationship? How do you support each other? What do you share?

Throughout this year, we invite former assistants, core members, associate members and volunteers to share their experiences of living in — or otherwise participating in — our community. Contact us (amy.geoffroy@larche-portland.org) with any submissions so we can share them on our blog, Facebook page or in other communications. Here are more ways you can Share the Journey and stay connected:



Corrine and Adam at the Oregon Coast

- Get our **Facebook** posts in your feed by liking us (www.facebook.com/LArchePortland)
- Sign up for bi-monthly **eblasts** at www.larche-portland.org
- Come to **Dessert with L’Arche** to share how you engage with our mission and why
- **Introduce us** to friends and colleagues. Invite them to meet our community and share their gifts with us.

— SUSTAIN US ON THIS JOURNEY —

Our journey together is one of sustaining each other. With your support, we are able to provide valuable supports to core members Joni, Ben, Robyn, Cindy, Adam, Marilyn, Rodney, and Erin and to the ten full-time and five part-time assistants who share daily life. Your gifts also impact associate members, volunteers, friends, families, and faith communities who engage with us. **Your investment in L’Arche Portland matters!** Transform lives today by making a gift in friendship and accompaniment. Mail in a contribution today or donate online at www.larche-portland.org.



- **\$60** provides celebrations for both homes for a month
- **\$100** funds the gap in funding for one core member for one day
- **\$300** provides a week of groceries for one house
- **\$600** allows assistant support of two core members on a retreat
- **\$900** covers weekly formation for one assistant for a year

— ASSISTANTS TELL THE TALE OF L'ARCHE —

by Andrew Noethe, Executive Director | Community Leader

Did you know that since our opening in 1987, over 100 assistants have been welcomed into our community to share life with our core members? We knew anecdotally that this experience is transformative for many assistants, but we did not have a way to analytically measure what the impact of “Living L’Arche” has been and continues to be on assistants. Until now.

In 2015, L’Arche Portland worked with consultants Partners in Dialogue to quantify and better understand the qualitative impact of L’Arche on the lives of assistants. From March to September, I, along with former executive director Susan Mitchell, Director of Philanthropy Tamara Yates, and board member Faythe Aiken (all themselves former assistants), interviewed 21 individuals and collected 36 survey responses. What we found was exciting, motivating and challenging: former assistants overwhelmingly felt their L’Arche Portland experience played a significant role in their formation, highlighting consistent themes of empathy, self-acceptance, and vulnerability. Their responses also helped us identify areas of continued need around assistant enrichment.



Malou and Robyn in quiet reflection



Fredi and Joni at the Benefit Celebration

During their time at L’Arche Portland, assistants reported that they:

- recognized people with intellectual disabilities as friends with gifts to share;
- developed empathy and compassion for themselves and others;
- discovered their own vulnerabilities and learned self-acceptance;
- learned to value “simply being” and enjoying the small things of life;
- developed communication, listening, and leadership skills

We are determining how to buoy the assistant experience and share this critical piece of our mission with donors, funders and partners. We have identified areas of additional opportunity in assistant formation and accompaniment, communication, leadership development, and organizational succession planning. We are actively seeking partners to bring this much-needed work to fruition. We would love to hear from you about ways we can support and develop assistants, as well as particular skills or connections you can offer to support these efforts.



Pictures from our Daily Life Retreat: Ben, Ilana, Robyn, Corrine and Cindy; Jonathan, Michael, Meredith, Malou, Adam, Rodney and Aaron



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People With and Without
Intellectual Disabilities
Sharing Life Together

— CORE MEMBER INTERVIEW: BEN MILLER WITH ILANA WEBER —

Ilana: We're talking about sharing the journey. How many people have you met since you came to L'Arche?

Ben: (smiles, looks up) Oh God, I don't know (laughs)

Ilana: Anyone special you've met here?

Ben: Mark. I don't know where Mark is. Far away.

Ilana: Yeah. What do you do with Ben L?

Ben: I call up. Please over here. Eat. (smiles)

Ilana: What about with Jerry?

Ben: Good. Eat. Big cup.

Ilana: You get a big cup at the Cheesecake Factory?

Ben: Yeah. Two. See?

Ilana: How do you feel when you see Ben and Jerry?

Ben: Happy. (leans forward, smiles) I love you. Big big.

Ilana: You tell them you love them and give a big hug?

Ben: Yes.

Ilana: We have lots of people coming and going at



L'Arche. What have you learned about me since I moved here?

Ben: Nose.

Ilana: I sneeze a lot? How many times?

Ben: Three!

Ilana: Do you have hopes for the future or things you want to do more of in community?

Ben: (leans forward) Out eat more.

Ilana: What do you like about going out to eat?

Ben: One one.

Ilana: You like going out to eat one on one? Can you tell me more about that?

Ben: No busy busy. Work more people. Busy Busy. I say "Hey! Wait a minute. Me, please, Why walk away?" Oh, bull! (smiles)

Ilana: At work people are busy but when you're one on one with someone, you have their attention?

Ben: Yeah. Good.

Ilana: That feels good?

Ben: Yeah. Happy inside. No walk away.