

IVS MESSENGER

International Voluntary Service Quarterly Newsletter



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FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

IVS held its Annual General Meeting on Saturday 20th June under very unusual circumstances. We had a “virtual” meeting – in that, thanks to Covid19 – we were only able to gather together via the internet. We saw each other’s faces displayed in a rogue’s gallery of little framed pictures on our screens as we “Zoomed” our comments to each other through the ether. Some initiates struggled with the technology. There was a lot of “Can you hear me?”“I can’t hear anything...” “We can’t hear you, turn your mic on...” “Turn your mic off now...” – and some members even resorted to holding up helpful written instructions – forgetting that the mirror image meant these were indecipherable. It was an interesting alternative to the traditional “ice-breaker” technique for large meetings.

31 participants were joined by an SCI observer, some ex IVS Board members and some prospective new IVS Board members – including two young volunteers. Ground rules were explained, minutes were approved; reports were received, including draft accounts for 2019, thanks were expressed to the brave staff, volunteers and Board who have kept IVS running against the odds - and Tellers were appointed for the items that required votes to be cast. The key issue was how Covid19 has disastrously impacted on IVS’s normative work. The pivotal decision was therefore about IVS’s future – should IVS fold its wings after nearly 90 years’ of organising pro-peace volunteering service or should it whittle down operations to a minimum and carry on? A clear majority voted for the latter option. The replenished Board will create a working party of volunteer members who will plan a way forward. Everyone wants to see IVS able to celebrate its 90th anniversary in 2021.

The Board now has 5 members, Hilary Campbell as Chair, along with Richard Williams, Tim Marc, Rosemary Hobday and Lorna Murphy. We are still looking for more members, please let Hilary know if you are willing to be co-opted.

VOLUNTEER STORIES

For this quarterly IVS messenger, we took the time to interview previous IVS volunteers and ask them a few questions on their experiences and what they gained through volunteering.

Hello, my name is Russell Cleaver and I was heavily involved in IVS from the mid 1960's through to the mid 1980's. These were years of tumultuous growth in all three branches of service- community work through local groups, short term international workcamps and the longterm overseas volunteer programme.

Why did you become involved in volunteering?

I came from a Quaker family so voluntary work was a way of life from my teens, starting with Oxfam. Quakers and other 'peaceful' organisations such as IVS have a fundamental belief that dialogue and social interaction between people of different nationalities and cultures can improve international understanding and relationships. I experienced an example of this in the early 1960's as a participant in 2 Tripartite Work and Study projects organised by British and American Quakers together with the Committee of Youth Organisations of the USSR. In 2002, 40 years later, a reunion was held in the UK to share thoughts and discuss the value and spirit of those gatherings during the Cold War years. So, for me, these were all enhancing experiences and valuable contributions to my life-journey. They may not have been life-changing in the 'light bulb moment' sense, but certainly gave me a greater understanding and tolerance of those people with different systems of beliefs, by meeting with them face to face.

Why should people join IVS and participate in these activities?

In the Cold War years, IVS played albeit a small part in chipping away at deep prejudices fuelled by the mass media. Today, as we all battle against fake news, the abuse of social media and the rise in nationalism all mean that working and engaging internationally are just as relevant as 50 years ago. The bridges are still out there to be built. The challenge to IVS is to continue to adapt and adjust to respond to these issues in a fast-changing world. So for people out there who believe in trying to counteract the divisions in society and speak out for truth, then IVS will have something to offer you.



Are you following us?!?!?



VOLUNTEER STORIES

Our next interviewee is Margaret McGavin. Margaret volunteered on the IVS London Region Committee, as well being secretary of the Central London branch, in the 1970s and 1980s and she has been a long-term supporter and a frequent volunteer at IVS work-camps.

Why did you volunteer?

When I first lived in London, I did not know many people and wanted to do something useful, then I heard about IVS.

Who helped you to volunteer?

It was the Central London Branch of IVS – I had arrived at my first project, which was decorating for an elderly couple in Paddington and the Co-Leader's first question was "Do you want to stay for supper?" I replied, "I don't know." But in the end, I did and never looked back.

What was your best experience volunteering for IVS?

My best experience would be, working at an international workcamp on Fair Isle, between Orkney and Shetland, population then 47 and I was helping to restore an old cottage - cleaning roof slates and preparing for a new roof to double the house size. We stayed in a converted fish store lit by candles and Calor gas. During my time, I also met the islanders and witnessed them knitting the traditional patterns, as well as, watching puffins and a host of other birds. There was a Force 9 gale, which meant everything had to be secured, including the ferry to the mainland and the light aircraft, even the phone box had to be tied up.

How did it change your life?



It gave me a new dimension; satisfaction from doing something useful, in the company of like-minded people from different walks of life and other countries. I learnt new skills; decorating, cement mixing, catering for a crowd of people on a tight budget along with making life-long friends and meeting some of the most inspiring and entertaining people I could imagine.

How did volunteering build understanding and peace?

Working together, whatever the task, needs concentration, and as people get to know each other, discussions, about anything under the sun, often begin and better understanding can follow.

Why should people support the work of IVS?

To give other young people the opportunities and pleasure, be it in the UK or abroad, that I had by volunteering.



Volunteer Corner

"I travelled around Croatia and was able to get a taste of what it was like across the country. During the summer, I visited Split and spent some time travelling to nearby countries such as Slovenia and Serbia while volunteering with Zagor, who made it all possible, as well as, the help I received from the people around me.

I will never forget the great time I had in Croatia and cannot wait to be able to go back to say hello to all of the great people that I met when I was there. Zabok will always hold a special place in my heart!"

- Alex's story



Special Mention - Finn Taylor

Finn Taylor, 14. raised around £500 for IVS at his Quaker school (Bootham, in York) this year. He had heard that IVS was founded by Quakers almost 90 years ago and was struggling because of the Brexit-effect so he organised bake sales (before the Covid19 virus struck) and donated the proceedings to IVS. We would just like to recognise his great achievement and say thank him for all his efforts.

THANKYOU

**Keep an eye on
our social media
pages for a
chance to sign up
to a virtual work-
camp!**

Farewell

We would also like to mention that two of our colleagues, Filippo and Thea, have moved onto pastures new and we would just like to take this opportunity to thank them for their tremendous hard work and dedication to IVS. They will be missed and we wish them the best of luck in their new adventures.

BLOG POST



Memories of my recent past talk about something safe. Slow. I felt secure, but I was certainly lost in my comfort zone. A full-time job as a career guidance adviser in a job center, friendly people around me, my familiar things, a place in the world. The perspective of a long-lasting everyday life forever similar to itself. Nothing worse.

Although my latest year had brought a lot of changes which had made me feel first upset, and then excited again, I still could hear a voice in my mind – a little me crying for help. The monotone sound of dissatisfaction, not to be ignored. He kept saying: "Why not?"

Yes, why not? Would I have been able to paint a brand-new picture of myself, while changing the coordinates of my life? What about trying to live and volunteer in another country for some time? I would have given European fully funded programmes a chance.

Can you figure out what spending the whole summer looking for an experience abroad has been like? Writing down dozens of CVs and covering letters, connecting daily to the European Youth Portal and scrolling down the website just looking for the right project? Not to forget, I wanted to improve my English, stay in the UK and keep doing a kind of experience close to the one I was used to in my hometown. I wish I could still be stuck to my old myself. We all crave for linearity, as human beings. Would I have ended up with breaking it?

By the way. Please, bear in mind this: in August, I was on my annual leave for three weeks. The sea, along with the sun, used to call me at any moment: "Come on, just for a dive!" (Come on, man! Focus on your purpose!) Then, one day (praised be), the right job description: Placement Officer, International Voluntary Service, Edinburgh, United Kingdom. Start date: the soonest I could. (Come on, man! Apply!)

It all happened very quickly. I mean, very. The Skype interview. The first feedback: "Sorry, we chose someone else." The disappointment, at the beginning of September. But then the good Lord must have been relying upon me. IVS called me back: "Would you still be available to leave?"

All I remember before starting my EVS project in Edinburgh last October, is the rush I was in. Deal with your responsibilities, do it in a proper way. Speak with your family, let your father and mother absorb the information: "Yes, mom. In a month." Talk to the boss, tell her that you are leaving. Train your substitute so that she could take over your job. Find a house in Edinburgh – a jungle for any flat seeker. Wrap your things, book a flight. Greet your friends, spend a couple of hours with anyone – don't forget they will miss you. Hug your grandma. Leave.

Memories of my recent past talk about something safe. Slow. Then all I started thinking about is urgency.

Written by Filippo Parisi
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"Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

- Desmond Tutu