

IVS MESSENGER



International Voluntary Service Quarterly Newsletter



FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

IVS is facing a very uncertain future and urgently needs more members to step forward and help out. Our Board is currently inquorate as there are only 5 members, and we have met 3 times since the AGM voted to scale down operations and carry on. We have established 4 working groups; Strategy and Structure, Fundraising, 90th Birthday Planning and Finance.

Please can we have more members on the Board and members also participating in the working groups. We are facing downsizing the office, two key staff members come to the end of their contracts in November and I am seriously worried that we will have to close the organisation. All meetings are virtual, the Board meets about every 4 weeks and the working groups have their own timetables.

We are pleased that some members have stepped forward to join the working groups but the Board needs further membership involvement in these difficult times. We are meeting by Zoom which has reduced the need for travel to meetings. Membership contributions are very welcome. We are working on a plan to hibernate/reset IVS due to our funding situation and the present Covid 19 limitations on our ability to send and receive volunteers. We are consulting with SCI, the working groups and considering how a merger/collaboration with VAP Volunteer Action for Peace co-ordinated by Nigel Watt and/or with VSI Voluntary Service Ireland could mutually help us all in this very difficult time for charitable organisations. We do need more support and an additional Board member or two to guide the organisation and help us survive the changed circumstances of the pandemic. Please feel free to contact Board members to find out what this involves. Just email us and we will respond. I will be very happy to discuss your involvement and any support is welcomed.

We continue to monitor government rules on travel and quarantine as it may affect volunteers who are here from abroad or planning to go to projects abroad. The office in Edinburgh is not fully open for staff to return, although we can access it to collect mail or any papers we need, and our three staff are continuing to work from home.

VOLUNTEER STORIES

For this quarterly IVS Messenger, we spoke to Hilary Campbell, Chair of the Board of Directors, about her time spent in work camps.

I first joined IVS in about 1968, aged 16. My first workcamp was in Downpatrick in Northern Ireland, you needed to be 18 to go on a camp abroad. We constructed a sloping path at a mental hospital so the older patients could go to the café if they were unable to manage the steps. My first trip abroad was to Poland in 1970 where we planted trees.

Then the big adventure, I was using the placement year of my degree to spend time at the University of Ghana in Accra so added in a couple of camps on the way there. I spent a week in Nigeria helping to construct an adventure playground and then went on to Togo. I was met by the camp leader at ASTOVOCT headquarters in Lome and we went off by truck to a rural village. The camp had about 20 participants, me from the UK, a group of 4 lads from Germany, 2 other girls from Scandinavia and the rest from other African countries. We stayed in the round mud huts with the villagers. Togo is a French speaking country although most of the villagers only spoke a local language. I was in a hut belonging to the village Pastor and he and his wife both spoke French. It was fascinating getting to know them and understand their way of life. They had twin girls about 7 years old and an 18 month old boy. As it was school holidays the girls spent a good half of every day working. Sweeping the huts, helping with cooking, collecting water and looking after their brother. Only one building in the village had electricity, the shop, and water was drawn from a well with a bucket on a long rope.



The old school was built of branches with palm leaves for the roof and the children got wet when it rained. We built a new school in the 3 weeks, with concrete blocks and a tin roof! There were local men who directed operations and we just helped out as labourers, carrying concrete blocks and buckets of earth for the floor. One morning we got up at 4am to go and pay our respects to the Paramount Chief of the area. You go so early in the morning to demonstrate that it is your most important task of the day! I had to make a wee speech as the only European Volunteer who spoke French. We were given some rather fierce palm wine which was a shock first thing in the morning. Looking back at the photos just now, I still have amazing memories of my year in Africa, especially my 3 weeks in Togo.



Are you following us?!?!





International Day of Peace 2020

Each year the International Day of Peace is observed around the world on 21 September. The UN General Assembly has confirmed this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, through observing 24 hours of non-violence and cease-fire.

This year, the world has seen that we are not each other's enemies. Instead, our mutual enemy is an unforgiving virus that poses as a threat to our health, security and the way of life as we know it. COVID-19 has shaken the world and reminded us that what happens in one part of the world, is still a very real threat to ourselves.

In March, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called on all warring parties to lay down their weapons and focus on the battle against this unprecedented global pandemic. While the message is intended for armed parties, solidarity and cooperation across borders, sectors and generations are also needed to win this new fight against the worst public health crisis of our time.

For the United Nations, 2020 was already intended to be a year of listening and learning. The UN has invited millions of people worldwide to join UN75, the largest and furthest-reaching global conversation on building the peaceful and prosperous future that we want to celebrate.

As we continue the ongoing battle with COVID-19, your voice is more important than ever. In these difficult times of physical distancing, this International Day of Peace will be dedicated to fostering dialogue and collecting ideas. Despite being distant from one another, we can still aim to achieve our goals together.



The 2020 theme for the International Day of Peace is "Shaping Peace Together." Celebrate the day by spreading compassion, kindness and hope in the face of the pandemic. Stand together with the UN against attempts to use the virus to promote discrimination or hatred. Join us so that we can shape peace together.

**Looking for ways to fill
your time during your gap year?
Try volunteering!**

Volunteering abroad is a fantastic opportunity to make new friends, learn new skills and help to change the lives of those in need.

Get in touch to find out more!



**"Life's most persistent and urgent question is:
'What are you doing for others?'"**
- Martin Luther King

Volunteer Corner

"We are really sad that our placement will come to an end soon. We had a really great time here and even during lockdown we got involved in different, amazing projects.

This year was absolutely awesome and we highly recommend the EVS programme to everyone who can apply for it and wants to enjoy some special experiences. We found a project where we could connect EVS with our hobby, which definitely helped us through lockdown.

Doing our EVS project at a circus in Great Britain was a great chance to deepen our passion in circus, to connect with other people with the same passion and to improve our English skills. We will definitely come back as our hosting organisation was absolutely lovely and amazing. We always felt very welcome, looked after and supported in everything we wanted to do!"

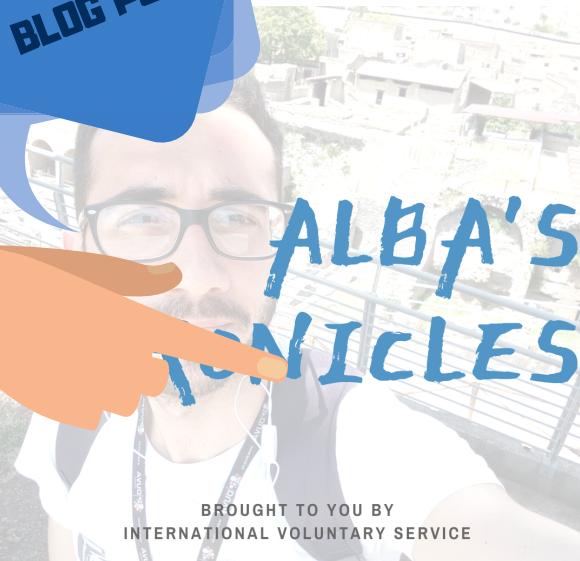
- Mia & Johanna's story, Let's Circus



"It was truly a wonderful experience filled with many professional learnings and personal developments. Whilst working in a team, we were able to craft art, design and other one-off events for the general public. We built an in-house darkroom and organised the 'Nostalgia: Analog Media Festival' which was a total blast and we were able to educate ourselves on all the intricate aspects of analogue photography development.

For our Mid-term evaluation, we took a trip south Sweden and explored a city called Umea, a town filled with all things design and architecture. We sampled some nice Swedish food, visited local museums and enjoyed the spectacular countryside views with the hope to witness even a small sign of northern lights. It was truly a unique journey, a mix of diverse opportunities to grow professionally and meet so many talented people who inspired me and became lifelong friends."

- Anna's story

BLOG POST


ALBA'S VENICLES

BROUGHT TO YOU BY
INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE

After a few months here, two recurring pictures of my weekly household life are:

1. Me, laying down on my bed, just playing my ukulele late at night, or maybe reading – perhaps writing. Outside, the world seems to ever flow, night and day – I can see it by my big window, whose glass has been missing the sunlight for many months. Alba's sunsets and dawns look the same, in winter: the first come too early; the latter too late.
2. Around the flat, some foreign people live their lives as if this shared house were just a place to occupy while waiting for their real existence.

Amongst them, me. I wonder whether we may never be closer than this, whilst talking about our cleaning rota or wishing each other a good day. Could we ever be more than acquaintances, as we are supposed to use the same loo? By the way, I can help them defrost the freezer, since I need it. Or to get rid of the rubbish, because it must be done. At some point, I should have made up my decision to start asking "How are you?", even if I didn't really care. I mean, it could be my fault: I am sure they don't mind. This is what I call "survival". This is the "live-and-let-live" philosophy I am gradually getting used to. If only they didn't leave their dirty dishes in the sink.

What do you physically lose first when you move abroad? Your habits, for sure. And all the smallest things – the ones you made everything of. The linear shapes and the regular borders of your usual spaces. A new house is the less familiar place at night, when you get up for a glass of water, but still can't move without making a door creak, or the floor squeak. And then, when opening the fridge, at any single moment you will miss the unmistakeable smell of your mother's timbale. It is a fact: that will never be your home. Sometimes, all this is quite depressing to me. A feeling of loss and isolation is perhaps unavoidable, while lonely cooking a sad omelette in the evening. And, why not, a sense of desperate alienation is right behind the fridge, and you can't help falling in love with your solitude. But then – when I am going deep inside my loneliness, getting closer to the bottom of desperation – I often realise how all this is just the less important part of my new life.

Because it's the exact moment in which I start to figure out the third recurring picture of my household life here:

3. Me, standing right next to the window and checking the weather outside. It could be another day of rain, maybe. I don't care anymore, as a Scot wouldn't. My life outside the place I still can't call my home is starting again. A new day volunteering at International Voluntary Service. Meeting my colleagues in the office, gathering with some friends after work. And then enjoying a drink in a pub, playing board games. Drama classes, ukulele sessions. Going to the movies. Very long walks, even if it's freezing, even if it's raining.

And when it's the moment to go home, it won't be as tragic as it used to be. Every day it gets better, every single time I look outside the window and start thinking about my whole experience here, I can also perceive how I should consider it as momentary and precious. I still don't know if this must be the place to write a new story. For sure, not in this flat. Maybe this country? Maybe not? And what about "home", where everything is still going on without me?

Too many questions. It's time to start a new day.

Written by Filippo Parisi
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