

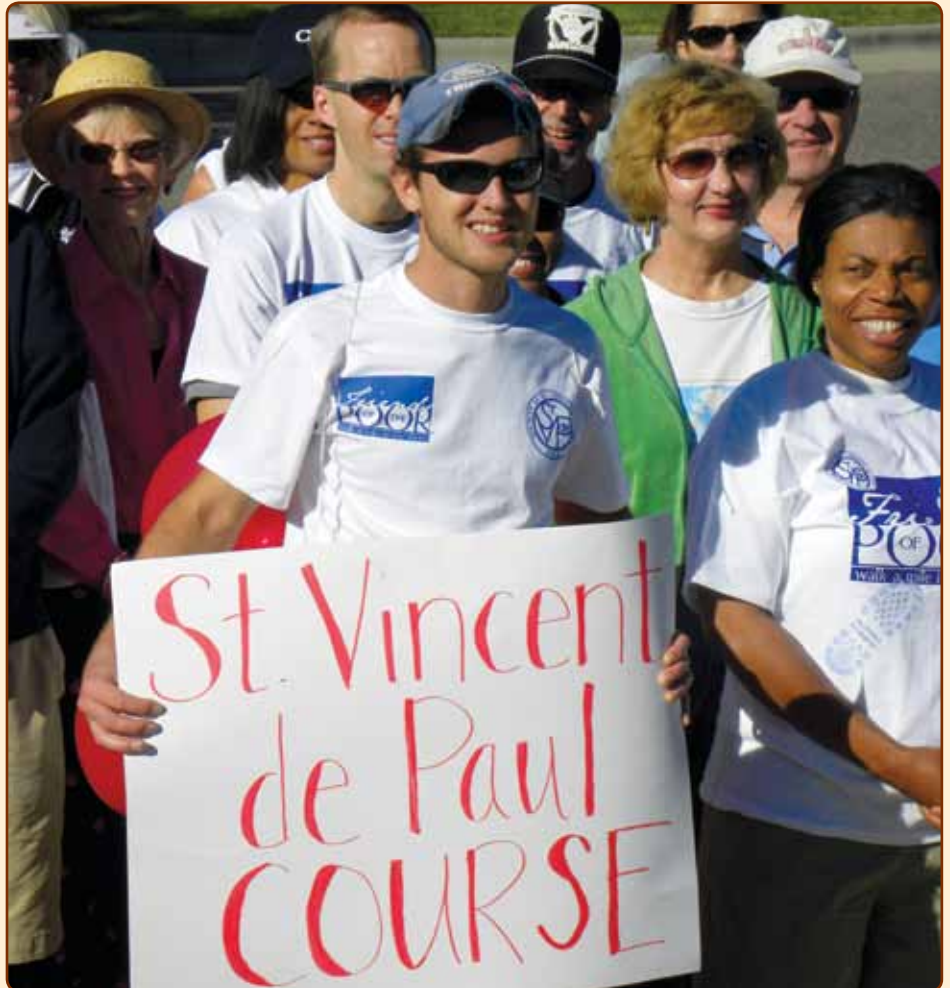
## ‘The Road Less Traveled’

By Jarrod Rhodes

**A**s I sit here writing this article, I find myself with this feeling that has been common for me this year at CVV: inadequacy. While most people have come into this year with their college degrees in various areas of studies, I came here without a degree. There’s a feeling of being in exile from a life and education I had gained from the past five years – a life out of high school working in industrial America (so needless to say, I haven’t written anything of this nature for a while). As I write this, my favorite Robert Frost poem comes to mind The Road Not Taken. Yet the Holy Spirit made a great change in me and now I find myself sharing this experience with 8 other great people in community, my co-workers, and the people that I serve on a daily basis at the St. Francis Center. We all came here to this point in our lives by different paths, but we are all here in each other’s lives none the less.

I often find myself reflecting on what life changes have taken place to bring the people that I serve at the St. Francis Center to where they are now: homeless. Is it because they are like me and refuse to give in to the status quo (so to speak), and sell their soul to corporate America? Has there been a tragic loss in their life? Or through a series of misfortunes find themselves on the street? Whatever the case might be, no matter the reasons why each and every one of us are at a particular place in our lives, I know that we are one body in Christ and are put on this earth for a purpose.

Back in November, my community and I were blessed with the privilege to listen to a talk given by a Vincentian priest named Fr. Memo. In his talk, he spoke of something that really touched me. He spoke of the point that we are not called to eliminate poverty because there are so many forms of it. Whether it be poverty from being poor because of a lack of the day to day essentials that we all need, such as food, clothing, and shelter; or the spiritual poverty that may come with wealth. We are merely here to accompany those who



Jarrod at St. Vincent DePaul Annual Walk for Those Who Are Poor

**“All I know is that if I trust in God, I will be steered in the right direction.”**

are impoverished in their time of need and give thanks and glory to God for the opportunity to do so. Hopefully we will be changed into a better version of ourselves by doing so.

Coming to the mid-point of this year of service, I find myself in a bit of a daze when I look to the future. Where does God call me to be after this time of community and service? How does He want me to take what I’m learning and put it into practice in my normal life as a welder and fabricator? Or am I even

supposed to go back to that life? All I know is that if I trust in God, I will be steered in the right direction. Even if it is a radical change like doing this year at CVV. Having met the people at St. Francis and those in the CVV community, it’s quite obvious that our paths have crossed for a reason. And I feel like I am a better person for it.

As Robert Frost wrote so poetically, “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I - I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.” ✦

## There is life here.

a poem for two voices

By Cody Meinhardt, CVV Alum

I stand alone on a sidewalk on the darkest night of the year; trees are bare; Earth rests.

*It's cold and no one is here to keep me warm; the world has stopped around me; there is no life here.*

Snow melts in the sun, seeping into the soil, bringing nourishment to long-forgotten roots; hidden life gathers strength for the coming change of season.

*I hardly recognize my reflection; my actions surprise me; a man asks for change, but I don't know how to respond; he doesn't understand my struggle.*

The sun slows its path across the sky as days grow longer; the air sheds its chill in favor of soft rain and gentle breezes; seeds are sown in warming dirt.

*I am stagnant, rooted in my pain, anchored to my guilt, bound to my mistakes; I search for release.*

New life emerges, shaking dust from green shoulders; nascent leaves stretch for the sun with palms wide; we must care for these fragile newborns; we are children.

*There is a new feeling in my heart; not a new beating, no new blood in my veins, but a lightness; I'm reminded that I've been here before.*

Stalks grow tall, bearing their first green spheres; they blush slowly over weeks of careful tending; colors emerge all around in new shades and unimagined hues; honeybees drink nectar from sweet blossoms; I see beauty.

*Another man asks for help; I return his gaze; I share with him all I have: my pain, my hope, my friendship.*

I close my eyes, standing alone in this garden, and take a bite from the season's first tomato; life is here in the juices running down my chin, in the dirt under my fingernails, in the comforting knowledge of this cycle of ebb and flow, birth and death, pain and love.

*There is life here.*



Picture artist: Melten Aktas



Madeline with Gathering Place guest.

## A Sense of Belonging

By Madeline Schissel

Madeline Schissel, resource advocate at The Gathering Place (TGP) here. Somehow we are at the midpoint of our service year and it seems impossible there are only six months left (probably five by the time this article circulates). There is already buzz among the 19 of us about what next year will bring. Some will be moving home to study or start a career, others hope to stay in Denver, and if they're lucky, to continue with their respective non-profits. And others want to continue the service year lifestyle for at least a little while longer. For me, I fall somewhere in the second category. The thought of being finished at The Gathering Place so soon is a tough idea.

I feel so thankful to have been placed in one of the most unique direct service sites in the social service world. TGP has been operating since 1986 and has grown from its foundation by two Denver graduate students to a three story building offering three meals a day, showers, laundry, computer lab, GED classes, and even the arts among many other intangible things. This building has become home to so many women, children and transgendered that it hardly feels like a shelter. When I'm at home we talk about community and work so hard to build it. When I'm at the Gathering Place, it's the same story. Community is what makes the agency so special. One woman is helped and she in turn then turns around and pays it forward to the next new client. It is such an example of what The Gathering Place is about and the kindness everyone has to offer.

I remember one day meeting Christine. A small lady who came in about a month ago. She was so new and a little intimidated. I remember seeing her at lunch and remembering her name. She smiled in a way that says, "You know me and I belong." This is a place where people do belong, no matter what. But we also realize that this is a type of an organization that shouldn't have to exist and hopefully one day won't.

Who are the women who come to TGP? There's no one way that it looks. There is some mental illness or drug addiction. But there's also the rent that sky-rocketed or the job that was lost. Often times people get trapped in a cycle. But knowing people personally makes me realize they are people. They are like all of us. They joke, they cry. They ARE all of us.

I am inspired by these women who have taught me so much about remaining positive in light of life's struggles. They've taught me how important relationships are, whether it's your bunk partner at the shelter, a fellow artist at the Card Project, or even God. There's someone to talk to; they are not alone. I know that what I have to learn will not end at TGP, but I'm grateful to be surrounded by the opportunities to learn now. ✦



Sarah (3rd from left with glasses) and the CVV Group 17 Community.

## Where is Home?

By Sarah Mayer

The combination of growing up on the South Side of Chicago and being a baseball fan created a fierce loyalty within me. Many things in life have a gray area but not Chicago baseball. My Grandma and my Dad have made one thing clear to me my whole life: you love the White Sox and you hate the Cubs. This White Sox loyalty has had a snowball effect throughout my life. I love the idea of living for something bigger than myself and the loyalty that comes from that.

I found that loyalty this year in my community. My community is much bigger than me; I am small part of a larger whole. It is amazing how much you can learn about life sitting in a messy kitchen with nine people you cannot believe were strangers five months ago. Initially community was just a group and an umbrella term so we knew where to go and how to divide the larger community of 19. It has grown to become our identity.

One aspect of CVV is living in

“Home is the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in.”

solidarity with those we serve at our work sites. Many of us serve people who do not have stable housing and could be uprooted or become homeless at any time. To gain a little insight into what this is like, my community will be switching houses with the other CVV community. A new house will mean getting to know new rooms, new shower schedules, new bikes, new chores, and probably some initial chaos and disrupted routines.

These logistics will get worked out, no doubt but it is the community dynamics that will take a little longer. Moving communities means that we will have to get used to a new physical layout and living space. Both houses have different factors that make them both isolating and comforting. Even though we have been assured time and time again that this is not a big deal it will be an adjustment for us.

I will be the first to admit that I have been the most reluctant with the idea of moving and I have recently seen the irony in this. My work site is at St. Francis Center with the housing team. The housing that SFC offers helps people transition out of homelessness. Residents are allowed to stay in their housing as long as they wish if they pay rent and follow the rules. I see people every day struggling to keep their housing. I understand and accept how easily a stable home can come and go. When SFC housing residents lose their homes and are forced to move they are often faced with homelessness. When I move houses I will be moving from my comfortable, stable home to another comfortable, stable home. While these situations are not exactly comparable I

have gained a sense of empathy that comes with attachment. This whole process has very much taught me that getting attached to a home is easy, no matter the shape and size.

My going away present before coming to CVV was a homemade quote book from a friend at home. Each day presents me with a different quote and many often come exactly when I need them. On a day when I was struggling with the idea of moving Robert Frost threw some wisdom at me, "Home is the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in." We might have a new location but my community is staying the same and the community is what makes me feel home. ✦

### Settlers and Strangers

The Lord said to Israel: The relation between yourselves and me is always that of strangers and settlers. If you will live in the world like strangers, remembering that you are here but temporarily, then I your God will be a settler in your midst in that my Presence will dwell with you permanently. But if you will regard yourselves as settlers, as permanent owners of the land on which you live, when the land is actually not yours but mine, my Presence will be a stranger, in that I will not dwell in your midst. In any case, you, O Israel, you and I cannot be strangers and settlers at the same time. If you act the stranger, I will be the settler, and if you act the settler, I must be the stranger.

- Rabbi Mark Tannenbaum



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## A Year On

By Luke Weber

When I first applied to CVV I was asked a lot of questions containing the 5 w's: who, what, where, when, and why? After doing my best to try and explain a year of service - something I didn't even fully understand - I would end with a sentence like this, "It's essentially a year off while still being on." Now that we're halfway through our time at CVV I'm failing at seeing the "off" side of our year. While I'm not at school right now or making an enormous salary, I'm still learning and living every single day. Amidst our busy schedules life goes on and our journey continues. A part of this journey contains the many changes we all face.

Several weeks ago we all experienced the holiday season. This time of celebration for so many brings joy, reunion, celebration, and tradition. However, this year I witnessed the other side of the coin as I celebrated the season here in Denver without a break that I've grown accustomed to throughout my years of school. Instead of going home for the holidays I was here seeing the sadness, pain, loneliness, and sorrow that so many of our clients feel. What a change from the traditions that I have been a part of for so much of my life! Just because it was Christmas homelessness didn't end and the struggling families we work with still struggled.

Every day I experience the joys and sadness that accompany our human experience. Some days one might outweigh the other, but nonetheless both feelings are present. I experienced the many different sides of emotion a couple days ago when I was gifted two tickets to the Broncos playoff game against the Steelers. As a lifelong Bronco fan my elation could not be contained. This was also a stressful event as I was watching Tebow play, a man whose unorthodox playing style makes me pull my hair out. Yet the toughest part of the day came before the game when I received a phone call from my mom explaining that the night before one of my classmates had passed away. While I wasn't particularly close to this person, he was the first one of my classmates to die. I was shaken as I realized that death is also a part of the human experience. Change continues to happen to us all during this journey with CVV

This year I was told something that I will never forget. Whenever you hear the phrase "that's a bummer," replace it with "that's life." Likewise, whenever you hear "that's awesome," replace it with "that's life". Things change; we face hard times and enjoy the good ones. One of the greatest blessings of community is that we have people there for us willing to pick us up when we fall, and to celebrate with us when we accomplish something great. Life is full of many twists and turns that exemplify our human experience. Let's embrace the changes and enjoy the journey with one another. ⬆

### Save the Date and Watch for More...

Annual Heart and Soul Concert, Thursday, June 14 at the Newman Center,  
 University of Denver Colfax Marathon (call CVV if you'd like to be on a relay team)

**If you do not burn with love, others  
 will die from the cold. -- St. Vincent de Paul**

**Thank you!**

**We are so grateful for the many ways  
 you keep us warm with your love.**

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