

In the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, the mission of the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers is to invite young adults into a process of transformation through companionship with those who are poor and marginalized.

Where flowers bloom so does hope

Stephanie Darby
CVV Year 23 Volunteer

It's bee swarming season at the Earth-Links community garden. Every so often, we see a small, winged creature fly past and a glimmer of hope stirs in our bellies.

We are anticipating the summer days when the beehives in the gardens will be ripe and overflowing with golden honey, and the Earth will blossom and show us all of her precious magic tricks.

But right now we are in an uncomfortable, in-between state where the soil is still blanketed in intermittent bouts of snow and the packets of seeds lay waiting to be planted to burst into new growth when the elements say the time is right.

Every morning I arrive at EarthLinks I'm amazed by the cycles of nature and the resiliency of the earth. While the ground seems dormant now, I know change is brewing.

Nature's abundance

I am in disbelief that a small patch of urban garden yielded almost two thousand pounds of flowers and produce in the previous growing season. In equal part, I am amazed by the resili-

▼ **The banner gracing the EarthLinks garden near W. 13th Avenue and Decatur Street in the Sun Valley neighborhood.**



▲ **Stephanie Darby working in the EarthLinks garden.**

ency of the people we serve and their hands that till the dirt. Earth-Links is much like a beehive itself; three days a week people who have previously or are currently experiencing homelessness pour into the garden to participate in

workshop, a social enterprise program where flowers and produce grown in our very soil are turned into lotions, candles and bookmarks. The workshop buzzes with participants and their hard work produces beauty, like bees making honey.

The cycle of homelessness mirrors the cycles of nature. People get housed, encounter difficult circumstances, lose their housing and cycle in and out of homelessness.

Much like the gardens blanketed in snow, seeds of adversity and hope are planted inside of our participants. Once the snow melts and the hard times pass, there are always new possibilities and growth.

Bees come and go throughout the seasons. Participants come and go, too, but they

know they are always welcomed back into a community that focuses on ending isolation.

I witnessed Jill, a participant who lost her housing, come back last week after a tough

bout of life circumstances. She was looking for case-management services and the warm embrace of a vibrant community. She brought hot sauce, hugs and kind words. She knew she could count on Earth-Links in any season of her life as a source of creative expression and support.

Often, faced with homelessness, it is easy for one's creativity and talents to be suppressed while focusing on basic needs and survival--but not at EarthLinks.

People are appreciated for their creativity and artistry and encouraged on their life path.

EarthLinks is a source of hope in sustaining people and the planet. As former First Lady Lady Bird Johnson said, "Where flowers bloom so does hope." ▲

INSIDE

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▲ Julie Medenwald, above, working with her students at Sewall Child Development Center.

Here, it's process, not product

By Julie Medenwald
CVV Year 23 Volunteer

One year ago, I was busily finishing my master's program, working on apartment turnover for my campus job and getting ready for the huge changes coming my way in August. As I envisioned joining the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers, I expected to be drastically hurled from my comfort zone.

To that end, I did everything I could to prepare. I tried living on a smaller food budget, I checked out all the books I could find from the CVV recommended reading list and I endured a three-week internal struggle over whether it was materialistic to bring a hair dryer to Denver.

In short, before I ever arrived I attempted to become the person I thought this year would make me. At Sewall Child Development Center, we practice the Reggio Emilia approach to learning. This method promotes the importance of experiential learning and creation. It emphasizes the importance of the process rather than the product.

Rather than holding up a perfectly con-

structed picture of a rainbow and telling the kids, "First paint with red, then orange, then yellow ..." we lay out paints, papers, brushes and stamps and say "Create."

One child's rainbow may be all brown ... another might be square -- and that's OK. The important thing is that they express themselves and learn as they go.

I have realized that my entire experience this year has been decidedly Reggio-like:

- I entered this year and was presented with nine unique individuals and told "Create your community."

- I walked into the Hedgehog room and met my teaching team and 15 preschoolers with varying abilities and was told "Create your classroom."

- I was given Reflections and Discussions, Monday night Masses and spirituality nights and told "Create your faith life."

Another key component to the Reggio method is that, while education is child driven, the child is never alone. Teachers are there to guide, support and encourage along every step of the journey. In the same way, I

have never felt alone this year. In creating a community, I have a house of supportive and loving companions. While facing challenges in my classroom, I had the guidance and support of other teachers and supervisors and the CVV staff. In searching for a deepened spiritual life, I discovered that God is ever present with me.

I once thought God had one great plan for me and I would constantly worry whether I was doing what God wanted, or following the right path.

Over the course of this year, I have started to think that, instead, God uses the Reggio method, too. God presents us with people, experiences and unique talents and allows us to choose how we use these gifts to create our own life and our own path. That is free will.

I started CVV focused on the product -- trying to become the person I thought I should be. Instead I have learned to trust the process and allow myself to be rooted by the experiences and people I have been blessed with this year. Only through the process am I truly able to grow and bloom. 🌱

Indeed, plants are like people ... and these



▲ Christina Sinak, second from left left, with CVV Year 23 Companions.

By Christina Sinak
CVV Year 23 Volunteer

I have always enjoyed plants and greenery but my thumb is not very green. Succulents are low maintenance, yes, but still require attention. These plants were not meant to grow in any of my rooms in St. Louis or in Dayton or in Denver.

Regardless, I welcomed these invasive plants -- spent money for these plants - and encouraged their growth. For the past 23 years, two old houses in downtown Denver have also welcomed invasive beings.

These perennial invasive beings who take part in CVV have come despite a promise of discomfort, a small stipend, countless opportunities for growth and a life to be shared with 19 others.

Those of you who are gardeners know how destructive or enhance an invasive species can be. Most often, invasive species acclimate to their new climate.



▲ CVV Year 23 volunteers at the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas.

Standing on the other side

A poem by **Christin Seward** | CVV Year 23 Volunteer

This is it
 This is what it feels like
 Unwanted
 Unwelcomed
 Separated
 Walled out
 Do they know me?
 Do they know my story?
 Do they care?
 What is it that separates us?
 Am I different?
 Am I undeserving?
 Am I criminal?
 What if they met me?

What if they saw me smile?
 We are neighbors
 But we don't know each other
 So close but so far
 Are our differences so large that
 we could never be friends?
 This towering structure stands
 before me, telling me
 "Not a chance"
 "I have something you cannot
 have"
 "You cannot partake"
 "You do not deserve it"
 Whether or not this is what they

say, this is what I see.
 This is what I hear
 What if they could all see?
 From my eyes?
 Are we not both human?
 Do we not bleed the same
 blood?
 When did we stop caring for
 each other?
 When did we forget?
 It must be an easy thing to do
 Standing on the other side. 🌱

*Christin Seward works at
 The GrowHaus.*

CVVers are like some plants!

The magic of perennials is they return year after year. Even when a perennial's buds are not visible, the plant is preparing itself by deepening its roots. Much absorption of nutrients is happening and growth is active for when the time comes to break through the ground and show off to the world what has been created.

My time in community at CVV has been my downward growth. Without learning to be present -- how to be here -- the planting of knowledge within myself will die. I have forced myself to stop and smell the roses.

A new experience, a new perspective, a new vision require attention and processing. New seeds need to be watered. Returning to community has allowed me to reflect outside of myself, helping me come to a better understanding of the everyday hardships the people we work with face.

It has assisted me in coping with misunderstandings in the current political world, in the smaller Denver area and in people with backgrounds different from my own.

I have learned to celebrate others' differences with the help of those with whom I share meals at our dinner table. The most difficult part of community living, for me, is giving up my human compulsion to be right and to be in control -- as in, just allowing the growth to happen. We practice compromise daily. What better group to learn these lessons with than people who support my physical and spiritual growth!

Spring is the time for blooming. Our time in CVV is coming to a close. As we prepare for the ongoing blooming in our lives, I am so excited to see the ways we will pollinate the world, each in our own ways! 🌱

*Christina Sinak works
 at Dominican Home Health Agency*

Saluting CVV volunteers



At the annual dinner, CVV saluted all its volunteers who give of their hearts and souls to make CVV possible. Pictured top, left to right, are Rick, Molly, Michael, Mary, Charlotte and Angelita. Above: Fred, left, and Jim.



▲ Michael Bruno, right, on the job at Denver Inner City Parish.

His shoes tell a year's worth of stories

By Michael Bruno
CVV Year 23 Volunteer

My shoes have taken me a long way. They've got a tread that's worn down, and they are a little beat up inside. But now they are comfortable.

When I joined CVV, I never imagined that I would do as much walking as I have, walking a journey with friends, old and new. My shoes have become symbols: The soles are my faith laced with the bonds of community that give me the comfort to carry on.

Starting my CVV year was like lacing up a new pair of shoes. I was coming off a difficult time and was ready for this fresh start God was giving me.

My shoelaces tightened as our communal bonds built through orientation week and into our first months together as we prayed, laughed and cried.

Meanwhile, my soles became a firm foundation of faith. The path, so far, was straight and easy.

These shoes were first tested as a steep curve came up in early November, when I got a text stating that a friend was feeling suicidal and was not responding to phone calls or texts.

I struggled through the day as I was waiting for an answer.

I prayed and tried not to let my new

soles of faith slip.

My emotions bottomed out as I felt the depths of sadness and fear for my friend.

I came to dinner unusually quiet that night, and my community asked me what was wrong.

As I relayed everything to them, it hit me why God had placed me here in that moment.

I shared, "It may be painful, but if this is the cost of loving someone, it's worth it."

Their response tightened the bond even more. In the end, my friend wound up recovering. My shoes, a little more beat up, held up well.

The year continued and my shoes took me to new heights as I worked at my site, gained new experiences and even witnessed the Confirmation of a community member. But another valley appeared when I found out my friend Nick needed a major operation. I prayed during the weekend be-



I prayed and tried not to let my new soles of faith slip.

fore the operation, and was buoyed by hope as I saw my community all sign a card of prayers for him.

The balloon popped when I found out that he was having severe complications. This was the moment when my new shoe's soles and laces fully came together. My community tightened its bond around me and my

faith grew, as I knew that, one way or another, God was going to take care of Nick. Nick survived, and our friendship grew through the ordeal.

My shoes aren't as new as they were at the beginning of the year. But they are comfortable.

With God as my foundation and with my community embracing me, I have new confidence to encounter the next companions on the journey. ▲

Michael Bruno works at Denver Inner City Parish.

Benefit for Colorado Vincentian Volunteers

Music for the Heart & Soul

A musical evening of contemporary songs and Broadway favorites

JUNE 14, 2018 • 7PM

featuring
Fr. PATRICK DOLAN & JOHN KITE



Heart & Soul 2018 features the eclectic music of the dynamic musical duo of singer/songwriter Father Patrick Dolan and pianist/accompanist John Kite. The evening of song offers contemporary music and Broadway favorites. The banter between songs is just as delightful as the music from this talented team.

Heart & Soul benefits Colorado Vincentian Volunteers and their commitment to serving Denver's needy.

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▲ A Blind Cafe ambassador reading a label written in Braille from Blind Faith Brewery.
▼ Blind Cafe staff and ambassador.



Editor's note: The Blind Cafe offers public and private experiences held in 100 percent darkness designed to break down social barriers and help people relate without the distraction of visual conditioning, social etiquette or cell phones.

Blind Cafe facilities are staffed by sighted as well as legally blind staff. These people engage audiences with live music and breaking of bread at community tables.

By Margaret Mailander

I was grateful to participate in The Blind Café with the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers. I lacked awareness of the experiences of the blind community and knew I would derive new insight from Blind Cafe.

Being surrounded by a supportive community helped me be vulnerable to the experience. I knew I was there to learn and I wanted to open myself to the exploration, internally and externally.

This experience of isolating one of my identities gave me time to reflect on ways in which I experience the world through each one of my own layered self-identities.

It was a heart-opening experience that helped me build my awareness of the blind community.

As counter intuitive as it may seem, the experience gave me the opportunity to gain a more abstract understanding of what it means to experience light.

Based on my previous limited understanding of the word 'light,' it would not have encompassed what I experienced in the midst of the dark room of The Blind Café.

But I know that what I felt was warmth and communion from the illumination of the Spirit in the room, light. ✦

Margaret Mailander is a member of the CWV Board of Directors

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¡Muchas Gracias!

We thank OUR LUCKY STARS for you!

- ★ **CVV 23**
- ★ **Alumni Association of CVV**
- ★ **Andy and Lisa Nowak and Slow Food**
- ★ **The Bank of Denver**
- ★ **The Blind Café**
- ★ **Blind Faith Brewery/Da Steeg Brewing**
- ★ **Steve Compton**
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- ★ **Superior Plumbing/Lyle Temple**
- ★ **Vanguard Charitable Trust**
- ★ **Randall Family Fund**

March Madness



The following universities participated in service trips coordinated by CVV this year:

- De Paul U**
- St. Edward's**
- Creighton U**
- St. John's U, New York**
- St. Ben's/St. John's, Minnesota**

Stuff we really need



▲ Medium-size canning jars



▲ A humidifier



▲ Bed pillows

“When we turn that gaze to migrants and refugees, we discover that they do not arrive empty handed. They bring their courage, skills, energy and aspirations, as well as the treasures of their own cultures; and in this way, they enrich the lives of the nations that receive them.”

-- Pope Francis

