



Making an Impact in Canadian Society

A Far-Flung Network

carries L'Arche values into careers around the world. One of the little known but powerful dimensions of L'Arche is its impact on the women and men who spend time in a L'Arche community as assistants. L'Arche donors help create safe and loving homes for people with disabilities. They also shape the personal and professional lives of thousands of young people who take learning and wisdom from L'Arche into all walks of life.

- Nathan Ball, Executive Director

An Anniversary Email

The theme for this bulletin sprang from an email I received one day last June from Julie Gittins, house leader of my L'Arche home for three years in the 1980s. "Today" she wrote, "I am celebrating the 25th anniversary of coming to L'Arche!" In the address line were her closest L'Arche assistant friends from 25 years ago—five of us who are still in L'Arche and four former assistants—a psychologist in Australia working with torture victims, a social worker in the non-profit sector in Canada, and an American couple, he a theology teacher and she a development director for an African American school. I cast back to when Julie arrived, 22 years old, having taught elementary school for a couple of semesters and not finding it a good fit. I remembered her funky polka dots and stripes and Manchester accent. And I remembered her care for all of us, her capacity to laugh and cry, to forgive and celebrate, and to be faithful in friendship, and how she grew in confidence, creativity and leadership over the time she was here. Julie returned to England. She married, has three children, and has long worked in local government social services. Like many assistants whose relationships at L'Arche have profoundly influenced their lives, she has stayed in touch (B.P., Editor)



Julie Gittins

Staff Development Officer / Trainer in Social Care, for the Local Authority (Social Services / Family Services), Manchester, England

My three years at L'Arche were probably the most formative of my life, professionally, spiritually and personally. Professionally, L'Arche has shaped my choices and values in my career in social care. Personally, L'Arche has given me many lifelong friendships, and influenced my own parenting. L'Arche also gave me a spiritual framework based on the values of 'I was hungry...' rather than 'Thou shalt not...' 25 years on, the circle is completing itself through my work on the committee to found a first L'Arche community in my home city.

Caz Dyer

Support Worker with adults who are homeless or on death row, United States



My time in L'Arche shaped me into a more rounded person. People in L'Arche taught me not just to reason intellectually but also to pay attention to my emotional and intuitive reactions to things happening around me. I learned to appreciate and name the gifts I see in myself and others, and so offer encouragement. I discovered that often those who are rejected or ignored by society have a great deal to teach the rest of us. I have therefore chosen to support people who are in such

situations as they look for ways to make their voices heard.

Joy Liao

Fellow, Geriatric Medicine, University of British Columbia



My brief year at L'Arche was a very significant season in my life. I was mentored by many core members who taught me about compassion, humility, presence and courage. Their friendships are life-transforming and to this day they continue to inspire

and shape the kind of person I want to be. During my time at L'Arche I discerned my calling to be a doctor and I'm currently completing my fellowship to be a geriatric medicine specialist.

Mark McCormick

Grade 3 Teacher, Ottawa Catholic School Board



When I speak with my Grade 3 students early in September about what God's dream might be for each of us, I always mention my own journey with L'Arche. Children respond intuitively to the notion that some people need extra care and extra love. When I mention that God's dream for some of us is to bring this extra care and

love to others, children respond with a wisdom that is already in their hearts.

Louise Provost

Social worker and clinical supervisor, Centre de réadaptation Gabrielle Major, Montreal



L'Arche marked the beginning of an experience that continues for me today. I treasure this beginning, the learning of new values and gaining of new convictions about people and a new political awareness. L'Arche is a place where the weak are strong, the last are first, where riches are not defined by your

...continued

Suzanne Coulson

R.N. – Public Health Nurse, Barrie, Ontario

The most important lesson I learned from being a L'Arche assistant was how to journey with my dad from the time he was diagnosed with ALS in 2006 to when he died in November 2008. I was able to be really present in his vulnerability. It was a sacred and healing time for me.

Jeff and Debra Moore

Founders of Just Us! Coffee Roasters, Wolfville, Nova Scotia

In 1982 Jeff and Debra founded the L'Arche community in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, and subsequently Debra served as community leader for several years. In 1996, the Moores and 3 friends established the Just Us! Coffee Roasters Cooperative – Canada's first Fair Trade Cooperative. Jeff and Debbie have been honoured by Dalhousie University and by the Atlantic Canada business community. Their store, one of the most successful worker-owned cooperatives, employs a L'Arche member who has an intellectual disability.

possessions but by what you share, and where beauty takes hold of all ones senses. In the world of performance and achievement in which I work and live, the weakest is not always the one who gets attention. My daily challenge in my work at this centre for people with an intellectual disability is to be at the service of the legacy that was given to me in L'Arche.

Pamela Cushing

Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, King's University College at the University of Western Ontario

As someone coming to L'Arche from the competitive, one-upmanship of the academic world, the most profound revelation I had was around fragility– both its universality and its acceptability. The idea that your brokenness is as fundamental to who you are as your capacities was simply not on my radar before L'Arche. It transformed how I think and feel about myself, friends, and colleagues. In particular I think it is immensely helpful in supporting students' growth towards a certain intellectual and personal honesty in their vital quests for self-awareness.

Niko Thomas

Pilot, Dusseldorf, Germany

As a friend and assistant of L'Arche I experienced warm-hearted, intense human relationships which developed quickly. We had to cope with the daily challenges of life and they called forth



Pamela and Jay met in L'Arche, married and have started a family.

happiness and sadness. I left with a wider horizon, letting things be how they are, feeling kindness, inner peace, tolerance, patience and love. Until now the L'Arche experiences and values have continued to have a lasting effect on my daily life.

Jay Pot

Software developer at ZTR Control Systems

I came to L'Arche after a year at university, feeling unsure of my life goals and of myself in general. At L'Arche I was welcomed warmly. I remember Peter reaching to shake my hand, and yanking me out of the chair where I was sitting. During my time there I developed a strong sense of empathy, a skill in my role today as a software developer of user-facing applications. Without realizing it at the time, I grew in my understanding of human behaviour, cognitive abilities, reactions, preferences and limitations. These are what help me today make tools that will better serve the person using them.

Krista Smith

Associate at Ritch Durnford, Lawyers, in Halifax, Nova Scotia

L'Arche is about living in relationship. For both core members and assistants, intensity and intimacy are intertwined with personal care. Today, instead of assisting core members, I help clients



with legal problems. Besides practicing Employment and Labour Law, I have assisted immigrants and refugee claimants on a volunteer basis. Clients seek accompaniment on a long and difficult journey that will inevitably test their resolve, self-confidence and patience. The small talk that we usually use to protect

ourselves is stripped away in the solicitor-client relationship. Just as I learned at L'Arche, the relationships I develop with clients are founded on radical trust and vulnerability. Every time a client entrusts me with the private details of her life, I do my best to honour and protect her dignity while seeking justice for her.

Delia Gica

RPN, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto

As a L'Arche assistant I appreciated the care we gave to the whole person—the core member's physical and emotional health, exercise, life skills learning, friendships, spiritual life, and recreation. After completing my nursing training I worked part time at various health care facilities before deciding where to accept a permanent position. I chose a facility where I could again, as in L'Arche, work in a team with a holistic approach.



Ralf Schmitz

Roman Catholic priest, Diocese of Trier, Germany

In L'Arche, I found shepherds who helped me to become a better shepherd. To discover another person – and myself, to respect another person – and myself, to embrace another person – and myself, and through this touch the Divine, was a powerful experience and a perfect paradigm for learning.



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