

# Volunteer experience teaches Catholic about herself

For the past year and a half, I have been living/working in Camphill Village in Copake, N.Y. (Camphill Village is a community of people, some with special needs, located on 600 acres of land. The organization is self-sustaining, with a farm, two gardens, and about 10 workshops.)

It's been my first time away from home, and I must say I was hesitant to go so far away - eight hours by car - to this place I had never heard of and live in a house with people I had never met, most of whom have some degree of developmental disability. I was lost - but I have found myself in these people.

For anyone who is lost and not sure where your life may take you, this experience will surely help you get on the right path. I won't guarantee that you won't be homesick, because you will. I also won't tell you that you will love it the whole time, because you won't. The one thing I will guarantee is that you will learn things about yourself that you might have taken another decade to find out.

Last year I lived in a care house taking care of the most fragile and elderly of the village - villager wise. Here is an explanation of the titles I will use throughout: 'villager' (one who has a developmental disability), 'houseparents' (long-term co-workers who stay for more than one year) and 'co-workers' (the young people who come from as far as Germany and Korea to volunteer one year of their lives to Camphill). The latter is my title.

This year I live in a younger, more active house where the oldest villager is 56 years old.

I cook for 12-15 people a day.

The evenings are normally spent in the house, which is amazing. Imagine just sitting in the living room without a television and crocheting while listening to music and listening to the villagers' stories of the day. The simplicity of this activity is what brings me such joy.

We (the co-workers and villagers) have all our meals together, from breakfast to supper. The meals are often loud and can be a little overbearing to one's soul. Imagine sitting between two people who are talking to you the entire meal and having to pay acute attention to their every word because if you don't they will get angry!

But, I can't complain. I really enjoy living and working here. The house I live in consists of 11 people (four co-workers, one staff child and six villagers). The villagers have disabilities ranging from vertigo to Down syndrome. We don't use labels regularly, only when explaining the way the village works to people; we are typically Crystal and Becky, not coworker or villager.

It's an interesting dynamic to live and work with people who have developmental disabilities - most of whom are old enough to be your mom or grandfather - yet you act as a guardian to them. It takes some getting used to. How do you respect them as an adult while at the same time reprimanding them for something they have done wrong? You will soon find out the answers!

I have learned many things since coming here, like, how to milk a cow, what simple pleasures are, how to use patience to the fullest extent, and that the key to happiness is not to take life too seriously, and finally, to just have fun whenever you can. There may be tragedy in every life, but there is simple happiness, too!

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For more information or to volunteer, visit [www.camphillvillage.org](http://www.camphillvillage.org).