

L'Arche is an international community of adults with and without disabilities living together and founded fifty years ago in France by Jean Vanier as an ecumenical and inter-religious community with roots in Catholic tradition. Since 1964, young volunteers from around the world choose to live in L'Arche communities for a period of time to learn the "art of presence" and the beauty of friendship with adults with disabilities through its community life. This 8-week immersion will take place in the L'Arche community in Bologna, Italy.

L'Arche-Pre Immersion-Elise Pepe

MAY 19, 2016 BY [ELISABETTA](#)

Hello, or should I say Ciao! My name is Elise Pepe and I am a soon to be junior at the University of Portland.

A glance at the next few months:

What exactly is happening in the next few months of my life? I was lucky enough to be chosen to be one of two University of Portland students chosen to travel to Bologna, Italy where I will be a part of a L'Arche community. Before being chosen for this immersion through the University of Portland Moreau Center I wouldn't exactly know what these words meant. To be completely honest I cannot even begin to imagine the experience I will have this summer. However, I can tell by the information given to me that it will be a summer full of love, opportunity and awesome experiences.

So what exactly is the organization L'Arche? L'Arche is an international community of adults with and without disabilities living and working together. I am fortunate enough to be a part of a community, like I previously said, in Bologna, Italy. Fun fact: Bologna and Portland are "sister cities," which mean that they work together to establish cultural, social and business links with another.

That is really all the information I can provide because with every video I watch, article I read or person I talk to about my future experience I learn that it is an experience unlike any other and different for every person. I will put some videos below that show a small glimpse!

Link to the L'Arche Bologna community: <http://arcabologna.jimdo.com/>

Link to the L'Arche Portland community: <http://www.larche-portland.org/>

Awesome video part of a L'Arche video series...filmed in Italy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD_DFwIDbXw

Video about L'Arche: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bInJLJlG8>

Stay tuned to see my experience in this journey!

Elise Pepe

L'Arche-Pre Immersion-Tayler Davis

MAY 19, 2016 BY [TAYLER](#)

Hi! My name is Tayler. Next week I will be traveling to Italy to work with L'Arche Bologna for the next two months with classmate and friend, Elise.

If you don't yet know what L'Arche is, it is an organization that fosters community and unconditional love all over the world. In my own words, the mission of L'Arche is to bring together different populations in our society and to show that we are all worthy of love, acceptance, and belonging. L'Arche does this by creating home and building communities where those with and without disabilities live and experience life together.

I first learned about L'Arche while participating in a Moreau Center immersion over fall break during my freshman year. We got to spend the evening in the Portland L'Arche homes, preparing a meal together and sharing in community with one another. The evening concluded with singing songs and participating in prayer. I found this short time in L'Arche to be extremely powerful. The love and care that everyone had for one another was so strong it felt palpable. It urged me to look more into L'Arche, including exploring more about it's founder, Jean Vanier, and different ways that I could get involved. To be completely honest, I have not created any expectations for this trip. I feel that it is much better to participate in experiences with an open and receptive mind and heart. When you do this it makes experiences much more powerful and easier to draw meaning from. I look forward to learning what L'Arche is going to teach me, whatever that may be.

And here we are! I am so excited to be blessed with this opportunity to share unconditional love with others, and to be able to live in true community and vulnerability with others.

Ciao,

Tayler Davis

I Don't Speak Italian -June 7th 2016

JUNE 7, 2016 BY [TAYLER](#)

Ciao, tutti!

It's been almost two weeks since Elise and I arrived in Italy. We were greeted by two L'Arche assistants at the airport when we arrived, and after introducing ourselves headed to the Arcobaleno (the L'Arche community). The adjustment to this new country and community has been difficult. After having a quick introduction with one of the assistants we were integrated very quickly into the daily workshops. There are three workshops total, and each ragazzi (community member) is assigned to be in a workshop. Monday-Friday we are apart of the workshops, working with the ragazzi. We share the work together, and also share time, snack, and lunch. In the afternoons after workshop closes, Elise and I head to one of the three homes for the rest of the evening until everyone goes to bed. On the weekends we spend the days in the homes and help complete chores and other activities that are planned...There is always lots of cleaning to do!

If anyone has been curious about the language barrier, I'm happy to note that I've already learned so much Italian. It's interesting how much you can force yourself to learn in a week after not understanding any of the conversations that are happening around you. I have learned lots of different key phrases and terms used commonly here in the community, and that has helped me a lot when connecting with the ragazzi and the other assistants and volunteers. It is still a lot to get used to, and I still often find myself awkwardly confused during conversations during meal time and other parts of the day. Thankfully, with many of the assistants here, English is at least mildly apart of their vocabulary. Many of my interactions with others consists of mixed Italian and English words, hand motions, signals, facial expressions, and noises. It's like constantly playing a game of charades.

When I reflect on these interactions, I feel different emotions. At times I feel like a nuisance because I have trouble communicating with everyone, and during other times I feel like this is what makes my relationships with others so unique. It is a special way that I communicate with the ragazzi and assistants, and I think that although I can't communicate with fluent Italian, that this unique way of communication allows for me to still bond and generate community with others. I am slowly learning that my own poverties can also be used as strengths. I just have to learn how to accept them, and how to use them positively during my time here.

I am grateful for all of the friends that we have already made during our time here, and for everyone that has helped with this transition into Arcobaleno. I look forward to the relationships that are going to be built, and to integrate fully into the loving community that is obviously present between assistants and ragazzi.

Until next time,

Tayler

June 22- Yes We Are Still Here!

JUNE 22, 2016 BY [TAYLER](#)

Well, it's almost been a month here in Arcabaleno. I am sorry we aren't updating the blog more regularly, but when being active in the community for 72 hours a week it is hard to find the time or the energy to post something.

I've thought about this blog a lot, and I've thought even more about what I could say about my time here so far. As I've mentioned before, the adjustment was difficult, but I can now proudly say that Elise and I have both found our rhythm in the community life. I think that for the remainder of our time here it would be important to think about key concepts that surround L'Arche, those with intellectual disabilities, and how those both connect with the rest of the world. While being here, there is a lot of time to think about these things. I often think about what it means to be a friend with someone who has an intellectual disability, and what it means to live in community. I also think a lot about communication and universal language. Being here has allowed for me to more actively think about these different topics and more. I hope to be able to use my experiences here in Arcabaleno to answer these topics in the upcoming weeks.

As for now, I am currently sitting in my bed debating whether I should eat a Kinder chocolate bar or just go straight to bed. I am also reminiscing on the time that we've already spent here. A month has gone by quickly. I often review the highlights of my time here... Here are a few:

- One of the ragazzi said hi to me (this is important because it takes her a long time to be friendly with people)...she even smiled! Score one for me!
- Watched "The Never Ending Story", "Despicable Me", and "The Cat in the Hat" movies with the ragazzi. I barely understood any of the words but that's okay.
- On Saturday my program was to be with one of the ragazzi and just hang out. This was pretty awesome because we were alone together which means that there were no other assistants or volunteers to give me assistance or guidance. I got to do something on my own! We chose to go on a walk together, and then we played her memory game

in the grass. A week earlier I got to help this same ragazzi celebrate her birthday and confirmation with her family.

-Went on a retreat for a weekend with the other volunteers and Michael, our mentor from Rome. We got to share our experiences from L'Arche and also talk about different important topics surrounding community and the mission of L'Arche.

– On Sunday we went to mass like we always do, but this time we got to see the baptism of 3 babies. First time that I had ever witnessed that! it was really great and so sweet. i definitely teared up a couple of times.

– Monday was the first time that I've gone to the swimming pool with some of the ragazzi from my workshop. The pool requires everyone to wear swimming caps and even the biggest one we could find couldn't fit my big head.

– One of the ragazzi cuddled with me during one of the movie showings and that was pretty cool because she usually writes me off after I tell her I can't understand her when she tells me something.

Talk to you soon!

Tayler

PS: I ate the chocolate bar.

What is Friendship with a Core Member?

JULY 3, 2016 BY [TAYLER](#)

I'm not sure if this should even be a discussion topic. When we create a topic of conversation about "being friends with those who have intellectual disabilities", aka core members, we immediately single out the population when this whole time it is the opposite of what we're trying to accomplish. At L'Arche we work and strive for inclusion, solidarity, togetherness, and equality between those with and without intellectual disabilities.

For example, a friendship between a core member and myself shouldn't be seen different than a friendship between Elise and myself. The core member is not the only one with disability. We all have disabilities and poverties that we may not make so evident to the rest of the world. Everyone is equal with one another in this aspect, and so are our relationships with one another.

In our society we have begun to glorify friendship, creating such high expectations for what makes someone a friend. In addition to this, I think we can all agree that the definition of friendship is somewhat subjective. These expectations we have created for friendship are what creates the topic of what it means to be friends with a core member. Being in a L'Arche community has taught me that the definition of friendship is much simpler and flexible than I originally thought. I now view friendship as being together

with another person or people that you enjoy and who enjoys you. Simple as that. It doesn't mean you have to spill all your secrets or spend every waking moment together. You don't have to have sleep overs or have known each other for years before you consider each other more important than just acquaintances.

When you are together, you are sharing your life and your time with one another and those are the most valuable things that you have. When you actively choose to spend time with another, it says volumes about your relationship. In my opinion anyway. When you share time together you immediately enter into a friendship. You learn together and you learn more about each other, and the more time that you spend together, the more vulnerable that you become with one another. And vulnerability is a key trait in any authentic relationship.

This vulnerability may come more quickly when we enter into relationships with core members, because their poverties, unlike our own, are more immediately evident. For example, many need assistance with using the restroom, eating, and other activities of daily living. Their vulnerability is present quickly to us, and allows for our relationships with them to be simpler and more authentic than maybe our highly webbed and complex relationships with those at home.

But these relationships with core members are very beautiful, and because of their authenticity, we learn much more about ourselves and the kind of person that we are.