



Experiencing strengths and weakness in Summer Service

Lorena Prieto of Goshen, Ind., was eagerly awaiting a call concerning a secretarial job, but instead she received one asking her to consider serving as a Summer Service Worker (SSW). After hearing about the community outreach worker/health clinic translator position, Prieto said, "I didn't think twice. I just told him, yes, I am interested."

The SSW program of Mennonite Central Committee provides opportunities for young people of color to develop service and leadership skills through assignments in their congregations or through community organizations. Prieto was looking for an opportunity to develop her character, discover her gifts and strengthen her weaknesses, and this opportunity sounded like what she wanted.

Through the SSW program, Prieto divides her time between The Center for Healing and Hope and North Goshen Mennonite Church. The Center for Healing and Hope works to meet the medical needs of uninsured patients, and Prieto serves as a health clinic translator. She guides patients through the bewildering maze of initial medical questions, helps with insurance forms and directs them to doctors or specialists.

In warm smiles, people show gratitude for Prieto's work, but this is a mutual exchange because Prieto experiences joy and satisfaction in serving people through interpretation and translation.

"Lorena models the kind of compassion that we want our volunteers to express to patients," said Dale Wentorf, executive director at The Center for Healing and Hope. "She develops a rapport with the patients so they feel comfortable. She just really disarms them and has a personality that allows them to trust her."

Prieto's community outreach at North Goshen Mennonite Church has been teaching a Spanish class to non-Spanish speakers. Prieto and Pastor José Elizalde invited to the class people from both within and outside the church in order to break boundaries between cultures and languages.

Teaching has been a challenge. Before this, Prieto's shyness kept her from public speaking. She has learned to get materials, decide on topics for the class, answer questions and respond to the frustrations of the students. Each new class gives her the opportunity to look for creative strategies like making up games to use in teaching.

The experience of being in front of 15 people has shown Prieto that God can use weakness and strength. The support of her community and experiencing God's love for the people she works with has increased her confidence in using God's gifts.

Five years ago, Prieto, who lived in Bogotá, Colombia, went to church as usual. A delegation

from the United States was visiting, and the pastor asked if someone could speak English for the visitors. Prieto didn't know English, but from deep inside, she found herself responding with a prayer, "God, I wish to speak English. I am here, send me out."

A year after this prayer, she came to the United States and began learning English. She sees her current job as an amazing answer to what she had prayed before.

"I love languages – it's something that's in my heart," she said. "It's a way to help people. I know how hard it is to learn a language – I've been in



Lorena Prieto (right) helps with translation at The Center for Healing and Hope with Jodi Birkey, patient advocate.

that situation."

Prieto will be starting her junior year at Indiana University South Bend in the fall, where she is following her passion and studying languages. In addition to Spanish and English, Prieto is also studying French.

Prieto's life experiences are aiding her in her service. "I'm in the middle of two cultures," she said. "I can see both of them, and try to be the medium to help people from both sides understand each other."

Prieto says that this Summer Service experience has shown her what she wants to do in the future. She would like to translate, interpret and learn about other cultures. ☺

- Cathryn Clinton and Jennifer Rupp

Five additional Summer Service Workers are serving in the Great Lakes region. Temprance Berry and Brandie Pauling at Community Christian Fellowship in Detroit, Michigan; Frank Johnson and Jessica Spencer at Lee Heights Community Church in Cleveland, Ohio; and Ivette Sifuentes at True Vine Tabernacle in Elkhart, Indiana.

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A sewing lesson in school kit bags

For many years, members of the Amish community in the Goshen (Indiana) area have diligently and generously volunteered with MCC meat canning.

Although a few individuals have also been involved in other material resources efforts, this winter three Amish schools developed a connection with MCC in a new way.

From February through April, three schools donated 50 filled school kits – a generous gift within itself. But in addition to that, they sewed and donated 376 school kit bags!

The project began when Ken Sensenig, MCC East Coast staff, visited eleven Amish schools in October with Les Gustafson-Zook, MCC Great Lakes Regional Associate. They visited classrooms, spoke about school kits, and even got the children involved in singing a school kit song.

After their visit, Orley Yoder and Glenn Lambright, Amish school board members, and Gustafson-Zook began brainstorming about how some Amish schools could get involved with school kits.

As they talked, it became clear that this could be a win-win situation for both groups. The upper grade girls in these schools were learning how to sew and needed ways to practice. MCC needed someone to sew bags for the donated school kit contents.

MCC provided the schools with donated material, patterns and rope, and the schools incorporated the sewing project into their classrooms. “The mothers were tickled that their older girls had this chance to learn how to sew,” said Lambright. Some students even took the material home to cut out the patterns, so they would have more time to sew in the classroom.

“We didn’t have anybody complain,” said Lambright. “It was a very worthwhile project, and we’d like to get more schools involved if we do it again next year.”

If you’re interested in getting involved with MCC material resource kits and projects, visit mcc.org/kits or contact the MCC Great Lakes material resource center at (574) 534-4071. ☎



Michelle Norman, material resources coordinator, counts a few of the 376 school kit bags that were sewn by three Amish schools in the Goshen area.

Save the Date!

Celebrate MCC

MCC Great Lakes Annual Gathering

February 27-28, 2009

Central Mennonite Church Archbold, Ohio

Look for upcoming information and registration at
mcc.org/greatlakes



At the Centro Educativo La Buena Tierra in Cuernavaca, Mexico, students learn about insects and their habitats.

This school was one of the places that Jorge Vielman, MCC Great Lakes Regional Associate, visited on a recent learning tour.

Buena Tierra was begun in 1998 by the local community, assisted by Sara King, MCC volunteer, and Marlin Yoder, current MCC Great Lakes Regional Associate.

MCC SALTERs have been a part of this partnership over the years, and the school is a part of the Global Family Program.

A positive presence in war-torn Iraq

John Filson is an MCC worker currently serving a three-year service term in northern Iraq. He recently received his Masters degree in International Peace Studies from the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana.

Greetings to you! I'm now into the eighth month of my assignment here in northern Iraq - enough time to breathe in the landscape, laugh with new friends, win and lose battles with Arabic and squint through sweltering summer dust storms.

This is the first chance MCC has had to place a service worker in Iraq since 2004, when Baghdad became too dangerous to maintain our presence there. My job is to coordinate MCC's support for our Iraqi partners who are carrying out vital humanitarian work of every kind, from caring for children orphaned by the war to providing villages with drinkable water for the first time to empowering community leaders with conflict transformation tools. In many ways my role is to bridge the physical and cultural divide between emotionally-exhausted Iraqis on one side and folks in the West who wish to offer prayers and resources on the other.

But the most important thing I can hope to accomplish here, in a society broken to pieces by fear and violence, is something I can be rather than something I can do: I can be a positive presence, when foreign faces like mine are often associated with threatening things.

Naturally, my appearance is a problem: I'm white, American, male, tall and thick. People who don't know me assume I'm a soldier for hire or a businessman like many *ajانب* (foreigners) in the north. When they learn I work for a small international humanitarian "organization," I often sense their alarm that I may be a missionary with clandestine plans to woo Muslims away from Islam or Christians away from existing churches.

Of course, these fears don't stop Iraqis from welcoming me warmly and spoiling me silly; in fact individual Americans are greeted with curiosity and generosity in the north. But such perceptions do create a solid barrier between our collective worlds. Genuine trust doesn't come easily here, and given Iraq's long history of negative experiences



School children in a small village in northern Iraq are eager to have their photo taken with John Filson, an MCC worker.

with foreign peoples I can understand why.

In this context, MCC is wise to emphasize relationship-building. The ancient societies in Iraq are woven together by relationships, and the strength of the barriers outsiders face is equal to the strength of the bonds that are created on the other side. Simply by making the effort to return to Iraq amidst difficult working conditions to say "we are still here if you need us," MCC is making a beautiful contribution to peace in Iraq and in our human community.

And the idea that an American from the fabled land of plenty would choose to be far away from his family and friends for three years to face electricity and water shortages, an intimidating language, and days when it's too hot to go outside between 7am and 8pm - and do all this for free - is a gesture of sincerity that cluster bombs and policy disasters cannot destroy.

Thank you so much for caring about Iraqis during this difficult time. Your prayers and support are truly helpful for many people you may never get to meet. My best wishes to you. ☺

- John Filson

SWAP summer season is in full swing

SWAP (Serving with Appalachian People) is in the midst of its busiest time of year! Over 1,400 people are volunteering this summer, with an additional 19 volunteers serving as summer staff.

More than 40 families have already benefited this summer from SWAP projects and volunteers, making their homes warmer, safer and drier.

The SWAP schedule is already filling up for the 2009 season. Get your applications in soon for your group to spend a week repairing homes and building relationships at one of our five locations in Kentucky and West Virginia.

For more information about the program or to fill out an application, visit mcc.org/swap or call (606) 633-5065. ☺

"I got my first construction experience on a couple week-long service weeks with SWAP as a teenager in the early nineties. I fell in love with the work and went on to work for a residential builder for over a year and then with another builder for three years while I went through seminary. I have served for a week with Mennonite Disaster Service in three states over the past three years. Because of my interest in this type of ministry, I now serve as the Brethren in Christ representative on the MDS Board of Delegates. I'm thankful for my experience with SWAP that got me started!"

- Greg Starr from Chambersburg, Penn.



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Contact Mary Ann Weber
574-534-4133 or mweber@mcc.org

mcc.org/serve

Living positively: HIV/AIDS in East Africa

Jennifer Rupp, Communications Coordinator for MCC Great Lakes, recently spent three weeks in Tanzania and Kenya on an MCC youth learning tour focused on HIV/AIDS.

Before leaving on my learning tour, I had a vision in my mind of what it would be like in Africa - the Africa that we see on television and read about in the news. I imagined people with AIDS lying on their death beds, frail and dying - hopeless.

The Africa I experienced however, was drastically different. Since 2005, ARV (antiretroviral) drugs have been made available free of charge from the government. With these drugs, people living with the virus are able to live longer, healthier, more productive lives.

Don't get me wrong, there is still a lot of suffering and challenges to be addressed. It can be difficult to travel to the hospitals and dispensaries for the drugs. The drugs can't work properly without the patient receiving the proper nutrition from a balanced diet and refraining from hard physical activity that will tax their body. These things are very hard to achieve in an environment where food is expensive and many single parents are trying to provide for their families. Stigma towards people with HIV is still very strong, and some people are afraid to get tested because of the reactions of their families and communities when people find out they have the virus. It can be difficult to get the healthcare supplies and equipment necessary to care for someone with HIV.

But the images of hope that I saw were very encouraging. The people working with these programs are a reflection of the tireless energy and fortitude that I imagine Christ displaying as he met with the marginalized people of society during His time on earth.

We met with many support groups throughout our travels - some of these meetings involved sharing meals or getting a history of the group's work. What sticks out to me the most from our entire trip, are the introductions that these groups would give. Each person stood up and told us their name, followed by the statement "and I'm living positively."

What a strong statement! Yes, it means the literal fact that they have tested HIV positive and are living with this horrific virus. But at the same time, they're living *positively!* Not waiting around for their time to die, but embracing each day of life and making the most of their time.

In the midst of a terrible situation, when it would be easy to give up and feel sorry for themselves, these folks are banding together to



Loans from MCC and other partner organizations allow people living with HIV/AIDS to start small businesses, like vegetable stands, to provide income for their families.

support and encourage one another. They're starting income generating projects and getting loans for small businesses. They're doing educational programs in schools to prevent the spread of HIV in the next generation. They're breaking down the stigma associated with HIV in their communities and encouraging people to get tested and find out their status.

The beautiful and gracious people that I met in Tanzania and Kenya taught me a lot about what it really means to live positively. 🌍

- Jennifer Rupp

For more information about MCC's work with HIV/AIDS around the world, visit mcc.org/aids.

World AIDS Day: December 1
How will you get involved?

**Join Hands Stop
AIDS Toolkit**

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mcc.org/catalog

