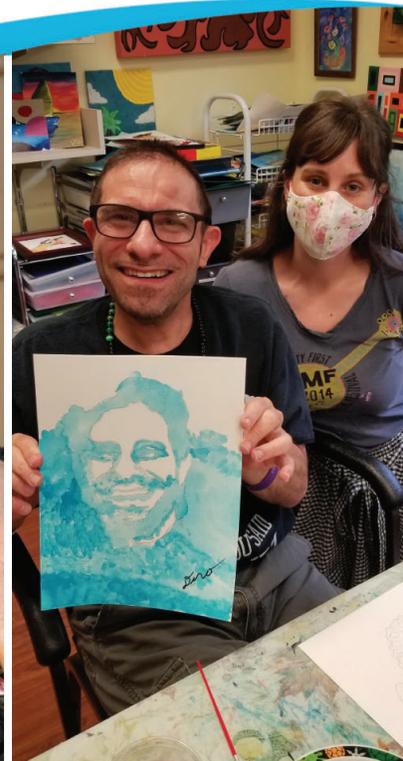




Project Impact Reports



L'Arche



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Part I - Organization and Project Overview

About L'Arche USA

L'Arche is a network of communities of people with and without intellectual disabilities living, working, praying, and playing together. Building on a movement that began in France in the 1960s in response to inhumane conditions of large institutions for people with intellectual disabilities, L'Arche communities began to be established in different areas of the United States, beginning in the 1970s. L'Arche International formed in 1981 and L'Arche USA was founded in 1986. Each L'Arche community operates locally as a separate non-profit with its own governing board. There are 154 member communities around the world, with 61 homes in the United States, home to 284 Core Members and 447 Assistants. Core Members are people with intellectual or developmental disabilities that live in a L'Arche home or participate in a day program. Assistants are people without intellectual or developmental disabilities who live with and support Core Members.

About the Project

During 2020 and 2021, six L'Arche communities from across the United States participated in an evaluation capacity-building experience called Project Impact, facilitated by the team at Dialogues In Action. Project Impact is a participatory, empowerment approach to evaluation. The approach is a self-generated, reflexive practice grounded in curiosity. The first cohort of three communities (Greater Washington D.C., Jacksonville, and Spokane) during 2020 and the second cohort of three communities (Boston North, Cleveland, and Tahoma) during 2021 gathered teams from their communities to engage in the project. Each of the six communities implemented a mixed-methods self-study of the impact of L'Arche in the lives of its members.

The initial phase of the project was focused on developing the ideas of intention. This included the formulation of an impact framework including impacts, indicators, and principles of change. The second phase of the project was focused on designing data collection methodologies and implementing both a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and a quantitative approach using an outcomes survey. The third phase of the project involved the application of the findings from the data for responses and strategies going forward.

After each community implemented their own self-studies, the team leaders convened to consider the intersection of their learning in meta-themes, those insights that are shared among the six communities as a sample of the L'Arche communities throughout the United States. The combined report is presented in this chapter and is followed by reports from each individual community.

L'Arche's Vision, Mission, and Values

L'Arche USA strives to make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities, foster environments that meet members' changing needs, and engage in diverse cultures working toward a more human society. The organization's mission includes supporting L'Arche communities in the United States, helping all members realize their full potential, and engaging the broader public so that everyone can experience the unique gifts of people with intellectual disabilities. In L'Arche, people of differing intellectual capacities, social origins, religions, and cultures build relationships rooted in trust and vulnerability. L'Arche USA advocates alongside people with intellectual disabilities for the rights they deserve. L'Arche USA partners with relevant organizations to raise awareness of policy issues.

Intended Impacts of L'Arche Communities

The focus of this evaluation was shaped by the primary ideas of intended impact. These ideas of impact, and the quantitative and qualitative indicators associated with each idea, provided the conceptual framework for the data collection. The intention of L'Arche is that members, both non-core and core, would experience the following impact as a result of L'Arche:

1. Members develop awareness, sensitivity, and curiosity for others, especially across differences in gifts and abilities.
2. Members experience personal transformation in fundamental aspects of their lives.
3. Members create meaningful relationships and find belonging in community with others.
4. Members approach vocation and life-purpose in a holistic and human-centered way.
5. Members critically engage societal values of accessibility and inclusion and advocate for social justice.
6. Core Members identify and live out their choices.
7. Core Members have full, healthy lives.
8. Core Members exercise positive influence in the lives of others.



Part 2- Evaluation Methodology

The aim of the evaluation project was to evaluate the intended impacts of L'Arche communities on members' lives. Specifically, the project teams explored two primary questions:

1. What is the impact of the experience of L'Arche on the members of L'Arche?
2. What about the experience of L'Arche contributes to the impact?

The initial step was to identify and clarify the intended impacts of L'Arche communities. The teams then used the Heart Triangle™ model to identify qualitative and quantitative indicators of impact focused on the mental, behavioral, and emotional changes in community members that indicate achievement of impact. These indicators were used to develop a qualitative interview guide and a quantitative questionnaire, which were used to measure progress toward achieving intended impacts.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

The qualitative portion of the evaluation was informed by the following principles and approaches:

Inclusive Research Approach. A key consideration in the design of the research instruments was to ensure inclusive and adaptive research models grounded in the principles of Universal Design, that were usable by people with diverse abilities. With the guidance of Dr. Andy Roach, Associate Professor in the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services at Georgia State University, teams designed interview protocols and survey questionnaires with consideration to three principles of Universal Design: equitable use, flexibility in use, and perceptible information (meaning information is communicated regardless of the user's sensory abilities). The research instruments were designed to be easy to understand and deliberately intuitive. Accommodations to allow for full accessibility were considered, including designing a version of the survey questionnaire to be completed in person with Core Members with the assistance of a direct-care staff person, volunteer, or family member (see Appendix B).

Qualitative Sampling and Data Collection. The total sample size for qualitative interviews across the six communities was 125 people. Participation included 43 Core Members and 82 non-core members (including direct-care staff/assistants, non-direct care staff, board members, volunteers, former staff, and family members). Interviews were conducted by team members in each of the six communities and consisted of staff and volunteers. Interviews took place both face-to-face and, due to Covid-19 safety considerations, via video call. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour in length with each participant. Interviewers gathered the data by capturing the conversation through detailed written notes during the interviews, and/or using Otter.ti transcription software. Notes were immediately reviewed and filled in after each interview to obtain a more complete rendering of the interview content.

Qualitative Data Analysis. Each team analyzed data inductively using a modified version of thematic analysis. The process for analysis involved 1) becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, and identifying themes for each interview; and 2) reviewing, defining, and naming themes. Specifically, the analysis involved the following sequence of steps:

- Review each interview four times through each of four lenses to illuminate a different aspect of what the data reveal about the research questions;
- Gather data into four categories to serve as an initial set of codes;
- Develop intra-interview themes to interpret the meaning and significance of the data from each interview;
- Review the initial themes as a team to identify the overarching and inter-interview themes
- Map the themes visually and examine them to further define and identify the features, causes and catalysts, new or surprising insights, and relationships between themes; and
- Determine the most significant and meaningful findings

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

The quantitative portion of the evaluation was informed by the following principles and approaches:

Preparing the Survey Instrument. The quantitative indicators of impact were used to design a questionnaire. The questionnaire included a brief demographic section followed by a substantive section with scale response-formatted questions that focused on the participant's self-perception, comparing knowledge, actions, and feelings before and after they were involved in the L'Arche community. The questionnaire concluded with a short section that asked for general feedback as well as optional demographic questions. A print version of the survey was also available and was used in some instances to administer the survey with Core Members or others with limited access to the online version.

Quantitative Sampling and Data Collection. Team leaders shared an invitation to participate in the online survey via email with their network of L'Arche community members and supporters. The online survey was live for two weeks, with reminders to participate administered throughout that time by team leaders. Responses to the printed survey were manually entered into the online software by team members and volunteers. 68 Core Members and 167 non-core members completed the survey, for a total of 235 responses.

Data Analysis. The data were analyzed primarily using measures of central tendency. The teams identified key insights, patterns, and gaps within the data and incorporated these discoveries into the related findings.



Considerations for the Evaluation

The project launched in early 2020, shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic was beginning to impact communities across the United States. The effects of the pandemic on community life and staff responsibilities resulted in the shifting of timelines and the division of the six project teams into two cohorts, with half of the teams completing their qualitative research and analysis in the fall of 2020, and half in the spring of 2021. Team leaders observed that in some interviews, particularly with direct-care staff, interviewees reflected on how their response may have differed pre-pandemic versus in the midst of the pandemic.

Part 3 - Shared Findings

The data revealed emerging findings from the shared discovery of the six participating communities. The following are the most salient discoveries about the impact of the L'Arche experience on Core Members and non-core members alike:

Findings about the Capacity for Care and Community

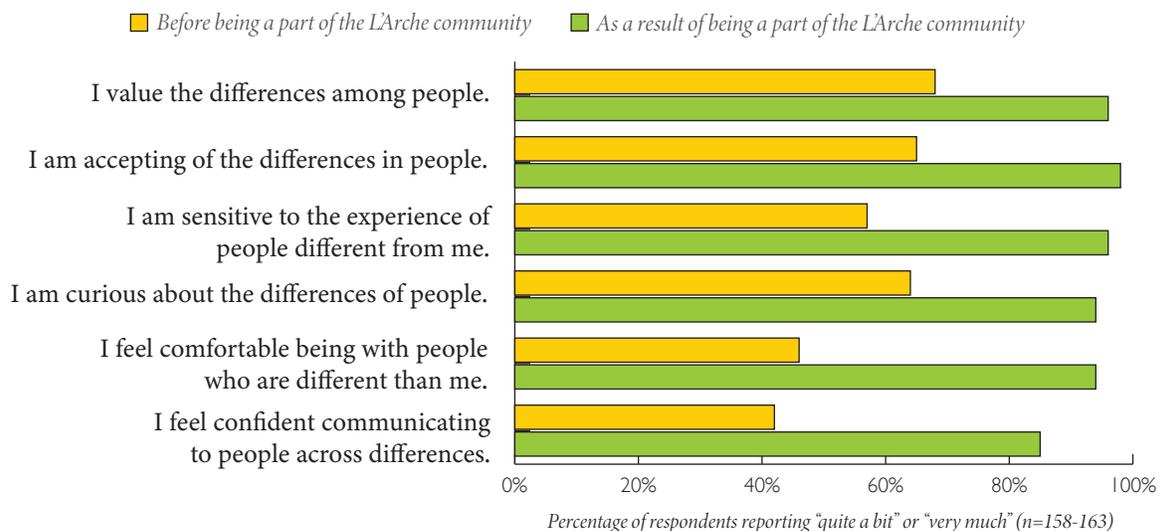
In this section, six findings point to the significance of members' experience of increased capacity for caring, relationship, and building community as a result of their time at L'Arche:

I. Care, Curiosity, and Compassion for People Across Differences. Many non-core members who were interviewed described being more aware of disability issues as a result of their experience at L'Arche. One said, "Physical accessibility is something I think about constantly now and makes me very passionate." This was caused by "being invited into really intimate sacred spaces with Core Members." The data show that those with a L'Arche experience are more comfortable than they used to be relating to people with disabilities. They attribute their relationships with Core Members as a driver of this change. People recognize the gifts and capabilities of those with disabilities and see them in a more holistic way. One volunteer said that before L'Arche, he was not attracted to engaging with people with intellectual

disabilities and never interacted with someone who had an intellectual disability. Since coming to L'Arche, he has spent years getting to know Core Members as individuals and has developed true friendships with them. As with the experience of others in L'Arche, participation in L'Arche expanded his knowledge of issues affecting people with intellectual and other types of disabilities.

The survey data also show that non-core members are making significant gains related to embracing and working across differences. The two items that show the most substantial growth are feeling comfortable being with people who are different and feeling confident communicating to people across differences. These items showed a 104% and 102% increase as a result of being part of L'Arche (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Non-core members are embracing and working across differences

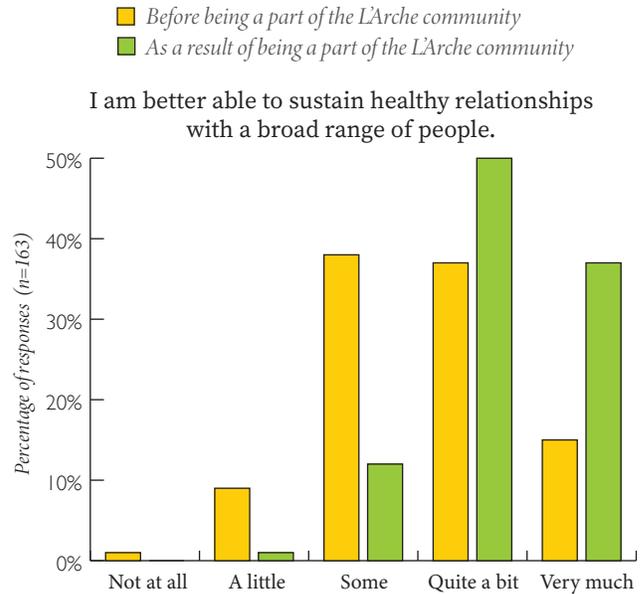


2. Celebrating the Worth of Others. Core Members said they enjoy being with people who are different from them. One proxy interviewee said a Core Member had “learned to adapt” because of many different people coming and going. Another proxy interviewee noticed that a Core Member had grown in her ability to interact with different people and follow up on her curiosity about them. Most volunteers said they were more comfortable with a wide range of people through being at L’Arche. For example, one said, “Being at L’Arche is what allows me to see that we are not so different. We are human.” The data show growth in the members’ ability to see, appreciate and honor the value, dignity, and worth of others because of their time at L’Arche.

3. Ability to Create Community. Those who have been with the community of L’Arche report that L’Arche changed how they value community more broadly. The experience changed their view of the power of community. Some had wholly new ideas about what community could and should look like. One expressed a newfound understanding of how communities like L’Arche can integrate themselves into their neighborhoods. Another learned that a community experience does not have to be geographically bound. Another still has come to view community as a space where people are equal instead of part of a socially determined hierarchical structure. Others changed how they saw themselves in relation to community. All Core Members report that relationships with community members were important to them. Community, and the desire for and ability to create community, is a capacity developed in people through L’Arche.

The survey data show that non-core members grew significantly in their ability to relate and build healthy relationships with others as a result of being a part of the L’Arche community. 88% of non-core member survey respondents said that they were quite a bit or very much able to sustain healthy relationships with a broad range of people as a result of L’Arche as compared to 53% before L’Arche (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Non-core members are better able to sustain healthy, diverse relationships



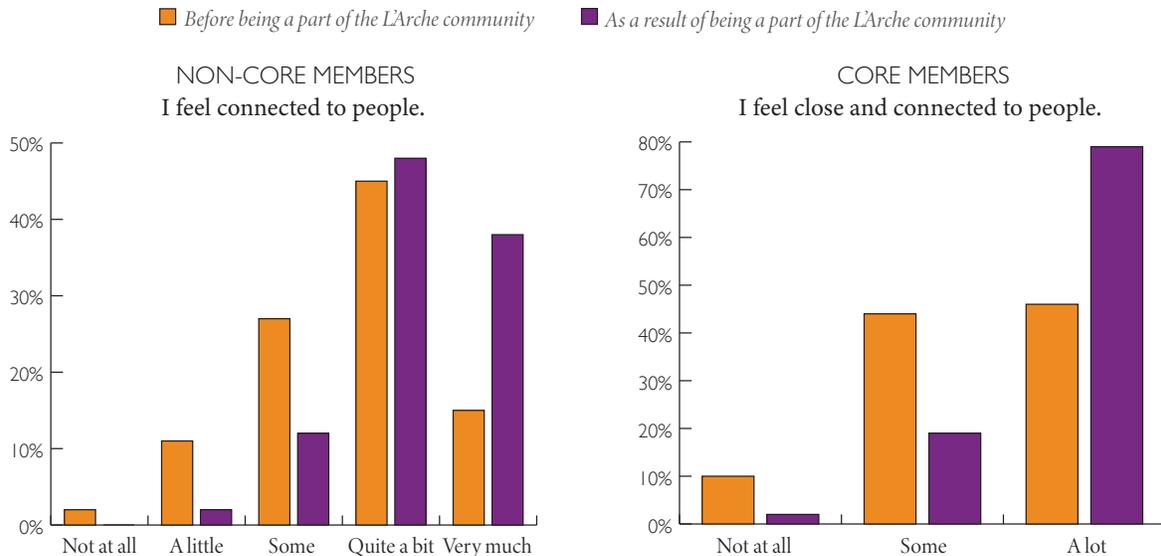
4. Genuine Connection with Others. Members of L’Arche demonstrate an ability to form genuine and deep connections with others. As an organization, L’Arche uses the term “mutual relationship” in its mission, writings, and trainings to describe the reciprocal bonds that are fostered between assistants and Core Members. Relationships are rooted in the recognition that both parties have something essential to contribute. Interviews with members of L’Arche reveal that mutual relationship and human connection are indeed being fostered at L’Arche and that members develop an ability to form real, authentic connections with others. One Core Member said that living in L’Arche made her a better person because she “loves a lot of people.” She spoke about her ability and willingness to give and receive love, and then to allow that love to change her as a person. Another Core Member described a change that occurred within a relationship with a non-core member whom she did not at first like. The word “love” is used by Core Members and non-core members alike in almost every interview, signaling that something transcending the typical client-caregiver relationship is occurring at L’Arche. Members are able to open themselves up to form genuine connections with other human beings.

The survey data also reveal that both core members

and non-core members feel more connected to others. 60% of non-core members reported feeling quite a bit or very much connected to people before L'Arche and 86% reported the same as a result of L'Arche. 46% of core

members reported feeling close and connected to people before L'Arche and 80% reported the same as a result of L'Arche (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Members feel closer and more connected to people



- 5. Lasting Relationships.** Relationships, and the development of the aptitude to make relationships healthy and productive, are at the heart of the L'Arche experience. One said, "Almost everything I know about love and relationships I learned from L'Arche." Core Members speak convincingly about the meaning and importance of the relationships they have made at L'Arche. Many Core Members said they keep in touch with close friends they have made through L'Arche, including former assistants who are no longer in the area. One Core Member signed about the affection he had toward another Core Member who passed away a few years ago. Another non-core member said that her relationships with others in the community are what is most important to her. She entered L'Arche with a strong desire to learn about other people and cultures. L'Arche helped that interest develop into a commitment to growing in relationship to other individuals in the more proximate community to which she now belonged.
- 6. Global Belonging.** The data showed that for some people being part of a L'Arche community takes them beyond their individual location. Being part of L'Arche meant

that one was contributing to a global movement, and along with that came a deep sense of belonging. Through time at L'Arche one member learned that a community experience does not have to be geographically bound, instead one could connect with L'Arche communities all over the world. A Core Member experienced an expansive understanding of family that, for her, spanned the globe. The data points to many people feeling interconnectedness and belonging as part of a larger whole.

Findings about Character Formation

Four cross-community findings in the qualitative data spotlight the transformation members experienced in the formation of character as a result of being part of L'Arche communities:

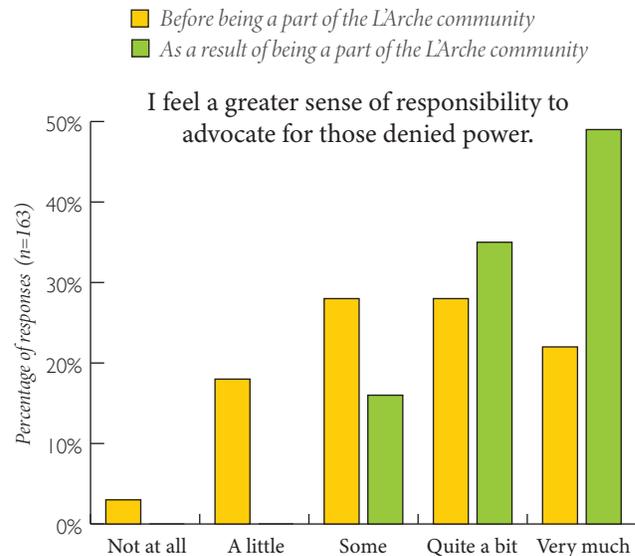
- 7. Personal Transformation and Shifting Habits.** Living in a L'Arche community results in personal growth and shifts in habits. The data show that assistants and Core Members developed more patience as a result of sharing living space. One assistant shared that a Core Member has "gotten much more flexible" about sharing responsibilities. An assistant explained how community

living is challenging, but also good for her: “It helped me grow... it has helped me be more flexible, and it has helped me be more okay with change.” Another assistant expressed an increased tolerance of difficult behavior in others, saying he noticed “a progression of being able to embrace a wider range of behavior; things that upset me before don’t anymore.” People said how time in L’Arche communities helps change habits. One assistant said, “L’Arche has been a wake-up call to so many assistants that we need to change our own ways.”

8. The Inner Growth of Character Development. The data reveal that most people experienced some sort of internal character change through being at L’Arche. People reported being more open to people, being more empathetic and resilient, and being more gentle, patient, and sensitive as a result of L’Arche. One person said they cared less about what others thought about them. One former staff member said that through L’Arche he became more sympathetic and compassionate and learned to love people how they wanted to be loved, not how he wanted to love. Another reported a change in the ability to stand up for others: “I have really developed a fierce loyalty to people with disabilities.” One person said L’Arche helped them believe they themselves have a lot to offer. A volunteer said he learned to make “my love for people more tangible and more practical, less a sense of love as a notion and emotion and more like something you actually enact with your hands.” Another volunteer said when he began volunteering at L’Arche that he felt gratitude and that the longer he remained, the more he felt contentment with the gifts of his life.

The survey data also show that non-core members are developing a greater sense of responsibility to support vulnerable populations. 84% of respondents report that they feel quite a bit or very responsible to be an advocate for those denied power as a result of L’Arche as compared with 50% reporting the same before L’Arche. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4. Non-core members feel greater responsibility to advocate for those denied power



9. The Development of Patience and Empathy. The L’Arche community has developed assistants’ and Core Members’ patience, tolerance, and openness to others. The data show the development of empathy toward others through L’Arche. Interviewees revealed they are more accepting of differences in others. One assistant expressed how living with different people has impacted him: “I am not as critical as I used to be. I have more room to allow people their individuality and see it as a good thing across the board.” Another said, “My relationship with Core Members has allowed me to be more flexible and to appreciate the good moments we have.” Several board members also spoke about how they are becoming more tolerant, open-minded, empathetic people. The data reveal that Core Members are also building empathy and understanding of other people. A parent of one of the Core Members said, “He has grown in his consciousness of other people.”

10. The Power of Love. Core Members and non-core members grew in their capacity to love themselves and others as a result of their time at L’Arche. This has led people to experience happy lives in community. It has also translated to community members’ ability to be kinder with family and friends outside of L’Arche. One assistant said that because of his time with L’Arche, “[I am] able to better connect with others and [I am]

learning how to make myself present in a way that's vulnerable and true, and in turn is open to giving and receiving love." When Core Members show their love through acts of kindness they share in humanity with their peers. Some community members said that it can be complicated to explain the experience and power of love in L'Arche to those outside of the community and who have not experienced it in person.

And controlling joy is not a good idea." The concept of "entering into the world" of another, rather than constructing an environment that they are expected to adapt to, creates a context in which people are free to be themselves and create the same opportunity for others. When everyone feels safe enough to be the most authentic version of themselves, it leads to the realization that everyone is a combination of strength and weakness, beauty and brokenness.

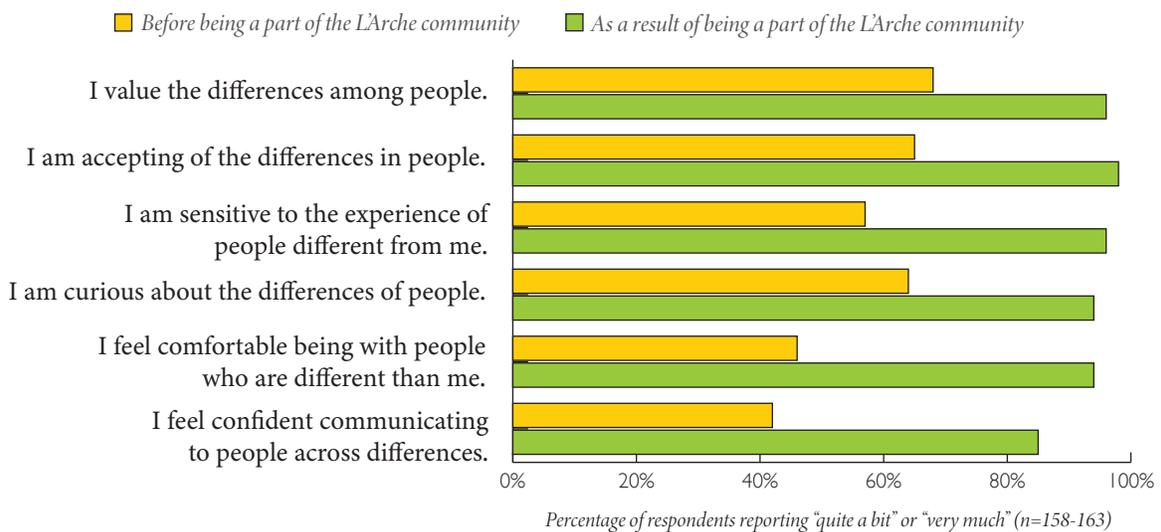
Findings about Personal Development

The following findings are discoveries about the personal growth and development experienced by both Core Members and non-core members as a result of their time at L'Arche:

11. Exercising Personal Authenticity. The data demonstrate a phenomenon of mutual transformation occurring within L'Arche. Individuals become the most authentic versions of themselves. Because they give the opportunity for others to become their most authentic selves, they come to believe that they are accepted and loved for who they are as well. One assistant realized she was trying too hard to control the people around her. She was confronted by a Core Member who asked her "Why don't you like me?" As the assistant reflected on why the Core Member came to that conclusion, she realized, "It came out of me trying to be too controlling.

The survey data show substantial personal growth in non-core members related to authenticity as well. Among the most significant areas of growth was in knowing personal strengths and weaknesses. 44% of non-core member respondents reported that they knew their personal strengths and weaknesses quite a bit or very much before L'Arche and 91% report that they know this as a result of being a part of L'Arche, a 107% increase. However, the data reveal that there is room for improvement in this area as well. In response to the item, "I do not hide who I am," 42% of respondents reported that they quite a bit or very much did not hide who they are before L'Arche as compared with 66% reporting this as a result of L'Arche. While this is a significant increase, the data illuminate that one-third of people do not yet feel as though they can be their authentic selves (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Non-core members are embracing and working across differences

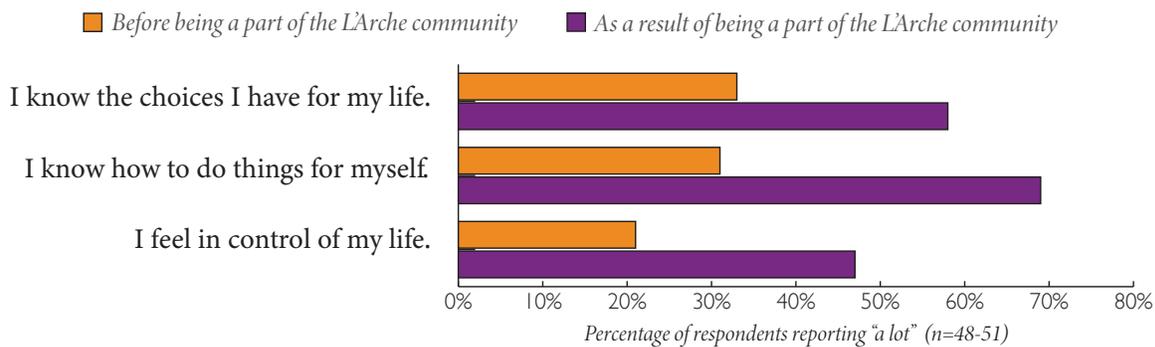


12. Building Voice and Choice. Core Members strongly value the integration of independence into their lives, which in turn gives them confidence and a sense of purpose. Many Core Members describe their ability to make choices as a very positive influence on their lives. By acquiring responsibilities within the house, and in turn, completing the tasks on their own, Core Members feel as if they are integrated into their community. It makes them feel important. They recognize that if they were not present, their community would notice the loss. One Core Member said, “I am important to the community because I lift heavy things.” Other Core Members express their preferences and responsibilities within the house, voicing the following as examples: “I like doing the dishes,” “I like choosing dinner and helping with the Christmas trees,” and “I like to live with no parents and be by myself.” Having voice and choice

gives Core Members an enhanced enjoyment of life, but it also enables them to decide what is important to them. They become more confident and secure in their sense of self. They feel like their life is in their control, which also enhances their happiness.

The survey data show that core members report tremendous progress in aspects of their independence since being a part of the L’Arche community yet there are opportunities for improvement in this area as well. 58% of core members reported that they know the choices they have in their life a lot since being at L’Arche as compared with 33% before L’Arche. 69% reported that they know how to do things for themselves a lot since being at L’Arche as compared with 31% before L’Arche. 47% of core members report that they feel in control of their life since being at L’Arche up from 21% before L’Arche (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Core members value their growing independence



13. Strengthened Spirituality. Faith is a part of everyday life for many in L’Arche communities. People reported that through their experiences in community, they encountered opportunities for spiritual growth, deepened spirituality, a strengthened faith, and an increased openness to dialogue about faith. One assistant said that as a result of their time at L’Arche, “[I now see] the bigger picture of where spirituality fits into daily life.” Another community member said, “Being in a faith-based organization has made me a more faithful person...I’m more mindful of spiritual things.” One community member said that their faith had been

strengthened through witnessing the faith of others, and they were “inspired by the strong faith of so many Core Members.” One Core Member said, “We are a faith community, and we help each other. Love our neighbors as thyself, and that is really good.” A non-core member cited daily relationships with Core Members, spiritual teachings they participated in at L’Arche, and the practice of sharing what they are grateful for around the dinner table as causes of spiritual changes in their lives. The data revealed that many members of the community had become more deeply spiritual as a result of their experience with L’Arche.

The survey data also reveal that non-core members' spirituality has been strengthened. 90% of non-core member survey respondents reported that they integrate their spiritual, mental, emotional life into their decisions about their future quite a bit or very much as a result of L'Arche. 60% reported the same before L'Arche.

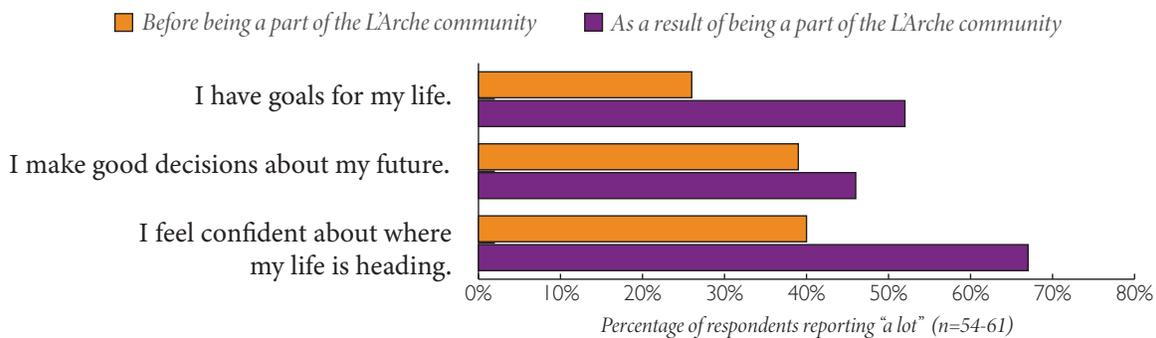
14. Core Members Gaining Pride and Purpose. Core

Members experienced increased purpose in their lives, fostering feelings of pride. For one Core Member her time at L'Arche "changed me to be a grown-up woman," which included being independent, making her own choices, having a job, and having her own money. For another Core Member, living at L'Arche has enabled him to be creative and express himself through his artwork. As a result, and of great importance to him, he earned money selling his art and made the decision to donate the proceeds to those in need. This demonstrates his experience of pride in his work, as well as his purpose

in giving back to others. One Core Member initiated and hosted talent shows at her house. She also serves as a leader in her home, welcoming volunteer groups to participate in the talent shows. Other Core Members spoke of joining committees and taking on leadership roles, including representing and sharing Core Member perspectives at board meetings.

The survey data also reveal that core members are developing a stronger sense of purpose and confidence. The percent of core members reporting that they have a lot of goals for their life increased from 26% to 52% from before L'Arche to now and the percent of core members that feel confident in their life is heading increased from 40% to 67%. One aspect of this area increased only slightly from before L'Arche. In response to the item "I make good choices about my future," 39% responded "a lot" before L'Arche and 46% responded the same since being a part of L'Arche (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Core members develop a stronger sense of purpose and confidence



Findings about Purpose in Life

Four findings reveal how members' perspectives and experiences about purpose in life have been influenced and informed by their time as part of a L'Arche community:

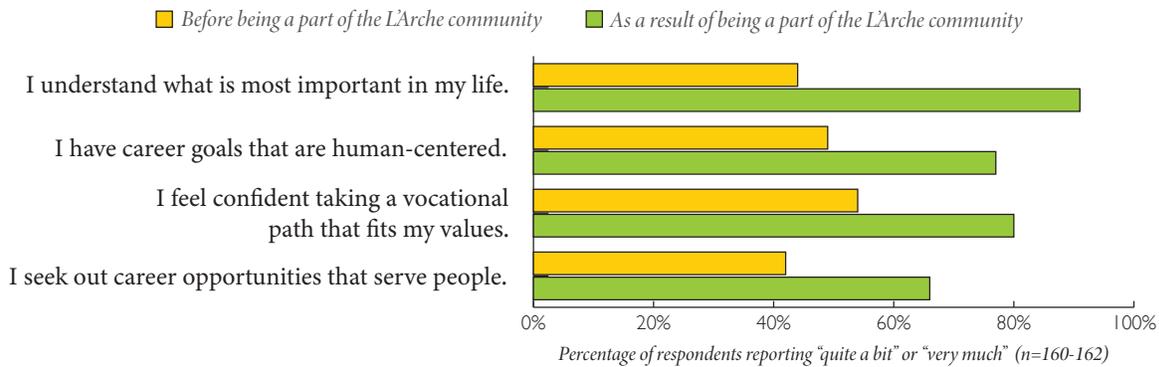
15. Career as Calling. Members of L'Arche view their job as a calling. This view sustains them through difficult times, allows them to see the meaning behind their work, and encourages them to be focused on relationships in the work that they do. In most interviews with non-core members, the data show that L'Arche is much more than "just a job." They view their role, regardless of the nature

of the role, as a calling. They believe that their work goes beyond providing a service or completing a set of tasks in exchange for payment. They believe that it is more of a vocation or a calling than a job. In thinking about life after L'Arche, one said, "Discernment and living in L'Arche made me realize that working directly with people—focusing directly on relationships with people, rather than research—was the direction that I wanted to go, and so I went into social work." The ability to find meaning and purpose in work is also what makes

people more resilient in the face of adversity. A non-core member said that when things were difficult, “We could have all just crumbled, but instead we rallied together.” This speaks to the benefit of having a collective sense of purpose and meaning in work.

The survey data also show that human and values-centered work is important to non-core members. Non-core members reported developing a greater understanding of what is important, having career goals that are more human-centered, feeling more confident taking a vocational path that fits their values, and seeking out career opportunities that serve people (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Non-core members pursue human- and values-centered work

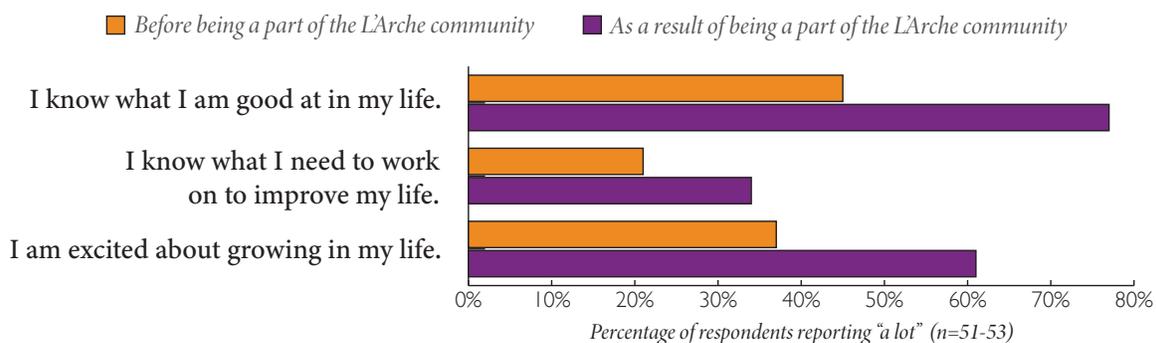


Self-Worth through Service. Core Members and staff alike have found profound self-worth and personal value through their daily activities and involvement in the organization. Members experience an enhanced sense of self-worth through their contribution to others in the community. Core Members talked about their participation in daily chores and prayer night. They said that these kinds of activities contributed to their feeling of love and purpose in their lives. The data show that whether they are putting the dishes away, passing a candle around the dinner table, or helping make dinner, members are aware of their worth. Having the opportunity to contribute to the lives and welfare of others reveals the strengths and aptitudes of people. Data show that Core Members were also more aware of their weaknesses, but they did not let it

defeat them. They explained that they were able to work on their weaknesses because L'Arche is a place where they feel comfortable. Through the community, they feel valued.

The survey data show that this growing self-worth is encouraging core members to grow in a variety of ways. 77% of core members reported that they know what they are good at a lot as a result of being a part of L'Arche, up from 45% before L'Arche. 61% of core members reported that they are excited that about growing in their life a lot as a result of L'Arche, up from 37%. In contrast to the qualitative data, only 34% of core members reported knowing what they need to work on to improve their life a lot, which may signal that this is an area for improvement (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Core members recognize their strengths and are excited to grow



- 16. Clarifying Life's Purpose.** For many, being in L'Arche clarifies and solidifies purpose and calling in life. When asked about the impact of L'Arche on their lives, many interviewees described a sense of confirmation that they are pursuing the correct career that aligns with what is important to them. They credit their experience at L'Arche with illuminating what makes life worth living in the first place. For some, being at L'Arche signaled a shift in their worldview. They were reminded that simplicity often holds meaning. One L'Arche member said, "[W]e are all here to take care of each other." Another board member said, "L'Arche is a great place to learn to love and serve yourself, others, and God." When the purposes of life become clear, interviewees spoke of experiencing a sense of personal joy and peace.
- 17. Redirecting Future Plans.** Many assistants experienced changes in values around career and future life plans as a result of living and working in L'Arche communities. One assistant explained how her career goals changed after "realizing the importance of community." She said, "I want to foster more [community] and make intentional community a part of my life." The data revealed that time spent working or volunteering with L'Arche resulted in many people choosing to remain connected to L'Arche indefinitely. One assistant said, "My experiences and the relationships that I've been able to build have been what have kept me here and guided my path. I don't know what's happening next, but I can't envision my life without some kind of connection to L'Arche." Another person chose "downward mobility" and not to buy a house in order to remain in the L'Arche community with his family. Before coming to L'Arche, a Core Member had a goal to live independently but changed her mind after her positive experience living in the L'Arche.
- 18. Simply Be.** The data show that members of L'Arche communities believe that a person's acceptance and value in the community is based on their presence, not just their actions. Non-core members spoke of their experience at L'Arche as a place where one does not have to be accomplishing a task in order to be considered contributing and valued. One community member shared that because of her time at L'Arche, she lost her interest in "stereotypical success" and the need to "achieve." One assistant said they did not need to always "do things," instead they were able to "just be present" with Core Members, without needing to also complete a task. To many non-core members, this felt very different from other work or volunteer experiences, where their value was measured by their level of productivity.
- 19. Security, Safety, and Trust.** L'Arche communities are places of security, safety, and trust for Core Members and for their families. Prayer nights were shared as examples of safe spaces for members to voice their feelings and express empathy for others. One assistant said, "Being in a place where you know caring and being cared for really matters feels like a good place to be." Core Members described L'Arche as a place where they have help and support. One Core Member said, "Being in community, everyone supports each other." While another Core Member said, "[I] get help when I need it." Several Core Members said that knowing they had a home in L'Arche was a source of comfort and security to their families. A Core Member said, "[My] family wanted me to be taken care of as they age." And another said, "My mother made sure I was okay before she died." As a result of L'Arche communities, families trust and believe their children and loved ones with intellectual disabilities have a safe and secure place to call home for the rest of their lives.

Findings about the Unique Experience of L'Arche
The following findings point to the special and unique experiences members have when participating in community at L'Arche:

The survey data also show that core members feel safe at L'Arche with 84% reporting they feel safe a lot since being at L'Arche, up from 55% before L'Arche.

20. Family as a Metaphor for Community. The L'Arche community was frequently referred to as a "family" in interviews with Core Members and their legal guardians. Core Members experienced a deep sense of belonging as members of their L'Arche communities. One said she began to see her life as part of a home and a community, to see it as part of a broader, shared experience rather than an individual one. A Core Member who had attempted to run away from his past living situations no longer expressed the desire to try to get away, rather he now feels that L'Arche has become his permanent home. A parent of a Core Member said that L'Arche is like his family, and she has witnessed that "he likes being part of a whole." When asked how they knew they were loved by other people in the community, a Core Member responded, "because we are a united family." One assistant spoke to the pain and beauty of accompanying Core Members in their final living moments: "It's really tough to walk the journey with people in their best moments, and then in their most difficult. When someone dies, it's like losing a family member."

21. Humor as a Common Language. The data show that sharing joy through laughter and humor is a common experience in L'Arche communities. Assistants explained the value in using humor to relate to Core Members. Humor allowed for deepening and growth in relationships. One assistant said of a Core Member, "I've learned that people's jokes are super important... when I laughed it made him laugh, and it made him happy ... it was a big lesson." Interview data show communities rely on humor to bring comfort and support during difficult,

discouraging, or overwhelming moments. One assistant said, "I feel like it's [fostering community], always trying to make people laugh and make people have fun... I feel motivated to try to do that even though it might be hard in some circumstances."

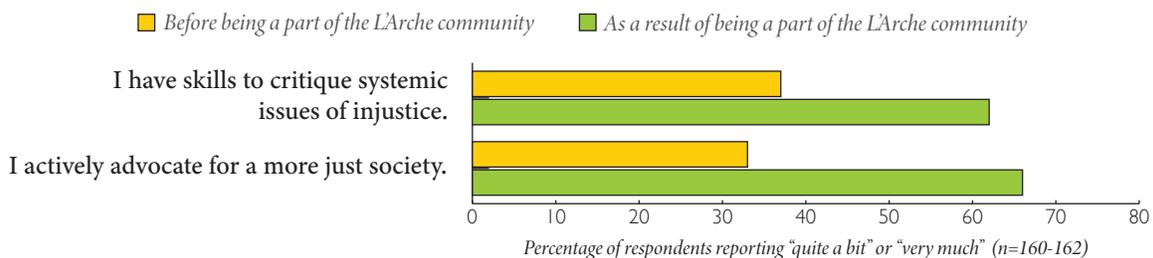
Findings about Areas for Improvement

Across the six L'Arche communities, the data reveal findings about areas that warrant more reflection and action for improvement.

22. More Attention Needed for Social Justice. Among the positive effects related to developing a sense of empathy and understanding, the data also reveal gaps in the ability of members to engage critically in the public square about issues of social justice related to disability, advocacy, and inclusion. The concepts of advocacy, engaging in social justice issues or addressing larger issues such as disability rights were largely absent in the interviews. A few people mentioned the term "advocacy," but did not elaborate or give examples of the advocacy playing a large role in community life. While many of the other impacts of L'Arche indirectly address social justice issues related to disability, there does not seem to be evidence of direct engagement in the issues themselves or a change in the way that people understand these issues.

The survey data also show that social justice is an area that is lagging. While improvement has occurred in this area for non-core members as a result of being a part of the L'Arche community, items related to social justice are among the lowest-rated on the survey (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Non-core members show modest growth in skills and actions to promote social justice



23. Needing Contribution for Community Direction.

Core Members are not as involved in community-wide decision-making processes as they might be. The data show that L'Arche does very well in empowering Core Members to make choices that affect their everyday lives. However, this does not translate into participation in larger decision-making. In many cases, Core Members are currently not involved in larger decision-making processes/structures that affect their lives. While they have autonomy over everyday things – how they spend their time, what they wear, or what they eat for dinner – they are not incorporated into larger decisions that affect their lives, either indirectly or directly. Core Members rarely expressed that they had opportunities to voice decisions that affect the “big picture” of the community, such as structural changes, policies, hiring new assistants, or other community-wide decisions.

24. Limited Connection with Neighbors. While L'Arche members spend time doing activities outside of the house, there is less interaction with the people in their neighborhood. When asked about life outside of the L'Arche community but within the surrounding neighborhood, Core Members did not have much, if anything, to say. As stated in other key findings, L'Arche develops a very strong community within the houses between L'Arche participants. L'Arche also encourages Core Members to go out of the house and do activities. However, when asked if they knew their neighbors, or if they spent time with the students nearby, many Core Members either say “no” or cannot identify a specific example. While there are some small connections, such as a school-affiliated program that many Core Members participate in, it appears that most would not recognize the neighbor living next to their home. It is difficult to identify the reason for this. It might be a lack of desire to connect, or it may not be as fulfilling as other spaces in the community. Core Members do not appear sad or have feelings of loss because of this gap.

25. Core Members with Unarticulated Unhappiness. The data show that Core Members do not have many answers or detailed thoughts about being unhappy, sad, or mad. This could be because there is not a healthy space for this dialogue. Some of the Core Members had positive thoughts to share, but quite limited thoughts about the conflicts they were facing. Their expressions about difficulties or areas of discouragement appear to be underdeveloped. Providing space for bad feelings can be hard in a place of care. It is possible that Core Members may lose touch with their uncomfortable or unhappy thoughts or states of being. Feeling all of the different types of feelings is important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and mindset. L'Arche communities' positivity and recognition of the good is so powerful, but it may be missing the roundness of feelings.

26. Challenge of Becoming Better Advocates. Board members and assistants alike mentioned room for improvement when it comes to being knowledgeable about issues affecting people with disabilities. Some expressed a belief that they were too entrenched in the day-to-day activities to know about the bigger picture issues and resources. Some who were not living in L'Arche homes experienced some disconnection to the struggles of the Core Members. Many study participants were discontent with their level of knowledge about how to be an advocate. One interviewee said, “I would be happy to advocate, but I need to understand [the issues] better.” Interviewees recognized that there could be an improvement in training, access to resources, practice in approaches to advocacy, finding opportunities, and establishing habits of advocacy.

27. Financial Sacrifice for Staff. For many assistants, community living at L'Arche came with numerous rewards, including doing work that was deeply aligned with their values. At the same time, the data also show that assistants experience financial hardships as a result of choosing to live and work in L'Arche communities. People have concerns for their financial

futures once they choose to leave L'Arche. Assistants experienced difficulties when aspiring to meet more traditional financial milestones for their futures, such as homeownership. One said, "I live in a very beautiful situation that I am so grateful for ... but I would love to own my own house.... these aspirations [are] surface level and material, but also [bring] a sense of dignity." One assistant spoke of seeking out supplemental avenues of income in addition to their work at L'Arche in order to support themselves in the future. He said, "I'm trying to scramble... so [in] retirement I have enough to sustain myself." The experience of financial insecurity and sacrifice highlights a difference in the ways assistants experience security in a L'Arche community compared to Core Members.

28. The Challenge of Living in Community. The data show that both assistants and Core Members struggled at times with living in community with one another. A number of Core Members spoke of difficulties with roommates and the challenges they faced adjusting to new habits and the practices of others. Many emotions and feelings arise when living in community with diverse groups of people. These dynamics are challenging. An assistant said, "Living in community is not going to be easy just because you live in community. It's the same as a family. It can be dysfunctional." One consideration when striving to create a positive home environment for Core Members is to also consider support for the wellbeing and care of assistants.

Part 4- Broader Community Response

In June of 2021, L'Arche USA convened a virtual, two-day symposium that brought together L'Arche community members from across the country and internationally, as well as invited academics in the fields of Psychology, Cognitive Science, Theology, Disability Studies, and Public Health. For members of the broader L'Arche community, the symposium was an opportunity to learn about and consider the results of the efforts of the Project Impact teams from the six L'Arche communities. The Project Impact team leaders and invited academics participated in three guided panel discussions. Project Impact team leaders shared their sense-making and reflections on the findings of their work in their individual communities. Members of the academic panels provided their insights and perspectives about the findings, including themes about the healing power of being recognized as human, authentic empathy, and sharing power. Panel members also spoke about themes of critical race theory, social justice, the intersection of race and intellectual disability, and the tension between the actions of acceptance versus improvement.

Following the panel discussions, small groups of symposium participants shared their perspectives and impressions regarding the evaluation themes and findings in breakout sessions. Participants were invited to share their responses to three questions: (1) What resonates with you?; (2) What did you find curious or surprising?; and (3) Where should we focus going forward? The following summarizes the broader community response to the Project Impact findings and the panel discussions:

Autonomy and Care. Members of the L'Arche community and those reflecting alongside the L'Arche community recognize the complexity of the relationship between the caregiver and care recipient. Assistants and community members without intellectual disabilities provide assistance for the practical needs of Core Members to ensure wellbeing and safety. At the same time, assistants want to allow for Core Members' autonomy and independence. Community members in L'Arche focus on the interdependence, or mutual relationships, between assistants and Core members. This means that caring for one another goes both ways. Care is not one-directional. In the mutuality of relationships, everyone needs care in some way. Core Members provide care to assistants too. One said, "Our Core Members need to know that we need them, too. People like to be needed. This is why we all come to L'Arche." Assistants want to find a way to provide care, while also allowing Core Members' to have autonomy in their lives. The concept of "relational autonomy", which is grounded in the field of psychology,

offers an approach to thinking about caregiving where differing contributions can be equally valuable.

Power and Inclusion. The organization of L'Arche has been influenced by cultural histories of colonization and Catholicism. Both histories include power resting in the hands of a dominant few, often resulting in oppressive and harmful outcomes for those with less power. As L'Arche continues to work towards inclusion and the welcoming of all people into L'Arche communities, there is the opportunity to examine power dynamics within the organization. Shining a light on power dynamics within a community can decrease the chances of abuse of power. While L'Arche strives to be welcoming and inclusive to all, there is a need to be sensitive to a focus on the integration of power for all members, especially those who have not historically been empowered. Attempts simply to subsume individuals into the dominant culture can result in the erasure of unique perspectives and experiences. For example, expecting Core

Members to conform to larger societal norms instead of allowing for difference could have harmful outcomes. The lack of racial diversity at L'Arche is another consideration within the theme of inclusion. Those who reflected on the findings in the symposium expressed a priority for L'Arche to grow as an anti-racist organization. They noted that there is the opportunity to investigate why the community is predominantly white, and how the community might become more welcoming for people from all racial and cultural backgrounds.

Spirituality. L'Arche was founded in the Catholic tradition and continues to be influenced by its Catholic foundation. As the organization has grown and evolved, L'Arche has come to welcome people of all faith backgrounds. L'Arche even welcomes people of no faith background. The data show that members experience life at L'Arche as a place where spirituality is welcomed, explored, and lived. At the same time, some members express a need for a clearer definition of the role of spirituality in community life at L'Arche. Community members have different perspectives about how to define the place of spirituality at L'Arche. Some want to remain connected to the Catholic traditions. For example, one community member said, “If we lose our roots, the tree will topple. How do we keep nourishing the tree?” Others stress the importance of L'Arche providing distance from the early participation and emulation of the Catholic religious community and appreciate the ways it has become a community more representative of the broad spectrum of humanity.

Vulnerability and the Vanier Inquiry. Vulnerability was an important theme for those reflecting on the findings of this study, both in the context of disability rights movements and in the lived experience at L'Arche. The perspective of some in the disability rights movement is that vulnerability is not a positive attribute because it equates to weakness. In contrast, L'Arche members see vulnerability as an opportunity for acceptance, compassion, and love. For many in L'Arche, the approach to vulnerability is grounded in the teachings of founder Jean Vanier. Recent revelations about Jean Vanier's abuse of community members over multiple decades, resulting in an independent inquiry, have left many in the L'Arche community questioning how to engage with the concept of vulnerability going forward. One participant said, “Since the inquiry, people are somehow more intrigued to come and learn alongside L'Arche because we have admitted and named that we are indeed vulnerable, that [we] are not perfect.... [This] has invited a way of meeting with others.”

See Appendix D for in-depth responses to the Project Impact findings written by the invited academic symposium participants.

Part 5- Going Forward

The findings of Project Impact and the subsequent reflection on the findings from the participants of the symposium demonstrate the significance of the impact of L'Arche on its members. The findings reveal that the effects of the L'Arche experience on members are deep and durable.

Through L'Arche, members develop awareness, sensitivity, and curiosity for others, especially across differences. Members experience personal transformation in fundamental aspects of their lives. Members create meaningful relationships and find belonging in community with others. Members approach vocation and life-purpose in a holistic and human-centered way. And for many, members critically engage societal values of accessibility and inclusion and advocate for social justice.

In the lives of Core Members, the impact is significant as well. Core Members identify and live out their choices. To a great extent, they experience full, healthy lives. They have a positive influence on the lives of others.

The findings demonstrate how the guiding principles of love, empathy, and authenticity at work in community become powerful contributors to people's lives.

Recommendations

The six participating communities considered themes that signaled areas for improvement. The symposium participants also consider questions about what comes next for L'Arche and where L'Arche should focus energy and efforts to improve in the future. As L'Arche communities consider their pathways forward, some of the more significant areas for consideration and attention are the following:

- **Share Power.** Sharing power with Core Members could increase understanding about their self-advocacy, or its absence, and deepen understanding about what empowerment for Core Members can look like. Structural shifts within the organization are needed to support Core Members' representation and involvement in decision making and leadership while avoiding tokenism.
- **Foster a Culture of Allyship.** L'Arche communities could engage more in the greater efforts for disability rights for all. The organization could foster a stronger culture of allyship and advocacy to encourage full and effective participation of members on behalf of disability rights. The L'Arche community could benefit from elevating disability rights advocacy as a priority. These efforts would serve to deepen relationships and build partnerships in the larger community and work to end isolation and segregation for all people with disabilities.
- **Prioritize Assistant Wellbeing.** Assistants can experience burnout, exhaustion, and financial stress while working and living at L'Arche. Those in leadership roles could deepen their commitment to the wellbeing of assistants and take steps to ensure a welcoming workplace with adequate systems of support. The recruitment and retention of staff would be strengthened and benefit from exploring new efforts to support the well-being and resilience of staff.
- **Consider and Clarify the Role of Spirituality.** The L'Arche community is welcoming of all faith traditions, including those having no faith tradition. And yet, there is a need to define and communicate more clearly the meaning and role of spirituality within the community. The community could take steps to understand more fully the perceptions of those with non-Christian

and other belief systems and explore their sense of spirituality and acceptance within L'Arche.

- **Further Define L'Arche Identity.** L'Arche could continue its ongoing internal discussions about values and essence. Identity-focused conversations could help when engaging in efforts about sharing power, fostering allyship, and considering the place and practice of

spirituality. These efforts would benefit the recruiting and retaining of new community members and staff and help to articulate values and impacts to external audiences like funding organizations. L'Arche's ongoing work in identity could help communities and members of communities healthily process challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and revelations from the Vanier Inquiry.

Part 6 - Community Impact Reports

L'Arche Boston North Impact Report

Introduction

L'Arche Boston North was founded as a community called Irenicon in 1983 in Ipswich, Massachusetts. The organization brought together four young adults with disabilities who desired to live independently of their parents while benefiting from the care and support of a community. This community formed as part of the L'Arche movement around the world, in which people with and without intellectual and physical disabilities chose to share life together in homes, growing in relationship with each other and learning from one another. Now known as L'Arche Boston North, the community remains committed to announcing the gifts of its members with intellectual disabilities. Just as caregiver assistants in the community provide essential physical, social, and spiritual support to members with intellectual disabilities, these members, in turn, provide an education in welcome, vulnerability, belonging, and celebration to their caregivers, transforming a human service into a relationship based on trust, respect, and deep understanding. L'Arche changes the world one life at a time by illuminating the beauty of each person—with or without a disability.

L'Arche Boston North serves 20 adults with intellectual and physical disabilities through residential supports. The community includes four 24-hour residential group homes and two Shared Living sites where community members with and without disabilities share life together. LBN also provides Meaningful Day Options for adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities through our kitchen-based vocational and community outreach program. Because it is a community as well as an organization providing residential

services, LBN responds to the social needs of residents through several types of programming. These include:

COMMUNITY GATHERINGS: Many adults with disabilities lack meaningful social engagement beyond paid caregiving. At L'Arche Boston North, community members with disabilities have opportunities to meet and interact with each other every Wednesday evening for programming with content ranging from spirituality to social gatherings to birthday celebrations. Community members also come together for monthly activities such as dances and bowling nights, as well as spontaneous weekend gatherings and parties.

OUTINGS AND TRIPS: As part of L'Arche USA and L'Arche International, L'Arche Boston North maintains relationships with individuals and communities across the United States and around the world. Community members with and without disabilities have numerous opportunities to enrich their lives and grow in solidarity with others through travel. L'Arche regional, national, and international gatherings allow members to develop fellowship and learn from one another. Additionally, individuals are encouraged and supported to travel. In 2017, for example, 3 community members with disabilities and supporting assistants were able to drive across the United States, stopping at L'Arche communities and national landmarks along their journey.

ENGAGEMENT WITH WIDER COMMUNITY: L'Arche Boston North is committed to making known the gifts of individuals with intellectual disabilities to the world.

Through partnerships with schools, universities, and religious institutions, the community welcomes immersion groups, hosts film screenings, and discussions, and travels to provide interactive presentations featuring community members with disabilities as educators. Additionally, L'Arche Boston North is dedicated to local community engagement. The community has produced and sold homemade hummus at the Haverhill Farmers Market since 2017, an opportunity to expand local impact and visibility while providing life skills training and meaningful social engagement for community members with disabilities.

At L'Arche Boston North, our mission is to create home where the gifts of people with developmental disabilities are revealed through mutually transforming relationships; to embrace our diverse cultures, working together to build a more human society; and to foster an environment that is inspired by the core values of our founding story: relationships, transformation, and being a sign of hope and a response to the changing needs of our members.

Methodology

The goal of our study was to evaluate what kind and quality of impact L'Arche Boston North is having on our members. We gathered and analyzed data to discover whether and how people's lives are being transformed as well as where impact is not occurring in order to focus our organization's attention on what best enables our community to live its mission of mutually transforming relationship across difference. Our evaluation was guided by two questions:

1. What is the impact of L'Arche Boston North on the lives of its members?
2. How is that impact happening?

We followed a study protocol that included mixed methods outcome evaluation with both qualitative and quantitative components. We collected and analyzed data, identified themes and findings, and explored possible responses to our findings to advance organizational impact and efficacy. We worked with a consulting partner and other L'Arche communities, using qualitative interview protocols and a quantitative survey developed from an earlier generation

of impact studies conducted collaboratively with L'Arche communities, which had identified and clarified L'Arche's intended impact and used the Heart Triangle™ model to determine mental, behavioral, and emotional changes that signal indicators of impact on our members.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

For the qualitative portion of our study, we used interview protocols developed by our partners to collect data about qualitative changes occurring in the lives of our community members. We used a stratified sampling technique to select a representative sample of community members with different lengths of organizational affiliation. L'Arche Boston North supports 20 individuals with disabilities with a staff of 45, a total of 65 program participants. We drew a sample of 20 interviewees from the following strata of our population.

- Core Members (individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities)
- Current assistants/staff members/volunteers (non-Core Members)
- Former Assistants/volunteers (non-Core Members)
- Family members of Core Members (non-Core Members)

Five L'Arche Boston North non-Core Members conducted the interviews. Interviews took place in person or remotely via phone or Zoom, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. Interviewers met with 5 Core Members and 15 non-Core Members.

Findings

Finding 1. Vulnerability and Relationship: Becoming Authentically Human

Key Insight

Vulnerability is a key aspect to building mutual relationships full of patience, forgiveness, growth, and joy.

Description

The common theme of relationships was brought up consistently throughout the interviews conducted. The data reveals that having the courage to be your most honest, vulnerable self is at the heart of relationships that are filled

with patience, forgiveness, growth, and joy. A core member of 28 years talked about how leaving her family and coming to a community meeting new people was scary. She shared, “My family wanted to make sure I was taken care of as they aged. It was hard to move. But I love my friends [at L’Arche] and they love me for who I am. Because I can be myself, and be who I am.” She went on to express that the people she has befriended in community will be friends for the rest of her life, and how lucky she feels to be loved for who she is.

One assistant said that in regard to how L’Arche has changed his capacity for love, he is “able to better connect with others and learn how to make myself present in a way that’s vulnerable and true and in turn, is open to giving and receiving love.” Finding the capacity for vulnerability is something that multiple assistants expressed they learned from core members. An assistant of 8 years remarked on learning vulnerability from core members, stating,

What is at the core of [what] makes somebody human, within people with disabilities, is not disguised by artifice; it’s just authentic and transparent, and truly who they are. And in a way that is, at first, somewhat frightening and difficult to enter into relationship with. But ultimately it’s the most liberating thing possible.

He went on to credit core members as being role models for how to be more “authentically human.” Another assistant voiced that since becoming part of L’Arche, she’s been:

...forced to be more honest and vulnerable. Core members bring their whole selves all the time and it would feel really dishonest to only give part of myself to that. And once you do that with people who are also giving their whole selves, you want to share that with everybody.

Non-core members reported sharing more of themselves and feeling more connected to people after their time in L’Arche. In a survey of non-core members, 72% of respondents said that they do not hide who they are “quite a bit” or “very much” as a result of their experience in L’Arche, as opposed to 46% before L’Arche. 100% also reported feeling “quite a bit” or “very much” connected to people, as opposed to 59%

before L’Arche. One survey respondent wrote, “I am more accepting of vulnerability in myself and others and believe in the power of love to heal.” Another wrote,

L’Arche has transformed how I encounter other people, even my own family. Vulnerability and wonderment and also so much joy! I am a better mother, daughter, sister, friend, neighbor, and leader because of the growth I’ve had in L’Arche.

Significance

Part of L’Arche Boston North’s mission is to create a home where the gifts of people with and without developmental disabilities are revealed through mutually transforming relationships. The findings show that a key aspect to forming those relationships is allowing oneself to be vulnerable and one’s most honest truest self. When a caregiver is able to be vulnerable with the person they support, it brings new meaning to the idea of relationships between the caregiver and the person receiving care. So often the supported individual is the only one seen as vulnerable. But when the caregiver shows their vulnerability, the whole dynamic shifts into a relationship that is mutually life-giving and mutually beneficial. Results indicate that for many people involved in L’Arche, learning how to be vulnerable has altered who they are and how they love.

Possible Responses

- **L’Arche Boston North can create more formations centering around vulnerability** wherein stories, memories, and ideas on feeling vulnerable can be freely expressed and shared.
- **L’Arche Boston North can create a “story vault”** – a place where collected stories regarding core member/assistant friendships can be kept and used for future formations.
- **L’Arche Boston North can have more frequent check-ins on vulnerability** – how relationships between assistants and the core members they support are developing, how this vulnerability makes them feel, and creating more safe spaces for vulnerability.

- **L'Arche Boston North can create more spaces for core members to teach and discuss vulnerability** and share what it is to be one's most honest self. Core members can share their own stories regarding what it has been like forming their relationships with others and use this teaching platform as a way to promote more core member leadership roles within community.

Finding 2: Joy and Laughter: Sharing Time Leads to Sharing Life

Key Insight

Joy and laughter shape and sustain positive relationships in community.

Description

Although times in community can become tough and overwhelming, positive emotions such as joy and laughter expressed during sharing time sustain relationships for the community to rely on.

As can be expected in an active community, emotions felt during sharing time can run the gamut. One could argue that witnessing and expressing a range of emotions is healthy: it is human. One assistant described it as, "joy to frustration to panic to like wholesome to like a wholesome moment you never know". Assistants remarked that their most felt emotions in daily life in community were joy, in addition to negative emotions such as frustration or panic. One assistant remarked on how community has shaped what is important for life:

It's important to feel fulfilled in what I'm doing to be joyful, but I think that joy comes from there's the joy of what you're good at and the joy of sharing it with people, and important to find a balance between those things.

In addition to sharing gifts, sharing in joy through laughter and humor was also mentioned in interviews. Assistants utilized humor as a common language to relate as well as grow in relationship. One said,

If I were to stand a certain way and say things that are too authoritative it would get me nowhere, often I would have

to be patient and be quiet and let him [core member] lead the interaction and once I've started doing that, I've had almost no interactions with him [core member] doing that it was really interesting for him to learn... I feel like I've learned that people's jokes are super important... learning when I laughed it made him laugh and it made him happy, and it was a big lesson to learn. As long as I laugh it was a big lesson to learn and part of growing in a relationship is learning what makes them laugh and what makes them happy.

Similarly, interviews also brought to light how in difficult moments (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), they relied on humor to foster community relationships and support. This support brought comfort, and even joy in times when it was discouraging or overwhelming. An Assistant remarked, "I feel like it's [fostering community] always trying to make people laugh and make people have fun...I guess it's always like I always feel motivated to try to do that even though it might be hard in some circumstances."

Likewise, although interviewees mentioned humor and joy in daily life, it is important to note that COVID-19, among other disruptive life events, is a possible interruption in how assistants and core members currently reflect on community, especially on subjective emotions. The stressful environment of the pandemic may have altered responses. Both core members and assistants reflected on community life during the pandemic, this leads to the question: would their responses be different in absence of COVID-19? Assistants mentioned the differences between the community pre-pandemic and the community in the midst of the pandemic. This can be accounted for assistants who have been with L'Arche Boston North for an extended period of time and are very familiar with the community before the COVID-19 outbreak. One assistant said,

I feel like the 2020 answer is different from every other year's answer. In the real world, I feel really embraced and I feel very warm and energized, especially when things are a little crazy. Sometimes frustrated, sometimes impatient/sad; even when I feel those things I feel very seen by others in the community.

One community member, remarking about emotions most felt during community, said,

I would say feelings of joy... I've stayed with community for as long as I have because there are days that have been really challenging, even in my current setting where I want to feel impatient or where I want to do, things can get overwhelming because of the needs that that might arise, especially as I think about in the last 11 years, more than 12 years in countering L'Arche throughout those that time, and thinking about how the being able to the feelings that I have are mostly joy, and then at times like overwhelmed.

Significance

Throughout our study, both assistants and core members revealed how joy and humor are central to life in community. They also revealed how when difficult situations arise, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the joy experienced from encounters that keep everyone together. Our data reveal that shared laughter and joy serve as a common language as well as provides a ground to connect on a deeper level. It also exhibits how in difficult scenarios, positive memories are used to lighten downcast days.

Possible Responses

- **Allow for the mundane** by creating space for downtime.
- **Balance events and downtime.** Events maintain purpose and are essential to life in L'Arche, but opportunity arises in the everyday moments.
- **Allow for opportunities for relationships to deepen** between assistants with core members, core members with assistants, assistants with assistants and core members with core members. Happiness isn't staged, it comes naturally through relationships.
- **Create space for community members to breathe** during stressful scenarios, although positive encounters are good and a vital part of community, people may need extra support during discouraging times.

Finding 3: Assistant Trade-offs: Redefining Success? "Don't Take the Money"

Key Insight

Committing long-term to L'Arche provides intangible benefits while significantly impacting financial security for Assistants, causing some to reevaluate life goals and their definition of a successful life.

Description

L'Arche brings new meaning to success and financial security for assistants. Sharing life in community is different from employment in 9-5 office employment, factory work, or the trades. In comparison to popular American ideas of "work," L'Arche Assistants work nontraditional hours and complete nontraditional tasks. One moment the house could be participating in the after-dinner prayer ritual of passing the candle, the next waiting in line for a midnight movie premiere. That being said, many interviewees mentioned a newfound vision of success after sharing time. Dreams of the future were translated from the pursuit of a traditional need to climb a "corporate social ladder" to a pursuit of humility. For assistants, it is no longer about money or success, but rather about having a positive impact on their lives and community at large. One assistant recalled how he was drawn to L'Arche because of the lifestyle he was aiming to pursue:

I have no dreams now. I've never had dreams about my future, I think. I just want to be where I am at the time. I don't think L'Arche has affected it. I don't like dreaming about my life or the future because I don't have any big goals. Being at [the] house every day is good enough for me.

The community living at L'Arche fosters and supports a simple way of living that assistants found favorable, but it also highlighted hardships. Assistants mentioned it was difficult to aspire to large traditional milestones:

I live in a very beautiful and wonderful situation that I'm so grateful for...but I would love to own my own house. So those kinds of aspirations which are all surface level and material but also...a sense of dignity...I wish that I was a little bit further along [as might have happened if I had] maybe chosen a different path. Would it have caused

more fulfillment? I don't know...but that is something that I do think about.

Another assistant mentioned they were trying other avenues of income to support themselves in addition to L'Arche:

I'm getting involved as I was looking at my retirement... so I've been trying to learn more about the stock markets... you know, I'm just trying to scramble in there so that at least...towards retirement hour that I have enough to sustain myself, you know to be a bit into my family...It's all about trying to get some ways, ways of getting income.

Additionally, as life during the COVID-19 pandemic grew more involved, one assistant mentioned they had to pause their own life goals because of the structure of L'Arche during the pandemic. They said, "I was giving some classes...Because of the structure, with the pandemic...I just kind of put everything on hold for now, but it's something that I need to finish..."

In addition to concrete milestones that L'Arche has impacted, L'Arche has also inspired abstract life goals. As one assistant witnessed his colleagues and friends reaching societal milestones of success and financial wellbeing, they recognized an alternative way of thinking for themselves,

There is no way I would ever want to do anything that is not directly related to trying to make the world a better place... A few years into L'Arche, my brother was going up the social ladder, becoming a stockbroker [with] tons of money. A good friend of mine became a principal of the school and was buying [a second] house on Cape Cod. Another friend of mine opened this really successful restaurant. These people were really close to me...doing these big, worldly things. And I remember part of me was like, I've got to get in gear and do something like that. But then another part of me, which thankfully, totally won over, was no, none of that is for you. Your life is going to be [about] being with people and trying to help people. It definitely changed the trajectory of my life in a profound way.

Assistants also took what they had grown to love about living in L'Arche and intended to pass it on to their own families.

One former assistant said,

As a dad...what I think for [my son]...what's most important is that I teach him how to love people and be of service to people and in relationship to people like not how to...get a great job or go to college. I think it's going to be pretty great.

The culture of life at L'Arche impacted assistants and friends of L'Arche to continue living L'Arche in some way, even after no longer regularly sharing time.

Significance

Through our study, assistants revealed an outlook on the future that is alternative to a typical American workday and its associated desire for success. Assistants also raised the concern that, although the lifestyle was inspiring, some questioned the tradeoff between "L'Arche Life" and traditional desires: owning a home and continuing education or professional development.

Possible Responses

- **More opportunities for assistants** to participate in roles with more responsibilities. As they continue to grow in their work with LBN they will be compensated accordingly.
- **Engage assistants in conversations** about professional and personal development.
- **Foster the humble "L'Arche way of life"** by inviting friends of the community over and inviting more people into sharing life.
- **Create a "where are they now?"** roster of assistants who are using their time at L'Arche to create a meaningful impact in their local communities to inspire others.

Finding 4: Core Member Security... “What have they been feeding you?” “Good food!”

Key Insight

Core Members experience L’Arche as a space of growth, family, and security.

Description

Core Members at L’Arche described home in L’Arche as a place where they have experienced personal growth; as a surrogate family, and as a source of help and support. Several Core Members said that knowing they had a home in L’Arche was a source of comfort and security to their families. One Core Member said, “Family wanted me to be taken care of as they age.” Referring to entering the L’Arche community, another Core Member said, “My mother made sure I was okay before she died.” Core Members also found security in community: “Being in community, everyone supports each other.”

Another Core Member noted that in community they could get “help when I need it.”

Core Members also shared ways that the L’Arche community stands in for family in their lives; for example, one Core Member highlighted sharing the same birthday as another community member, which was important to them after their twin died. Another Core Member said, “It was hard to move, but I love my friends and they love me.” Core Members also discussed their personal growth since coming to L’Arche, a place where “I can be myself and who I am.” One Core Member said that “being surrounded by good people” had made them a better person, noting that they know they are loved in community because community members “are always happy to see me.” Another Core Member reflected on a conversation with a sibling who marveled at the change in them since coming to L’Arche: “My brother says, ‘You grew up. What have they been feeding you?’ And I said to him, ‘Good food.’”

Significance

Part of L’Arche Boston North’s mission is to create homes for life for Core Members with disabilities. Core Members’ description of the community as a place where they

could grow and feel secure and loved suggests that they are experiencing L’Arche as a second home away from their families. In conjunction with our findings regarding Assistants’ financial insecurity and self-sacrifice, this finding highlights some differences in the ways caregivers and care-receivers experience security in a L’Arche community and suggests a tension between L’Arche as a service provider for people with disabilities and L’Arche as a community where people with and without disabilities share life together that is felt less by Core Members than by Assistants.

Possible Responses

- **L’Arche can continue to ensure that Core Members and their families find L’Arche to be a safe and secure place** by investing in community resources around aging and end-of-life care.
- **L’Arche can provide “good food” to Core Members and Assistants** by investing in opportunities for new learning and personal growth.

Finding 5: Defining diversity differently- Two Assistants and Three Core Members Walk Into a Bar... Ouch!

Key Insight

L’Arche brings together people who would likely not meet otherwise, but mutuality allows people to experience a connection much deeper than superficial qualities.

Description

A common theme of the interviews conducted was that L’Arche provides a space for people to encounter others who look, think, and act differently than they themselves do. Results indicate that growing in relationship with one another and experiencing shared relationships with core members brings about the opportunity to experience new things. One international volunteer who lived and shared life in community for two years expressed,

In particular, on diversity, I experienced a diversity of spirituality at L’Arche. Participating alongside core members and assistants brought me to learn more

about their different faiths and helped me to break out of the box I was in when I first arrived and changed my perspective of how I view my own relationship with God.

Diversity within L'Arche looks like sharing your whole self, all of your cultural traditions, beliefs, and hopes. Many interviewees shared that it was the core members in their homes, in their natural abilities to be vulnerable, who created a safe space for new people to share of themselves.

The survey data also show that non-core members have made significant gains in how they think about, feel, and approach diversity. While non-core members came to L'Arche already appreciating diversity, this grew as a result of being a part of the L'Arche community.

In considering what diversity means, the data also revealed that the relationships within L'Arche act as a sign, or a “talking point,” for the greater community to see diversity in action. One interviewee shared that upon moving into a new neighborhood, “We wanted to be nice and kind to people on the street. And that’s one thing I wanted to do with the neighbors. So that way we can get to know everybody in the community.” A core member who has been in L'Arche for 37 years remarked, “Sometimes people look at us funny when we went to the YMCA at the same time, but I made sure I smiled so they would know we are friendly and welcoming.” When assistants and core members live their lives in public with the same joy as they do within the homes, the relationships attract the attention of others, demonstrating with confidence that a life of diversity is not only possible but beautiful.

Significance

In our society where opinions are increasingly polarized, it is important that L'Arche creates a space where a diversity of opinions and experiences can co-exist. L'Arche is a sign of hope that living together with diversity is possible. L'Arche community members reflect that their richest relationships come about when bridging gaps through listening and intentionality. These relationships exist between core members, between core members and assistants, and between assistants of widely varying backgrounds.

Possible Responses

- **L'Arche Boston North can deliberately recruit for diversity** in new core members and assistants to enrich community life.
- **L'Arche Boston North can continue welcoming “whoever comes through the door”** and building a community of people who might not otherwise meet.
- **Once the COVID-19 pandemic is passed, L'Arche Boston North can develop a presence and relationships in new greater community spaces** that will in turn bring more diversity within our community and broaden our reach for recruitment.

Finding 6. Spirituality- More Than Just Singing “Kumbaya” (Even though sometimes we do sing “Kumbaya”)—L'Arche Spirituality

Key Insight

L'Arche community members' spirituality becomes more inclusive, less rigid, and more rooted in love through participation in L'Arche spiritual practices.

Description

L'Arche community members reported growth in personal spirituality as a result of experiencing L'Arche spiritual practices, becoming less rigid, more inclusive, and more rooted in love. Members of L'Arche expressed a deepening of spirituality because of their time in the L'Arche Boston North community. Assistants interviewed noted the importance of L'Arche spiritual practices, which include prayer at meals and in the evening, monthly prayer gatherings, and rituals such as the Washing of the Feet.

L'Arche spiritual practices at L'Arche Boston North are rooted in Christianity, and several Christian community members noted that coming to L'Arche felt comfortable because of their religious background. For example, one assistant said, “The things we do at L'Arche are things I've enjoyed doing my whole life.” L'Arche spiritual practices can affirm and deepen individuals' existing values and spirituality. One assistant noted, “Seeing [Core Member] pray for people makes me think I've got to remember to do that, too.”

Participating in L'Arche spirituality also gives community members opportunities to learn from one another's different spiritual practices and backgrounds. One Core Member discussed the development of her Christian spirituality in her L'Arche home, saying, "L'Arche brought me to Jesus. I didn't know him, but when I came to L'Arche I learned about him and believed. He is here with us every day." The parent of one Core Member said, "Since [Core Member] joined L'Arche I've had more of an opportunity to talk about my faith with people I otherwise wouldn't have shared it with." An assistant reported beginning to pray because of the experience in a L'Arche home:

Seeing how each Core Member just really leaned into their own intentions, in their own ways that felt very communal and mutually belonging to one another. And that just lit a fire in me that I could say 'Okay, something is happening here that's collective, and it's beautiful while being distinct to everyone's flavor.'

Several community members reported encountering spiritual practices and ideas in L'Arche that challenged them or caused them to participate in activities they would not have chosen outside of a L'Arche context, such as retreats and daily prayer practices. One assistant mentioned that quiet time with people in prayer, which was not previously part of their daily life, is now a favorite time of day. Another described a change in perspective about supporting Core Members to attend religious services, after several years of noticing that "there was something beautiful about the communal experience of what was happening." A past assistant, laughing at the memory, reported, "Literally sitting around singing 'Kumbaya'—in any other setting would have felt silly/ too feel-good/ touchy-feely, but in L'Arche I was okay with it." Community members noticed an increased ability to accept, and sometimes even embrace, new spiritual practices encountered in the L'Arche community.

Non-Core Members surveyed reported increased integration of their spiritual, mental, and emotional life into decisions about the future as a result of their time in L'Arche. After spending time in L'Arche, 86% of non-Core Members surveyed reported considering spiritual, mental,

and emotional factors "quite a bit" or "very much" in decision making, as opposed to 45% before L'Arche. Non-Core Members also reported having "quite a bit" or "very much" more clarity about what they believe in as a result of their experience in L'Arche: 91% said that they had more clarity, as opposed to 63% before L'Arche. (Core Members surveyed were asked a different set of questions, so there is no comparable data for that group.)

Community members also described their experience of L'Arche spirituality as inclusive, creative, and based on loving others. One former assistant reflected that his time in L'Arche had shifted his spiritual focus from institutional religion to "fruits of faith." Another said, "I identify as Christian but struggle to proclaim my faith because it feels exclusive—L'Arche makes a more inclusive space that can get creative and bring people together." One former assistant talked about L'Arche as a "spiritual homecoming," saying it was "what I thought, what I had always thought, what I had never been able to embrace before" in its inclusive openness and emphasis on listening to people. She expressed a sense of liberation in that "it's okay to love someone a lot and live out ways of expressing that." Other assistants also discussed developing an understanding of love for others at the heart of their spirituality. One assistant said, "the way we practice religion is okay, but there has to be a core message and it is love, and as long as you can communicate love that's what's most important." Another said, "I feel like I'm more aware of trying to live my faith in a Christian way, in which I understand it, the important thing is to love people." One assistant described lived everyday spirituality in L'Arche as "loving and serving others."

Significance

As L'Arche grows in the United States, where official membership in organized religion is declining, communities are engaging in conversations about spiritual practices and their evolution to embrace the diverse people who call L'Arche home. Community members at L'Arche Boston North describe a L'Arche spirituality that emphasizes simplicity, inclusivity, openness, creativity, intentional time spent together, listening, learning from one another, and

focusing on loving people. These findings suggest that the concept of L'Arche spirituality extends beyond the Christian context in which many US L'Arche communities were founded. Furthermore, the individual experiences of growth and finding meaning in shared practices suggest that L'Arche spirituality impacts the way community members relate to one another and the world around them, particularly in the way they see love of others as a central value and spiritual practice. This practice of love makes it possible to (in the words of the current L'Arche mandate) “go deeper, go out, go within,” continuing to nourish existing spiritual traditions while exploring and learning from one another.

Possible Responses

- Spiritual reflections emerged more from interviews with assistants than with Core Members, due to the questions outlined in the protocols. **L'Arche Boston North can explore whether Core Members experience the spiritual deepening, flexibility, inclusiveness, and love described by assistants interviewed in this study.**
- **L'Arche Boston North can provide more opportunities for Core Members and assistants to**

deepen in spirituality by challenging themselves through experiences outside their comfort zone, perhaps with pairs of Core Members and assistants exploring new faith traditions and communities.

- **L'Arche Boston North can provide more opportunities for Core Members and assistants to deepen within their existing spirituality** by engaging in their church communities, attending events, and developing relationships beyond brief weekly contact at church services.
- **L'Arche Boston North can explore ways for Core Members to have more independent access to spiritual practices** so that they are less dependent on Assistants and the logistical constraints of the L'Arche home. This could include the use of technology or the development of relationships outside the community to support spiritual practices.
- **L'Arche Boston North can prioritize inclusiveness in its spiritual practices** by emphasizing non-verbal and creative activities. Such activities are more accessible to many Core Members as well as to other community members from a variety of spiritual and religious background

L'Arche Cleveland Impact Report

Introduction

L'Arche Cleveland is a community of five homes on the east side of Cleveland, OH. In L'Arche, Core Member is our term for adults with developmental disabilities, who are at the core of our mission. Assistant refers to the people who support our Core Members. Our mission is to celebrate the gifts of adults with developmental disabilities, foster an environment of community that supports our Core Members, and work together to create a more human society.

Our community is made up of 15 Core Members, 25 assistants, a Leadership team, and a loving network of friends who support our mission. Assistants share life together with our Core Members through everyday acts of love. To be an assistant is first and foremost about being a friend. It is about sharing a home, sharing meals, sharing spirituality, and sharing the joys and sorrows of daily life. Assistants live and serve alongside our Core Members to build an intentional, mutually supportive community where every member is celebrated for their unique gifts, given an equal voice, and motivated toward a greater purpose. While committed to this mission, assistants are also trained to offer direct support for the various needs of core members.

Mutually transformative relationships form the heart of L'Arche. By sharing daily life together, community members can learn true friendship and teach one another to love unconditionally. In L'Arche, we believe that everyone has gifts to offer and that all gifts deserve to be celebrated.

For this study we had four team members interview 21 L'Arche members, including 8 Core Members and 13 non-core members (staff, volunteers, and board members).

Findings

Finding 1. All You Need is Love

Key Insight

L'Arche community members learn the importance of love and acceptance through their time in community.

Description

Love and acceptance are what L'Arche is all about: learning and growing to accept others as they are so that we're able to love them. L'Arche is about learning to grow your love for others. One interviewee said, "I think my love and empathy has changed from wanting to be in a nurturing role to truly being in a friendship or being in a mutual relationship."

In L'Arche, we strive to practice inclusion to make community a place of welcome. We realize that although we're all different we have the same needs for love and acceptance. One member said, "We are all human, we all want the same thing. We want to be in relationship with people who want to be loved. We want to be needed. I think that that's the big lesson that I learned." The survey data also support this perception. 90% of the non-core members who responded to the survey reported that they are "quite a bit" or "very much" able to sustain healthy relationships with a broad range of people as a result of being a part of the L'Arche community.

Some members said that it could be complicated to share with or explain L'Arche to others; instead, you must experience L'Arche personally to truly understand the deep level of love that exists in community at L'Arche. One said, "It took me a long time to be okay with telling people that L'Arche is where I belong."

Being around the different members of the L'Arche community becomes a great tool for learning to love and accept people for who they are. When asked about how it felt to be part of the community, a Core Member said, "I care about everybody and I think they care about me."

Significance

In a community with so many differences, it is important that the community has a high level of acceptance and love for others as well as a desire to grow that acceptance and love. It has been very encouraging to see that the longer people have been involved with L'Arche, the deeper their love and acceptance becomes. The more we can spend time

among people with differences and get to know them the more we can be accepting of them and love them. The more we can accept and love people with any differences the more that can be spread throughout the world.

Possible Responses

- We can encourage more learning about our differences and similarities by creating opportunities to share personal stories; for example, sharing stories of how community members came to L'Arche or sharing Sacred Stories.
- We can seek out more community involvement, for example with neighbors and local schools, to create natural relationships between Core Members and other members of the outer community.
- We can create surveys and questionnaires for assistants to assess workplace satisfaction and to solicit feedback about their feelings around belonging and inclusion.
- We can create activities and programs that celebrate and honor different traditions and enhance cultural awareness among Core Members and assistants.

Finding 2. We're Only Human

Key Insight

Exposure to differences leads to positive change across multiple areas of life.

Description

Community members stated that L'Arche provided many new experiences for them. Some interviewees stated that they didn't have previous experience with people with disabilities or living in community with others. Once non-core community members were exposed to people with disabilities and living in community with core members, they felt that they had more in common than they originally thought. One said, "I've never worked with people with disabilities before. And I guess when you're working with different disabilities, you're noticing that they are people too, and human." Several non-core community members shared how they had realized that Core Members were "human" and

didn't need to be viewed or treated differently. It is notable in the data that 95% of non-core members feel comfortable in being with people who are different from themselves after being in L'Arche. One administrative staff member reflected on her first interaction with a Core Member, and said,

What it brought me to, is that there's not a whole lot of difference between human beings, whether they have a disability- whether they have a physical disability, or have an invisible disability that perhaps people can't see, or it's a developmental disability. We all have our drawbacks... but what we have in common is that we are human. We are all people.

In interviews with Core Members, a focus on differences between people was much less noticeable. During an interview with a core member and her mother, the mother said, "She's in the best place that God created... without judgment... we're all the same to her." One core member said that being "weird" and different was a good thing, and you just had to "ask nicely" to get to know people better.

Other interviewees stated that age and how long they have been in community have helped shape their lives. One community member said, "I think as we get older, we just get more accepting of how the world is, and that things don't bother us as much as when we were younger." The survey data show that after coming to L'Arche 86% of respondents knew where their life was headed, compared to only 66% knowing this before they came to L'Arche. One could consider that as a result of living at L'Arche, community members experience growth around self-knowing. Nearly half of the non-core members have been at L'Arche Cleveland for 6 to 21+ years. The relationships created in community have encouraged many of our assistants to stay with L'Arche longer than they have remained in other workplaces. Several community members stated that being part of the L'Arche community made them value community, relationships, and belonging in other aspects of their lives. Once community members build connections in L'Arche, they begin to recognize the importance of relationships and seek them out in other ways. One said, "I was intentional [in finding other communities] because I was so far away...I just know

personal relationships are really important, and if you don't have those, it's a little hollow... [I've been] drawn to creating community and making people feel connected.”

For many of our community members, exposure to people who are different from them, and living in community with others, led to a change in perspective which has carried over into their personal lives. Assistants became more open to change, and became more flexible and “transparent” in all areas of their lives.

Significance

This study revealed that exposure to differences leads to positive changes in perspective and ways of thinking, and showed that people are capable of changes, regardless of their previous experiences. New experiences created in L'Arche communities made an impact on many different areas of community members' lives. Many participants indicated that when they experienced something in L'Arche, like mutual relationships with others, they sought that out in other areas of their personal lives as well.

Possible Responses

- To encourage more human connections, we can engage in more community outreach, for example inviting individuals and groups from the greater community to L'Arche events.
- We can encourage interaction between our houses to provide even more opportunities to build relationships within the L'Arche Cleveland community.
- Community Accompaniment – Accompaniment in L'Arche is a time for a community member to connect with another person (called their accompanier) to discuss and reflect on their time in L'Arche. This can be particularly helpful when processing challenges that come up in community. The accompanier will offer insight, wisdom, and encouragement for the community members to continue their L'Arche journey.
- Create opportunities for assistants and core members to visit other L'Arche communities nationally and internationally to be exposed to even more differences

Finding 3. Power in Numbers

Key Insight

Spirituality has become more impactful to community members because of belonging to a spiritual community.

Description

Spirituality is an essential part of L'Arche's mission and identity and was a common theme among interviewees. Many of L'Arche Cleveland's community members practice Catholicism, but we have community members of a variety of faiths or none at all. The interviews indicate that even community members who already had an active spiritual life before coming to L'Arche experienced spiritual growth while part of the community. The data show a significant increase in people integrating their spiritual, mental, and emotional life into future life decisions from before coming (77%) to after being at L'Arche (93%).

When asked about how L'Arche shapes what is important in life, one community member said “A faith-based component... being in a faith-based organization has made me a more faithful person... I'm more mindful of spiritual things.” Community members discussed how witnessing the faith of others has strengthened their own faith, and one described “being inspired by the strong faith of so many core members.” In one core member interview, the core member's mother shared that L'Arche made faith an even bigger part of her daughter's life: “L'Arche does practice and recognize faith and how they attach it to the individual person... and the growth of that faith through L'Arche is one of the most important things we've experienced in L'Arche.”

Other community members stated that being involved with L'Arche encouraged them to grow spiritually. One said, “I was inspired during this time [at L'Arche] to put in place some spiritual direction for myself. That has been wonderful... It caused me to reflect on experiences at L'Arche and also in my personal life.”

One core member uses a communication device. After spiritual activities, like Community Prayer, her mother programs her device to include topics related to the event, like forgiveness. She said, “There's a great recall, because she's participating, and then the message remains on her device.”

Multiple religions are currently represented in the community. Several core members practice Catholicism and two core members are Jewish. The different spirituality of others has allowed community members to learn about other's spirituality and traditions, and to strengthen their own. One said, "I think that I am much more open to other people's beliefs and traditions around their faith, but [L'Arche] has also drawn me much closer to my own Catholic tradition."

Church is an important part of life in L'Arche. Community members shared they enjoy being able to worship together and felt more connected to God when worshipping with other members of the community. An assistant said, "When we used to go to Mass together, being there with the assistants and core members, it somehow felt connected with a greater force for me, elevated somehow." One assistant said that seeing the faith of core members outside of the church opened his eyes and gave him a new motive "to love God" and find his own faith.

Significance

L'Arche was founded as a Catholic organization, so religion and spirituality have become an important part of L'Arche philosophy. Many community members indicate that being with other community members has strengthened their own spirituality. L'Arche is made up of many different religions and exposes people to differences in faith traditions. In some cases, this has resulted in members converting to a different religion. Throughout the study, it appears that the faith of others has inspired the faith of the individual throughout the community.

Possible Responses:

- We can arrange group visits to assistants' and core members' diverse places of worship.
- We can encourage prayer, meditation, or reflection regularly in the houses and make these practices part of the daily routine.
- We can have different religions represented in community prayer events.
- We can hold intentionally inclusive interfaith spiritual retreats

Finding 4. It's Me, It's You, It's Us That Build Community

Key Insight

Fostering "community" is an important aspect of our way of life that draws people in and encourages them to remain with L'Arche.

Description

Community was noted in various ways throughout our many interviews. The data show that relationships were at the core of community living. L'Arche was described as a community of joy and happiness, where relationships were nurtured. Healthy relationships and friendships were important and encouraged. One assistant said that when she is out in the larger community with core members and someone asks who she is, she doesn't say she is a staff person. Instead, she explained, "I say I am a friend." Another interviewee said,

I love the family atmosphere... I think so often people with disabilities are treated differently. And I think as much as possible people at L'Arche treat the core members as they would anyone else.

Alternatively, the data show it can be difficult to transition into community living. The L'Arche community can be a hard and difficult place to live. One community member said, "living in community is not going to be easy, just because you live in community. It is the same as a family. It can be dysfunctional." Our core members are wonderful people, some of whom have mental illnesses in addition to their developmental disabilities. An assistant shared,

Sometimes things get very hard and even scary sometimes...some days are wonderful and some days are not. And you know because we are all human beings, no matter what our abilities are...there can be unpleasantness. You know- rage, cruelty. These are human emotions and we are human beings living in our homes.

There are many emotions and feelings that come up as part of community living, some of which make living at L'Arche a challenge at times. Even though there are challenges, one

positive finding in the survey data is 52% of respondents reported that they are “quite a bit” or “very much” able to work through conflicts with others since before coming to L’Arche, and 100% reported this as a result of being a part of L’Arche.

When biological and L’Arche communities intertwine it can be a place of great growth and support. A parent of a core member said,

When we left that first meeting at L’Arche, my husband and I cried all the way home...He said, ‘My son will be safe at L’Arche. I am happy. I am so happy.’ I was crying because I was happy with L’Arche.

Even those who do not live at L’Arche have observed that it is a place where people have great care for one another. One assistant said, “You do feel the joy and positivity of the entire group. And it’s not only the core members but it is also the assistants.” Since it is more often the case that assistants come and go, the stability in the community resides with the core members. One assistant said, “Being in a place where you know caring and being cared for really matters, feels like a good place to be.”

Significance

There are lots of types of community. L’Arche is a community and has feelings of being a family. The community creates the possibility for personal and community growth, as well as places of challenge and obstacles to overcome. Assistants who come to L’Arche are encouraged to live in community. Embracing living in community and learning from the challenges that inevitably arise in that setting is a great opportunity to grow personally, and to form meaningful relationships with others.

Possible Responses

- Use house meetings as an opportunity to work through problems related to living together.
- Practice Accompaniment for core members and assistants.
- Foster healthy community living styles.
- Form support groups for parents to create community.

- Provide assistance in finding psychological help for those who are in need.
- Have more opportunities for core members and assistants to get out into the local community.
- Include families (assistants’ and core Members’) in L’Arche gatherings and activities.
- Share the benefits of living in community when recruiting new assistants.
- Broaden the community by inviting members of the local community to L’Arche community activities, events, and daily life.

Finding 5: The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Key Insight

Being part of L’Arche has taught many lessons, impacted many lives, and provided many blessings

Description

The data show there are many gifts in L’Arche that ripple into our everyday lives. A former assistant said, “I just think that L’Arche is a wonderful organization and community...They (core members) will never really understand how lucky they are, but you know this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for them.” One of our core members said, “I feel safe here at L’Arche. I know that people love me because they do the things I cannot do or that I have a hard time doing, like giving me a shave and helping me with my shower.” The survey data support this finding. 70% of the core members who responded to the survey reported feeling somewhat safe before coming to L’Arche and 10% reported that they did not feel safe at all. 87% of the core members reported they feel very safe and no core members reported not feeling safe since being a part of L’Arche.

The greatest gift that L’Arche has is the core members. When one was asked if it is hard to be nice to people sometimes, his immediate response was, “No.” It is not hard for him to be nice to others. This is a change observed by others during his 7 years in L’Arche, indicating that L’Arche has had a positive influence.

L’Arche is an international organization. A long-term assistant said, “I’m inspired to know that I am part of

something...important and impactful on a global scale.” We can forget that there are L’Arche communities around the world when we are busy and focused on doing our job, but realizing this we can feel supported as part of the global community.

L’Arche is a faith-based community and the data show participating in life in the community has influenced people’s personal faith. One shared, “I was raised Catholic, but you know being in a faith-based organization...it really may have made me a more faithful person...I’m just more mindful of spiritual things from being in L’Arche.” One core member said, “I get to go to church (living at L’Arche), where I used to live I didn’t go to church.”

At L’Arche we gather together for meals, which is a time to be together and form deeper relationships. We pray together and support one another in times of joy as well as challenge. As a current assistant noted, “Forgiveness is such a big thing in L’Arche.” In community, we can ask for forgiveness and receive forgiveness.

Significance

At L’Arche we want to become the best people we can be in order to be a healthy community. As a healthy community, we can share the gift of L’Arche with everyone around us in the larger community. The gift of L’Arche can foster gratitude, acceptance, and love for one another.

Possible responses:

- Affirmations of individuals by the whole community on special occasions.
- National and international travel to share and receive the gift of each L’Arche community.
- Pen pals/ Zoom pals with others in L’Arche and throughout the world.
- Have more community outreach and volunteer opportunities.
- Create a memory book of sayings of our community members to share with the local community.
- Open a L’Arche Cleveland day program for retired core members.

- Share with each other our sacred stories of who we are and how/why we came to L’Arche.
- Visit and learn about others’ religions and faith traditions by attending services and activities in the community.

Finding 6. Making Changing Habits a Habit

Key Insight

The day-in-day-out impact of life at L’Arche is bigger than we realize.

Description

L’Arche assistants shared that they often find themselves in a new or unfortunate situation, but these situations are only as bad as their perception of difficulty. They have come to realize that any of their attitudes will impact the core members. Forming relationships with core members has resulted in some non-core members changing habits. A board member said, “It is so easy to stick to your environment, but it is worth it [to be at L’Arche] to reverse some bad habits.” Experiencing life at L’Arche has been a “wake-up call” for a number of assistants that they need to “change our own ways.” One core member shared that they naturally kept to themselves, but learned sacrifice and selflessness through living with two other people. They said it is still a struggle, but they work hard at changing their habits every single day. Personal changes in L’Arche members were apparent in the survey data, where 52% of non-core members respondents reported they knew “quite a bit” or “very much” where their life was heading before coming to L’Arche, compared to 86% who reported they knew where their life was heading after coming to L’Arche.

Significance

One of the simplest, but most complex lessons that we learn is that not everyone views the world through the same lens as us. L’Arche provides a place where we can practice “meeting people in the middle” and working to better understand each other. At L’Arche we learn to shift negative habits, operate as a team, and learn from others who are different from ourselves.

Possible Responses

- L'Arche 'Survivor Island' retreat where groups work on challenges together to promote bonding and teamwork.
- Work on an outreach project larger than ourselves to bond together in various new ways.
- Gather personality profiles (enneagram/Meyer Briggs) and learn more about other personalities and different ways to work through differences.
- Visit other L'Arche communities from different cultures to learn more about the dynamics of other communities

Finding 7. You Can't Give Water from a Dry Well

Key Insight

One of the most important duties of a caregiver is to first care for yourself.

Description

Assistants and board members shared that they are attracted to organizations like L'Arche because they want to care for others in need. One assistant said that they changed their career path because they wanted to be in a more people-centered environment. When asked about what he learned from L'Arche, he said, "Caring and being cared for matters."

Though working at L'Arche can be incredibly rewarding, it can also be a bit draining at times. Assistants in the

community discussed the challenges of being in L'Arche and living and working with others. An assistant said, "living in community is not going to be easy just because you live in community." There is a need to consider how to support assistants in their caregiving. There are many aspects of life at L'Arche that illustrated the value and benefits of life in community. When asked about how L'Arche can be encouraging, an assistant stated, "It can be a surprise to you to know that people accept the things about you that you didn't realize was acceptable. So there's love there."

Significance

It is important to have a positive home environment for the Core Members, which means having a positive and supportive work environment for assistants. Assistants need to feel supported, and at the same time, they do feel encouraged and appreciated for being themselves.

Possible Responses

- Opportunities for daily assistant journaling
- A retreat for assistants where they can take time to reflect on themselves and what they need from L'Arche
- Routine therapy
- International assistant pen pals

Conclusion

The findings reveal that L'Arche Cleveland has had a powerful and positive impact on the lives of its members in a variety of ways. A key insight that was discussed throughout the findings was the carry-over from L'Arche into daily lives. From changing career paths and religions to just recognizing the importance of living in intentional community, for many L'Arche Cleveland members, L'Arche opened their eyes to a different way of living. Another common finding was the importance of spirituality for community members. Many found that their own spirituality was strengthened during their time at L'Arche, simply from witnessing the faith of others.

One significant finding from the data was the increase in awareness of differences and recognizing those differences. Non-Core Members found that after experiencing L'Arche, they realized that there were fewer differences between people with disabilities and people without disabilities than previously thought. Through this exposure, community members are more likely to advocate for people with disabilities. A part of L'Arche's mission is to create a more human society.

L'Arche Greater Washington D.C. Impact Report

Introduction

L'Arche Greater Washington, D.C. (GWDC) is a community of people with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) sharing life together. We celebrate the unique value of every person, recognizing and accepting our need for one another, and building relationships that transform all of us. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit, L'Arche GWDC provides housing and support services to adults with intellectual disabilities. We serve hundreds of people in the wider community, of many different backgrounds, by offering a place of belonging and growth. Our community life centers on relationships led by our “core members,” who are the adults with intellectual disabilities who live in L'Arche homes. People come from all over the country and the world to visit L'Arche and learn from our core members, our mission, and our model. Along with providing housing and support services, we provide education and outreach, leadership development, and opportunities for spiritual formation.

We have four homes, two in Washington D.C. and two in Arlington, Virginia, where we eat, play, learn, laugh, grieve, and pray together. We do “with” and not “for”, meaning we grow and support one another in a mutually transformative way. We are an inter-denominational Christian community that welcomes people of all faiths, or none. L'Arche GWDC is part of the international federation of L'Arche communities; committed to making known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities all over the world.

What we seek to impact:

- *Impact 1.* Members develop awareness, sensitivity, and curiosity for others, especially across differences in gifts and abilities.
- *Impact 2.* Members experience personal transformation in fundamental aspects of their lives.
- *Impact 3.* Members create meaningful relationships and find belonging in community with others.
- *Impact 4.* Members approach vocation and life-purpose in a holistic and human-centered way.
- *Impact 5.* Members critically engage societal values of accessibility and inclusion and advocate for social justice.
- *Impact 6.* Core members identify and live-out their choices.
- *Impact 7.* Core members have full, healthy lives.
- *Impact 8.* Core members exercise positive influence in the lives of others.

Methodology

The aim of our evaluation was to see what kind and quality of impact our L'Arche Greater Washington D.C. community is having on our community members. Our community members consist of core members (adults with intellectual disabilities), assistants (staff who support core members), additional staff, volunteers, and board members. To increase our understanding, we explored the eight impacts listed above through qualitative inquiry by conducting interviews with our community members.

Over the course of the project, we (a) developed and refined our ideas of intended impact and indicators of impact with other L'Arche communities, (b) designed qualitative interview protocols and conducted interviews, (c) identified findings, and (d) considered the implications to those findings for program improvement and innovation.

We conducted 36 interviews focused on 28 people. We interviewed 12 core members - two of whom we interviewed a second time accompanied by another team member. We interviewed 24 non-core members - six of these were proxy interviews for core members (we asked interviewees about impacts on core members, not on themselves) and two non-core members accompanied core members in an interview (per the core member's request).

We used the protocols created in tandem with two other L'Arche communities, but we modified a few interview questions for core members in order to increase their comprehension and comfort in the conversations. Interviews

were conducted predominantly by three team members who know L'Arche GWDC well - two staff members and one board member. Three interviews were conducted by a volunteer who had no knowledge of L'Arche GWDC.

The qualitative interviewing was followed, almost a year later, by two quantitative surveys. One that was sent to L'Arche GWDC staff, board members, and select friends, volunteers, and former staff members, and one that was tailored to core members. A L'Arche GWDC virtual volunteer at one of the homes went through the survey with the majority of the core members. The surveys received 41 responses for non-core members and 11 core member responses

Limitations in the interview process and methodology

The interviews took place after the Jean Vanier inquiry results were published, with the inquiry uncovering that Vanier had sexually abused several women. This timing may have impacted people's responses, as we were in a time of change and inner turmoil. Many interviews took place during the initial months of the coronavirus lockdown. The situation was changing rapidly and it was hard to schedule interviews when needed. Safety protocols for COVID-19 also resulted in many of the interviews being video calls or phone calls, rather than in-person interviews. We encountered a few technological and logistical challenges, as some interviewees, particularly older people and core members, were still adjusting to using video chat as a way to communicate. The coronavirus lockdown also meant that three members of the original evaluation team left and we brought in one new member to the team. The three people who departed included a team member with the most experience in evaluation work and a team member who was a core member of the community, which was a loss of two important perspectives in our analysis.

We did not interview people who had left L'Arche earlier than planned (whether staff, volunteers or core members), such as staff who had been asked to leave. Our data may look different than it would have had this specific group of former community members been part of the interview process. Former staff who had left after a planned period of time or on good terms were included.

As a predominantly white organization, we did not have many people of color to interview generally. We also had limited participation of people of color due to our stipulation in selecting our sample population that participants "must have been part of the community for one year." Our community is becoming more diverse, but unfortunately, we did not receive responses to participate from the two people of color who were contacted to be interviewed. All of the interviewers were also white.

The quantitative surveys were deployed almost a year after the qualitative interviews and during a tumultuous time for the L'Arche GWDC community. The volunteer who conducted the core member survey found that it was not accessible to the core members, as they would not have been able to read it themselves (except for 1 core member, who thought the questions were repeating themselves).

The interviewer said, "The nuance within each section was too subtle and seemed a bit repetitive to me too. The only accessible part of the survey was the cluster of stars to represent [that represented not at all, some, or a lot]. But, because I was sharing my screen it wasn't easy to see that and for the core member to understand how that related to the possible answers."

Findings

Finding 1. Now We Know: Increased awareness of the challenges people with intellectual disabilities face and the way they should be treated

Key Insight

Increased awareness but lack of speaking up for inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities.

Discussion

A majority of non-core members interviewed said that due to L'Arche they were more aware of disability issues, ranging from physical accessibility to government involvement in the lives of people with disabilities, to churches being more inviting to people with disabilities. However, only about one-third of the non-core members interviewed said they were more likely to speak up to include people with disabilities.

All six volunteers interviewed said that L'Arche increased their awareness of the circumstances (and often challenges) that people with intellectual disabilities face. Only one volunteer said he was more likely to speak up about these issues or go out of his way to include people with disabilities, by sharing that he strives to promote inclusion in different environments. Another volunteer noted a defining moment of awareness that his voice mattered through being at L'Arche when discussing voting with a core member. He was considering if the core member should be able to vote or not. Quickly he came to the conclusion that people with intellectual disabilities should be able to vote. He realized it was "a slippery slope when you start making lists of who can or can't do something... then at some point I could be off the list!" One volunteer said that for them L'Arche reinforced that personal relationships "should" be the frame through which to see justice issues, but they did not note being more likely to speak up about these issues.

Most of the current and former staff members interviewed said they were more aware of disability rights issues, but only a few said they were more likely to speak up about these issues or go out of their way to include people with disabilities. One staff member became more aware of how accessibility inhibited her housemates from attending events at their church. While she named these issues out loud to church members, she hadn't done advocacy in the larger sense. One respondent said that in her early years in the L'Arche community she wasn't as aware of accessibility issues because L'Arche itself is so inclusive. Advocacy for her is now a "growing edge." Another staff member said, "Physical accessibility is something I think about constantly now and it makes me very passionate." She considers herself a "champion" for people with disabilities now. This mindset was the result of her "being invited into really intimate sacred spaces with core members." A former staff member said, "I now have not only the responsibility but the inclination to talk to people with disabilities, especially when I see them not being included because I have had such wonderful experiences sharing my life with people with disabilities." Both board members interviewed said they were more aware of the issues people with disabilities face and are more likely

to speak up about disability issues or to intentionally include someone with disabilities.

The quantitative data show that non-core member's sense of responsibility to advocate for others, skills to critique injustice, and confidence to discuss disability rights all rose through their time in L'Arche. The majority (58%) of non-core members responding to the survey reported they raise awareness about disability rights quite a bit or very much as a result of being a part of the L'Arche community. 66 percent (an increase of 36%) of respondents reported that they actively advocate for a more just society quite a bit or very much as a result of being at L'Arche. This was different from the qualitative findings, in which only a minority of non-core members said they actively advocated. Nonetheless, the quantitative findings related to advocacy were rated lower than other items, showing this is still a weaker area. The quantitative survey was deployed many months after the qualitative interviews, and after a summer of anti-racist activism, much of which occurred right in the heart of Washington, DC. This timing may have also impacted the responses.

Core members: It was noted for almost half of the core members interviewed in proxy interviews that they became more aware that their voice mattered through being at L'Arche. Being at L'Arche allowed them to speak up for themselves and others. One core member is very passionate about advocacy work. He shared that L'Arche has given him more opportunities to do this type of work. Being in a community where people valued them, listened, and encouraged them to share, seemed to help core members find their voices or continue using them. A proxy interview found that one core member showed outsiders how people with disabilities deserve to be treated by the way he lives and by his charitable activities.

It is ironic that data showing core members growing in speaking up for themselves came from proxy interviews. While core members might explain how they reach out to others, how they help their homes, or how they have more independent opportunities, they did not say that they now speak up for themselves more. The quantitative data validated this, showing that 100% of core members believed they spoke up for themselves before coming to L'Arche,

as well as now that they are living at L'Arche. This is an interesting difference in the interviews done directly with core members and those done by proxy. One interpretation is that others see things in us that we do not notice in ourselves. Another interpretation is that core members always spoke up but no one was listening.

The quantitative data show that core members did experience a change in speaking up for others, with 80% reporting that they spoke up for others some or a lot before coming to L'Arche and 100% reporting that they speak up for others some or a lot after living at L'Arche.

Significance

The majority of non-core members interviewed said that they were more aware of how people with intellectual disabilities have been and should be treated. This awareness situates the mission of L'Arche in context. If one is unaware of past and present injustices that people with intellectual disabilities face, our mission - to make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities - may seem unimportant. Through being in relationship with adults with intellectual disabilities at L'Arche, people without intellectual disabilities become more aware of systemic discriminatory and ableist structures. Additionally, those in relationship with core members may become aware of their own biases and discriminatory ideas and behaviors.

The best speakers for people with disabilities are people with disabilities. Nothing can change without their voices, and their gifts will not be known without their ability to make them known - including to themselves.

It seems that some people at L'Arche (especially non-core members) while growing in their awareness of the unjust treatment of people with intellectual disabilities are not being compelled to take action outside of an internal or sometimes interpersonal level. Part of the L'Arche mission is to “engage in our diverse cultures, working together toward a more human society.” While working toward a more human society can look like many things, one way is through advocacy.

Possible Responses

Teaching advocacy:

- L'Arche GWDC may wish to review our existing orientation materials for volunteers and staff in order to see how we are framing the bigger picture of rights and challenges for people with disabilities, and the ways in which things have changed and could change.
- L'Arche GWDC may want to teach some examples of advocacy in faith formations or other spaces. While not all people need to become advocates, knowing that there are advocacy opportunities available could be useful and interesting to many.

Finding 2. Demystifying Differences

Key Insight

Greater comfort and appreciation for people who are different.

Discussion

Most core members said they enjoy being with people who are different from them. For many, however, this was a trait that they've always held rather than one they learned at L'Arche. One core member said it is important to be around people who are different from you. They said, “Getting to know people helps you to love them more.” One proxy interviewee said a core member had “learned to adapt” because of many different people coming and going. Another proxy interviewee noticed that a core member had grown in her ability to interact with different people and follow her curiosity. The quantitative data validated this, showing that core members came in with high acceptance, curiosity, and comfort with disability, all of which rose slightly through being at L'Arche.

Most volunteers interviewed said they were more comfortable with different people due to time spent at L'Arche. One volunteer said L'Arche, in conjunction with AA, has helped her become more open and accepting of people in her family with whom she disagrees. She is more willing to “accept people as they are” since being at L'Arche, which is something she learned through her relationship with a core member,

and her relationships and observations of assistants and their interactions with core members.

When interview participants were asked about being aware of and appreciating differences between people, some responded with an emphasis on similarity, not difference. Three current and former staff members said that people are not so different, including people with disabilities. One of the staff members emphasized that L'Arche helped her focus on how we are the same; specifically, L'Arche spirituality (along with relationships with L'Arche community members) was what encouraged her to see all people as sacred and any differences as good. A current staff member said, "Being at L'Arche is what allows me to see, oh, we are not so different. We are human." Another staff member said they are now more aware of, and appreciate, the socio-economic differences that impact people's employment; and the way they approach accompanying people with disabilities in their job. One assistant said her willingness and openness to engage people with differences has increased since coming to L'Arche. Before L'Arche, the assistant engaged in fairly homogenous groups, now she is learning to see "difference as a gift, not a barrier."

Several people (non-core members) specifically said they were more comfortable with people with disabilities, with all mentioning relationships with core members as a driver of this increase in comfort. The quantitative data on non-core members validated these findings. Non-core members had high levels of curiosity and value of differences. These levels rose during their time with L'Arche. The biggest change for non-core members taking the survey was in their levels of comfort being with and confidence in communicating with people who are different from them.

Subpoint 1: Greater comfort specifically around people with disabilities. Several people (non-core members) specifically said they were more comfortable with people with disabilities, with all mentioning relationships with core members as a driver of this increase in comfort.

Subpoint 2: Individuals now appreciate the gifts and shared humanity of people with intellectual disabilities in a more

deep and holistic way. Several staff members (current and former), both board members interviewed, and several current volunteers said that due to L'Arche they now recognize the gifts and capabilities of people with disabilities and see them in a more whole way. One volunteer said that before L'Arche he was not attracted to engaging with people with intellectual disabilities and had never before interacted with someone who had an intellectual disability. Since coming to L'Arche he has spent years getting to know core members as individuals and has developed true friendships with them. Participation in L'Arche "totally" expanded his knowledge of issues affecting people with intellectual and other types of disabilities. His attitude toward the importance of inclusion for people with disabilities has changed. He said, "Developmentally disabled persons contribute significantly to a well-functioning community." As one assistant said, "Inclusion of people with disabilities makes shared spaces better for all involved."

Significance

Most (a small majority) of non-core members now have a greater appreciation for, and comfort with, people with disabilities from spending time at L'Arche. Non-core members who did not answer in the affirmative mostly felt they entered L'Arche already comfortable with people with disabilities. The mission of L'Arche is to make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities and to do so we must reach people who might not be comfortable with people with intellectual disabilities, or in fact are not comfortable with people who are different from them. We do so by inviting people into the community (such as for dinner) and going out into our city to share.

At L'Arche, there are many opportunities to engage and form relationships with people of different backgrounds and experiences of life—from core members welcoming assistants from all over the world to assistants and volunteers having the opportunity to form close relationships with people with intellectual disabilities in a more intentional way. Observing how others interacted helped people notice similarities and appreciate differences. We also strive "to build a more human society" - that means a society that is inclusive, where people

with all sorts of differences (abilities, disabilities, ethnicity, race, faith, etc.) can live together. To reach that goal we want to model inclusivity. If we do our job well, people come away from encounters with L'Arche more open to differences, and members of our community continually grow in our ability to be with each other in our differences.

Possible Responses

Influence on L'Arche GWDC's Diversity Commission work:

Interviewees came to the same conclusion of appreciating differences and having greater comfort around people with intellectual disabilities through two different routes- either they said they were more likely to see what they had in common, or they were more open to celebrating differences. Knowledge of these two routes is valuable information for L'Arche GWDC's diversity commission as they sculpt language and training. Do we want people at L'Arche to focus only on our similarities, only on our diversity, or do we want people to hold both of these as truth? A volunteer provided additional insight for us to ask our members to consider- when does the change in accepting people different from us need to happen in ourselves, and when does it need to happen externally?

A consideration:

As listed in the "Limitations" section, the people interviewed were predominantly white. Could their whiteness, considered the "mainstream" and dominant culture in US society and at L'Arche, influence how they interact with those different from themselves? Would someone of color, who is used to being the "other" in society, report something different?

Finding 3. Being Part of a Whole

Key Insight

Individuals see the value in belonging to a community.

Discussion

Relationships and community were mentioned in almost every single interview. Several current and former staff and volunteers said that L'Arche reinforced or grew how they valued community or changed (in a positive way) their

view of community. Some people changed their ideas about what community could look like. One participant was more aware of how L'Arche communities can integrate themselves into the neighborhood. Another interviewee learned that a community experience doesn't have to be geographically bound - that one could connect with L'Arche communities all over the world. And another now thinks of community as a space where members are more equal, rather than a part of a hierarchical structure. Other interview participants changed how they saw themselves in relation to community. One said she began to see her life as part of a home and a community, part of a broader experience rather than an individual one.

All core members mentioned that relationships with community members were important to them, mostly mentioning one on one relationships. There was a sense of belonging to each other and caring for one another, but it did not always expand outside of the home. A parent of a core member said that L'Arche is like his family, and she has witnessed that "he likes being part of a whole." One core member said that the L'Arche community is important to her- it takes care of her, and she cares for it. Another core member said she knows she is an important member of the L'Arche community, because other members help her, and she helps them. One core member had a very expansive understanding of family that spanned the globe; she named that she had a big family before L'Arche and now that she is in L'Arche she has an even bigger family: "I have a big family wherever I go, right now I have a big family at L'Arche."

Several people mentioned belonging in community in their interviews. One person said L'Arche has helped him be able to sense when belonging isn't there, after experiencing how everyone values community interactions and the importance of being in a community. A community member shared: "What I appreciate so much about L'Arche is the sense that belonging isn't earned, instead [it is a] fact of life by virtue of being another human."

Subpoint: L'Arche models intentional community in a way that individuals recognize an ongoing desire to be part of something bigger than themselves. As a result of living in the L'Arche community for four years, one core member's mother shared how she has witnessed her daughter's goals

shifting. Before moving into L'Arche her daughter's goal was to live independently in an apartment, as this is what she saw others doing after they left their parents' home. Her mom says now this core member seems to understand and value community life more, and she no longer wants to move to an apartment where she would live with less people and outside a community.

One volunteer said his original life plan was to move back to where he grew up once he retired. Now that he is retired, he shared that he desires to remain where he is currently. He listed many communities, including L'Arche, that made him want to stay in the area. An assistant shared that she would have gone back to school to get her Master's in Social Work, but being a part of the intentional community at L'Arche is so life-giving that she has chosen to stay. She said,

My experiences and the relationships that I've been able to build have been what have kept me here and guided my path. I don't know the answer as to what's happening next, but I think I can't envision my life without some kind of connection to L'Arche.

One person shared that being part of a community like L'Arche "seems like a really important thing for me in the future." Sticking with community, even when it is hard, and being intentional in community, were two key reasons cited for growth in how participants felt about valuing community. Community attributes cited in the data include: community is based on your presence rather than actions, and a community draws out people's gifts.

Significance

L'Arche GWDC identifies itself as a community. The findings show that our existence as a community is experienced by many who come through our doors. A common understanding of L'Arche is our offering of homes of belonging for people with intellectual disabilities. We learn that the sense of belonging extends beyond the home to the wider community of people. We also find that the feeling of being in a community at L'Arche GWDC is attractive enough for people to make lifestyle changes to remain engaged and connected. Being a part of a L'Arche community is an

alternative way of thinking about what one needs to be fulfilled. Instead of valuing traditional markers of success, such as higher education, or moving to a home for increased independence, people in the community at L'Arche seem to be fulfilled by their belonging and relationships.

Possible Responses

Recruitment and hiring:

Creating a warm, committed community experience is a point of employee retention. Advertising L'Arche GWDC as an intentional community of people may be an appealing tool to attract and retain assistants. The data indicate that assistants will likely experience a sense of community while working at L'Arche.

Spreading the word:

People with intellectual disabilities and their families might not be aware of L'Arche GWDC's model of inclusive community homes for adults with intellectual disabilities as an alternative to independent apartment living or other group homes. While L'Arche's capacity to create more homes is limited, increased awareness of L'Arche's model of residential services and quality care in a community-based setting could help fuel interest in more L'Arche homes, as well as other places for people with and without intellectual disabilities to experience community.

Finding 4. Evolving Spiritual Practices

Key Insight

Many people's spirituality changed by spending time at L'Arche (half of the people interviewed), with most people changing in what can be characterized as a positive way.

Discussion

Some core members identified that being at L'Arche fostered their spiritual practices of prayer and engagement in local faith communities. Some core members named that they have taken on a leadership or participatory role in a faith group since coming to L'Arche- from leading a L'Arche prayer night to joining the choir at their church. One core member explained, "We're a faith community and we help

each other. Love our neighbors as thyself, and that's really good." However, another core member said she experienced no change in spirituality while at L'Arche. Several core members shared that prayer was an important practice in their spiritual life. One core member's parent said that she has witnessed a growing spirituality in her son since coming to L'Arche- specifically blessing people and praying for them, and more involvement at his church: "He goes around blessing people. If he sees someone in distress he'll put his hand on their shoulder or head and say a prayer." She attributed this to L'Arche being a faith community.

Subpoint: A more daily, practical faith for assistants.

Several assistants said their faith changed to be one of seeing God in daily life and acting faith out in practical ways. One assistant said prior to coming to L'Arche she was more "heady" in spiritual practices. Her mindset changed in seeing God around her rather than seeking God in a morning or evening reflection. Now she recognizes God's presence in the big and small. Another assistant has a more meaningful spiritual life now, and "lives daily in the kingdom of God." She now finds God in her relationships with others, their gifts, and needs, and not just in Catholic worship practices. She has discovered a more personal God. A former assistant said that due to L'Arche, and specifically to the L'Arche teaching that everyone is loved by God, he moved from "an intellectual or head based faith to a more practical hands-on faith" and now prioritizes relationships. To him, the L'Arche spiritual teaching about everyone being loved required a practical response. A current staff member said L'Arche spirituality helped her to see how all people are sacred. Daily relationships with core members, L'Arche spiritual teachings, and the act of naming what they are grateful for around the dinner table were all cited as causes of spiritual changes. Two community members converted to Catholicism. One cited how L'Arche introduced him to Catholicism and said L'Arche also helped him focus on things that matter to him. However, two people said they were less spiritually engaged while at L'Arche- one citing the busy schedule of being part of the L'Arche community, and another the stress of working in community. Some volunteers also do not feel like their faith has changed as a result of being at L'Arche.

The quantitative data reveal that non-core members increased how much of their spiritual life they integrate into decisions about their future. 64% of non-core member respondents reported that they integrated their spiritual, mental, emotional life into their decisions about their future quite a bit or very much before L'Arche and 92% report the same as a result of L'Arche.

Significance

Generally, core members seem to have more spiritual opportunities and support in engaging with these opportunities at L'Arche than they had in prior living arrangements, which has led to increased external spiritual practices and engagement. In contrast to connecting to larger groups, it appears that some assistants find more spiritual growth in close relationships with individuals and their community- in the daily moments of the day, as opposed to attending an event or participating in a group religious activity.

People with intellectual disabilities historically were not included in the church. L'Arche has connections with churches in the area that are welcoming to people with ID. L'Arche has helped make these churches safe places for people with ID by showing up, building relationships, and advocating. Meanwhile, people without ID may already be familiar with corporate church life, and instead, find newness and growth in building relationships with people with ID. Conversely, people without ID may not have been welcomed or had the chance to participate in spiritual or religious settings, and are now doing so with the support of the L'Arche community.

As a faith community, L'Arche seeks to be a place where everyone can grow spiritually, wherever they may be in their faith journey. While only two people cited being less spiritually engaged, it could be worth looking into whether or not the community allows mental space and scheduling space for people who are very involved to grow. For example, if assistants support core members in going to their churches on Sunday morning, they may miss the opportunity to attend a church service they prefer at the same time.

Possible Responses

Questions to ask:

- How can L'Arche GWDC assistants become more engaged in church life? Is this something they want? What at L'Arche may be inhibiting assistants from engaging with religious/spiritual communities of their choosing?
- Why are community members not mentioning the numerous spiritual activities that happen regularly in the L'Arche communities in interviews? (For example, dinner prayer, prayer night, faith formation, Cchat and Cchew/faith and sharing, retreats.)

Finding 5. Freedom for Core Members to Discover, Deepen, and Lead

Key Insight

As a result of living in the L'Arche GWDC community, core members make more choices, communicate more freely, and serve as leaders.

Discussion

Most core members expressed that they make more choices in their life now than they did before coming to L'Arche. During one interview a core member said that she wanted to go to a medieval festival, and then promptly said that she'd put it on her "MAP" (annual planning meeting). The same core member's parent said that she has noticed L'Arche is a place where life can also happen naturally for her daughter. The core member can invite someone out to ice cream, and the people in the community make it happen and join in. Another core member shared that before coming to L'Arche she had to share a bedroom. Now that she is at L'Arche, she is happy to have her own room with a wall color of her choosing. A long-time core member explained that L'Arche, "changed me to be a grown-up woman," which included being independent, making her own choices, having a job, and having her own money. A guardian of a former core member said the core member was given the freedom to make his own decisions, which allowed him to develop himself. The core member felt "entitled" to make decisions and act as he wished because "he knew he was loved" by

others at L'Arche. The quantitative data validated this finding. There was a major change in what core members reported from before they came to L'Arche to after being in L'Arche in their knowledge of their life choices, knowledge of how to do things for themselves, and feeling in control of their lives. 60% of core members reported that they knew the choices they have for their life, 71% reported that they knew how to do things for themselves, and 60% reported that they felt in control of their life before coming to L'Arche. After being at L'Arche, 100% of core members reported the same in all of these areas.

Several core members speak up and communicate more at L'Arche. Two core members' proxy interviewees shared that the core members communicate and speak more at L'Arche because they learned that people wanted to know them, and they mattered to others. Three other proxy interviewees said the core members are now bolder and more assertive, and more likely to express emotions and reach out to others. Core members may become bolder in communicating since assistants value what they have to say, and show them through listening, talking, and asking questions. Core members are supported in communicating and L'Arche is a safe place of trust.

Many factors contribute to core members' freedom and decision-making. Assistants that live with core members model freedom and autonomy that core members may not have recognized before. Assistants and the L'Arche community encourage and name gifts of core members, along with asking them their preferences. L'Arche also generally has the resources to respond to the needs and choices that core members make— enough staff, money, and space. Over half of the core members named developing new and deepening existing gifts/passions at L'Arche. In a proxy interview, a mother shared that since her son came to L'Arche to be a core member, he had developed a passion for flowers and gardening that never existed before. Another core member's mom said that her child's ability to make friends and connections has grown through L'Arche's support. For one core member, living at L'Arche has enabled him to exercise his creativity and express himself through his artwork, and – of great importance to him – he earned money selling his art

in order to give to those in need. He has had the freedom, opportunity, and support at L'Arche that he needs to be able to help fulfill this deeply felt desire to assist others.

Subpoint: Core members leading at the point of their gift(s) in their relationships, homes, and community. Many core members shared that they invite people to go out to eat, hang out, or come over for dinner. This shows initiative and leadership, as the core members are the ones extending the invitation. A few core members mentioned that since coming to L'Arche, they have joined more committees and taken on more leadership roles than before they were in L'Arche. One core member is on multiple L'Arche GWDC committees, including his place at the L'Arche GWDC board meetings. Another has started hosting talent shows at her house for her housemates. She has even welcomed volunteer groups and led them in participating in the house talent shows and presentations sharing about L'Arche. She names ideas for future house activities and ways to improve the home, such as starting a garden. One proxy interviewee shared a story of how a core member was typically more reserved at events at the beginning of her time at L'Arche. Over time, this core member began using the microphone at events and leading others in activities. One core member shared how she is taking on more responsibilities in the home, such as taking out the trash, preparing dinner, setting the table. Her mother shared these were tasks said she did not do often while living with her at home. Core members' leadership appears to stem from feeling a sense of ownership and belonging in their home and in friendships. Other community members express a desire to be led by core members. Core members consistently have their gifts affirmed by those around them, along with witnessing and being emboldened by each other's gifts. The quantitative findings showed that core members felt they did more to help others, were listened to more, and know how to have a positive impact on others more now since they have lived at L'Arche.

Significance

In society, many people assume that people with intellectual disabilities need to be helped and served. What people often don't realize is how much people with ID have to offer and

give back. In line with L'Arche's mission of making known the gifts of people with ID, core members at L'Arche lead at the points of their gift in their homes, in the greater L'Arche community, and in their neighborhoods. It is a beautiful thing to witness core members leading the community, and important in L'Arche's work of modeling inclusion.

Historically, the voices of people with intellectual disabilities have been shut out, ignored, and not sought after. Fortunately, core members at L'Arche reported that they feel they have the freedom and opportunity to make their own decisions, use their voices, and discover themselves and their passions. The findings indicate that L'Arche is turning the tables and creating a space where people with ID are valued and taken seriously. This is directly tied to our mission of making known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities and meeting the needs of our members.

Possible Responses

Communicate:

Many people outside of L'Arche might not realize the significance of core members having choices, or they might not realize how core members lead us. We should make a point to communicate this as a way to model inclusion to others! This could be folded into our existing communications and outreach efforts, efforts which L'Arche GWDC has a dedicated staff person to support. We could include a slide about our committees – all co-led by core members – in our usual presentation. We could also include more about the deinstitutionalization movement in our presentations and perhaps a personal story from a core member about life before coming to L'Arche.

Finding 6. Building Real Relationships That Last

Key Insight

L'Arche GWDC is a community where enduring relationships are formed.

Discussion

“Almost everything I know about love and relationships I learned from L'Arche.” - *former assistant*

All core members shared about important relationships they have made at L'Arche. Many core members said they keep in touch with these close friends, including former assistants who are no longer in the area, through visiting them, calling them, and inviting them back to visit. One core member signed about another core member he lived with who passed away a few years ago. This core member also shared about a new assistant at his house, as one of his first new friends as he listed out people he cared about. on the list of people he cares about.

Every non-core member interviewee specifically mentioned friendship with core members as part of their L'Arche experience. A few people realized through L'Arche that relationships were the most important aspect of their lives. One person said L'Arche helped him realize "I am most myself and most human and I experienced the most happiness and the most growth when I'm giving priority to other people." One current staff member fully identifies with the community and does not think about herself as separate. Her relationships with others in the community are what is most important to her. She entered L'Arche with a strong desire to learn about other people and cultures. At L'Arche, that interest developed into a commitment to grow in relationship to other individuals in the now more proximate community to which she belonged. Relationships at L'Arche present the opportunity for meaningful growth, as L'Arche practices approaching people as equals in mutual relationships.

Subpoint: Relationships as a way to learn or means to another impact. While many people mentioned that L'Arche either taught them or revealed to them that relationships were their priority, relationships were often spoken of as a means to an end, or a cause of significant change, rather than an end in and of itself. Many community members explicitly pointed out how relationships with Core Members caused a specific impact in their life. These impacts included relationships that caused members to appreciate differences, be more comfortable with different people and people with disabilities, be more aware of the gifts of people with disabilities, lead them to speak up and advocate, aspire to be a better communicator, seek to be a better person, and

more. Some people were especially moved or changed by witnessing the relationships between core members and assistants (or other staff).

Significance

L'Arche seeks to "Make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities, revealed through *mutually transforming relationships*." The data reveal strong findings around relationships- every person mentioned relationships when interviewed about the impact of L'Arche. This signifies that L'Arche GWDC's efforts to build "mutually transforming relationships" have been successful and are a cornerstone of the L'Arche experience for community members. Through living in the L'Arche community, core members meet many people and share their stories. It is likely that bonding activities such as vacations, celebrations, dinner time, and other ways that people share their lives, their feelings, and their time together, contribute to the ability for core members to build relationships (though this wasn't directly named).

Possible Responses

Potential Further Research:

We know many people with intellectual disabilities are segregated, and people with disabilities generally might not have friends with whom to build relationships. How are relationships a specific need in the larger ID community? Can L'Arche GWDC showcase ourselves as leaders in the relational space? Open Future Learning has some interesting work on the social lives of people with ID that could be a useful jumping-off point in thinking about how we discuss segregation and friendships. We could make videos interviewing core members about their friendships. These videos could be included in recruitment materials and outreach events.

Finding 7. Outer Experiences Leading to Inner Growth and Internal Character Development

Key Insight

Most community members experienced internal character change through being at L'Arche, including staff, volunteers, and core members.

Discussion

The data reveal that internal changes experienced while part of the L'Arche GWDC community included being more open to people; being more empathetic and resilient; and being more gentle, patient, and sensitive. One person said that as a result of living daily life with core members they cared less about what others thought about them and felt free to be silly. One former staff member said that through L'Arche he became more sympathetic and compassionate, and learned to love people how they wanted to be loved, not how he wanted to love. Another non-core member reported they had developed empathy and expanded to say, "I have really developed a fierce loyalty to people with disabilities." One person said L'Arche helped them believe that they themselves have a lot to offer. A volunteer said he learned to make his "love for people more tangible and more practical" and "less a sense of love as a notion and emotion, but like something that you actually enact with your hands." Another volunteer said when he began volunteering at L'Arche, he felt gratitude, and the longer he remained, he developed contentment with the gifts of his life. Most non-core members said the changes came through relationships with core members, as well as witnessing how assistants practically care for core members. Some people who worked at L'Arche also mentioned personal growth in terms of job skills, including time management, flexibility, and anticipating needs.

The quantitative data show that non-core members came in with a strong sense of knowing themselves and their beliefs, and were practitioners of personal reflection. This sense of self grew as a result of living at L'Arche. 47% of survey respondents reported that they know their personal strengths and weaknesses quite a bit or very much before L'Arche and 88% reported the same as a result of L'Arche. 65% of respondents reported that they had quite a bit or very much clarity about what they believe in before L'Arche and 77% report the same as a result of L'Arche. 65% also reported that they practice personal reflection quite a bit or very much before L'Arche and this increased to 82% as a result of L'Arche.

Core members have grown in leadership, setting boundaries, and acting on empathy. Core members have also experienced increased friendliness, adaptability, and assertiveness. Much of this growth is attributed to the support they experience at L'Arche. One core member had grown in her belief that her desires and needs mattered, and she was more comfortable in her own skin. Another core member became more aware of himself and his feelings.

The quantitative data was clear on core member personal growth, showing marked increases in knowing "what I'm good at in life," knowing "what I need to work on to improve my life," and "I'm excited about growing in my life." That last one - excitement about growing in life - showed the largest increase of any of the core member quantitative data points, as it started out quite low with 40% of core members reporting they were not at all excited and only 20% reporting that they are a lot excited about growing. This rating jumped significantly higher with 100% of core members reporting they are a lot excited as a result of their time at L'Arche.

Significance

L'Arche seeks to be a community where we encourage and experience inner growth. We have been called a "school of the heart." The data indicate that L'Arche GWDC has created an environment where people are able to grow in personal ways and engage in mutually transformative relationships.

Possible Responses

Communicating:

Character development tends to be a widely understood part of the L'Arche mission. People come to L'Arche seeking character development. Spiritual leaders Henri Nouwen and John Vanier (though we no longer read the latter) wrote about inner character development. Yet we do not always explicitly state character development when communicating about L'Arche GWDC. Do we want to name character development and inner growth in our future communications and outreach efforts?

Finding 8. Interacting with People in a More Positive Way

Key Insight

Many people mentioned that they have learned how to live and work with different personalities due to being at L'Arche GWDC.

Discussion

Two staff members and one volunteer said being at L'Arche helped them appreciate and be able to work with people who have different personalities or communication styles. A volunteer mentioned L'Arche has taught him to not want to control a situation or a conversation, but instead to be “really trying to hear people where they are.” One volunteer said being in relationships with core members has made him more empathic and able to accept the shortcomings of others. One current staff member and one core member mentioned learning strategies for working with or living with people who are angry or upset. One core member learned about respecting people’s boundaries and working at relationships. He learned that each member of the community had something to offer, even if he personally did not like them. He is dedicated to growing his friendships and spending quality time with people. Two staff members also specified that L'Arche reinforced or taught them that people are generally good and trying their best. Both staff members specified that they learned this through relationships. One staff member mentioned specifically learning from relationships with core members.

Sub-point: Better communication skills. Individuals at L'Arche reported improved communication skills, including better listening, more confidence in addressing conflict, choosing to interact with kind words, and being better able to interact with people who communicate in ways that are different than their own. Some core members improved their communication skills. One core member improved her ability to disagree with others and learned to find healthy alternatives to address conflict. Many big personalities in her house make this skill helpful. Assistants modeled and practiced this skill with the core member. One core member lived in other group homes, but people did not

engage with him. Ever since coming to L'Arche, over 12 years ago, people have been speaking to him and listening to what he has to say. As a result, this core member now speaks much more than before, as reported by his mother. Another core member reported that L'Arche has taught her to “speak nicely” and given her an opportunity to share “kind words” and positivity with her housemates and community members. On the whole, being in a L'Arche community has given core members more opportunities to interact with others— as there are many people and social gatherings— than their lives before L'Arche, thereby giving them more opportunities to increase their communication skills. People at L'Arche also actively value what people with intellectual disabilities have to say. When core members experience that others have a genuine interest in them, they open up and share more of themselves.

Some volunteers reported that being at L'Arche has increased their patience and listening skills. One volunteer said he specifically learned to relate better to people with disabilities by listening and not “just taking over.” One assistant shared that L'Arche has made her a better communicator, listener, and better at addressing conflict (despite being conflict-avoidant before L'Arche). L'Arche challenged her to communicate with many different people in culturally diverse settings including in Spanish and American Sign Language. She has grown in her ability to address conflict, through other community members naming this as an area of growth for her and encouraging her to lean in.

The quantitative data show that non-core members arrived at L'Arche with a (self-reported) fairly high sense of how to get along with other people, and this sense increased as a result of time at L'Arche. The biggest change was in how non-core members were able to resolve conflicts with others, which was the lowest-rated (mean rating of 3.17) of their interpersonal skills and rose to be the highest rated (mean rating of 4.19) after spending time at L'Arche.

Data from the quantitative survey show that core members also had an increase in their ability to know what makes people sad and to feel close and connected to people.

Significance

The mutually transformative relationships at the heart of L'Arche are not possible without the ability to communicate and interact in positive ways. L'Arche provides a space and the support for people to grow in those skills. Examples of space and support include yearly training on giving and receiving feedback, counseling and mediation sessions, and simply the opportunities to be around people who are very different in affirming atmospheres. The ability to communicate and interact in positive ways speaks to the ethos of L'Arche - a place of belonging for people of many different backgrounds.

Possible Responses

While L'Arche GWDC provides many structured spaces for community members- particularly employees- to learn and practice positive interactions, these spaces were not named by employees or community members in interviews. How can employees grow to incorporate naming these trainings as assets that build valuable skills learned at L'Arche? Should they? Would incorporating core members into leading these trainings make them more notable and meaningful?

Communicating:

Should L'Arche GWDC communicate more about the impact of providing spaces for positive interactions? This could be included in outreach presentations that GWDC regularly holds, including to student groups and churches.

Finding 9. To Simply “Be”: Be present and be yourself

Key Insight

L'Arche GWDC is a place where people learned to “simply be” - be present and be themselves. Members of the L'Arche community realized they did not have to constantly be accomplishing something or be perfect.

Discussion

One community member shared that she lost the need to achieve and lost some interest in stereotypical success through her time at L'Arche. Other members mentioned not

needing to always “do things” and instead they were able to sit in companionable silence with core members, without a task, just being present. One member said that L'Arche made her less worried about fitting in because the community “reminds me that I am a person worthy of love every day, and I don't have to be nervous about trying to fit in somewhere.” She cited relationships at L'Arche as her means for learning.

The data show that core members are able to lean robustly into being their full selves and they model this for the people around them. This attribute was captured generally in the interviews with core members often noting what external opportunities became available for them to use their gifts. One core member was able to overcome a barrier of only being able to practice her gift of dancing at her day program. With assistants' encouragement and support, she extended her dancing to her home. Eventually, this core member shared her gift of dance by leading her community in dancing together. Another core member's parent said that her daughter is more comfortable being called on to lead a group than in the past. The core member is now aware of her gifts and belonging in the community.

Two volunteers described coming from backgrounds of being in control and in charge- through being a parent and in their jobs. They both expressed that L'Arche was a place where they did not have to fulfill that role. One volunteer learned that she could and needed “to take a back seat.” Through relationships with core members, conversations with assistants, and observations of the two groups interacting over the years, she learned that she is not in control: “I don't have the right to change them [core members]. It's up to each person to change themselves. It's not up to us to change others.” She also recognized that any change that needs to happen is within herself. The other volunteer shared that he values being able to “do” things in community and to contribute, but he has learned: “It's just about being there, showing up, eating dinner- it's enough.” Another volunteer now takes time to be able to listen to others express their authentic selves. He “slows down” and takes the time necessary to be present for others. One interviewee said she now knows that internal workarounds being your genuine self is what is most important, thanks to the urging of core

members to “be herself.” She is now more aware of her strengths, is more comfortable with vulnerability, and is more inclusive. A former staff member said, “Many of them [core members] are a walking invitation for someone to be themselves - for me to be myself. Because they are themselves, and they’re not trying to put on any pretense.”

Significance

As we work together for a more human society, we want each person to be accepted for who they are - and to accept themselves as well. This finding shows how L’Arche is a place where people can be who they are, where they are accepted not for accomplishments or credentials but simply for their humanity. We could not be a community of belonging without the ability to accept ourselves and each other.

Possible responses

Volunteer changes:

After learning about the volunteer experiences, one can be left with mixed thoughts. On one hand, volunteers at L’Arche GWDC were able to focus on building relationships because there wasn’t much for them to be actively accomplishing. On the other hand, one might argue that it is important for L’Arche to provide meaningful engaging volunteer opportunities that allow volunteers to use their gifts. Here are two recommendations:

- L’Arche GWDC can change the title of “volunteer” for those who are there to build relationships with core members instead of engaging in a specific activity or task.
- L’Arche GWDC can create more volunteer activities or structures that allow volunteers to share their gifts and build relationships with core members at the same time.

Finding 10. Welcomed Home: Finding family and belonging at L’Arche

Key Insight

Many core members, or their proxy interviewees, named that L’Arche was their family and/or that they experienced belonging at L’Arche.

Discussion

One core member exemplified how he operates from a place of belonging in his home- recruiting assistants, naming an assistant who he thinks should be Home Life Leader, cooking great food, inviting everyone to visit, and calling everyone in L’Arche brother and sister. Another core member said: “I have a big family wherever I go. Right now I have a big family at L’Arche.” A friend of a core member observed that through their time at L’Arche the member seems more joyful and they are able to invite people into the home and “hold down the house.” One core member, when asked how they knew they were loved by other people in the community, answered: “Because we are a united family.”

Several volunteers feel a sense of belonging and grounding in their role as volunteers, though not necessarily as “members” of L’Arche. Some staff members mentioned commitment to L’Arche and finding belonging. For example, one assistant named L’Arche as family and the commitment to relationships as central, and their primary focus, before the commitment to the “mission.” They are committed during imperfect times and joyful times, having created a “family of choice.”

The quantitative data reveal that core members’ sense of safety, stability, and happiness all increased from being at L’Arche, with happiness making the biggest leap. 40% of core members reported that they were not at all happy before L’Arche and 100% reported that they are “a lot” happy as a result of L’Arche.

Significance and Possible Responses

L’Arche seeks to offer lifelong homes, not just a residence, so it is encouraging to hear core members and others name L’Arche as home and family. This signifies that we are doing our job and accomplishing our goal. We can fold the theme of “simply being” into our presentations to groups that would be interested in this topic, such as churches and Jesuit volunteer groups.

Finding 11. Redirecting Future Plans

Key Insight

Community members made major life changes due to spending time at L'Arche GWDC.

Discussion

A core member had the goal to live independently but changed her mind after experiencing community at L'Arche. Another person chose “downward mobility” and not to buy a house, but instead chose to stay in the L'Arche community with his family. One person chose to stay on as staff at L'Arche, rather than continuing to follow their former career goals. A volunteer stayed in the area instead of moving because of his L'Arche community. For others, their mindset shifted about their career or life choices. One former staff member said being at L'Arche made it feel natural to be a dad, and now he is a stay-at-home dad. Another community member is now interested in working in aging and end-of-life care. A current volunteer said that his time at L'Arche, specifically seeing how core members have very simple but very full lives, has encouraged him to be less anxious about having grand plans for his life. He is now more open to receiving the simple gifts of life and community.

Quantitative data show that non-core members already had a fairly high level of focus on human-centered, value-based service careers (mean rating of 4.07) when they came to L'Arche, a focus which increased somewhat (to a mean rating of 4.44) from being at L'Arche. This did not negate the qualitative data but revealed that there might not be as many

major life changes as the qualitative data suggest, but rather that L'Arche cemented a path they were already on. They came in with middling confidence in knowing their priorities in life and where life is headed, which also increased from being in L'Arche.

The quantitative data reveal that core members increased their knowledge of what they are good at in life and what they need to work on to improve their lives since being at L'Arche. Core members experience a significant change in being excited about growing in their lives.

Significance

It is a testament to the deep impact L'Arche has on people that some will choose to change their life plans, or their view on life, after spending time in the L'Arche GWDC community. L'Arche is able to introduce people to a new way of life- an inclusive, simple, joyous way to live that is often at odds with how we are taught to live in other spaces. People find the mission and model of L'Arche - seen in relationships and community living - compelling enough to change their own plans.

Possible responses

Recruitment:

Participating in L'Arche GWDC and the resulting reconsiderations of life plans could be an interesting angle to consider communicating when hiring and recruiting new staff. We can create communications materials around this point specifically, and how L'Arche supported career change generally.

Conclusion

Through conducting interviews we learned that time at L'Arche GWDC had a positive impact on core members, volunteers, staff, and other community members. One consistent thread throughout the interviews was the mention of relationships - especially relationships with core members. Having close relationships in an inclusive community setting seems to be mutually beneficial for people in all different roles. L'Arche provides opportunities for people without intellectual disabilities to build meaningful relationships with people with intellectual disabilities. These are relationships that they likely would not have experienced in such depth as they had at L'Arche.

Core members at L'Arche experienced opportunities to expand their social circles, spiritual practices, hobbies, gifts, and leadership roles. L'Arche provides a well-rounded place for people with intellectual disabilities to be treated as a full person.

During one's time at L'Arche, many people experienced significant internal changes that extended to impacting how they treated others and what they valued most in their lives. For some community members, these changes went very deep and L'Arche has been a catalyst for growth in many areas of their lives.

Possible issues at L'Arche GWDC:

- We have a limit to who we can support at L'Arche GWDC. Based on our model of small, family-style homes we simply cannot serve everyone. A current volunteer expressed how he was troubled that L'Arche can only house a limited number of people, as he sees the value of L'Arche and longs for more people to live there.
- Employees experience work stress. Two staff members said they have less time for their own spiritual practices. One staff member said they felt joy and belonging when spending personal time at L'Arche, but they felt very stressed while working there, which included working 12-hour days and responding to constant change.
- One person who had spent time in both the homes and the office felt that the office culture and decision-making were out of step with the values of L'Arche. They said: "...when it comes to the value, for example, of recognizing gifts within people, I didn't really feel like that happened at the office. I also felt some administrative decisions were made that were not remotely 'fully human.'"
- The data reveal mixed responses on whether or not someone would engage in advocacy or speak up for someone with disabilities. Many people did not seem moved to advocate for people with disabilities. If we want to model inclusion, it would be better to offer people some information on how to advocate with people with disabilities- on a personal daily level, by reaching out to their elected representatives or using other advocacy methods.
- L'Arche GWDC has a white dominant culture. We question whether or not we have cultural competency. The L'Arche community and leadership is predominantly white and Catholic. We need to ask ourselves, are we a welcoming space for people of color? We need to understand if there is higher turnover for staff members who are people of color, and if so, why?

Recommendations to apply:

Teaching advocacy:

As responses around advocacy - whether in personal life or in politics - were quite mixed, L'Arche GWDC could look at how to teach community members to take what they learn at L'Arche and how to apply it to their lives. It appears this isn't being taught in a systematic way, and it could be good to fold this teaching into already existing formations and workshops.

Communicating:

This impact evaluation revealed new avenues for our Communications and Outreach efforts, especially naming personal character development and how core members have opportunities for freedom, decision making, and leadership, and why this is important.

Further discussion:

L'Arche GWDC can look into the work-life balance of staff at L'Arche; especially within the context of a high turnover rate for direct support professionals generally.

Diversity Commission:

This evaluation is another example of how L'Arche GWDC is a white-dominated culture. Some of the findings and questions that came up in the evaluation could be useful to our Diversity Commission as they work to help us all engage in diverse cultures and make everyone feel welcome.

L'Arche Jacksonville Impact Report

Introduction

L'Arche Jacksonville is a community with four family-style homes, the Blanchart Community Center, and an off-site day program called the Rainbow Workshop. We believe that by creating an environment where people with intellectual and physical disabilities can share their gifts, we are affecting a positive change in the world. We believe that these shared gifts have the power to transform the lives of those who are open to receiving them. We celebrate the unique value of every person and recognize our need for one another. We resolve to explore and appreciate the diverse cultures and faith practices within L'Arche and to work together toward a more evolved and caring human society.

At L'Arche, persons with an intellectual disability are known as “core members,” and “assistants” are those who come to share life with them. L'Arche Jacksonville currently has 15 core members, about 20 live-in and live-out assistants, an administrative team, as well as a network of friends and volunteers. Assistants work to build a relationship of mutual care and support with persons with disabilities by fostering a home life of unity, mutual respect, and participation by all members. Assistants help create a home together with core members; and accompany them in their daily life by providing direct care and assistance with dressing, bathing, money management, medical care, appointments, family and work connections, household chores, laundry, medications, meal preparation, and transportation. Assistants also support core members in sharing their gifts within the house and the larger community. Additionally, the Rainbow Workshop is part of L'Arche Jacksonville, where core members participate in meaningful work Monday through Friday. The Rainbow Workshop gives core members the opportunity to express their creativity in the form of painting, ceramics, mosaics, jewelry, and more.

Methodology

The aim of our evaluation was to see what kind and quality of impact L'Arche Jacksonville is having on our members. To understand this, we explored two broad evaluation questions:

1. What kind and quality of impact are we having on our members?
2. What aspects of our program are causing this impact?

Over the course of the project, we (a) developed and refined our ideas of intended impact and indicators, (b) designed and implemented a mixed-methods outcome evaluation using both qualitative and quantitative means to collect and analyze data, (c) identified themes and findings, and (d) considered the implications to those findings for program improvement and innovation.

This project began by identifying and clarifying the intended impact of L'Arche Jacksonville. Once the ideas of impact had been developed, we used the Heart Triangle™ model to identify qualitative and quantitative indicators of impact on the mental, behavioral, and emotional changes in our members. We used these indicators to design a qualitative interview protocol and a quantitative questionnaire to evaluate progress toward achieving our intended impact.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

For the qualitative portion of the evaluation, we designed an in-depth interview protocol to gain data about the structural, qualitative changes resulting from our program. We used a purposeful, stratified sampling technique to select a representative sample from the population we serve. The number of program participants was 50. Our sample size was 11, drawn from the following strata of our population:

- Core members (who have intellectual disabilities): 3
- Current assistants/staff members (non-core members): 6
- Volunteers or former assistants (non-core members): 2

Our interviewers were four L'Arche Jacksonville team members. We convened one-on-one interviews lasting from between 45 minutes and one hour in length and collected interview data. We then analyzed the data inductively using

a modified version of thematic analysis. Each interviewer implemented the first three phases of thematic analysis (becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, and identifying themes) for each interview. Together, we developed common themes from the entire data corpus; identifying the overarching and inter-interview themes that emerged from the full scope of our data analysis to illuminate the collective insights and discoveries. We mapped these themes visually and examined the dynamics among the themes, causes and catalysts of the themes, new or surprising insights related to the themes, and relationships between the themes that were revealed in the data. We then determined the most significant and meaningful discoveries and brought them forward as findings to be described in the final phase of thematic analysis, this report.

Findings

Finding 1. Reaching Across Boundaries

Key Insight

Members of L'Arche flourish in their ability to reach across defined social roles or boundaries and form genuine mutual relationships with others.

Discussion

Members of L'Arche demonstrated an ability to form genuine, deep connections with others. As an organization, L'Arche uses the term “mutual relationship” in its mission, writings, and trainings to describe the reciprocal bonds that are fostered between assistants and core members. Mutual relationship is rooted in the recognition that both parties have something essential to contribute. Interviews with community members reveal that mutual relationship and human connection is indeed being fostered at L'Arche, and that members develop an ability to form real, authentic connections with others.

There are several key characteristics of these connections, notably, a high level of trust, genuine love and concern that transcends traditional social roles, mutual growth, and forgiveness. Core members consistently stated that they turn to the assistants for support, beyond mere physical assistance with activities of daily living. Core members describe

turning to the assistants for emotional support, to process difficult or confusing feelings, or to discuss things that are troublesome to them. This willingness to turn to assistants to process difficult emotions indicates a high level of trust between assistants and core members. A core member, when asked what she does when she is feeling sad, mad, or upset immediately responded, “tell an assistant.” Another core member said that when she is sad the assistants comfort her by “giving me a hug and a kiss.” Core members trust the assistants with their most vulnerable emotions.

Another key factor in the relationships that members of L'Arche have learned to develop is an openness to personal growth. One core member stated that living in L'Arche has made her a better person because she “loves a lot of people.” This speaks to her ability and willingness to give and receive love, and then to allow that love to change her as a person. Another core member described a change that occurred in a relationship with a non-core member who she did not like at first. This relationship transformed as the core member realized that the person she did not like at first “misses me and loves me.” She was able to enter into mutual relationship because she realized that she was loved. One assistant explained,

I've realized that in my life it's been hard for me to forgive in friendships and relationships. But I think especially since moving into Sunflower House, I've definitely learned a lot about forgiveness- what it means to forgive, and to accept forgiveness and move on.

Core members and non-core members consistently showed that they are connecting with one another in a way that goes far beyond what is expected of their roles. Members demonstrated that they are able to reach across established boundaries and connect with others on a human level. Typically, the “client-caregiver” relationship in organizations like L'Arche is based on one party providing a necessary service to the other. Yet, the word “love” was used by core members and non-core members alike in almost every single interview; signaling that something transcending the typical client-caregiver relationship is occurring at L'Arche Jacksonville. Members are able to open themselves up to

form genuine connections with other human beings that exist outside of the social roles that have been assigned to them. Several non-core members described the core members as family members, for example, one assistant said,

They've become my family...I don't see them as a person with a disability. I see G. as my sister, or my aunt....R. as my brother because we're both the young ones of the family...J. is like a grandfather, and S. is like my uncle... I see them all like family members rather than the people that I care for and they're a huge part of my life.

One assistant spoke to the pain and beauty of accompanying core members in their final moments, saying, "It's really tough to walk the journey with people in their best moments, and then in their most difficult. When someone dies, it's like losing a family member." Core members also consistently described knowing that they were loved by the assistants, and they reciprocated this love.

Survey data support the finding that members of L'Arche reach across boundaries to form mutual relationships, and also suggest that members develop the practical skills necessary to build healthy friendships. Survey respondents, on average, scored their ability to work through conflicts with others at a 3.12 before their involvement with L'Arche. Since being a part of L'Arche, the average score rose to 4.04, suggesting that L'Arche has supported their growth in developing the skills necessary to work through conflicts with others, which fosters healthy relationships.

Significance

The ability to form mutual friendships that do not adhere to social norms is extremely important and has exciting implications. Based on social norms, people are encouraged to treat others in accordance with their roles in society. People with whom we have chance encounters are often viewed in terms of the services they provide, not so much as people with a rich interior life. Your waiter at a restaurant provides you with food service. The mail carrier delivers your mail. Your boss signs your paycheck. Separation is encouraged for the sake of "professional boundaries." Boundaries are certainly valid and important—but if

taken too far, they run the risk of creating the impression that another person is nothing more than the service they provide to you, or the recipient of a service you give to them. Members of L'Arche have demonstrated that it is possible to form healthy, mutual relationships, rooted in love, respect, and understanding, with people who may not normally form friendships due to their social roles. This understanding can be carried beyond L'Arche, fundamentally affecting the way members of the L'Arche community interact with other human beings; be it in the workplace, volunteer roles, family roles, or in everyday social interactions. Not everyone will go on to form deep, meaningful connections with their mail carrier, but these findings show us that it is possible to enter into some kind of mutuality with everyone we encounter, no matter the context.

Responses

- L'Arche Jacksonville can provide avenues for assistants and core members to share stories of mutual relationship and connection with one another at formations, trainings, and retreats.
- L'Arche Jacksonville can encourage the use of mission-centered language in daily community life for both assistants and core members. For example, using terms and phrases such as *sharing life*, *friend/core member*, or *assistant*, rather than *working*, *client*, or *staff*.

Finding 2. Finding Common Ground

Key Insight

Members of L'Arche appreciate and connect with people of different ability levels, cultures, ethnicities, and religious preferences.

Discussion

Members of L'Arche are exposed to people of diverse backgrounds and demonstrate that they are able to appreciate and connect with people who have different backgrounds from their own, sometimes despite initial misgivings. A conversation between a core member and an assistant beautifully illustrates this ability to connect with people who are different, despite some trepidation:

Interviewer (I): You live with people whose skin looks different to yours. How do you feel about that?

Core member (CM): Scared.

I: You have friends in community who have different skin tones...are you scared of them?

CM: In a way.

I: How do you become friends with someone whose differences frighten you?

CM: Help them.

I: Okay, you help them? You do something good for them?

CM: (nods)

I: Do you let them help you, too?

CM: Mmm-hmm.

I: Do you discover that you have things in common with them?

CM: Smile...laugh...jokes...teasing...

I: Do you find that people who are different than you sometimes like to drink coffee, too, just like you?

CM: Yup!

I: Wow, I just learned something new about you...you make friendships with other people even when you're scared by the ways that you are different...I'm proud of you. Thank you for sharing this with me.

This exchange illustrates one core member's ability to overcome a fear of difference by connecting on a human level. Another core member, when asked if there were any

members of the community that she did not like at first, but has since changed her mind, responded by naming two assistants. The core member did not name a specific reason for disliking these assistants at first, but it is worth noting that the two assistants named had very different backgrounds than the core member. Both assistants were non-white; one is from India and speaks with a heavy accent, and the other identifies with a particular sect of Judaism and wears a long, white robe as is custom for his religion. The core member shared that she had changed her mind about these two individuals and that she appreciated the ways that they helped her and made her laugh. This is another example of a member of L'Arche changing the way that they view another person who is different from them by forming a personal connection.

In L'Arche, people of very different backgrounds who may not normally cross paths are brought together for a point in time. They can form a connection, sometimes despite initial fear or discomfort, and they can walk away with a deeper willingness to reach across difference. A former assistant said,

When I lived in community it was very diverse... I think I had never had a close friend that was Jewish, and I'd never had a close friend that was Muslim before. Two of my best friends in L'Arche, and friends to this day, are Jewish and Muslim. I feel like especially [with] Islam, in our world, there's just so much fear and so much that's misunderstood. Getting to know people who come from these different traditions, I think has really helped me to know that we're so much more similar than different. I know it's a cliché, but it's true. I learned to be open more to things that are different than my own experience.

Another assistant described,

I think there's just something about L'Arche that teaches you about how people are so different. I don't mean this in a bad way, but you just don't care, you don't care about what race or ethnicity or religion someone is. They walk in your door and you love them for who they are. And you accept them, and you meet them where they're at. I think with any person that I've come across since moving and sharing life in L'Arche- that wall, or that pre-judgment, has totally left.

The quantitative data support the finding that L'Arche members grow in their ability to connect with and appreciate people who are different from them. In response to the statement "I am accepting of the differences in people," survey respondents scored higher since becoming involved in L'Arche, compared to before their involvement; on a 5-point scale, members of L'Arche gave an average rating of 3.84 before their involvement and a 4.65 rating since their involvement.

Significance

Societal norms and expectations encourage people to trust and hold close people who are similar to them; for example, similar backgrounds, race, ability level, socio-economic status, etc. We often see how fear of the "other" leads to racism, ableism, sexism, etc. Members of L'Arche Jacksonville have demonstrated the ability to overcome their fear and misgivings, and see the "other" as a human being, rather than defining them by their difference. If members of L'Arche can learn to connect with the people in their own community who are "different," then they can begin to chip away at their own internal biases and prejudices that affect the way they may judge or view people who are outside of their community. Due to the nature of the community, members of L'Arche *must* share space and have interactions with people who have different backgrounds from them, whether they would have intentionally chosen to or not. Through these interactions, members of L'Arche form real, authentic connections with people who they may not have had the opportunity to interact with otherwise; or possibly they may have even actively avoided because of their difference. These connections can lead to a variety of fruitful outcomes, such as members of L'Arche may realize that judgments or stereotypes that they believed about certain groups of people were not true; they may feel more comfortable with interacting with diverse groups of people in daily life outside of L'Arche; they may feel empowered to form friendships with people who are different from them; they may be interested in engaging further in learning about other cultures, and they may gain a perspective that takes them beyond their personal life experience.

Possible Responses

- L'Arche Jacksonville can create opportunities to celebrate diversity in the community with international-themed community nights.
- L'Arche Jacksonville can have structured conversations with the core members about race and diversity in ways that they will understand.
- L'Arche Jacksonville can acknowledge different religious holidays that are represented in the community.

Finding 3. "Every Little Thing is Welcome"

Key Insight

Members of L'Arche learn and appreciate their gifts, which contributes to a sense of self-worth.

Discussion

Members of L'Arche recognize and celebrate their own unique gifts and strengths, and recognize that they have something of value to contribute to the world around them. In interviews, members consistently talked about the opportunities they have in community to discover and share their gifts and their belief that their gifts are appreciated. One assistant explained:

Here, no matter what gift I have to offer, whether it's cooking a meal, or helping someone clean a bedroom, or you name it, I know that it will be appreciated, which makes me more eager to do it. Here, everything is appreciated. Every little thing is welcome.

This concept that "every little thing is welcome" says something profound about the member's recognition that what they bring to the table, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, is embraced, appreciated, and celebrated. In multiple interviews, core members and non-core members displayed pride in who they are and what they have to share with the people around them. One core member said, "I just like myself. I'm good at anything. I'm getting better at stuff as time goes on like driving the forklift. I learned how to use the washer and dryer." He elaborated, "I'm important. I'm very important. I'm important around

L'Arche." For many, learning how to use a washer and dryer may seem insignificant. Yet, for this individual, learning this skill became a source of pride and accomplishment. The progression of this conversation illustrates how this individual's recognition that he is good at things and has gifts to share, leads to his belief that he is important as a person. Another core member shared, "People like me because I'm funny." This candid and unabashed honesty, which may catch some off guard in a culture where false modesty is prevalent, is delightfully refreshing. It is clear that this core member is confident in her strengths, and also believes that others appreciate her strengths as well. In speaking about what brings her joy, an assistant shared,

Being able to share my gifts, like my gift for music or my gift for building friendships, and being able to share those friendships. That's something that's been bringing me a lot of joy lately; sharing the beauty of mutual friendships with other people who may not have had that experience before.

In this example, the assistant demonstrates the conviction that sharing her gifts, particularly her gift for building friendships, is important because it has a direct impact on the people around her. Her ability to form mutual friendships with core members, and her willingness to invite others to experience those friendships for themselves, results in positive impacts beyond herself.

The survey data also show that members of L'Arche are gaining a deeper understanding of their own gifts. Non-core members reported that since coming to L'Arche, they are more aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses. In response to the statement, "I know my personal strengths and weaknesses," survey respondents reported an average score of 3.45 before their L'Arche involvement. Since being a member of L'Arche, this average score jumped to 4.31. Survey results for core members reveal a similar pattern. In response to the statement, "I know what I'm good at in my life," core members' average scores increased from 2.33 to 2.77 since being a part of L'Arche.

Significance

Value is often assigned based on what people have to contribute to the world around them. This is evidenced in the way that people who are considered the most skilled in their fields are rewarded with power, prestige, and wealth. One of the dangers to this system is that it inadvertently (or sometimes directly) implies that value and importance directly correlate with what a person has to contribute to society. A person who has what is judged to be a valuable contribution is considered a more valuable or important person, while the person who contributes something that is deemed of lesser value is viewed as less important or less valuable. Members of L'Arche engage in an alternate way of thinking, in which all people's contributions and gifts, no matter the scope, are celebrated as being important and valuable. Members of L'Arche learn to recognize and appreciate their own gifts, as well as the gifts of the people around them, regardless of their level of success or prestige. This recognition and appreciation will empower members with a sense of self-worth that goes beyond how they see themselves in their roles in L'Arche. Members will be encouraged to see themselves, and others, as valuable members of society, regardless of traditional measures of success.

Possible Responses

- L'Arche Jacksonville can plan community-wide celebrations to celebrate successes and significant life events of community members.
- L'Arche Jacksonville can assign responsibilities to all community members relative to their ability levels, and celebrating them when they fulfill these responsibilities.
- L'Arche Jacksonville can create structured opportunities for community members to share affirmations with one another.

Finding 4. Authentically Me

Key Insight

Members of L'Arche become the most authentic versions of themselves and give others the freedom to be the most authentic version of themselves.

Discussion

The data reveal that mutual transformation occurred within L'Arche. Individuals became the most authentic versions of themselves because they believed that they are accepted and loved for who they are. At the same time, community members developed the ability to give others the space to become their most authentic selves. One assistant told a story about realizing she had been trying too hard to control the people around her. She was confronted by a core member who asked her why she did not like her. As the assistant reflected on how the core member came to that conclusion, she realized,

It came out of me trying to be too controlling. And controlling R. is not a good idea. Controlling most of the people here is not a good idea. But that's where that comment came from. And definitely, it makes me relax more and enter into the world of G. or the world of R., rather than trying to create an environment for them. To enter into the environment that they are in, their personalities.

The concept of “entering into the world” of another, rather than constructing an environment that they are expected to adapt to, creates a scenario in which people are totally free to be themselves without having to adapt to others' expectations or desires. The assistant said,

I let the assistants be themselves too. I'm a grandmother-age compared to the assistants here—they're children. And yet they come with all their own gifts and creativity, and it lets me be more free to let them be them, as well as let the core members be who they are.

This long-term assistant could have easily concluded that her expertise and experience outweighed that of the newer, younger assistants, instead, she chose an alternate approach. With the alternate approach, she allowed newer assistants to be themselves and to share their unique gifts; just as she allowed the core members to be completely themselves.

A non-core member described the same willingness to let others be exactly and completely who they are. She referred to the core members' ability to create this type of environment. She said, “Core members are very forgiving,

loving, and accepting. They meet you where you are, [they] don't judge.” She reaffirmed the concept of entering into the world of another, rather than expecting them to alter themselves to fit into your world. This non-core member shared that core members enter into her world and they do not judge what they find. Allowing another to see the truest self and knowing that there will be no judgment, empowered people to feel free to reveal their strengths, weaknesses, dreams, desires, struggles, and joys. An assistant shared,

With our friends, I think they reveal personally to me, my truest self. But my true self is me and all my weakness and brokenness. And so I think it just makes me appreciate people more, in a way, because we're all in solidarity...we all are broken humans.

When everyone felt safe enough to be the most authentic versions of themselves, it led to the realization that everyone is a combination of strength and weakness and beauty and brokenness. There was no longer a need to keep up the false pretenses of being strong, happy, and confident all the time when people trusted that they would be welcomed whether they are strong or weak, happy or sad, or confident or insecure. Most importantly, when the authentic self, including the good and the bad, was welcomed and celebrated, it led to the realization that self-worth was not dependent upon doing good things, or being strong, or feeling happy. Worth existed outside of what a person did, felt, or believed. An assistant explained,

I think something that I've struggled with in life is shouting my own worth...it's so important to me to shout the worth of my friends because I know what it's like to not feel accepted or not feel worthy. I think they've helped reveal to me my worth...knowing that I'm worthy, knowing God's love for me. It's mutual. We're an example of friendship.

A mutual transformation occurred, where the assistant realized her own worth, while she also led the people around her to realize their own worth. These two processes occurred in tandem. When a person realized that their life has value, despite any shortcomings or failures, they realized

that others' lives have value too. The understanding that people are important, worthy, and valuable, allows them to feel comfortable living as the most authentic versions of themselves, and encouraging and giving space for others to do the same. Perhaps the simplest way to illustrate this is a quote from a founding core member of L'Arche Jacksonville. When asked the question: "Do you express yourself?" she replied, without hesitation, "You know I do."

Significance

The freedom that L'Arche members feel to be the most authentic versions of themselves in community will affect the way they move through the world beyond L'Arche. L'Arche provides a safe place where members can discover and develop their sense of self, without feeling like they have to put up a façade. Once they have had some "practice" with being their authentic selves in the safe space of community, they will be emboldened to carry this practice into other spaces, where they can bring their true selves to their families, friends, other workplaces, etc. The practice of being oneself is difficult to measure. We find that it is illustrated when members of L'Arche stand firmly for what they believe in, even in difficult situations, stay true to their word, live with integrity, be vulnerable in relationships with others, and be honest with others about what they think and believe. A strong sense of self can also build resilience because, despite external circumstances, people with a strong sense of self are confident in who they are, what they believe, and what they have the ability to control. Through membership in L'Arche individuals can be empowered with a sense of self that allows them to be more resilient when faced with challenges or difficulties.

Possible responses

- L'Arche Jacksonville can be structured for assistants and core members to share their personal stories, either verbally or in writing.
- L'Arche Jacksonville can ensure that policies and structures hold people accountable, but also give people space to make mistakes without fear of punishment; and ensure that policies prioritize relationship over task.

Finding 5. Career as Calling

Key Insight

Members of L'Arche Jacksonville view their job as a calling. This view sustains members through difficult times, allows them to see the meaning behind their work, and encourages them to be relationship-focused in the work they do.

Discussion

Consistent in almost all of the interviews with non-core members was the sense that L'Arche is so much more than "just a job" for them. They viewed their role, no matter which role, as a calling. In L'Arche, some assistants stay for 20 years while others stay for only a year or two. Assistants revealed in interviews that they viewed their time in L'Arche, whether brief or long-term, as holding meaning that went far beyond the scope of the average job. Assistants believed that the work that they do (although some hesitated to even use the term "work") went beyond providing a service or completing a set of tasks in exchange for payment. They believed that their experiences were more of a vocation or a calling than a job. As one assistant said, "I don't even know how to explain it, but living in community is so much more than me taking care of a core member." Another former assistant said, "It's so easy to get task-oriented. And so [I've learned] that view from L'Arche- to focus more on people." One assistant said,

I'm being inspired myself while I'm providing a service. It doesn't matter whether I'm doing dishes or mopping floors or helping somebody get out of bed. Somehow it all blends together. It doesn't feel like a chore. It feels more like the words we use, sharing life.

"Sharing life" is a term used in many L'Arche communities as a substitute for "working." It is meant to reflect exactly what this assistant described- working in a L'Arche community is more like living life alongside people with disabilities than being paid for services provided. The simple tasks of the role which could be interpreted as monotonous or mundane, such as cleaning or helping with a core member's morning routine, were found to be inspiring when viewed as a part of a calling to share life alongside people with disabilities. The ability to find inspiration in simple tasks is reflective

of a much more profound view of one's role than may be expected of the typical job. Many assistants would be hard-pressed to find inspiration in doing dishes or mopping floors unless they viewed these tasks as part of something larger and more meaningful. A non-core member shared,

[It is] hard to help everyone, but I can do my part here, walking on the journey with the 16 core members who live here now. Make sure they have quality of life, best quality of care, walk the journey with them at the end of their lives. I feel like it's my calling to be with them.

This statement touched on something profound—that members of L'Arche recognized that they cannot help everyone or solve all of the problems plaguing society, but they can find a niche, and find meaning and purpose in doing good and creating change within that niche. The same person said, "Being with people with disabilities is my little place in the world." Another assistant described how coming to L'Arche has impacted her own journey in finding her vocation:

I think I walked into L'Arche knowing that I was just going to be here for a year. But also in the back of my mind...knowing that I wanted something like L'Arche, I think, but never really pinpointing exactly what that was or meant. When I came to L'Arche, that's when literally my world turned in a good way. It flipped right upside down, but I think it's where I'm meant to be because I can't picture my life without it. I don't know where my road in L'Arche will lead me. I just know that it will be a part of my life forever.

Another former assistant shared a similar experience of L'Arche changing the trajectory of her career path:

When I was graduating from college, I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do. But I did think I would go into a much more academic field. Discernment and living in L'Arche made me realize that working directly with people—focusing directly on relationships with people rather than research was the direction that I wanted to go. So I went into social work.

For this former assistant, L'Arche had a very direct impact on her future career. For some, L'Arche provided a place where they can fulfill their calling long-term, as is demonstrated by the many long-term assistants who have been a part of L'Arche for 10 or more years. For others, L'Arche is a temporary vocation that impacted the way that they viewed the meaning of work, or in some cases, even inspired them to pursue a previously unconsidered career path.

The ability to find meaning and purpose in work makes people more resilient in the face of adversity. A non-core member said that when things get difficult "we could all just crumble, but we rally together." This speaks to the benefit of having a shared sense of purpose and meaning in work. A long-term assistant said,

I can do the housework without wiping myself out, or whatever it is, and there's a peacefulness about that- to know that all shall be well. And if all isn't really well, all will be well. There's a peacefulness in my heart that I'm not going to lose.

When people believe that the work that they are doing is a part of something that goes beyond themselves, they develop the ability to see beyond difficult circumstances. Members are better able to face challenges because they believe that the purpose of the work that they are doing is large enough to accommodate temporary setbacks.

During the course of her interview, a long-term core member suddenly exclaimed, "I want to say a little about me. Because I came in before everyone else was here." This particular core member has been in the community for over 30 years, so she truly did come in before everyone else. When subsequently asked what do people here learn from you, she answered, "About the same as anyone else. Only move when you have to." She did not elaborate any further, so the meaning of "Only move when you have to" is left to interpretation. One possible way to understand her words is to find your niche, or your "little place in the world," or to discover how you can find and create meaning in that niche, and then to stay there. Only move when you have to.

In the survey data, non-core members scored consistently high on statements related to viewing their career as a calling

and pursuing human-services-centered career paths. Average scores were already fairly high before members' involvement with L'Arche, suggesting that L'Arche attracts people who are seeking meaningful, human-centered careers. Average scores increased since people's involvement with L'Arche, suggesting that L'Arche fosters and supports these career paths. For the statement, "I understand what is most important in my life," average scores rose from 3.65 to 4.44 since people became involved in L'Arche. In response to the statement "I integrate my spiritual, mental, emotional life into my decisions about my future," survey takers' average scores rose from 3.67 to 4.37 since L'Arche involvement. These results suggest that L'Arche encourages its members to intentionally consider their potential career paths and how they line up with what they consider to be their life's purpose. The average score in response to the statement, "I have career goals that are human-centered," increased for survey-takers after being members of L'Arche, jumping from 3.88 to 4.39.

Significance

After discovering a sense of meaning in their work at L'Arche, members can go on to seek purpose in their chosen vocations. They can select careers, or vocations, where they feel as though they are working for something greater than themselves. If they are intentionally selecting jobs based on a sense of calling or purpose, they will likely view their job as more than just a paycheck. Their career or vocation will be an avenue through which they can affect change and carry out a specific purpose. This career choice can lead to greater job and life satisfaction because people can have the belief that what they are doing is important, and they can feel a sense of pride in what they do. The strength drawn from working with a sense of purpose and meaning can contribute to an increased ability to avoid burnout and overcome adversity. Members of L'Arche can be more likely to prioritize people and relationships over tasks and efficiency in their fields of work. The assistant's role at L'Arche prioritizes relationships with the core members over all else. Due to this experience, members of L'Arche could continue to prioritize people over tasks in future roles. Based on a few interviews, there is the suggestion that some members of L'Arche will

go on to pursue careers in human services, inspired by their time working directly with people in L'Arche.

Possible Responses

- L'Arche Jacksonville can provide immersion experiences for student groups in order to recruit assistants who approach working at L'Arche as a calling rather than a job.
- L'Arche Jacksonville can practice intentionality around language- avoiding terms like work, staff, shifts, clients, etc.
- L'Arche Jacksonville can provide educational opportunities to share the latest research around finding meaning in work.

Finding 6: "Choices Make Me Feel Happy"

Key Insight

Core members at L'Arche Jacksonville believe that they have a sense of autonomy and control over their lives.

Discussion

Core members believe that they have a sense of autonomy and control over their lives that comes from their ability to make everyday choices about their lives. All core members interviewed answered an immediate "Yes" when asked if they get to make choices. When asked about what kind of choices they make, many core members shared about everyday choices they make about what they will do with their day, what they will eat, what they will wear, who they will spend time with, etc. Core members also resoundingly shared that they enjoy the opportunity to make choices. One core member said, "I do make choices every day. I like making choices." Another shared, "I choose clothes. Choose pants, shoes, socks. Choose jewelry. Choices make me feel happy." Even the simplest of choices that many people may take for granted seem to have a profound impact on the core members. All core members were enthusiastic about their ability to make choices and eager to give examples. Another core member responded by going beyond giving examples of concrete choices; when asked what kinds of choices he makes each day, he said, "Do the right thing."

When asked about choices, a core member said, “Whatever choice, it may not be the right choice.” When the interviewer asked her if she liked getting to make her own choices even if that means she may make the wrong choice, she answered yes. There is something valuable in the ability to make the “wrong” choice sometimes. Allowing core members to make choices, including choices that non-core members may disagree with, was vital to allowing core members to fully exercise their rights, and to fully recognize their dignity.

Core members scored very high in survey questions related to choices and feeling like they have ownership over their lives. There were marked increases from before they were a part of L’Arche compared to after. The average score for the statement “I know the choices I have for my life” increased from 1.98 to 2.51 since joining L’Arche. Average scores for the statement “I know how to do things for myself” rose from 2.19 to 2.68, and scores for the statement “I feel in control of my life” rose from 2 to 2.48. The data support the conclusion that L’Arche is supporting its core members by helping them understand the choices they have and that they can exercise their right to make choices. This can help core members feel a sense of ownership of their own lives.

Significance

The ability of core members to make choices that affect their everyday lives is vital to their feeling that they have a sense of control and autonomy over their lives and futures. If core members at L’Arche feel that they are in control of their own lives, then this can encourage them to advocate for themselves both in and outside of L’Arche. Core members can understand that they have a right to make decisions that affect their own lives, to be as independent as possible, to be active participants in their community, and to experience full inclusion. They will feel empowered to exercise and advocate for these rights in everyday situations, for example when choosing which items they would like to get from the grocery store, making decisions (to the extent of their ability) about their healthcare, and other decisions that affect their lives in small or large ways. Core members can also recognize when

they are not being afforded the respect and dignity that they deserve, and, ideally, will feel empowered to advocate for their right to make decisions.

Possible Responses

- L’Arche Jacksonville can review our practices and policies to ensure that they promote person-centered practices.
- L’Arche Jacksonville can educate all assistants, and provide in-depth training to new assistants, on the “dignity of risk” and person-centered practices.
- L’Arche Jacksonville can ensure that House Meetings take place on a weekly basis to give core members the chance to advocate for their needs and desires.
- L’Arche Jacksonville can educate core members in self-advocacy techniques.

Finding 7. Lack of Engagement in Social Justice

Key Insight

Members of L’Arche are not engaging critically in social justice issues surrounding disability, advocacy, and inclusion.

Discussion

The concepts of advocacy, engaging in social justice issues or addressing larger issues such as disability rights were not mentioned in any of the interviews. A few people mentioned the term “advocacy,” but did not elaborate or give examples of the advocacy playing a large role in community life. While it could be argued that many of the other impacts of L’Arche indirectly address social justice issues related to disability, there does not seem to be evidence of direct engagement in the issues themselves or a change in the way that people understand these issues.

Survey data suggest that L’Arche does foster the desire to engage with social justice issues, but does not provide the skills or knowledge necessary to do this. Since being a member of L’Arche, non-core members self-reported that they “feel a sense of responsibility to be an advocate for those denied power” (the average score was 4.32 for this statement). However, the average scores in responses to the statements “I have the skills to critique systemic issues of

injustice” and “I actively advocate for a more just society” since being a member of L’Arche were low compared to other statements on the survey, at 3.8 and 3.83, respectively. This implies that L’Arche has work to do in giving its members the skills and knowledge necessary to actively advocate for people with disabilities.

Possible Responses

- L’Arche Jacksonville can provide more education for core members and assistants about social justice issues related to disability rights.
- L’Arche Jacksonville can look to other organizations that are doing a good job of providing avenues for self-advocacy, and consider using their approach as a model.
- L’Arche Jacksonville can convene “Topic Tuesdays” on a local level, which involves talking with core members about issues that are important to them.

Finding 8. Not Having a Say in the “Big Picture”

Key Insight

Core members are not involved in community-wide decision-making processes.

Discussion

L’Arche does very well in empowering core members to make choices that affect their everyday lives. However, this does

not translate into participation in larger decision-making. Core members are currently not very involved in larger decision-making processes and structures that affect their lives. Core members have autonomy over everyday things such as how they spend their time on a daily basis, what they wear, or what they eat for dinner, however, they are not incorporated into larger decisions that affect their lives, either indirectly or directly. Core members did not express the feeling that they have opportunities to voice decisions that affect the “big picture” of the community, such as structural changes, policies, hiring new assistants, or other community-wide decisions.

Possible Responses

- L’Arche Jacksonville can create a “Wisdom Council” of core members to consult on community-wide decisions.
- L’Arche Jacksonville can create avenues for meaningful participation while avoiding tokenism.
- L’Arche Jacksonville can provide liaisons to work with core members on various committees to make sure that they understand and contribute feedback to the decisions being made.

Conclusion

The findings from the interviews at L’Arche Jacksonville largely confirmed that L’Arche is indeed fulfilling key parts of its intended impact. Notably, L’Arche Jacksonville is promoting the formation of healthy mutual relationships that transcend traditional boundaries; creating spaces for people of diverse backgrounds to connect with one another on a human level; encouraging members to appreciate and celebrate their own gifts, as well as the gifts of others; and fostering growth by helping members to become the most authentic versions of themselves. Findings also indicate that people who work at L’Arche Jacksonville viewed their career as a calling, and will go on to find meaning and purpose in future work. Core members at L’Arche developed a sense of autonomy and independence because of the choices that they were empowered to make in their everyday lives at L’Arche. Overall, all of these findings indicate that members of L’Arche experienced significant personal growth and transformation as a result of their time at L’Arche. Responses that can be easily and readily implemented to foster these insights include: acknowledging different religious holidays represented in the community, reinforcing mission-centered language, and giving assistants and core members opportunities to share their stories about mutual relationship during scheduled meetings. In the future, broader responses can be implemented, such as reviewing our practices and policies to ensure that they support our impacts.

Key areas where L'Arche Jacksonville still has work to do include engaging our members in social justice issues, especially disability rights, and providing meaningful avenues through which core members can participate in big-picture decision-making. A first step to engage our members more critically in social justice issues can be to look to other organizations currently actively engaging in advocacy and disability rights work. We may be able to learn from their practices and programs. Providing core members with opportunities to engage in community-wide decision-making may prove more challenging, as the opportunities for engagement may look very different depending on the core member. A valuable place to start could be to begin having conversations with individual core members about what kinds of community-wide decisions are important to them.

Any one of the insights discovered in the qualitative inquiry could provide countless areas for future evaluation. In particular, the topic of diversity within L'Arche Jacksonville and other communities could warrant further exploration. Our findings indicate that L'Arche members are able to connect with people of diverse backgrounds, but it would be interesting to take an individualized look at the different types of diversity (or, perhaps in some cases, lack thereof) such as economic, racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. We can understand more deeply what diversity looks like currently in L'Arche, and how we can do a better job of welcoming people of diverse backgrounds. Learning more specifically about diversity in L'Arche will help us in the future to create an intentionally inclusive environment that is truly welcoming to all.

L'Arche Spokane Impact Report

Introduction

L'Arche Spokane is a community of people with and without intellectual disabilities sharing life together in Washington State. L'Arche Spokane's mission is to make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities. We foster home environments that meet our members' changing needs. We engage in diverse cultures working toward a more human society. We have two homes in the Logan neighborhood in Spokane, where our "core members", adults with intellectual disabilities, live in community with assistants. Along with housing and support, we provide education, leadership development, and opportunities to connect with the greater Spokane community. We are an interdenominational Christian organization, and we welcome people of all spiritual backgrounds and beliefs. We are part of an international federation of L'Arche communities, committed to developing extraordinary friendships for people with and without intellectual disabilities through ordinary actions like shared meals, work, play, and prayer.

Methodology

Our evaluation aimed to learn the kind and quality of impact our L'Arche Spokane community is having on our community members. Our community members consist of core members (adults with intellectual disabilities), assistants, and other staff who support core members, volunteers, and board members. We began this impact assessment through qualitative inquiry, conducting interviews with community members. In total, we interviewed nineteen individuals, which included seven core members, seven assistants/staff members, two guardians, and three board members. In preparation for the interviews, we considered our intended impacts, potential indicators of these impacts, and designed an interview protocol with the aim of a deeper understanding of mental, emotional, and behavioral transformations experienced by our community as a result of living and participating in our L'Arche Spokane community. The interviews and analysis of interview data

were completed by a team of six. The team included our Community Coordinator, four volunteers experienced in the community, and one core member.

The qualitative inquiry was followed by using quantitative means to collect and analyze data. Eleven core members (100%) responded to the survey. Twenty-three individuals responded to the survey for non-core members, and participants included current and former assistants/staff members, board members, volunteers, and guardians.

Findings

Finding 1. The Power of Community Care

Key Insight

L'Arche Spokane members have developed skills in loving themselves and each other.

Discussion

Core members and assistants grew in their capacity to love themselves and others, which has led to the experience of a happier life along with the ability to be a kinder person outside of L'Arche with family and friends. The data show that assistants, in particular, learned to be true to themselves and express themselves more authentically in this role. One assistant said, "Sometimes I feel more myself around core members than my own wife." Another said, "I can just be myself here. How wonderful!"

The data show that at L'Arche Spokane, core members and staff feel appreciated. One assistant said she used to feel left out, but now she feels like she belongs and she is loved by others before they even know her. Another assistant mentioned how valuable and frequent hugs are in the L'Arche community. A board member said he feels loved and accepted despite his weaknesses. One core member shared, "I know I am loved because people listen and say nice things." Another core member said he feels loved when he spends time with others laughing and doing activities together. Many members of the L'Arche community in Spokane emphasized unconditional love that follows the feeling of appreciation.

Through their experience at L'Arche, members also strengthen their love for others. This sense of kinship is important to many people in the L'Arche community. A major component of this impact is seen in the ability of people to take care of each other. Whether it is among core members, between core members and assistants, or among assistants, loving and caring for each other is one of the most vital parts of L'Arche. One assistant said, "I love the people I meet. I notice their contributions and truly think the best of them. Laughter is good for the soul and helps me take life less seriously than before." Another assistant discussed how this capacity to care for others, shaped at L'Arche, has carried over into his personal life, where he has learned to be caring and present when taking care of his aging father.

The data show that core members develop in their ability to love and care for each other through their experience at L'Arche. Among the expressions from core members revealed in the data are the ways they show love toward each other through acts of service and help. In interviews, core members discussed how they are bringing each other food and coffee, holding the door open for one another, or comforting others when they are sad. Another core member began telling his parents he loves them after joining the L'Arche community. Previously, this core member would only tell his parents that he won't hate them. Other core members said, "I love him, he's my brother. I love to hang out with him." They also said, "I like making coffee for my friends," and, "I like to help people calm down by making them laugh." Caring for each other is also shown through fun and laughter. There are expressions of joy and enjoyment in L'Arche. Interviewees expressed feeling better as a result of the laughter and levity they experience with each other. One core member said, "I like to help people by bothering them and making them laugh. It makes them happier." There is a clear recognition of one another's emotions and sensitivities; and a common coping mechanism appears to be through laughter.

In the quantitative data, the survey question receiving the highest score from core members (a score of 2.82 out of 3.0) was "Since being a part of the L'Arche community I know what makes other people happy." Also of interest, the core members responded to statements around feeling safe, life

feeling stable, and feeling happy essentially the same before and since being a part of the L'Arche community. Further study would be required, but this may be linked to most of the core members coming directly to L'Arche from living with their nuclear family. L'Arche Spokane is somewhat unique in that most core members have family members that are actively involved in the community.

Significance

The increased capacity to love and care for others has lasting effects on core members and assistants alike. The experience of being around people who express genuine care, and the ability to grow in one's own ability to care, builds confidence, strengthens the sense of security, and contributes to overall happiness. When core members show their love through acts of kindness, they share in humanity with their peers.

Possible Responses

- L'Arche Spokane can develop ways of being more intentional about caring throughout the community.
- L'Arche Spokane can intentionally integrate practices of community care into the programming of L'Arche.
- L'Arche Spokane can continue holding space for affirmation to ensure everyone feels loved, for example: introducing an affirmation box, writing little notes, etc.

Finding 2. Enhancement of Self-Worth through Service

Key Insight

Core members and staff have found a sense of self-worth and value through their daily activities and involvement in the organization.

Description

Members experienced an enhanced sense of self-worth as a result of their contribution to others in the community. Core members expressed features of their participation in daily chores and prayer night. Core members talked about how these activities contributed to their feeling of love and purpose of presence. The data show that whether they are

putting the dishes away, passing a candle around the dinner table, or helping make dinner, members feel aware of their worth.

Having the opportunity to contribute to the lives and welfare of others reveals the strengths and aptitudes of people. Data show that core members were also aware of their weaknesses, but they did not let it defeat them. Core members were able to work on not feeling defeated because at L'Arche there is a comfortable space to acknowledge weaknesses. Through feeling valued, comes the feeling of being loved.

Significance

Participating as an active member of the L'Arche community catalyzes a sense of value, love, and self-worth. Further research on the specific factors leading to this quality would add to the positive experience of the L'Arche community in the future. The positive impacts are present across the data, regardless of the identity of the interviewee, which shows that participation in the L'Arche community is valuable.

Possible Responses

- L'Arche Spokane can create intentional opportunities for participation through activities that are meaningful to the individual. WE can utilize existing processes (i.e. Negotiated Care Plans, functional accompaniment, Meaningful Day calendars, etc.) while looking for new ways for members to contribute from their giftedness.
- L'Arche Spokane can work to ensure balance – make sure members know that their value is inherent in who they are and not just by what they are able to contribute.
- L'Arche Spokane can continue to emphasize and encourage a culture of “doing with rather than doing for” to support participation in activities that promote self-worth and encourage contributions to others.

Finding 3. Building Human Connection and Community

Key Insight

As a result of time spent with L'Arche Spokane members have grown their community and connections.

Description

The data show that due to living in community, staff and core members strengthened their connections with others both inside and outside of L'Arche. One assistant said that having group time has promoted growing relationships and made him value doing the same thing with people outside of L'Arche. A core member shared that he met his best friend through L'Arche and stays in touch, even though the friend does not live in community with them anymore. A volunteer said she is “realizing the importance of community” and now wants to make “intentional community part of my life.”

Core members feel particularly connected with others in their living setting. One parent said of their adult son, “[He is] making progress because he is part of a larger community that can structure social activities for him.” Another core member and their legal guardians call the L'Arche community “my L'Arche family.” Yet another core member no longer tries to run away from his living situation; he now feels L'Arche is his permanent home.

The survey data also support this finding. In the core members' survey, the second-highest score (2.73 out of 3.0) is in response to the statement “As a result of being a part of the L'Arche community I feel close and connected to people.” Questions around relationships were scored highly on the non-core member survey as well.

Although many positive experiences were expressed by the L'Arche community members, living in community with others is not always easy. The data show that assistants and core members alike struggle with living in community at times; yet, they are dedicated to making it work. Several core members discussed difficulties with roommates and adjusting to new habits and practices of others. Similarly, an assistant said, “[They are] learning to get along with people they wouldn't have otherwise.”

Significance

L'Arche Spokane's intentional community setting causes shifts in how staff and core members form and maintain relationships in many aspects of their lives. These shifts could lead toward a larger movement of living in community and sticking with it despite the difficulties.

Possible Responses

- L'Arche Spokane can continue to emphasize the benefits of living in community, despite the difficulties through sharing success stories among members of how this community has contributed toward connections outside of L'Arche.
- L'Arche Spokane can build resilience and skills around conflict resolution when community living is difficult through coaching about healthy conflict.
- L'Arche Spokane can create educational materials to be shared within the community and beyond. For example, a pamphlet sharing lessons learned from community living.
- L'Arche Spokane can promote community mentorship, including opportunities for people to artistically express themselves.

Finding 4. Developing Patience and Empathy

Key Insight

The L'Arche community has developed assistants' and core members' patience, tolerance, and openness to others.

Description

L'Arche has helped assistants and core members release control over little things they were used to controlling before they joined L'Arche. Before joining L'Arche one assistant would say that she was a “control freak” and wanted to have everything the way she needed it. She called herself a perfectionist. She said,

Community living is very challenging. It's also very good for me and it helps me grow. I tend to be a control freak and that is basically impossible when you are living in community because you just can't control everything. So, it has helped me be more flexible and it has helped me be

more okay with change. It has forced me to find ways to get along with people that I wouldn't normally get along with.

The data show that assistants and core members are developing patience. One assistant noted that a core member has “gotten much more flexible” about sharing responsibilities. Another core member is growing into his patience as he continuously learns and re-learns what it means to live in community. Living in community also teaches us to let go of structures. For example, one assistant said,

I have had to learn to let go of my need of control, to both receive and extend grace, to recognize the gifts of others which are so different from my own. To learn to love people even when there is nothing loveable about them. Even when they get on my nerves. Even when we drive each other crazy because we are too alike or too different. I am learning how to apologize, how to be less selfish, how to listen well, and be more patient.

The data show intentional community has resulted in a greater expression of empathy towards others. Interviewees revealed they are more accepting of differences. One assistant expressed how living with different people has impacted him: “I am not as critical as I used to be. I have more room to allow people their individuality and see it as a good thing, across the board.” In the non-core member survey, the highest scores went to the section of questions around valuing and accepting differences in people as a result of being part of the L'Arche community. The same questions in the “before being a part of the L'Arche community” section also received high scores as compared to other “before” questions. We believe this may be attributed to the type of individual that is attracted to L'Arche and attempts to recruit staff and volunteers with these values.

Additionally, interviewees expressed a newfound tolerance for difficult behavior. One assistant revealed he has noticed “a progression of being able to embrace a wider range of behavior; things that upset me before don't anymore.” Another noted: “My relationship with core members has allowed me to be more flexible and to appreciate the good moments we have.” Several board members also shared how

they are becoming more tolerant, open-minded, empathetic people. The data show that core members also are building empathy and understanding of other people. One core member's parents said, "[He] has grown in his consciousness of other people. He notices people need help and takes action."

Significance

Both assistants and core members build the important life skills of developing patience and empathy, which show up in other areas of their lives. It is important to note the alignment with spiritual aspects of tolerance and letting go of control as well. L'Arche would be wise to be vigilant in fostering these changes in members and assistants and to continue to purposefully attempt to hire staff members who demonstrate these qualities.

Possible Responses

- L'Arche Spokane can implement workshops or activities with core members and/or assistants to encourage emotional expression to each other, and to help members deal with conflicts and issues that inevitably arise.
- We can promote the message to our community that L'Arche is both a safe space and a place for collaboration.

Finding 5. Building Voice and Choice

Key Insight

At L'Arche Spokane making choices and setting boundaries with others has developed leadership skills and a sense of voice for core members and assistants.

Description

Core members strongly value the integration of independence into their lives, which in turn gives them confidence and a sense of purpose. Many core members describe their ability to make choices as a very positive influence on their lives. By acquiring responsibilities within the house, and in turn, completing the tasks on their own, core members feel as if they are integrated into their

community. It also makes them feel important as if they were not present their community would notice the loss. These responsibilities (such as cooking, cleaning, etc.) also create a routine. One core member said, "I am important to the community because I lift heavy things." The consistency of the routine provides stability and comfort. Getting into this routine helps core members feel like they are good at something, and in turn, completing the task becomes an important part of everyday life.

One core member's parent said, "L'Arche has helped [her] transition out of being the 'baby' in the family by giving her responsibilities in the house." Other core members express their preferences and responsibilities within the house, for example: "I like doing the dishes," and, "I like choosing dinner and helping with the Christmas trees," and "I like to live with no parents and be by myself."

Furthermore, the data show that participating in activities they choose outside of the home is an important part of core members' lives. Not only do outside activities give core members an enhanced enjoyment of life, but they also enable them to decide what is important to them. As a result, core members become more solidified in their sense of self and more confident. They feel like their life is in their control, which also promotes confidence and happiness. One core member said, "I like that I have friends and I'm good at making friends."

Through this enhanced sense of responsibility, leadership and self-advocacy skills are also strengthened. Finding a safe space to advocate for oneself in a world of adversity can be found in L'Arche Spokane. The data show that core members at L'Arche feel like they can set their boundaries where they want them, and they aren't afraid to speak up. One core member often tells others, "This is my choice, my life. No thank you." The data show that core members have found their voice during their time at L'Arche through speaking up about individuality, preferences, and likes/dislikes. The community living environment fosters a place of opportunity for speaking up and making individual and group choices. However, comments reveal that core members and assistants may have different opinions about the type of choices that are really important to the core member, and the types of choices that assistants assume are important to the core member.

Significance

When core members feel purpose and ownership of their lives, confidence and happiness come as a result. As they integrate into the community further, these skills are developed and can show up in other areas of their lives as well. Responsibilities not only contribute to the house, but also to the personhood and identity of each individual.

Possible Responses

- We can become aware of and promote strengths in community members. We can assist people to figure out their gifts and elevate them to empower the rest of the L'Arche Spokane community. i.e. practice a version of “strengths-finder”.
- We can delegate more strengths-based activities, including leadership roles, to core members.
- We can train assistants to let core members do as much as they can by themselves, for themselves. For example, “doing with rather than for”.
- Rather than making assumptions, we can work to understand which choices and boundaries are truly important to each individual core member.
- We can provide opportunities for L'Arche community members to express their voice and acquire leadership skills in the greater Spokane region.

Finding 6. Spirituality as a Vehicle

Key Insight

The spiritual practices and culture of L'Arche Spokane have served as a vehicle for tolerance and emotional connection with others and have provided opportunities for personal growth and a deepened spirituality.

Description

The data show that faith has become a part of everyday life and has resulted in deepened spirituality for L'Arche community members. One assistant revealed they now see “the bigger picture of where spirituality fits into daily life” as a result of L'Arche. The data also reveal that members are able to engage in more “open dialogue” about faith than they had in the past. Interviewees expressed that being a part of

a community that supports their faith has reinforced their beliefs.

The data indicate that faith is closely tied with the emotional development and wellbeing of community members. Interviewees revealed that prayer nights gave core members a safe space to voice their feelings and express empathy for others. One core member expressed that his community has helped him be a caring person by “pray[ing] for other people at prayer night.” The data illuminate how faith as a part of everyday life has resulted in deepened spirituality and the emotional development of empathy.

Significance

The spiritual aspect of L'Arche's programming contributes to both core members' and assistants' experience living in community. There may be more to learn about how interviewees indicated that their beliefs have been reinforced. It would be interesting to understand how beliefs differed among core members before joining the L'Arche community, and whether those with more distinct beliefs felt as welcome as those with more similar beliefs.

Possible Responses

- L'Arche Spokane can continue to be welcoming and encouraging of all faith backgrounds.
- We can determine how best to bring our message of inclusivity to the religious population.
- We can provide opportunities for members to share their backgrounds and faith traditions in ways from which everyone can benefit (during prayer nights, retreats, etc.).

Finding 7: Reinforcing a Life Calling

Key Insight

Participation in L'Arche Spokane is fulfilling as it solidifies one's purpose in life and reinforces a person's life calling.

Description

When asked about the impact of L'Arche on their lives, many interviewees described a sense of confirmation that they are pursuing the correct career that aligns with what they deem important in life. They credit their experience at L'Arche with illuminating what makes life worth living in the first place. Participants discussed a shift in their worldview. They were reminded that simplicity often holds more meaning than we give it credit for. Community living reminded one person, "We are all here to take care of each other." A board member summarized his feelings with, "L'Arche is a great place to learn to love and serve yourself, others, and God." When the purposes of life become clear, all interviewees were in agreement that an unparalleled sense of joy and peace follows.

Most of the participants interviewed had careers that centered around service. From nursing to accounting to construction, interviewees revealed that they found purpose in being able to help others with their learned skills. The data show that L'Arche acted as an important reminder in times of doubt. One participant expressed a time in his life when he was feeling unsure about his current vocation. After volunteering at one of the L'Arche houses, he knew he was being called to a life of service. He said, "L'Arche reinforced that I was in the right spot for me." An assistant expressed how her career goals have changed after, "realizing the importance of community." She said, "I want to foster more of it and make intentional community a part of my life." The data collected suggest that participation in L'Arche not only solidifies the purpose of life for participants but also acts as an affirmation when it comes to a person's life calling.

Significance

For many who hold nonprofit jobs, a dedication to a cause or calling is more important than a salary. Many in this field seek a fulfilling career and life direction where serving

and community take priority. This is important when considering the challenge and dedication required to take on this kind of work. This data reveals the kind of person that L'Arche's culture and community attract. L'Arche needs to communicate its values and direction carefully because they are the reason many members choose L'Arche for employment, to volunteer their time and expertise, and to contribute their resources.

Possible Responses

- L'Arche Spokane can create videos or Instagram posts to share insights into the beneficial outcomes that result from a simpler way of life.
- L'Arche Spokane can focus on marketing and outreach that emphasizes the impact staff and volunteers experience by being part of a mission-driven community.
- We can help more people learn about L'Arche through more community involvement.

Finding 8. Limited Connection with Neighbors

Key Insight

While L'Arche members spend time doing activities outside of the house, there is limited relationship with the direct community, such as neighbors or the nearby university.

Description

When asked about life outside of the L'Arche community, but within the surrounding neighborhood, core members did not have much to say. As stated in other key findings, L'Arche develops a very strong community within the houses between L'Arche participants. L'Arche also encourages core members to go out and do activities. However, when asked if they knew their neighbors, or if they spent time with the students nearby, many core members either say no or cannot identify a specific example. While there are some small connections, such as a school-affiliated program that many core members participate in, most would not recognize the neighbor living next to their home. There are many factors that contribute to this lack of engagement. Neighbors change frequently as the community is surrounded by

student housing. Some of the core members indicate that they become frightened by loud parties nearby. It might also be a lack of desire to connect, or core members may not experience the same level of fulfillment as they do in other spaces in the community. Core members do not appear sad or experience feelings of loss because of this gap.

Significance

A key component of the L'Arche programming is to be integrated and involved in the larger community. There is more to learn about whether this lack of engagement in the surrounding neighborhood has produced a negative effect on the experience of core members. Engaging with the surrounding neighborhood and the larger community outside of L'Arche provides visibility to the society around them, which could provide advantages in recruiting, donor cultivation, or any public relations efforts.

Possible Responses

- We can determine which relationships in the larger community are important to core members and assistants and where the surrounding neighborhood falls in terms of priority.
- We can host L'Arche Spokane open houses for neighbors and the larger community. For example, Christmas Tea, Thanksgiving dinner, backyard barbecues, etc.
- We can use food incentives to get members together with neighbors, including making dinner together with people in the neighborhood.
- We can learn how best to actively engage more with Gonzaga University.
- We can provide more activities for neighbors and core members to participate in together.
- We can increase social media connectivity with the community.

Finding 9. Is There Space to Be Unhappy?

Key Insight

Core members have trouble articulating unhappiness.

Description

The data show that core members do not have many answers or detailed thoughts about being unhappy, sad, or mad. This could be because there is not a healthy space for this dialogue. Some of the core members had positive thoughts to share, but they were quite limited in their thoughts about the conflicts they were facing. Their expressions about difficulties or areas of discouragement were underdeveloped. The quantitative data would seem to support this insight. Responses to the statement “I know what makes other people sad” were among the lowest scores before being a part of the L'Arche community and they did not go up after being a part of the L'Arche community.

Significance

Providing space for bad feelings can be hard in a place of care. It is possible that members may lose touch with their uncomfortable or unhappy thoughts or states of being. Feeling all of the different types of feelings is important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and mindset. L'Arche's positivity and recognition of the good are so powerful, it may be missing the roundness and depth of feelings.

Responses

- We can coach core members on how to identify difficult feelings and increase self-awareness.
- We can proactively identify and process negative feelings when they come up for community members.
- We can provide a visual strategy or reminder of negative or difficult emotions (for example, physical symbols of anger, sadness, etc.).
- We can create regular safe spaces and opportunities for people to express challenging emotions.
- We can use opportunities like workshops, coaching, or expectation-setting exercises to help core members develop their capacity to express difficult emotions.

Finding 10. Becoming Better Advocates

Key Insight

Board members and assistants expressed room for improvement around being knowledgeable about issues affecting people with disabilities.

Description

Each board member and assistant that was interviewed was asked the question, “In what ways has your knowledge of issues affecting people with intellectual and other types of disabilities expanded through your participation in L’Arche?” One person explained her newfound awareness of the difficulty to procure consistent assistants for the L’Arche houses. She explained, “I better understand the challenges in being able to pay a livable wage for quality caregivers.” However, beyond this response, it was discovered that many of the study participants had a difficult time articulating an answer.

Some participants believed they were too entrenched in the day-to-day activities to know about the bigger picture issues and resources. While others, who do not live at the houses, conveyed a feeling of disconnect to the struggles of the core members. This is not to say that the study participants were content with their lack of knowledge regarding these challenges. One interviewee said, “I would be happy to advocate, but I need to understand [the issues] better.”

It is interesting that the questions in the survey related to advocacy show one of the greatest increases in average score from before being a part of the L’Arche community to the score as a result of being a part of the L’Arche community. The average score for items related to advocacy increased from

2.87 to 3.73 (out of 5.0), a 30 percent increase. Nevertheless, whether it is a question of greater communication, improved training, seeking out appropriate resources, or establishing novel approaches to advocacy, interviewees recognized that there is always room for improvement.

Significance

One of the intended impacts of L’Arche is that members critically engage societal values of accessibility and inclusion in advocacy for social justice. Though members actively participate in accessibility and inclusion through their day-to-day work, their lack of advocacy could mean that they are not internalizing the cause outside of the L’Arche community. Lack of participation in advocacy work also could be due to burn-out, lack of training, or a simple lack of awareness. The overall significance of this is that L’Arche’s impact is limited to its members and their influence on others, which at this time stops before it reaches a place of systems-level policy change.

Responses

- We can promote greater awareness of L’Arche and its advocacy role at the local, national and international levels.
- We can develop strategies for better communication about intellectual disability issues within the community.
- We can seek out appropriate resources for increasing interest and ability in advocacy efforts.
- We can work to establish novel approaches to advocacy.

Conclusion

Through our inquiry, we determined a number of impacts L’Arche Spokane has on community members. The data revealed that members have developed skills in loving themselves and each other, and both core members and staff have found a sense of self-worth and value through their daily activities and involvement with L’Arche. These findings are significant because they speak to an increased capacity for all members to express genuine care for others, while also growing in confidence, and experiencing greater overall happiness. Through active participation in the L’Arche community, members have grown their connections with others. Experiences at L’Arche have allowed core members and assistants to become more patient, tolerant, and open to others, which has increased their capacity to experience empathy. Core members and assistants have shown development in choice-making, setting boundaries, and leadership skills. For core members, this has been especially

transformative when feeling purpose and ownership over their own lives has resulted in increased confidence and ultimately greater happiness. The interviews revealed that L'Arche Spokane's spiritual practices and culture have contributed to increases in tolerance and improved connections with others and served to provide opportunities for personal growth and a deepened spirituality.

For many who work and volunteer at L'Arche Spokane, the work was experienced as a calling, not just a job. Many staff members felt it was a priority in their lives to take on positions in the service of the community. The data also revealed areas of potential improvement in the impacts of L'Arche. We can improve our efforts to better connect with neighbors and the greater Spokane community. L'Arche Spokane can also improve on our education, advocacy, and outreach efforts to engage society in improving accessibility, inclusion, and social justice issues that are affecting people with disabilities in our communities. This evaluation process has allowed us to better understand the significance of our impact in community in L'Arche Spokane. We were able to name and describe potential responses to continue to have beneficial impacts in our community, while at the same time continuing to improve our efforts going forward.

L'Arche Tahoma Hope Impact Report

Introduction

L'Arche Tahoma Hope (LTH) was founded in 1977 as a place of possibility and intentional community for adults with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). In L'Arche, persons who experience I/DD in their lives are known as “core members,” and “assistants” are those who come to share life with core members as companions, supporters, and caregivers. LTH formally affiliated with the international L'Arche federation in 1984. Today, the community comprises four licensed group/adult family homes, daytime programming, L'Arche Farm & Gardens employment and service-learning programs, and the Welcome Center, which connects families living with an adult with I/DD in their home with L'Arche and with one another. A total of 16 core members live in our homes, four additional core members live in other settings and work or volunteer weekly on the Farm, and 50 families that include at least one adult experiencing I/DD participate regularly in Welcome Center programs. As an organization, L'Arche Tahoma Hope employs about 50 people with an annual budget of \$2.4 million. In a typical year, we can host as many as 2,000 students, service-learning participants, volunteers, friends, and guests at our community events.

As an intentional and faith-based community, life in L'Arche is focused on the transforming power of mutual relationships across difference. Our mission calls us to invite those traditionally on the margins of society into the center of our community life. We do this in part by celebrating the unique value of every person and recognizing our need for one another, and by honoring our Christian heritage while welcoming all to grow in their own journeys of faith. We hear anecdotally that people grow in their understanding of what it means to be fully human through their experiences in L'Arche, but only rarely has the full impact of those experiences been studied or quantified. In fact, we often struggle to name what we experience even just to ourselves. LTH is grateful to be one of 12 L'Arche communities in the United States participating in Project Impact, a national

project of L'Arche USA funded by the Templeton Foundation and led by the consulting firm Dialogues in Action.

Project Impact

To launch the study, a national team drawn from participating L'Arche communities worked with the Dialogues in Action's Heart Triangle™ model to identify areas of evaluation as well as qualitative and quantitative indicators of impact, in order to assess mental, behavioral, and emotional changes experienced by core members and assistants. A common set of tools was designed to generate qualitative interview and quantitative survey data and analyses.

The areas of potential impact suggest that in L'Arche, core members:

- Identify and live out their choices
- Live full, healthy lives
- Exercise positive influence in the lives of others

Questions were also designed to measure whether L'Arche core members and assistants:

- Develop awareness, sensitivity, and curiosity for others, especially across differences in gifts and abilities
- Experience personal transformation in fundamental aspects of their lives
- Create meaningful relationships and find belonging in community with others
- Approach vocation and life purpose in a holistic and human-centered way
- Critically engage societal values of accessibility and inclusion and advocate for social justice

In the next stage of the study, each community conducted interviews and then identified themes and findings based on their own data and analyses, considering the significance of the findings for program improvement and innovation. This report presents L'Arche Tahoma Hope's findings

and considers the implications of the findings within our community as well as for our role in wider society.

Methodology

The study design included both qualitative and quantitative means to collect and analyze data. One complication that we experienced was that the study was first launched at LTH in February 2020. When the pandemic hit, we had to pause our participation. By the time we returned to the Project, we had been living with the pandemic for a year, and we had witnessed and continue to feel the impact of the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. In addition, several of the original interviewers had left the organization or moved to new roles. To begin anew, we needed to assess what data that was collected in 2020 was still relevant, refresh our understanding of the measurement tools, and recruit and train two new interviewers.

Understanding what core members are telling us requires listening not only to what they might say with words, body language, or signs, but also a close observation of their emotional state as well as knowledge of the context in which they live, work and spend time. While there are no foolproof methods for interviewing or surveying core members, L'Arche continues to experiment with tools and techniques to bridge communication divides. At LTH, we have a mix of core member communication styles, and most core members in our community are accustomed to having someone they know assist them in responding to surveys of this type.

Qualitative Data and Analysis - Interviews

We completed full analyses on 26 interviews, out of 33 conducted. The interviewees included:

8 core members (4 residential, 3 non-residential Farm & Gardens, 1 Welcome Center)

18 Assistants (14 current, 4 former)

Demographic characteristics of the interviewees include:

Length of Time in L'Arche

First Year of Involvement - 2

2-5 years - 10

6-10 years - 7

11-20 years - 3

21 years or more - 4

Racial/Ethnic Identity

White – 22

Asian – 3

Black – 1

Current/Former Daily Participant

Current – 22

Former – 4

Age Range

22 years to 76 years

Gender Identity

Woman – 15

Man – 10

Trans - 1

Quantitative Data and Analysis - Survey

Core Members. A total of 13 core members responded to the survey, with 12 living in one of our homes, and one living outside of L'Arche. Twelve indicated their race as white, with one preferring not to answer. Most of them have lived at LTH for over two decades. Nearly all responded with the support of a helper.

Length of Time in L'Arche

1-5 years - 2

6-10 years - 2

11-20 years - 1

21 years or more - 7

Response Modes

Core member on my own -1

Core member with a helper – 10

Helper on behalf of core member, based on personal knowledge - 2

Non-core Members. A total of 41 individuals responded to the survey for non-core members, including 26 staff and 23 combined responses from volunteers, Board members,

family members, former staff, and friends of the community. The majority of respondents indicated that they had worked as assistants directly with core members or in other staff roles. A few key demographics of this group include:

Length of Time in L'Arche

- First Year of Involvement - 7
- 2-5 years - 12
- 6-10 years - 3
- 11-20 years - 9
- 21 years or more - 10

Racial/Ethnic Identity

- White – 36
- Hispanic – 1
- Black – 1
- Prefer not to answer - 2

Gender Identity

- Woman – 24
- Man – 10
- Non-binary/Fluid – 2
- Prefer not to answer – 3

These data match our historical identity as a predominantly white and majority female and cisgender community, with a widening distribution across ages and lengths of time as a part of the community.

Findings

Summary of Core Member Findings (Findings 1 and 2)

The main findings from our core member interviews point to the importance of relationships in their lives, both with core members and non-core members. Core members also describe the comfort and joy they find in their interactions with others, as well as the pride and purpose they feel as known and celebrated members of the L'Arche community. There is a clear sense of belonging.

Finding 1. Relationships Remain at the Center

Key Insight

Core members experience L'Arche as a place of meaningful relationships that they can count on. These relationships are key to core members' sense of feeling cared for, especially having people they can rely on to help them make decisions, and for support through difficult times.

Description

All of the core members interviewed for this study talked about or pointed to images that conveyed the importance of relationships in their lives. Whether at home or in their work at L'Arche Farm & Gardens, the trusted relationships core members develop with their work teams and housemates remain at the center of their sense of belonging. Core members who process well verbally consistently named particular individuals who are important to them at work at L'Arche Farm & Gardens or at their L'Arche home, and they often specifically described the things that were important to them about that relationship. For example, one core member repeatedly noted that when he needed to make a choice, or when he was sad, he wanted to talk with a particular assistant. Through experience, he knew that the assistant would be able and available to help him process his options and his feelings. Another core member noted, "Sometimes I get overwhelmed. I just need alone time and to talk to one person who I trust." And when that happens, she says she feels "good. I feel cared about."

Another core member repeatedly named core member housemates during the interview, talking about the things they have in common and what they enjoy doing together. When this core member was asked about what she likes about her life since she came to L'Arche, what seems most important to her is that her relational world has expanded and now includes her L'Arche family, her Deaf family (through her relationship with a deaf resident in another adult family home), and her church family (through getting connected with a faith community that worships in ASL).

The finding about the importance of relationships also held true for core members who do not process verbally as easily. For example, a core member who has worked on the

Farm for many years consistently pointed to pictograms of people in his responses and mostly ignored every other response option. Based on his response choices, it is reasonable to conclude that people and relationships at the Farm are very important aspects of his work life and that he feels included.

Significance

This finding confirms that core members in L'Arche experience relationships as central to their sense of being cared for, whether the relationship is with a fellow core member or an assistant. Core members rely on their relationships for a sense of belonging, for helping to process their emotions, and for more practical aspects of life such as making decisions.

Core members also rely on assistants to help them stay connected with family and friends outside of L'Arche. Several core members named their connection with their parents and siblings as important sources of support as well.

Finding 2. Keys to Empowerment: Fostering Pride and Purpose

Key Insight

Core members experience pride and purpose in L'Arche. They feel they have an important role in their home or program as well as in the community, and they take pride in the areas in which they make independent choices for their lives.

Description

During interviews, core members stated that they enjoy times when they are more independent and have space to be themselves. Some choices that core members named as important were: choosing when to have time off, picking out their clothes, choosing what to watch on TV, deciding what they want for breakfast, and choosing who they want to hang out with.

Core members also described what they perceive to be their role when they are in a group setting. A core member who works on the Farm said,

I am a good core member, a leader of the farm, and I follow all the rules. I communicate without being rude. I

am kind and a leader. People ask me about me and they are respectful.

For this core member, understanding the rules and working to follow them were essential to his experience of purpose and belonging in the group. Another core member described her purpose as being a helper as she participates in group activities: “In the Welcome Center [where daytime programs take place], I help interpret, write, draw. For them, I read, show books. When that’s done, I help interpret.”

Several core members described their role in terms of sharing a particular gift, such as being the funny person on the team or being a person who asks how people are doing and offers hugs and caring. Pride in participating in household chores was also mentioned. Core members who have the opportunity to volunteer either within L'Arche or in the wider community expressed pride in having the chance to help others.

The quantitative survey data bear out this finding. In response to the statement “I know what I’m good at in my life,” 50% of core members selected “A lot” when reflecting on their time before L'Arche. Since being in L'Arche, 100% of the core members responded with “A lot.”

Significance

This finding is significant in that it confirms L'Arche’s ongoing work to maintain a strong culture of “doing with” over “doing for” in interactions with and between core members. The sense of pride that core members feel in their ability to do things and make choices for themselves as well as to support and help others is key to feeling empowered. L'Arche’s emphasis on celebrating one another’s gifts is confirmed by this finding, as core members can recognize their own gifts and feel a sense of purpose when they share their gifts with others.

In the assistant interviews, some concern was expressed that L'Arche still has work to do to more fully engage core members in making decisions for their lives and in participating in making decisions in community life. A longing by assistants for better inclusion practices and greater empowerment of core members in L'Arche will be further explored in Finding F below.

Responding to the Core Member Findings

Taken together, these two findings demonstrate that adults experiencing I/DD develop significant relationships and experience a sense of pride and purpose through their experience in L'Arche. While L'Arche is certainly not the only place where adults with I/DD experience empowerment and belonging, this finding does point to one potential difference between L'Arche and other settings where adults with I/DD are considered “clients” who receive services based on perceived differences in abilities. In these settings, staff is generally encouraged not to develop friendships or close relationships with the clients. At L'Arche, positive and healthy assistant-core member friendships are encouraged, and these findings show that core members benefit from that sense of closeness with assistants who both care about them personally and ensure that core members have opportunities to be independent contributors to community life.

It is notable that 100% of the core members surveyed responded that they feel happy “A lot” since being a part of L'Arche. From the study findings overall, it seems clear that trusting relationships with assistants, friendships with one another, a clear sense of their own gifts, and ways to share those gifts are cornerstones of a positive and meaningful experience for core members in L'Arche. As LTH continues to explore ways to further empower core members to make their own choices for their lives, it will be important to continue to listen to what core members tell us is most important to them.

Summary of Assistant Findings (Findings 3-7)

Although L'Arche assistants come from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, and for a varied range of reasons, study results show that assistants experience many similar significant impacts. From experiencing being loved and cared for in new ways, learning to be more empathetic toward others and themselves, expanding their spiritual practices, and coming to value the importance of reflection to making meaningful choices in their lives, assistants grow in their understanding of what makes for healthy relationships and communities. Often this growth comes

through individual and interpersonal struggles, leading assistants to wrestle with questions about power, choice, and how to make a difference. Assistants carry these questions throughout their time in L'Arche and into the world after they leave.

Finding 3. “What the World Needs Now Is Love, Sweet Love” and L'Arche is One Place to Find It

Key Insight

As they grow in their relationships in L'Arche, assistants grow in empathy toward others.

Description

In many interviews, assistants mentioned growing in understanding and empathy towards others, particularly through the experience of intentional community life. There were several factors that assistants cited for why their empathy for others grew. First, listening to others was particularly important, including taking in the other person's body language in order to better understand them. Assistants mentioned that they grew in their ability to use different communication styles as well as becoming more aware of different conflict styles. In one interview an assistant said, “I feel more encouraged to help people to have an open mind and be patient with people, because we are all going through something, and some are just better at hiding it.”

Second, assistants noted that they learned to love those they did not get along with or click with at first. Specifically, living with all types of people helped them learn many new things about people that they would not have otherwise been exposed to. Relationships deepened in sharing fun times and celebrations as much as in experiencing conflict and hurt feelings. An assistant noted, “I tend to be logical and practical, and I feel like here I've become more patient, open to emotional connection to others, giving and receiving support.”

Assistants particularly appreciated how they came to these learnings through their experiences with core members. One assistant commented, “I've learned from [core members] to give love more freely.” Another said, “I feel like the [core members] love so unapologetically and genuinely. They are not afraid to love, even though I sometimes was and am.”

The quantitative survey data support these findings. In all of the questions related to valuing differences, the mean aggregate scores increased more than a full point when assistants were asked about the difference in themselves before and after becoming a part of the L'Arche community. Strikingly, responses to “I feel confident communicating to people across differences” increased from a mean of 2.80 to 4.15, a 48% increase.

It may be that assistants' growth in empathy is also related to their overall growth in relational skills. Survey responses also show growth in understanding what makes others happy or triggers them negatively, in ability to sustain healthy relationships with a broad range of people, and in feeling connected and working through conflicts.

Significance

Living in the world can be a frightening, confusing, and isolating experience for many people, especially in young adulthood when many assistants come to L'Arche. This finding is encouraging because it tells us that assistants in L'Arche often experience something quite the opposite: L'Arche Tahoma Hope is a place where people experience love and belonging.

In a world short on empathy, this finding provides significant support for the L'Arche model of community being a place where differences can be bridged. Social science research shows that a lack of empathy can lead to increased violence and antisocial behaviors that undermine our society as a place where everyone can thrive. Empathy has also been described as the cornerstone of emotional intelligence. Increased emotional intelligence supports personal growth and success in a myriad of ways, from building more stable family lives to being more effective in the workplace.

Empathy also builds resilience during tough times. Instead of blaming others or taking the blame, empathy helps people offer patience and understanding to one another, as well as to themselves, as the next finding shows.

Finding 4. Learning Self-Acceptance

Key Insight

Engaging in community life and relationships in L'Arche leads assistants to growth in self-acceptance.

Description

This finding is closely linked to the one above, as growing in empathy for oneself and growing in empathy for others is often closely tied. As assistants grew in empathy toward others, they learned that they could extend that empathy to themselves as well. Compassion toward themselves came from a sense of feeling loved by others in the community - both core members and assistants. Interviewees noted that it is easier to love yourself when others love you because receiving love freely given encourages you to believe that you are worthy of receiving that love. An assistant noted that when others accepted her even in her failure, she was able to grow from the experience, rather than getting stuck in self-doubt. When another assistant was asked what is important for her life and vocation she said,

To help others believe in their own worthiness and belovedness - to know they are beloved. I think core members have helped me do that for myself...core members flip it back on me and help me know I'm loved just for being me and not for the role I do.

As a tangible demonstration of feeling cared for, many people mentioned that they are learning to share their wants and needs. Through working and living at L'Arche, they have learned they are worth speaking up for. When asked what skills she is learning one assistant said, “I've learned to say what's on my mind more. Especially in more difficult times. Instead of just saying I'm fine, I'm able to say that it's hurting me in some way.” Another assistant said as she reflected on how she's changed in community: “I've been encouraged more to pat myself on the back. I really don't like it but I've been doing it lately. Especially when I bake, I used to brush off the compliments, but now I say thank you and know that I am a good baker.” Assistants seem to be learning self-acceptance while in the L'Arche community, often overcoming rather than continuing patterns of being perfectionistic or overly accommodating.

Assistants also said that they have learned greater patience and acceptance of their own physical, mental, or emotional struggles through deep relationships in L'Arche. Assistants identify with the struggles of core members because of similarities they can see as fellow humans with their own struggles. After mentioning some of the ways she struggles in life, an assistant remarked, "There have been days when I don't feel like I can make it till [the end of the work day], but my relationships with the core members have shown me that I can be fully myself and show up as I am, and that's okay." It seems that close relationships with others in community help foster self-acceptance even through difficult situations.

Survey responses show that assistants feel freer to be who they are as a result of their experiences in L'Arche, which is also related to self-acceptance. In response to the statement "I do not hide who I am," more than twice as many respondents answered "quite a bit" or "very much" as a result of being a part of the L'Arche community (68%) as compared to before being a part of the community (30%).

Significance

Self-love and self-acceptance can be hard skills to learn. They are not things most people learn in the workplace and sometimes may not be valued in a professional setting, because these so-called "soft skills" are not perceived to lead to greater productivity or profit. It is significant that the values and practices of L'Arche lead people toward self-acceptance in a world that often does not offer that.

Like empathy for others, self-acceptance is a valuable skill that builds resilience and emotional intelligence. Self-acceptance allows people to embrace all of who they are and to be patient with themselves through difficult moments. Rather than getting stuck in self-doubt or overly critical thoughts, assistants in L'Arche often learn to forgive themselves and be content with what they can contribute, knowing that they are doing their best and that their self-worth is rooted in being a loved human being rather than through how much they can get done or how well they can perform their tasks. Self-acceptance allows people to acknowledge both their strengths and their weaknesses, and to connect with others on that basis. This also gives people a

good foundation from which to grow as a person and in their relationships.

Finding 5. "Spiritual but Not Religious" is an Opportunity

Key Insight

L'Arche asks all community members to be open to spiritual growth. This finding demonstrates that by fostering an environment that is welcoming to people with and without religious backgrounds and draws from many faith and humanistic traditions, assistants experience new ways of making meaning and expressing their spirituality.

Description

Regardless of the role of a faith tradition in assistants' lives, once they come to L'Arche, they encounter other beliefs and traditions in an environment of welcome and respect. In the process of building relationships with other members of the community, assistants became more open to and accepting of others' beliefs, rather than judging them. This finding held true whether assistants came to L'Arche with a set of values and beliefs that were shaped by their experience with a particular faith tradition, or whether they came with a sense of rejecting or growing beyond a particular faith tradition, or with no tradition at all. A former assistant commented,

I was always told that you should make friends with everybody, but your best friends should be the same, thinking the same thing as you. I think in L'Arche, I was washed with the realization that's not the only way to do that, and it's actually a lot more enriching, that spiritual community not only exists, but it exists in a more healthy way amongst people who are different and have different views on things.

When purposely made welcoming to all, community worship and celebrations encourage assistants to discover new expressions of spirituality without fear of being judged. These expressions continue to be meaningful. A former assistant shared,

The spiritual aspects in terms of specific religious settings didn't do much for me, positive or negative. Whatever.

But I think L'Arche helped define some of the values that I think are important. Like "All are Welcome," that we all have our own gifts, and that being who we authentically are is a way to let the light shine. The traditions of gathering I found very meaningful. And still do.

Many interviewees noted that this encounter with other belief systems and ways of practicing spirituality caused them to grow in their understanding of their own beliefs. Many, although not all, specifically mentioned that they moved toward a less structured spirituality and away from observing specific traditions solely because they should or were expected to. These assistants felt more confident in creating their own practices by developing or reclaiming traditions that are meaningful to them. One assistant summed it up well by saying,

I've been exposed [in L'Arche] to all these other ways [of finding meaning], and at this time in my life I am finding great comfort in going back to the scriptures I grew up with. Now that I have been able to come back to that in a very new way that does not feel boxed but feels open... it can interact and be enhanced by all of these other ways that people make meaning and seek the holy and God in their life. Those other ways don't feel threatening anymore; they can enhance the way I seek out God and the holy.

L'Arche structures and practices such as community worship, celebrations, and formation create both the encounter with different values and beliefs as well as the opportunity for individuals to reflect on their own values and beliefs. Another assistant described having more choices now in how spirituality can be lived and made a meaningful part of life:

I like L'Arche spirituality because it focuses on interaction and relationship as being spiritual and sacred. Prayer now seems more open and can just be what you are grateful for in the day. L'Arche spirituality seems more open and fluid and human; it isn't so much about what is right and wrong but just about who you are. I think that my spirituality is more fluid now and less structured. It used to be about going to church on Sundays, but now I have more choice. The choices that I do make now feel more

meaningful - like when I do go to church or pray with a core member. Because now it's about me wanting to do it.

Unfortunately, the core member survey tool did not successfully elicit responses from core members about their spiritual journeys in L'Arche. However, it is worth noting that many of the corporate celebrations at LTH are rooted in long-standing traditions that are meaningful to core members and that they talk about and look forward to, such as prayer times and observances during the Christian seasons of Advent and Lent.

Significance

In a world where people sometimes get dug into their spiritual corners with devastating effects, L'Arche offers a way of affirming a plurality of beliefs without losing our identity as a community that values our individual and collective spiritual journey. Not that there aren't sometimes tensions; the significant thing is that we work to remain open to one another because of the value we place on mutuality in relationships. An openness to other faith traditions requires assistants to regard their practitioners as fellow human beings on their own journey of meaning, rather than people to fear or criticize or even to go to war against.

At L'Arche Tahoma Hope, we intentionally strive to hold our historical roots in Roman Catholicism together with the current reality of who is attracted to our community by finding ways to welcome and include a plurality of beliefs and practices. We have specifically worked to infuse beauty into our rituals, as well as to ensure that those rituals don't perpetuate harm. While this is not easy to put into practice, and we don't always get it right, this finding shows that our efforts are bearing fruit for assistants as they experience and describe their own spiritual growth.

Traditionally, L'Arche has claimed a spirituality based in relationship. Given the high value that core members place on relationships, it is likely that practices that emphasize connection will hold more meaning for them. There is more to be explored in this regard.

These findings point to the difference between religion and spirituality. While the comment "I'm spiritual but not

religious” is often lamented by mainline traditions as they see their formal membership falling, at L’Arche it is an opportunity to explore what that can mean for our corporate faith life and for assistants’ spiritual lives. We may come from different religions or no religion, but we are able to practice spirituality together in meaningful ways that enrich our community life and our individual spiritual journeys.

Finding 6. “Mind the Gap” - Longing for Justice Inside and Out

Key Insight

Many assistants come to L’Arche wanting to live into their growing understanding of what a more just world should look like. For some, L’Arche is falling short in living their understanding of our values. And for most, this longing doesn’t translate into working for change in the wider community, either while they are in L’Arche or after leaving.

Description

A significant number of assistants talked in their interviews about a perceived dichotomy between who L’Arche says we are and their lived experience and observation of how we actually share community life and structure ourselves as an organization. This dichotomy was named as both a sense of falling short in our practices of inclusion, as well as not modeling more diversity of perspectives in our membership and in our decision-making structure. Complicated power dynamics and internal tensions around these issues were acknowledged as part of daily life in the community.

Interviewees said that inclusion, to them, means allowing all people to authentically voice their desires and opinions - meaning that people who have traditionally experienced life on the margins of society are given voice and space to be themselves, and not just used for the community to claim greater diversity. There were different perceptions as to how well L’Arche does this, with some assistants feeling that LTH does it well, and others feeling that we are falling short. As one long-time assistant and leader in the community explained,

I think when I first came here, the amount of inclusion was super radical to me. Everyone seemed on an equal

playing field and everyone was included. I now feel like this is a place that we have to grow because I have learned about disability justice and because of our large majority of white people. This comes back to my questions about power structures and dynamics. L’Arche in a lot of ways has benefits over a lot of group care settings, but we are not the apex. We cannot be regarded as the most radical anymore. We are not the pinnacle of radical inclusion at this point.

Assistants also stated in their interviews that it is a fine line between empowerment and control. As the caregiver, there is a level of power that needs to be used thoughtfully and kindly. This is often an area of growth over time, as assistants realize their initial efforts to empower others end up being controlling rather than supportive. Assistants find they need to do the hard work of separating themselves from those decisions. One way that an assistant said they deal with this dynamic is to emphasize healthy choices, but without forcing core members to make the same decision the assistant would make. Another described a shift to understanding empowerment as “being with” rather than “doing for.”

Both current and former assistants talked about being much more aware of the barriers in society for people with disabilities, whether it is related to medical and governmental systems or the physical environment such as lack of truly accessible restrooms in public places. Survey results showed a significant increase in positive responses to the statement, “I feel confident discussing disability rights.” The score rose from a mean of 2.30 before being part of the L’Arche community to a mean of 3.83 after, a 67% increase.

When it comes to taking action through advocacy, however, the picture is more mixed. Survey results showed only a slight increase in response to the statement, “I actively advocate for a more just society,” from a mean of 3.0 to 3.92. A few assistants among those interviewed talked about personally advocating for individual core member needs and about helping core members use their own voices with policymakers and through the ballot box. Many assistants expressed a desire to make a difference in how society at large treats people with disabilities, but they also felt they

lacked knowledge, time, or motivation to do so. A current assistant noted,

I definitely want to be more active on a political level - something I never thought of before. I want to be an ally, lend my voice to the disabled population. I feel empowered, because of L'Arche, to venture into whatever that might look like.

The quantitative survey data were analyzed to see whether longevity in the community affected what assistants know and how they feel about and act on their understanding of disability rights awareness and advocacy. Although the sample is too small to draw definitive conclusions, the data reveals a few interesting possibilities when the results of questions about awareness and advocacy before and after being a part of L'Arche are cross-tabulated with the length of time that respondents, specifically those who had provided direct care, said they had been a part of the community. Those with five years or fewer in the community were the majority of current direct care assistants who responded, whereas, for former direct care assistants, the majority had been part of the community for six or more years.

For current direct care assistants with three years or less in L'Arche, there is a slightly higher baseline in awareness of and confidence in their ability to discuss disability rights before they came to L'Arche, as compared to former direct care assistants with more years in L'Arche. Therefore, the percent increase in the mean scores for all current assistants for awareness is significantly smaller (70% increase) than for former assistants with a longer time in L'Arche (118% increase). On confidence in their ability to discuss, the mean increase was only 55% for current assistants, as compared with 92% for former assistants, again because of a higher baseline. Therefore it can't be concluded that a longer time in L'Arche is associated with a larger impact on assistants' awareness and confidence in discussing disability rights.

By contrast, with regard to advocacy, scores for both current and former direct care assistants were similarly spread across the scale of "Not at all" to "Very much" for before their time in L'Arche. After their time in L'Arche, while both groups' scores increased, they were still fairly

evenly distributed between the "Some" category and the combination of "Quite a bit" and "Very much." This is consistent with the qualitative finding of a gap between what assistants know and believe versus how they act in the advocacy arena, and that gap appears to persist across the length of time in the community.[2]

It is notable that not a single respondent answered "Not at all" on any of the questions about awareness, skills, and advocacy after their time in L'Arche. They had all felt at least some impact on their understanding, awareness, and ability to address disability rights and to support, speak up for, and/or advocate for vulnerable populations.

Significance

The founding story of the global movement of L'Arche, as it continues to reveal itself over 50 years later, includes powerful seeds of personal growth, transformation, and empowerment - and thorny weeds of paternalism, colonialism, and abuse of power. Sometimes it feels as if we live in a web of tensions: human service agency and employer versus intentional community of voluntary members; holding responsibility for vulnerable lives versus empowering each person to choose their own risks, failures, and successes; and radical change-makers versus evolving through learning and growing together. Yet we are all of these things and more, depending on the views and values of who is in the community at any given time.

L'Arche's belief and confidence in the transformative power of human relationships across difference makes for a resilient foundation for exploring these tensions, and for identifying and moving toward changes that will strengthen our community and hopefully the L'Arche movement. We are living with the understanding that often L'Arche does empower people to live their best lives, as noted by the findings from this study, as well as the reality that we must also continue to examine our organizational culture and traditions for traces of paternalism, unhealthy power dynamics, and imbalances between choices and sacrifices.

Finding 7. “What will you do with your one wild and precious life?” ~Mary Oliver

Key Insight

L’Arche Tahoma Hope assistants benefit from approaching their “wild and precious” lives deliberately, by consciously taking time to reflect on and grow from their experiences. As part and parcel of this, assistants also take their evolving understanding of what “community” is and how to build it beyond L’Arche when they leave, some with more success than others.

Description

In their interviews, many assistants mentioned the importance of intentionality, by which they meant living their lives with some kind of deliberate guiding direction or purpose, as an important part of their journey with L’Arche. Assistants felt that trying to deliberately understand themselves and others helped bring their own values into focus. What can at first seem like forced intimacy when they arrive at L’Arche soon grows into an invitation to go deeper into their hearts and souls and to be honest with themselves. Specific spaces in community life were named as helpful in this process. For example, one assistant said,

I think the small things, team meetings, check-ins, having space for sacred stories, different celebrations, and rituals, are all things that helped me grow and helped me better define what was really important to me.

In the area of spirituality, another assistant said,

When I first got here, I didn’t know where I fell on the spectrum of spirituality. But joining ‘Sacred Space’ and formation has opened up the idea of believing in the energy that we all have inside of us and in myself. Formation kind of opens that up for you and helps you think about it.

Another assistant spoke about their struggle not to measure themselves by a traditional understanding of what it means to be successful at work.

I naively thought when I was new to community that a lot of the [internal] changes that have occurred, or that I still hoped to occur, would happen naturally just by being

here...in this environment. That I would grow and develop in my attitudes and my behaviors. And in a way that is true, but it doesn’t just happen. It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of repetition and time and conscious effort to unlearn things that we’re carrying with us, and to learn new things in their place.

This intentionality takes place in both inward and outward directions. Inward, by assistants developing a deeper relationship with themselves by understanding their own needs, values, and desires as noted in the quotes above. But also, outward, by diving into a deeper understanding of community and allowing themselves to be changed by it. Many assistants initially found the notion of “community” to be a difficult thing. Most expressed some form of the sentiment that living a life in community with others poses challenges by needing to try to balance their own needs and desires with those of others. One former assistant noted that he had learned that, “You can make a community anywhere. Maybe you can’t make a L’Arche community anywhere, but you can build community anywhere, whether or not you are with people with disabilities. And it’s a lot harder than it looks.”

By making an effort to show up, assistants said that their understanding of community and their role in it deepened. For some, this stemmed from coming to believe that community was a place where everyone could be themselves and try to find themselves with the love, support, and acceptance of others. For others, this grew from a kind of empathy with others in the community - recognizing that everyone was in the same boat of trying to work out what it meant to be a good, satisfied person. One long-term assistant said that when thinking about community, “investment” came to mind - a sense of mission or purpose. Though others might have different priorities or interests within that mission, everyone is united in the broader goal of creating connection and giving everyone the space to be who they need to be.

The self-awareness that is gained through reflection and personal growth while at L’Arche is reflected in the survey data as well. As a result of being part of the L’Arche

community, a majority of respondents indicated increases in self-understanding, clarity of beliefs, and feeling comfortable in their own skin. About a third of respondents indicated an increase in practicing personal reflection. The largest increases are associated with the statement “I know my place in the world,” going up from a mean of 2.88 to 3.65.

For assistants who have left L’Arche to enter other career fields, the time and space for reflection and accompaniment relationships can be greatly missed. A former assistant expressed a sentiment echoed by others who have left L’Arche when he said,

Being at my current point in life [in medical school], I don’t have functional accompaniment, like where I have someone who knows me well, knows the details of what’s happening in my life right now: who I’m living with, what parts of it are hard, what parts of it are life-giving. [Someone] who can comment or give me a space to reflect. What could I be doing differently? What is my goal? How do I best approach that? So in terms of appreciating differences [between people], that’s something I’m still trying to do since leaving L’Arche but it’s much more difficult. It’s easily several orders of magnitude more difficult outside community than it was inside community.

Significance

L’Arche Tahoma Hope strives to be a place where people can be who they need to be and uncover who they want to be. This finding suggests that L’Arche is succeeding in accompanying assistants as they undertake the long process of discerning what it is that drives them, as well as in discovering and sometimes redefining for themselves the value of community.

And as the experience of former assistants shows us, this process of rooting, taking time to reflect on our lives, and to think and talk things through, is not something people get a lot of encouragement or structure to do in other environments. Those who leave L’Arche miss the intentional time and space for developing a sense of purpose that can help to counter a lot of the anxiety of modern life.

Responses to Assistant Findings

The findings related to assistants point us to several important responses that touch on staff recruitment, formation and training, accompaniment and supervision, leadership formation and practices, community life, and organizational fundraising.

Implications for Staff Recruitment

L’Arche’s staffing model includes a significant amount of planned, voluntary turnover, resulting in a mix of longer-term assistants and many who stay just one or two years. This means that we are continually engaged in recruitment efforts for new assistants. The findings in this report could help our messaging, in order to attract people who seek personal growth in the ways L’Arche supports assistants to grow. The idea of a community of people trying to improve themselves, do good, and be intentional about their interactions with others, especially across differences, may prove quite attractive to those with similar values. The findings might be particularly relevant for the recruitment of live-in assistants, because of the added intensity and the speed of personal growth that often comes with sharing home life with others on a 24/7 basis.

Implications for Assistant Training and Formation

While L’Arche has always emphasized formation as a crucial part of the L’Arche experience, these findings point to areas that it would be helpful to focus on when designing skill training and formation. Skills such as active listening and learning to communicate in nonverbal ways could be cultivated more intentionally. In addition, the findings support L’Arche’s ongoing attention to the fruitfulness of individual and group reflection time to surface, name, and process the ways assistants experience relationships in L’Arche.

L’Arche spirituality is often the subject of formation. These findings suggest that inviting assistants to remain open to new experiences, engage one another about their values and beliefs, and participate in corporate worship activities are effective ways to encourage them in their personal spiritual journeys – whether the impact shows up relatively soon after they arrive, or years later.

Exploration of values, and ways to connect behaviors to values both as individuals and as a community, would be another fruitful topic for formation. This is particularly true in responding to the finding about the gap between the desire for a more just world and the challenge of doing the work that is required to make change happen. Through our ongoing work on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, LTH will continue to explore how we can be more intentional in fostering both awareness of discrimination and inequality, as well as cultivating attitudes and actions that promote equity and inclusion.

Finally, the assistant findings point to the need for a library of common tools for accompaniers and teams to use for reflection and meaning-making in a variety of settings in the community. While some of these tools exist, an important next step will be to review their effectiveness through the lens of these findings.

Implications for Accompaniment and Supervision

Accompaniment in L'Arche combines supervision of roles and tasks with concern and care for the whole person as a member of the community. These findings support exploring specific themes in the accompaniment relationship related to our desired impacts, and connecting those themes with specific behaviors using examples of the joys and challenges experienced by assistants in our daily life together. As we review and revise our guidelines and expectations for accompaniment, these findings will help us ensure the opportunity for assistants to grow through the accompaniment relationship.

The findings also strongly support the importance of the Spiritual Life Director role, who is someone who also accompanies assistants through the struggles and joys that come with personal growth. Sometimes assistants need someone outside their supervisory relationship to talk with about what is going on in their life and their relationships, and the Spiritual Life Director offers counseling experience and a theological framework to help assistants make sense of their experience.

Implications for Leadership Formation and Practices

An important implication of these findings for leaders is a sense of reassurance that the impact of L'Arche is actually what we say and believe it to be. Leaders tend to be problem-solvers and to focus on the gaps, sometimes at the expense of taking the time to acknowledge and reinforce what is going right. These findings support confidence that as a community, we are living the L'Arche mission in ways that assistants find positive and impactful.

Leadership practices are the focus of work at all levels of L'Arche, as the organization continues to grapple with the international Inquiry into inappropriate and coercive relationships maintained over decades by our founder, Jean Vanier. It is critical that leaders in L'Arche understand the tender place in which assistants often find themselves as they wrestle with big questions in their lives, and that appropriate supports and boundaries are in place that promotes safe exploration of these questions.

Leaders also have to be ready to listen deeply and respond to calls for change in ways that are authentic, rather than performative, while continuing to keep the mission of L'Arche at the forefront of who we are and what we do. This is a difficult task that requires safe and brave formation spaces where leaders can be both supported and challenged in their own growth.

Implications for Community Life

Community life in L'Arche can be challenging. These findings prompt us to continue to find ways to tell ourselves our own stories and our common L'Arche story. We need to remind ourselves what is good, right, and true, even while we struggle to grow and improve. One example of this would be to continue our intentional way of making our corporate celebrations beautiful, thoughtful, welcoming, accessible, and inviting. Another example is to share the voices of former and longer-term assistants more often, as they can offer perspective on what their experience in L'Arche means for them later in life.

It is also worth considering how we can continue to cultivate relationships and engagement with former assistants who are missing the rituals and reflection spaces that helped them navigate life in L'Arche. This could be as Board

members, community accompaniers, volunteers, donors, or regular participants in certain community activities such as community nights, birthday celebrations, or formation.

Implications for Fundraising

As small, independent non-profit organizations, most

L'Arche communities experience a need to raise funds independent of state contracts or other fee-based income streams. These findings will help reach both individual and institutional funders, particularly those who are interested in positive human development, the formation of values, and nurturing the spiritual journeys of young adults.

Conclusion

In general, the findings of this study bear out the impacts that were posited at the beginning. Core members at L'Arche Tahoma Hope identify and live out their choices, live full and healthy lives, and exercise a positive influence in the lives of others. The findings also affirm that L'Arche fosters measurable and transformational personal growth for assistants, specifically in their awareness, sensitivity, and curiosity about others. Assistants come to approach vocation and life-purpose in a more holistic and human-centered way, with some element of concern for accessibility and inclusion, and a desire to advocate for social justice. Significantly, both assistants and core members create meaningful relationships and find belonging in community with others.

The study findings point to a more extensive effect on assistants' skills in listening and in growing in empathy toward others and acceptance of themselves than was originally expected. At LTH, there is also a significant impact on the spiritual lives of assistants that was not fully anticipated. These are areas of strength that L'Arche needs to continue to cultivate.

The study findings leave us with some questions, however. It is difficult to tease out the effects of longevity on the impact of L'Arche on assistants and core members. There is a need for tools and strategies for going deeper with core members, to better assess their needs and desires for independence and inclusion. There is also considerably more anecdotal evidence of the positive impact of L'Arche on core member lives overall, and particularly on their faith journeys, than this study captures. Clarity on the role of L'Arche in forming and fulfilling assistants' desire for and work toward social justice is another area to continue to unpack.

Between the first and second phases of this study, L'Arche Tahoma Hope adopted a new five-year mandate, outlining the areas in which the community seeks to learn, deepen and grow. The findings of the study align well with our mandate priorities, which call us to strengthen our care for one another in the context of working toward a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable community. The implications of the study will be integrated into our strategic plan for putting the mandate into action, which should be completed within the next few months.

LTH extends deep gratitude to all who have helped design and carry out this study, from those who secured funding to all who worked on project design and implementation. Many thanks to all who spent time in interviews and who responded to the survey, and particularly to those who supported core members to respond to the survey. It was a true community effort, and one that will support our efforts to attract, engage and support all who make L'Arche their community, whether for a period of time or for life.

Part 7- L'Arche Impact Reflections

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Relational Matters: Reflection on the L'Arche Impact Report

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." – Ann Frank

In the field of psychotherapy, we often discuss “therapeutic action,” the concept of *what facilitates change in psychotherapy*. What are the circumstances, actions, and attitudes of patient and therapist that make possible real and lasting transformation? This impact study by L'Arche USA is asking similar questions about life in and with L'Arche. It's safe to say that anyone who's ever been involved with L'Arche knows it makes a difference in the lives of its members and beyond. But just *what* difference it is making and how is that change created for core members, assistants, staff, board members and friends? And what is left out? What flaws, insufficiencies, or gaps are revealed in the study in what it concludes, and by what it might not include at all? I find myself reflecting on these questions from both my own experience with L'Arche (I'm a former assistant and board member, among other connections) and from the perspective of my intersecting vocations as a therapist and professor who engages the convergences of relational psychoanalysis, spirituality, and pastoral care.

The impact report reveals that L'Arche facilitates growth and transformation for its members. Involvement with L'Arche moves people toward more compassion and self-compassion, greater appreciation of difference, increased self-awareness, experiences of mutual recognition, deeper connections with oneself and others, and a growing sense of meaning and purpose. This resonates fully with my own experience over a 25-year relationship with L'Arche, and it is a portrait of what many psychotherapists would see as a movement toward a fuller and more authentically related human life. What follows

are a few observations of the report's conclusions from a relational and “psychology of spirituality” perspective. These observations are not meant to be comprehensive, but simply to highlight a few areas of psychological resonance.

We matter, we need to know that we matter, we need to know others matter.

Relational psychoanalysis frames the human person as created in and by relationships. Each of us needs to feel recognized and valued by others who care for us. Ronald Fairbairn, a British psychoanalyst, claimed we must experience ourselves as the “gleam in the other's eye.” Not all of us have this experience in our early lives (and no one has it perfectly), but later relationships can help to resume the developmental movement toward a healthy feeling of being a valid and valued person.

Developmentally, the experience of being recognized allows a healthy sense of boundaries between self and “other.” When I am recognized as myself, I can recognize you as yourself, separate and different from me, but also connected to me. I can only be me authentically because you are you, authentically. This mutual recognition of the “irreducible autonomy of the other” (a phrase coined by relational psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin) means that we can be in authentic relationship without the illusion that the other person is under our control or that they must be as we have imagined them. The other's value rests in their being there as a person.

The Impact Report reveals the transformative potential of L'Arche in terms that resonate with the psychological need for

mutual recognition and for feeling valued as ourselves.. Not everyone arrives at L'Arche with a sense that they matter, but time in L'Arche brings to life the psychological and spiritual conviction that everyone counts.

We need to feel our contributions matter.

Whether from a clinical or spiritual point of view, a corollary of our need to know we matter is the need to feel our relationships are not one-sided, and that we have the ability and power to contribute in a way that matters. British analysts Donald Winnicott and Melanie Klein both emphasize the developmental need to feel we are “contributing-in” to our relationships and communities. In the quest for mutual recognition, being “done-to” or “done for” is not helpful. Instead, it is essentially one side of a potentially exploitative dynamic – one person is doing and the other one is being done-to. The doer-done-to dynamic is the opposite of mutuality. The Impact Report reveals an understanding of this potential danger is implicit in the L'Arche model. Part of the impact L'Arche has on the life of its members is that it fosters both mutual recognition and mutual vulnerability that values “doing-with,” so that all members feel empowered to contribute in to the community via their unique talents, skills, ideas, and energy. For many people at L'Arche (and in the world for that matter), in all different roles, being able to contribute in, and to have those contributions acknowledged and valued, is a powerful and transformative experience.

The myth of independence and invulnerability is just that, a myth. But there are dangers.

Whether from a psychological or spiritual point of view, there is transformative potential in recognizing our interdependence and our need for one another. There is no human being who is not vulnerable in some way and at some time, but American culture in particular has tended to depict the ideal person as tough, independent, and self-sufficient. Clinically, the need to appear “in control” or to “not need anyone” can cause significant suffering. A relational psychoanalytic understanding of personhood stresses that our human vulnerability is a given and that our

need for one another, rather than being “weakness,” is in fact the foundation of compassion and justice. In a framework of mutuality – mutual recognition and valuing of the other – we are able to say, “I see you,” and also, “your suffering can move me.” The Impact report highlights the experience of mutual vulnerability and interdependence as potentially powerful agents of growth. However, the elevation of ideas of vulnerability also holds potential danger when the reality of power is not also recognized.

Power must be acknowledged.

There is no human relationship that is completely free of the dynamics of power. Some of us hesitate to accept this statement because we think of power as threatening or negative. This is not the case. Without power, nothing could move! But power can become dangerous – certainly when it is abused, but also when it is not acknowledged. It is a central tenet of professional ethics in both psychotherapy and ministry that awareness of power helps to discourage its abuse. Because of the varying realities of ability and resources (physical, emotional, spiritual) among L'Arche members, at any given time one person or group is in a position of power in relation to another person or group. In light of this reality, we might rely on the wisdom of the late Lewis Aron, a relational analyst who reminds clinicians of the “mutual but not equivalent” dynamic in the therapeutic relationship. Those in a position of power in whatever way have an obligation to recognize use their power in ways to empower, advocate for, and encourage others (“power with” rather than “power over”).

The fact is that being vulnerable with another entails risk, but it should not be an occasion for exploitation. Transformation can be fostered in vulnerability, but only in a framework of sufficient trust and safety where the boundaries and expectations are clear, and the differences in power are acknowledged.

It would be remiss not to invoke the fact of the revelation of the abuses of power that are part of the founding story and history of L'Arche. Although many in the USA communities may not have had any direct or meaningful relationship with Jean Vanier, the reality of his behavior and its hiddenness

conflicting findings, including those that provoke discomfort and disappointment given desired outcome. The world cloud above visually displays common words in the report—one can begin to image the connective and influential relationships among these core ideas.

While the richness of this report requires prolonged engagement, I share here a few initial reflections and look forward to further engagement and reflection. My academic education and experience is in community psychology, prevention science, disability studies, program evaluation, and public health. I also have lived experience as a L'Arche Assistant and Board member. I draw from this professional background and lived experiences to reflect on what can be learned from L'Arche, what L'Arche can learn from others, and future directions.

Intentional Community: Be More than a Sign

The Project Impact report conveys the many successes of L'Arche communities in building and sustaining intentional community with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and of differing levels of societal marginalization. The Project Impact report also relays the power of community and its many positive influences on individuals—from creating friendships among those who might otherwise not come in contact with one another or be in relationship with one another to the ways those friendships are mutually beneficial and influential.

The search for genuine acceptance, for a sense of belonging, and for authentic inclusion in one's community are deeply desired by many people with intellectual disability (and others) and far too often absent from their lives given longstanding segregation, discrimination, and marginalization. While L'Arche has long desired to serve as a sign for how to build meaningful, mutual relationships and community, L'Arche could also proactively lead in this space offering insights and lessons derived from their decades of experience across the world to others seeking to build similarly meaningful relationships and inclusive communities. Such deliberate outreach may foster an improved quality of life for more individuals with intellectual disability.

Disability Rights: Rooting out Ableism via Anti-Ableist Work

The Project Impact report repeatedly notes gaps in attention to and desire for gains in topics related to social justice. Here I offer a few reflections related to ableism and the ways I would encourage L'Arche to undertake anti-ableist work with greater intentionality. Part of being accountable to marginalized populations means unpacking social influences on structures, processes, and dynamics at all levels and taking actions towards ensuring they are fully free of beliefs and practices that reify injustice. More specifically, movement towards eradicating ableism entails dismantling the intentional and unintentional interpersonal, institutional, and structural dynamics that discriminate on the basis of disability and give rise to inequities so that people with disability experience equal access and flourish. For those without developmental disability, this process is one of allyship or the lifelong, positive, and conscious actions undertaken to promote the inclusion of marginalized populations.

There are vibrant disability rights and self-advocacy communities that can and should be leveraged to achieve these goals. Core members might benefit immensely from joining these movements locally or globally. They might experience greater disability pride, an understanding of their rights and responsibilities, and increased confidence and skills to lead their lives as desired. Community members without lived disability experience can leverage these communities to learn more about disability justice and the experiences of people with disability, how authentic relationships and using one's power can amplify the voices of people with intellectual disability and transfer privilege and power, how to critically assess structures/policies/practices and take action to embody disability justice, how to take action to encourage others to become allies, and how this work is a life-long commitment and using reflexive practice to continuously grow. There are many existing resources that can be accessed toward these goals, an audit might be undertaken to identify and reduce ableism, co-leads might emerge as ways to increase power among core members, as but a few examples of promising directions toward anti-ableist work.

Leveraging Strengths and Resources for Continued Growth

Looking towards the future, keep in mind that things that are hard are not necessarily bad—everyone with experience with intentionally community living knows this to be true first-hand. As L'Arche undertakes important work to further generate desired impacts, the organization and individuals embedded therein have many strengths or assets that can be leveraged in these growth processes. One that merits specific attention is the relationships that exist among individuals with and without intellectual disability. A key construct in disability studies and bioethics is that of relational autonomy, a construct that recognizes the social contexts within which we all exist and the implications for decision-making.

Considerations for relational autonomy may be critical to expanding opportunities core members have for choice and control over their lives and over L'Arche policies and practices. That is, by considering how relationships are marked by allyship and can be an asset in anti-ableist work, L'Arche may achieve greater success in desired growth toward disability rights.

Briefly, it is also important to note that L'Arche may benefit from greater connections to efforts to offer living wages to all workers, efforts to better train and support direct support professionals, and efforts to build communities of practice to help support individuals and communities undertaking anti-ableist work.

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Impact Report Reflection

In the interdisciplinary space of Christian theology and religious education, a commitment to accessibility and inclusivity for people with intellectual disabilities takes on a particular urgency. If we are unable to creatively welcome and educate brothers and sisters across the whole wide and wonderful diversity of human intellectual capacity, then our faith communities will be incomplete, missing a part of the Body of Christ even. The L'Arche Impact Report and Symposium suggest the potential of a robust dialogue between L'Arche and theological educators towards collaborative ways in which educating in faith and theological reflection and discourse can occur with, rather than for or about people with intellectual disabilities.

What Does Your Field Have To Learn From L'Arche?

There is a strong sense of the spirituality (very broadly construed) of L'Arche spread across the findings of the Impact Report. For instance, the data points to “growth in the members’ ability to see, appreciate, and honor the value, dignity, and worth of others” (#2); growth in “ability to relate and build healthy relationships with others” (#3); personal transformation and growth in patience and empathy (#7, #9), compassion and gratitude (#8); and increased capacity to love self and others (#10). Relatedly, a whole range of findings indicate that L'Arche helps its members to find clarity around self-worth and purpose in their lives, including discerning a “call” in life (#15-18).

These findings seem to be both rooted in the Christian/Catholic foundation of L'Arche and also suggest a more universal and open expression of spirituality. Theological and religious educators can learn from how L'Arche makes readily manifest some of these contours of the contemporary human quest for the transcendent and the deepest sources of our human experience and values. Such findings suggest some tracks along which formation into a life of faith or a spiritually meaningful life or community can occur and how the values and tenets of a spiritual tradition are passed on. At a very fundamental level, L'Arche demonstrates how the inner and outer life can be brought together in concrete practices of care

and relationship, directly within the milieu of our daily lives. L'Arche provides a living example of how the most personal and transcendent yearnings of our lives find expression and conversion when we authentically and wholeheartedly enter into relationships in community. That all of this occurs in a community marked by rich faith and spiritual plurality – as well as a wide diversity of abilities, cultures, etc. - makes it all that much more challenging, hopeful, and relevant beyond L'Arche.

Such questions are often approached theoretically within scholarly discourse, but L'Arche makes clear that these are very real matters of praxis with profound consequences. To find ways for the transformational praxes of relationship in L'Arche to inform theoretical reflection and research is a critical task for the academic field of theology and education. To be fair, this work has already begun in earnest by multiple theologians, but this Impact Report suggests there is still a wide range of ground yet to explore.

What Does L'Arche Need To Learn From Your Field?

The dialogue occurring between theology and disability studies can fruitfully challenge L'Arche towards some of its stated growth edges. An important part of this dialogue has been its efforts to theorize and create more accessible and inclusive faith communities, spiritual formation, curriculum and pedagogical methods and to increase participatory research methods that can include people with intellectual disabilities in crafting research questions and solutions. As noted in the Report's areas of improvement, there is room for growth in such arenas, particularly as L'Arche seeks to more critically engage issues of social justice for people with disabilities in the public square (#23), foster greater core member involvement in structural and policy change and decision making in communities (#24), and gain skills and resources to become better advocates (#27) a turn towards some ideas from this interdisciplinary dialogue could prove beneficial.

Relatedly, disability studies and critical disability studies are increasingly engaging with a growing disability justice movement that is seeking to raise the profiles and perspectives

of people with disabilities and to foster communities of practice and activism. This movement engages the spheres of socio-economic, political, and cultural power, and challenges repressive bodily and intellectual norms. Such work is accompanied by a growing awareness of the dynamics of ableism, including ways to raise critical consciousness around this issue and to creatively mitigate its pernicious impacts. Closer alignment with such movements could greatly benefit and shape the approach of L'Arche to its internal power dynamics, including shifting it away from some of the less helpful aspects of the charity model of its founding and towards a more equitable sharing of power across ability difference rooted in its mutual relationships. Such internal shifts would also re-focus and re-invigorate the prophetic witness of L'Arche in the church and world.

What Are Some Next Steps That L'Arche Might Want To Take?

1. As I noted above, there is a strong sense of the spirituality (very broadly construed) of L'Arche spread across the findings of the Impact Report. There is a real gift in the fact that the spirituality is so intimately intertwined with the many other facets of the impact of L'Arche in people's lives. In light of this, some "next steps" for L'Arche in the USA might be extracting some of the more compelling and common themes to explore them more thoroughly. Relatedly, these themes might be markers of the leading edge of contemporary spirituality that L'Arche represents. To articulate them more robustly, clearly, and widely could help L'Arche to deepen its role in the present stage in the evolution of human spirituality. This step includes finding new language that honors both the treasured traditions and the emerging spiritual transformations and insights engendered by L'Arche.
2. It is clear from the "areas for improvement" portion of the Report that L'Arche in the USA is seeking to grow in its more direct engagement with issues of disability justice and public policy. I could foresee some next steps in this regard as: (1) identifying and deepening relationships with critical disability scholars and activists

who are working at the nexus of theory, lived experience, and public policy, (2) leveraging the profile of L'Arche to provide ever more unambiguous rebuttals to ableism within our US culture (this would also include a close look at ableist tendencies that can manifest within L'Arche assistants, staff and structures), (3) drawing on a Universal Design for Learning or similar inclusive design

framework to comprehensively examine all internal and external communication and formation material and processes for maximum access and inclusion, and (4) exploring the work of assistants and staff through the lens of allyship (including its relationship to - and difference from - friend and/or advocate).

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L'Arche Report Response

I responded to each of the queries in the paragraphs that follow. However, before responding to the report, I want to acknowledge the incredible work of the team that conducted this research. The scope of the qualitative and quantitative data collected (and analyzed) is impressive. To have accomplished this during a pandemic is even more noteworthy!

What does your field have to learn from L'Arche?

Because the evaluation team was so successful in engaging participants, the summary report covers a lot of ground. As such, selecting one or two themes (out of 29) to highlight is a difficult task. However, I want to life up the concept of love, which is discussed at multiple points in the report, for closer examination. For example, the report summary states:

One Core Member said that living in L'Arche made her a better person because she “loves a lot of people.” She spoke about her ability and willingness to give and receive love, and then to allow that love to change her as a person.... The word “love” is used by Core Members and non-core members alike in almost every interview, signaling that something transcending the typical client-caregiver relationship is occurring at L'Arche (p. 7).

Love as a construct and topic of study might seem a little “squishy” to many social scientists. Certainly, our society too-often equates love with the sort of sentiments expressed in Hallmark Cards, romantic comedies, and paperback romances. However, the love discussed in this report is only distantly related to the typical representations of love in popular culture. The words of both core members and non-core members describe a love that is intentional, relational,

accepting, and compassionate. As I read the report, I found myself reflecting on bell hooks' book, *All About Love: New Visions*. In her journey towards a meaningful definition of love, hooks invokes the words of the psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, who wrote love is “the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth.... Love is an act of will—namely both an intention and an action” (hooks, 2000, p. 5). Peck's words are echoed beautifully in the reflection of a volunteer who observed that, through L'Arche, he learned to make “*my love for people more tangible and more practical, less a sense of love as a notion and emotion and more like something you actually enact with your hands*” (p. 9).

Later in the report summary, the evaluation team writes: “*Some community members said that it can be complicated to explain the experience and power of love in L'Arche to those outside of the community and who have not experienced it in person*” (p. 12). The results of this investigation provide many concrete descriptions and examples of how love is enacted and experienced in L'Arche communities. I hope these “thick descriptions” can provide a starting place for conveying love's centrality to L'Arche's purpose, values, and impact.

What does L'Arche need to learn from your field?

I hesitate to suggest that L'Arche can learn anything from my field, but I do welcome L'Arche's embrace of Universal Design for Learning (UDL; <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>). Developed by the non-profit CAST, the UDL Guidelines offer "concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities" (CAST, n.d.). Member development is one of L'Arche USA's focus areas and L'Arche communities already use a variety of inclusive learning strategies that focus on the members' learning and growth. The UDL guidelines might provide a useful framework for guiding future curriculum development and implementation.

What are some next steps L'Arche might want to take in thinking about its impact on community members and other stakeholders?

This grant-funded project reflects the Templeton Foundation's focus on research that informs "the developmental science of virtues and character, including identification of relevant precursors, correlates, developmental trajectories, and assessment of potential inter-individual differences" (Templeton Foundation, n.d.). This is a worthy goal, but I found myself wondering if a focus on individuals' character and virtue development misses a "key ingredient" of the L'Arche experience. Perhaps, Gergen's writing on *relational being* can provide a useful heuristic for thinking about next steps in this work (2009). Gergen argues that relationships, rather than the behaviors and perceptions of bounded individuals, should be the focus of investigation. For example, he notes, "there is no action that has meaning in itself, that

is, an action that can be isolated and identified for what it is. There are no acts of love, altruism, prejudice, or aggression as such. In order to be anything at all, they require a supplement, an action by at least one other person that ratified their existence as something" (Gergen, 2009, p. 33). While it is necessary to understand how core members and others are changed by L'Arche, it might be more important to continue to delineate the qualities of the interactions and activities that create those changes. How might L'Arche intensify its focus on relationships in future evaluation studies? Perhaps ethnography, focus groups, or participatory methods can serve as strategies to capture what Gergen calls coordinated action (or co-action) in L'Arche communities.

As L'Arche plans for future evaluation work, it is important to continue to build on the inclusive and participatory methods that were utilized in the current study. How might L'Arche continue to demonstrate its commitment to amplify the voices of all people, particularly those with intellectual disabilities? The current evaluation represents an important step toward recognizing that aspiration. However, as Aldridge (2016) indicates, "the fundamental difference between participatory research and other research methodologies lies in 'the location of power in the various stages of the research process'...and the fact that, in the main, the stories and 'voices' of participants are placed center stage, both in the design and objectives of participatory approaches" (p. 9). Future studies might extend the findings of this current work by further centering L'Arche core members in the design and implementation of the evaluation process. This is not easy work, but I can think of few organizations better positioned than L'Arche for this sort of undertaking.

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The uncertainty some symposium participants had with the silence or lack of input from core members about what needs to improve could be signaling deeper unconscious systemic problems. First, core members have been taught to view the ideal world from an ableist perspective and see their own as deficient. A lack of an Intellectual disability epistemology that views and positions having ID as an okay and legitimate way to be in society, contributes to this silence/ dilemma.

The stirrings of some L'Arche members whether they can be in a position to fully represent perspectives or voice of core members is an important sign or 'haunting' of the conscience to determine if the direction we take with representation and inclusion is sufficient. Inclusion in itself exists within a power dynamic that supposes an "other" needs to come to the position or worldview of the one including. It basically happens through a colonial relationship where the more privileged have access to knowledge, resources, dominance through being the majority and so on. The success of the dominant group and a lack of seeing itself as dominating the 'other' is because of dominant world views, rhetoric and attitudes created and systemically sustained by the dominant group. Having a dominant voice, they may seek to convert the other to be like themselves and with intellectual disability, the term inclusion has become a popular approach.

Inclusion has the connotation of affording people with ID the 'good life' similar to that of their none disabled counterparts. The success and beauty of life is viewed from the perspective of popular culture and world view which most of the time is ableist in nature. Becoming like an "other" does not in any way give justice neither does it allow God given identities and purposes to emerge. Inclusion and the idea of affording 'justice' or democracy for people with intellectual disability most of the time ends up obscuring the oppressions core members were experiencing by making them invisible. This is a much worse tragedy since inclusion masquerades as a good thing while all it has done bring everyone into the dominant culture and perspective. By doing so the identity of the disenfranchised is buried deeper while the dominant

ideologies continue to establish themselves as absolute truths that are ethical and objective. This approach does nothing to challenge the conscience of the dominant group which is very important if transformation has to happen. It is not just the core members or people with ID who need to walk towards ableist world views but in fact, the opposite needs to happen if justice is to be served and people with ID have to live their lives fully.

Since people with intellectual disability have lacked social capital and historically have been disenfranchised to have a worldview and be accepted as such, L'Arche has a difficult task of being intentional about the capacity to identify the 'hauntings' core members exhibit despite being comfortable and treated well because suppression of one's true God given identity always finds a way of putting up resistance to be othered and surfaces. This could take the form of the inability of core members to perceive any challenges, and sometimes it could be practical shows of what has now been branded as challenging behavior. Just as every other spiritual being is making their journeys through life discovering who they are in God and their purpose, so do core members. Since people with other abilities and disabilities do not require permissions to become themselves from their fellow human beings, the lives of core members or people with ID should stop being held at ransom for the benefit of others other than themselves and their service to God.

To help the situated knowledges of core members shine through requires the support of L'Arche members in the process of becoming. The process can be messy and complex since the people who support core members (assistants and administrations) have their realities/worldviews in conflict with those of core members. L'Arche can also not work alone in this process since the issues that disenfranchise people with ID exist beyond L'Arche spaces. The justice core members require touches on all aspects of society: economic, educational, health, spiritual, political etc. L'Arche therefore might need to reconsider its often-quiet position and be proactive in knowledge production as well as influencing discourse for people with intellectual disabilities in society.

Appendix

Appendix A

L'Arche Project Impact Protocols 2020

Interview Protocol — Basic Version

Impact 1: Members develop awareness, sensitivity, and curiosity for others, especially across differences in gifts and abilities.

In what ways are you more aware of and appreciate the differences among people? → How have your beliefs and values about people (and especially about people with disabilities? changed through this awareness? KNOW - BELIEVE

Since being with the community, what skills have you developed in relating to people with all kinds of abilities? What has come easily for you? What's been especially difficult to do? → How have these skills changed how you interact with people more broadly? How have you had to develop yourself in order to approach the world in a more sensitive way? DO - BECOME

What emotions do you most frequently experience when you are spending time in community? What changes have you noticed in your comfort levels with being around people with differences? → How has your love, empathy, or care toward others changed since being at L'Arche? FEEL - LOVE

Impact 2: Members experience personal transformation in fundamental aspects of their lives.

How has the way you practice your spirituality changed since coming to L'Arche? What spiritual practices/resources have you tried that you wouldn't have tried if not for L'Arche? How have those gone for you? What have you adopted easily? What has really stretched you? → What changes have you noticed in the way you live out your spirituality as a result? DO - BECOME

What have you learned about yourself because of L'Arche? What has surprised you about yourself in your time at L'Arche? What have you learned about your strengths and weaknesses in your time at L'Arche? → How has this influenced the way you see yourself and see your life? (Or)How do you see yourself and your own life differently because of your time being here? KNOW - BELIEVE

Of the personal qualities you have developed during your time in L'Arche, which do you feel most proud of? How has being at L'Arche encouraged who you are? How has it challenged and disrupted who you are? → How has being at L'Arche helped you stay engaged in growing the things that really matter in your life even when you are feeling frustrated and challenged? FEEL - LOVE

Impact 3: Members create meaningful relationships and find belonging in community with others

What have you learned from living in a community setting with different people? What has been most surprising for you to discover? → How do you see the notion of community differently because of your time living in L'Arche? How do you see yourself differently? How has the notion of “belonging” developed for you through your time here? KNOW - BELIEVE

What about being in community at L'Arche has challenged your way of relating to people? In what areas have you struggled to show up fully? What skills or behaviors have you taken from your experience of community at L'Arche and applied elsewhere in your life? What has been most difficult for you to follow through on outside of the L'Arche community? → How do you relate to people differently now that you've been a part of L'Arche? In what ways has being in community been integrated into your life? DO – BECOME

How has L'Arche made a difference in the kinds of emotions you experience when you're with others in community? What's changed in your level of comfort or discomfort in community, especially with people unlike yourself, since being with L'Arche? → In what ways has your time at L'Arche affected your dedication to creating community wherever you go, even when it feels hard or daunting or overwhelming? FEEL – LOVE

Impact 4: Members approach vocation and life-purpose in a holistic and human-centered way.

How has being a part of L'Arche affected the dreams you have about your future? What have you discovered or clarified about your purpose in life through being at L'Arche? → How has being with L'Arche shaped how you think about what's important for your life and vocation? KNOW – BELIEVE

What about L'Arche gives you inspiration? In what areas are you more motivated differently than you used to? Where do you struggle with the motivations within your heart about your life that you may expect you'd be farther along now than you are after spending time in the community? For what kinds of things in your life do you feel less energy for now that you've been with L'Arche? → How has your time with L'Arche affected your dedication to pursuing these kinds of things with your life even during times when you feel deflated or discouraged? FEEL – LOVE

What decisions have you made for your career/vocation since coming to L'Arche? What steps have you taken for your future career path? What steps have you wanted to take but haven't yet? → How has L'Arche affected your pathway for the future, in vocation and otherwise? What have you taken from this experience and applied to other parts of your life? DO – BECOME

Impact 5: Members critically engage societal values of accessibility and inclusion and advocate for social justice.

In what ways has your knowledge of issues affecting people with intellectual and other types of disabilities expanded through your participation in L'Arche? What other kinds of things have you become aware of that you never really thought about regarding inclusion and social justice since being with L'Arche? → In what ways has your thinking/mindset/outlook toward inclusion been challenged and reformulated through your time with L'Arche? How does that affect how you view the world every day, even when you're not around the community? How have you internalized the ideas of social justice for yourself? KNOW – BELIEVE

Since being with L'Arche, in what ways do you feel either more encouraged or more discouraged about the state of society as it relates to inclusion? What troubles you now more than it used to about our society? What do you think you should be more concerned about more than you have been, even though you've been with L'Arche? → What has changed in the ways you care about issues of social justice and inclusion? How has that affected you over time? FEEL – LOVE

What have you done to challenge societal values that perpetuate lack of accessibility and inclusion since you've been with L'Arche? How has it gone? What has been difficult to do? What kinds of opportunities to speak up or do something have you missed? What have you been meaning to do that you've been procrastinating about? → How has being with L'Arche made you show up differently in your life for the inclusion of others in our society? DO – BECOME

L'Arche Project Impact Accommodation I – Revised Interview Protocol

- Explore the six ideas of impact, using the kinds of questions suggested below.
- Add or subtract questions as you see fit, keeping the primary ideas of impact in mind.
- If needed, translate the open-ended questions to close-ended to initiate every new idea.
- Use follow-up prompts like: *What was that like for you? What did that look like for you? Tell me more about that. Etc.*
- If possible, seek reflection on the responses to inside-triangle question(s) in bold

Impact 1: Members develop awareness, sensitivity, and curiosity for others, especially across differences in gifts and abilities.

1. Who do you like spending time with in your community?
2. What do you like about them?
3. Who did you not used to like being with that you like more now?
4. What has helped you like this person more?
5. What have you learned about people in your community that you didn't know about them when you first met?
6. How has knowing that helped you understand them better?
7. What has helped you be thoughtful and kind to people, even people who are hard to get along with?
8. What makes it hard to be thoughtful and kind to people sometimes?

Impact 2: Members experience personal transformation in fundamental aspects of their lives.

1. What do you like about yourself?
2. What are you good at?
3. What kinds of things are you getting better at doing in your community?
4. Have you learned any new tasks or skills?
5. What do those look like?
6. How does it make you feel when you learn or try out new things?
7. Is there anything you'd like to do in your community that you aren't already doing?
8. How has this community made you a better person?
9. What sort of things could you do to become an even better person in the future?

Impact 3: Members create meaningful relationships and find belonging in community with others

1. Who do you spend time with?
2. What do you do when you spend time with people?
3. What do you like best about being with people in your community?
4. Who enjoys your being around you?
5. What do other people like about you?
6. Why do people enjoy being around you?
7. How do you know that you are loved by other people in the community?
8. How do you show you care about others?
9. How does this community make a difference in your life?

Impact 4: Members approach vocation and life-purpose in a holistic and human-centered way.

1. Has there been a decision that you agreed with or liked?
2. What do you do when you don't like a decision?
3. Are you a part of making decisions in your community?
4. What do you do to make decisions in your community?
5. What do you do to listen to others?
6. What does it feel like when people listen to you?
7. What do you want to do in your life?
8. How do you want to make other people's lives better?

Impact 5: Members critically engage societal values of accessibility and inclusion and advocate for social justice.

1. What do you do outside of your community to help people?
2. What do you want to do to help people when you are outside of your community?
3. How do you feel when you help people?
4. Can you think of a time when you tried to stop someone from doing something wrong? What did you do?
5. What do you do to stand up to people who are not treating others well?
6. If you could do something to make the world better for people, what would you do?
7. How has your community helped you be the kind of person that looks out and cares about others?

Impact 6: Core members identify and live-out their choices.

1. What choices do you make every day in your community?
2. How does it make you feel to make choices?
3. Who helps you make choices?
4. What do you think you can do since you've been in your community?
5. Are there things you don't do anymore since you moved into your community?
6. Are there things you can do now in community, that you didn't do before?
7. What are things you want to do in the future?
8. How will you do those things in the future?
9. How has making your own choices and decisions changed your life?

Impact 7: Core members have full, healthy lives.

1. What makes you feel safe in your house?
2. What are some healthy foods that you like to eat?
3. What is your favorite way to exercise?
4. How does taking care of yourself make you feel?
5. What makes you sad?
6. What do you do when you feel sad?
7. What makes you feel happy?
8. What happens when you get sick?
9. When you are sick, how do you get better?
10. How do healthy behaviors like exercising and eating right change your life?

Impact 8: Core members exercise positive influence in the lives of others.

1. What activities do you do with people in your community?
2. What do people in your community do for you?
3. What do you do for people in your community?
4. What do you do for others that you feel proud or good about?
5. Do you make your community better? How do you make your community better?
6. Why are you important to your community?

Interview Protocol – Accommodation 2 – Open-ended questions with a response set of pictures

Impact 1: How do you feel about being with people who are different than you?

Impact 2: How are you different from when you first came to L'Arche?

Impact 3: Who do you feel good being with at L'Arche?

Impact 4: What are some problems you see in your neighborhood?

Impact 5: What do you do when you see something that makes you unhappy?

Impact 6: What choices do you make?

Impact 7: What do you do to be happy? What do you do when you're sad or mad?

Impact 8: How do you help people?

Interview Protocol – Accommodation 3 – Proxy Protocol (on behalf of core member)

Impact 1: Members develop awareness, sensitivity, and curiosity for others, especially across differences in gifts and abilities.

In what ways have you seen _____ be more aware and appreciative of people who are different than they are since being with L'Arche? → How have you seen the beliefs and values of _____ about people changed through this awareness? KNOW - BELIEVE

What interpersonal skills has _____ developed since being at in the community → How have these skills fundamentally affected how _____ interacts with others? DO - BECOME

What is the most frequently experienced emotion _____ feels in the community? What changes have you noticed in _____ comfort being around people who are different? → How has the empathy of _____ toward others changed since being in community? FEEL - LOVE

Impact 2: Members experience personal transformation in fundamental aspects of their lives.

How has the way _____ experienced or practiced spirituality changed since coming to L'Arche? → What changes have you noticed in the way _____ lives out spirituality as a result? DO – BECOME

What has _____ learned about themselves because of L'Arche? What has _____ learned about their strengths and weaknesses in their time at L'Arche? → How has this influenced the way _____ sees themselves? KNOW – BELIEVE

What makes _____ proud of themselves since coming to the community? In what ways does _____ feel vulnerable in community? → How has this community helped _____ care about themselves more? In what ways do you see _____ dream about what is possible for their life? FEEL – LOVE

Impact 3: Members create meaningful relationships and find belonging in community with others

What has _____ learned from living in a community setting with different people? → How has being here made a difference in how they experience a sense of care and belonging? KNOW - BELIEVE

What about being in community at L'Arche has been challenging for _____? In what areas has _____ struggled to connect with people? What about being in community has been most difficult for _____? → How does _____ relate to people differently now since being in the community? DO – BECOME

How has the level of comfort in being with others changed since being a part of the community? → In what ways has being at the community made a difference in how _____ is connected to people, or able to connect with people? FEEL – LOVE

Impact 4: Members approach vocation and life-purpose in a holistic and human-centered way.

What about being in community gives _____ a sense of meaning and purpose for life? → How has being with in the community affected how _____ thinks about what's important for their life? KNOW – BELIEVE

What about being in the community gives _____ inspiration for living? What seems to be taking life and energy away from _____? → How has being here helped to keep _____ engaged in pursuing their best possible life, even during times when they felt down or discouraged? FEEL – LOVE

What decisions has _____ made about what they wanted for their life since being in the community? What decisions has _____ struggled to make for the future? → How has being in the community affected the bigger pathway that _____ is taking for their life? DO – BECOME

Impact 5: Members critically engage societal values of accessibility and inclusion and advocate for social justice.

In what ways has _____ payed attention to the needs of others since being a part of the community? → In what ways has being in the community affected the perspective of _____ toward the needs and rights of people in the community and beyond? KNOW – BELIEVE

Since being in the community, how has _____ appeared to feel encouraged or energized to include others in activities and the community? → What has changed in the way _____ seems to care about inclusion and fairness (social justice) FEEL – LOVE

What have you seen _____ do to pay attention to or include people that are typically overlooked? → How has being in community affected how _____ shows up with people who are vulnerable in the community or society? DO – BECOME

Appendix B

Core Member Survey Questions

How are you completing this survey?

- Core member on my own
- Core member with a helper
- Helper on behalf of a core member using my observations and perceptions of the core member

About the Core Member

What L'Arche community are you a part of?

- Boston North
- Cleveland
- Greater Washington D.C.
- Jacksonville
- Spokane
- Tahoma Hope

How long have you (core member) been a part of the L'Arche community?

- First year of involvement
- 2 - 3 years
- 4 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 20 years
- 21 or more years

Where does the core member live?

- live in a L'Arche home
- I do not live in a L'Arche home, but I participate in L'Arche programs

The Impact of the L'Arche Community

Before being a part of the L'Arche community...

1. I accept people who are different than me.
2. I want to learn about people who are different than me.
3. I am comfortable with people who are different than me.

	🚫	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	Not at all	Some	A lot
1. I accept people who are different than me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I want to learn about people who are different than me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I am comfortable with people who are different than me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Since being a part of the L'Arche community...

- I accept people who are different than me.
- I want to learn about people who are different than me.
- I am comfortable with people who are different than me.

	🚫	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	Not at all	Some	A lot
I accept people who are different than me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to learn about people who are different than me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am comfortable with people who are different than me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	⊘	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Before being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	Some	A lot
4. I know what I'm good at in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I know what I need to work on to improve my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I am excited about growing in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	⊘	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Since being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	Some	A lot
I know what I'm good at in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know what I need to work on to improve my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am excited about growing in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	⊘	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Before being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	Some	A lot
7. I know what makes other people happy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I know what makes other people sad.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I feel close and connected to people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	⊘	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Since being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	Some	A lot
I know what makes other people happy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know what makes other people sad.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel close and connected to people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Before being a part of the L'Arche community...	  		
	Not at all	Some	A lot
10. I have goals for my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I make good decisions about my future.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. I feel confident about where my life is heading.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Since being a part of the L'Arche community...	  		
	Not at all	Some	A lot
I have goals for my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I make good decisions about my future.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel confident about where my life is heading.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Before being a part of the L'Arche community...	  		
	Not at all	Some	A lot
13. I speak up for others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. I stand up for the rights of others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. I speak up for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. I help others treat people fairly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Since being a part of the L'Arche community	  		
	Not at all	Some	A lot
I speak up for others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I stand up for the rights of others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I speak up for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I help others treat people fairly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	⊘	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	Not at all	Some	A lot
Before being a part of the L'Arche community			
17. I know the choices I have for my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. I know how to do things for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. I feel in control of my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Since being a part of the L'Arche community			
I know the choices I have for my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to do things for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel in control of my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	⊘	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	Not at all	Some	A lot
Before being a part of the L'Arche community...			
20. I feel safe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. My life feels stable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. I feel happy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Since being a part of the L'Arche community...			
I feel safe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My life feels stable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel happy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Before being a part of the L'Arche community...

23. I do things to help people.

24. I feel like people listen to me.

25. know how to have a positive impact on others.

	⊘	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	Not at all	Some	A lot
23. I do things to help people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. I feel like people listen to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. know how to have a positive impact on others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Since being a part of the L'Arche community ...

I do things to help people.

I feel like people listen to me.

I know how to have a positive impact on others.

	⊘	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	Not at all	Some	A lot
I do things to help people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel like people listen to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to have a positive impact on others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

More about who you are (optional)

What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- Above 64
- Prefer not to answer

What is your gender identity?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary/ Fluid
- Transgender
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to answer

Please indicate your race-ethnicities

(select all that apply):

- African
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino/a/x
- Middle Eastern or Northern African
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to answer

If survey was completed in assistance to or on behalf of a core member, please answer the following:

Please indicate what accommodations you used in administering this survey. (Check all that apply)

- Administered survey during more than one session.
- Administered survey across more than one day.
- Allowed frequent breaks during the administration of survey.
- Administered survey in a room or place where individual is most comfortable.
- A preferred community member assisted with administration of survey.
- Read survey items aloud for individual.
- Paraphrased survey items for the individual using more appropriate vocabulary.
- Clarified/re-explained survey items based on the individual's questions or requests for assistance.
- Asked the individual to restate the directions or item content to verify understanding.
- The individual responded to the survey orally (and another person made a written record of his/her responses).
- The individual responded to the survey by pointing or with gestures.
- The individual responded to the survey using sign language.
- The individual responded to the survey using an augmentative communication device.
- The individual required frequent verbal encouragement to maintain engagement/finish the survey.
- Other _____

Appendix C

Non-Core Member Survey Question

About your role in L'Arche

What L'Arche community are you a member of?

- Boston North
- Cleveland
- Greater Washington D.C.
- Jacksonville
- Spokane
- Tahoma Hope

How long have you been a part of the L'Arche community?

- This is my first year of involvement
- 2 - 3 years
- 4 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 20 years
- 21 years or more

What is your primary role in community?

(You can select more than one, if applicable)

- Staff- Direct Care
- Staff- Non-direct care (for example: programs/ office/ leadership)
- Volunteer
- Board Member
- Parent/ Guardian/ Family Member
- Other
- None

What was your former role in community, if applicable?

(You can select more than one)

- Staff- Direct Care
- Staff- Non-direct care (for example: programs/ office/leadership)
- Volunteer
- Board Member
- Parent/ Guardian/ Family Member
- Other

The Impact of the L'Arche Community on You

For each of the following items, please rate yourself based on where you were before you were a part of the L'Arche community and again where you are now that you've been a part of the L'Arche community.

A. Tell us how you treat people who are different from you.

Before being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
1. I value the differences among people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. I am accepting of the differences in people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. I am sensitive to experience of people different from me	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. I am curious about the differences of people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. I feel comfortable being with people who are different than me	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. I feel confident communicating to people across differences	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Now, as a result of being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
I value the differences among people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am accepting of the differences in people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am sensitive to experience of people different from me	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am curious about the differences of people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel comfortable being with people who are different than me	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel confident communicating to people across differences	<input type="checkbox"/>				

B. Tell us what you think about who you are.

Before being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
7. I know my personal strengths and weaknesses	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. I have clarity about what I believe in	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. I feel comfortable in my own skin	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. I practice personal reflection	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. I know my place in the world	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. I am able to stand up for what I believe in	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Now, as a result of being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
I know my personal strengths and weaknesses	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I have clarity about what I believe in	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel comfortable in my own skin	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I practice personal reflection	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I know my place in the world	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am able to stand up for what I believe in	<input type="checkbox"/>				

C. Tell us what you think about your relationships with other people.

Before being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
13. I know what makes others happy	<input type="checkbox"/>				
14. I understand what triggers others negative	<input type="checkbox"/>				
15. I am able to sustain healthy relationships with a broad range of people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
16. I do not hide who I am	<input type="checkbox"/>				
17. I feel connected to people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
18. I am able to work through conflicts I have with others	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Now, as a result of being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
I know what makes others happy	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I understand what triggers others negatively	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am able to sustain healthy relationships with a broad range of people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I do not hide who I am	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel connected to people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am able to work through conflicts I have with others	<input type="checkbox"/>				

D. Tell us what you think about your goals for life.

Before being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
19. I know where my life is heading	<input type="checkbox"/>				
20. I understand what is most important in my life	<input type="checkbox"/>				
21. I integrate my spiritual, mental, emotional life into my decisions about my future	<input type="checkbox"/>				
22. I have career goals that are human-centered	<input type="checkbox"/>				
23. I feel confident taking a vocational path that fits my values	<input type="checkbox"/>				
24. I seek out career opportunities that serve people	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Now, as a result of being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
I know where my life is heading	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I understand what is most important in my life	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I integrate my spiritual, mental, emotional life into my decisions about my future	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I have career goals that are human-centered	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel confident taking a vocational path that fits my values	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I seek out career opportunities that serve people	<input type="checkbox"/>				

E. Tell us how you stand up for yourself and others.

Before being a part of the L'Arche community..	Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
25. I feel a sense of responsibility to be an advocate for those denied power	<input type="checkbox"/>				
26. I have skills to critique systemic issues of injustice	<input type="checkbox"/>				
27. I raise awareness of relevant topics of disability rights to those around me	<input type="checkbox"/>				
28. I feel confident discussing disability rights	<input type="checkbox"/>				
29. I consistently support vulnerable populations	<input type="checkbox"/>				
30. I actively advocate for a more just society	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Now, as a result of being a part of the L'Arche community...	Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
I feel a sense of responsibility to be an advocate for those denied power	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I have skills to critique systemic issues of injustice	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I raise awareness of relevant topics of disability rights to those around me	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel confident discussing disability rights	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I consistently support vulnerable populations	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I actively advocate for a more just society	<input type="checkbox"/>				

31. Tell us anything else you would like to share about how your life is different because of your L'Arche community.

More about who you are (optional)

What is your gender identity?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary/Fluid
- Transgender
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to answer

What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- Above 64
- Prefer not to answer

Please indicate your race-ethnicities (select all that apply):

- African
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino/a/x
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to answer