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Colorado Vincentian Volunteers EST. 1994

# JOURNEY

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The mission of the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers is to invite young adults into a process of companionship with those who are poor in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul

## Light in the darkness

By Karli Hunton CVV Volunteer

**K**aela Allton was involved in a severe bike accident on her way home from working at the GrowHaus on Oct. 14, 2015.

After a long week of hope, prayers and tears, Kaela died surrounded by family and the love of her newest community.

One of my favorite Creighton Jesuits once said to me, "The closer something is to your heart, the more difficult it becomes to express in words."

Perhaps, then, you can imagine the difficult task of describing such an incredible person who so many held close, and the pain that is felt in her absence.

It is difficult to articulate the experiences we had with Kaela. It is difficult and impossible, however, to share her beauty, wisdom and character -- and the ways we were changed by them -- with words.

From the moment Kaela arrived she graced us with a warm, intentional heart. She spent evenings playfully lurking around the house and popping her head into rooms just to check in.

We were guaranteed to share a few laughs or get joyfully caught in a reflective conversation (most likely both).

Most of my memories of Kaela begin with hearing a light tap on my door. An all-time favorite was the time I opened the door but had to look down the hall and found her, snickering against the wall and pretending to hide.

I think back and thank God for always smiling and opening the door instead of



Kaela Allton with fellow CVV volunteers in the fall of 2015.

surrendering to my first thought, 'I was just about to go to sleep.'

I'm constantly grateful for the challenging and thoughtful questions she offered and the comforting stories and insight I got in return.

It's not just her insight that we loved and admired.

Kaela was a one-of-a-kind prankster, a genuine jokester.

You'd walk the hall and find our name tags and posters turned upside down, or you'd find her hiding in a corner to startle you into laughter.

Even in her absence, our community experiences her facetious spirit.

**We are called to share the ways we were changed and made better knowing her.**

I remember Alex telling a story about losing her key. She flipped over every surface in

her room until she finally sat down, frustrated, on her bed.

As soon as she stood up, the key appeared to have been there all along. "I know Kaela had something to do with that," she concluded.

Kaela's humor, laid-back energy and willingness to contribute created a space that opened us to be ourselves.

She brought people together and even in her death Kaela inspired strength in community unlike anything I've ever witnessed.

From crying and praying in the hospital chapel to sharing impromptu meals and prayer services; from the mountains of food and cards that poured through our doors, to the endless invitations, prayers and embraces; the CVV community came together from every corner of the network.

We came together not because of death, but for Kaela. For each other. In every way, she has taken a tight community and woven it stronger.

Whether giving personalized and undivided attention or creating a community out of strangers, Kaela used her words and example to challenge.

To lose someone so full of wisdom and light left our community in the darkness of an irreplaceable void.

But perhaps it has presented us with our greatest challenge from Kaela: To find the light ... to spread the light. Her light.

In the midst of the heart-break, we are called to share the ways we were changed and made better knowing her.

We are called to smile and open the door to insight, relationships and selflessness. Her light was her listening ear, her ability to give unconditionally and love endlessly.

She touched each of us with that light and we are called and challenged to recognize that light in ourselves and shine it brighter.

I now smile at the memories of her characteristic winks and unbeatable knee dancing.

Even more, I continue to seek the qualities in her that are so strong they remain alive, tangible in our experiences each and every day. ✨

Karli Hunton works at The Gathering Place.





Lynne Bauman at Mount. St. Vincent

By **Lynne Bauman** CVV Volunteer

**A**t Mount Saint Vincent there are many days I must be brave. I see the effects of abuse and neglect. I witness extreme outbursts, violent behavior and reactions.

I live in the reality of these children's lives in a residential facility, many without families.

It is exhausting to comprehend. More exhausting is to be pushed, insulted, threatened, punched or kicked after sharing myself, trying to build relationships.

*Get away from me!*

*LEAVE ME ALONE, you ....*

The kids will push you away until they think you will respond with threats or violence in return because that is what they have learned to expect.

*I don't feel safe, I think I am going to hurt myself.*

However, in training we are taught to remain calm in crisis situations -- to exhibit how to regulate emotions and handle frustration and fear.

These behaviors stem from the inability to feel safe. Our job as staff is to connect with these children, to help them regulate emotions and come back down to baseline, a calm, safe state.

*I think I did pretty good with my goal of anger management ...*

*I mean I didn't attack anyone!*

For most kids at MSV, their world view and faith in adults has been shattered. Most have never looked to adults to find support and comfort.

How blessed are we to have the capacity to trust, to look to others for light in dark, scary situations.

We look to many sources and people, whereas these kids have had no one.

*One of my foster families had swings like these.*

*Why trust adults, why bother to form a relationship with someone who will just hurt me?*

It makes perfect sense, but it is our job to chip away at this barrier and connect. It's our job to help these kids find the light in our eyes and in our relationships and eventually in the rest of a world that is good and hopeful.

But how brave they must be to take that step, to trust again. Slowly, they do begin to believe.

*Miss Lynne! I've been waiting to see you. Look! I got adopted!*

They start to see glimpses of light through memories we form on the playground, in games, races down the hall, thumb wars, searches for beetles and four-leaf clovers, an epic train of dominos, or ridiculous discussions about why we shouldn't suck on our arm to give ourself a hickey.

*It's called a hippe, ya DUM DUM.*

Despite the trying and difficult moments, there are hilarious and heart-warming ones as well.

*Can you sit next to me? Right here, we can share my pillow.*

There are a lot of bad days at MSV.

But I heard a story that altered my thinking: In Micronesia, a volunteer said she was having a bad day. She was informed that instead of "bad," locals use a word translated as "brave." Some days you have to be a little braver.

There are many days I have to be brave at MSV, but it is nothing compared to the fight these children fight everyday.

I am in awe of their resilience.

For as "bad" as their pasts have been, they are even braver.

I have learned to be brave because of them, and pray that they continue to be brave, discovering light and hope each day. 🙏

*Lynne Bauman volunteers at Mount Saint Vincent Home.*

## When candlelight becomes prayer

By **Brian Vander Heiden** CVV Volunteer

**S**ince arriving in Denver I have been attending St. John's Cathedral, which is only a few blocks from the Capitol.

During the 6 p.m. service, prayer stations are set up to help people in brief reflection after the homily.

One of these stations includes four large water basins filled with sand.

People are invited to light a candle as a prayer offering and place it in the sand. By the end of the reflection, hundreds of candles illuminate the church. It is a powerful visualization of the hundreds of conversations with God simultaneously happening in the church.

I see that I am not alone in bringing my burdens, joys and sorrows before God. A single flame can look disheartened, as if it were battling the vast darkness in isolation.

Surrounded by other candles, however, its light blends with the other flames to become part of something

greater: Each new flame joins the collective fight to eliminate the darkness.

This weekly ritual of watching fellow Christians create light with their prayers has helped me reflect on my year as a Vincentian volunteer.

My fellow volunteers and I have become painfully aware that working for social justice can be frustrating.

In the non-profits and schools we serve, we encounter unsolvable situations on a daily basis. It is easy to become exhausted: Issues seem too intractable for us to have an impact.

I sometimes feel like a single candle flame running out of wax.

However, when we pray together, we realize we are not alone. Communal prayer is an acknowledgement that we are vital companions in one another's spiritual journey.

When I ask my community to pray for a person at work, I no longer feel isolated in my concern. I feel supported by the communal hope for this person.

Whether it be at meals or weekly mass, praying together signifies that we share



Brian Vander Heiden at work.

mutual concerns. Just like the candles at St. John's, prayers said in community blend to form something greater than an individual petition.

Each person's prayer strengthens the collective effort to ask God to dispel the darkness in the world. Our prayers become a single flame that yearns for God to sustain us to create a brighter future. 🙏

*Brian works at Denver Urban Ministries.*



# A typical Tuesday night at CoHo

*The love of home makes the typical something bigger*

By **Alison Sackerson** CVV Volunteer

**C**oming home to our houses in the evening after work is one of my favorite things. Tuesdays, in particular, I look forward to.

Here's a typical Tuesday.

Tuesdays are gleaning days! After work, Chuck, Lynne and I drive Gladys (our affectionately named red Ford stick-shift truck) to Spinelli's Market, a local neighborhood grocery that donates food to us once a week.

We return to Woody's House (WoHo) where we divide the donations between the two houses.

Giana is cooking at the stove and Mary is chopping veggies at the counter. Tommy is sitting at the table along with Jess chatting about preschoolers at Sewall.

After dividing up our food, I return to my house, Cornelia's House (CoHo). I pull into the back parking lot and can see through the brightly lit windows into the breakfast room.

The table is set and ready for dinner to be served in just a short while. As I walk up the stairwell, Karli rushes to the back door and opens it for me, greeting me with a big smile. I walk into the house and am filled with happiness, warmth, and comfort. Home.

As I pass through the entry, I look to my left into the kitchen. Coleen and Clare are on cooking duty. They are singing to the radio as they prepare



**Alison Sackerson, far right, front row, in one of many community moments.**

our dinner. I glance to the right into the breakfast room where Kristen is making her lunch for the next day.

I continue down the hall where Kate is playing the piano. The music follows me toward the front of the house where I see Loren coming in through the front door, just off the bus from Aurora.

Natalie, I have a hunch, is up in her room where she retreats to read before dinner. I poke my head in to her room to say hello before going off to my room to unwind. Dinner will be served soon, but we are waiting for Cat to get off of her late shift at work.

Soon I hear the dinner bell!

We all make our way to the dinner table and tonight it's breakfast for dinner!

The room is filled with talk of our day. We go around the table and share our highs and lows, talking about the

participants at our volunteer sites who impacted our day.

This time allows us to share with our housemates our joys and even our struggles with the work we do -- and allows us to reflect on the experiences with people who genuinely want to hear about the good and the bad.

Once the dishes are cleaned we go back to WoHo with Kate and Cat who are bringing over the compost bucket.

I meet up with Michelle who is my so-called one-on-one for the week. We visit, sip tea and eat some ice cream.

In the other room I see some other WoHoians hanging out. Katharine is working on a puzzle; Alex is sharing her piano playing and Brian is in deep discussion with Chuck and Mary.

As the night comes to a close, I return to CoHo. I see the light on in the distance where some of the girls are hanging out in the nook. Once again, I walk into the house and am filled with happiness and warmth and the comfort of home.

By the time you receive this newsletter, we all will have switched houses. My home will no longer be CoHo, but WoHo.

As much as I will miss that breakfast room and the nook with the inviting lights, the house isn't what makes my community. The people, the conversations, and the passion that drives us each day shines most bright and make the light that brings me home. ✨

*Alison Sackerson volunteers at Dominican Home Health Agency.*

**Alison Sackerson, left, on the job at Dominican Home Health Agency.**





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## JOURNEY

### ¡Muchas Gracias! SNAPS to YOU!

(A tradition among CVV21 invites us to snap our fingers as a gesture of appreciation or affirmation)

Alumni who helped with recruiting this fall ... **Song Liang, Mike Ryan, Beth Samson, Haley Rieger, Shelby Snedeker, Colleen O'Brien, Mo Brabec, Laura Shrode and Corrine Schraufnagel.** Let's not forget folks who provided housing for recruitment season: **John Dargatz, Jill and Dave Trawick, DePaul House in Chicago, Maura and Greg Carpinello and Deb and Bill Janssen**

#### More SNAPS!!!!

- 23 Online monthly donors
- 88 Colorado Gives Day donors
- 222 Thanksgiving/Christmas donors both online and return envelopes
- 8 Monthly donors using envelopes

**Where human prudence fails,  
the light of divine wisdom begins to dawn.**

-- St. Vincent DePaul

- Anonymous donors and foundations
- Donors for the Kaela Allton memorial fund
- Egan Printing
- Sir Speedy at 11th and Lincoln and Liz Adams for her generosity over the years
- The staff and parishioners from: St. Elizabeth of Hungary and Most Precious Blood
- The Vincentian Family members
- The CVV volunteers' Spiritual Directors
- The Martin Family Foundation
- The Anschutz Foundation
- SC Ministry Foundation
- Seaman Foundation
- El Pomar Foundation
- Café Sanora and David Boyan
- The priests who preside at our liturgies

### Ways to support CVV

- Give online: Go to [www.covivo.org](http://www.covivo.org), click on "Donate Now" or make a contribution with the enclosed envelope
- Volunteer your time at one of our CVV placement sites or just call.
- Include CVV in your Planned Giving considerations. For information go to [www.covivo.org/ways-to-give](http://www.covivo.org/ways-to-give)

### Save The Date for Heart and Soul Benefit Concert

Thursday, June 16, 2016  
Newman Center

*Mary Frances + Bill*