



VIDES Canada

VIDES Canada Volunteers International Sponsors Three Siblings from Eritrea:

In 2009, VIDES Canada Volunteers International received a request through Sr. Elizabeth Purcell, (our provincial), to sponsor three siblings: Veronica Sultan Baryay , Rita Sultan Baryay and Timnit Sultan Baryay, three refugee young women from Eritrea who had escaped to Khartoum, Sudan. They were registered under UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and living in shelters.

In 2010, VIDES Canada Volunteers International started the process for sponsoring these three young women through ORAT (the Office for Refugees, Archdiocese of Toronto) and with the help of Fr. Alex Osei (Spiritan). It was a new project for VIDES Canada, therefore Sr. Jeannine Landry (VIDES Canada's Director) attended several Formation Sessions offered by ORAT.

On August 23, 2013 a request was sent to Immigration Canada to add their younger brother, Hermon Sultan Baryay as a dependant of his sister, Rita. and to be granted to join in the resettlement with his sisters. Meanwhile Timnit, the older sister, officially declined to continue the process. Hermon was then accepted by Immigration Canada to join his sisters.

Under this sponsorship program, VIDES Canada Volunteers International became responsible for the three of them for one year. We organized several fundraising events to raise money

(\$12,000 Cnd amount was suggested to sponsor each refugee) in order to cover the expenses incurred throughout the year, such as; groceries, clothing, transportation, etc.. Not knowing the date of arrival, we began to prepare by collecting different items such as clothes, furniture, computer, cell phones, heater etc.

Read more on page 2... "The Eritreans Arrive"

Madagascar: A Transformative Journey

My husband and I are members of VIDES-Canada and we have volunteered to go to Madagascar at different times. People are usually curious about our experiences and they often ask about them. The Madagascar journey was a multi-layered, personal discovery. Transformative experiences are usually private and complex and they take time to convey to others. So I usually limit my talks to the beauty of the Red Island, its amazing flora and fauna, the deep spirituality of the people and of course the scarcity of basic resources. In truth, Madagascar laid the foundations for an unexpected metamorphosis of the heart.

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THE ERITREANS ARRIVE IN CANADA



Finally on February 24, 2014 at 6:35 a.m., Sr. Jeannine and Rina Grella (a Member of the Board of Directors of VIDES Canada Volunteers International) welcomed the three siblings at Pearson International Airport in Toronto. We welcomed them with presents and trinkets such as; a Canadian hat, chocolates, Canadian mugs, maps of Toronto and Ajax, and a booklet with the essential information for their resettlement in the Canadian Society.

An official welcome party was organized in the home of Diane Dias, who graciously offered her basement free of charge to the three refugees for one year. Veronica performed the coffee rite to express their thanks and joy to the Canadians welcoming them with so much warmth and enthusiasm. The VIDES members and friends brought different Canadian dishes while the Eritreans offered their specialty, "injera." The evening was a moment of learning about each other and of listening to part of the sad story of these young refugees. They conveyed so much faith in God, the Blessed Mother and tons of courage and resilience during the long wait of five years in Khartoum shelters for refugees without knowing if and when they would eventually be accepted in Canada. After some time to adjust to their new country, Veronica and Rita started looking for work while Hermon, who was only seventeen, was registered in the local High School. All three have made an effort to learn English well.

On February 24th, 2016, they celebrated their second anniversary of their arrival in Canada. They have made so much progress. Veronica is now registered at York University in Toronto and is pursuing an undergraduate degree in Business and Finances, BBA. Rita is taking English and Math classes as preparation to apply to Humber College Nursing Program, and lastly, Hermon will graduate this year from High School and pursue a College degree in Auto Mechanics.

They are now living in an apartment in the North of Toronto not far from our community. Rita and Hermon work part time jobs to pay for their expenses. They are now completely autonomous and very thankful to be in a free and democratic country where they can enjoy peace and freedom. They are always happy to share small and big steps of their life journey. They know they can always count on us, the Sisters and VIDES Canada. In spite of all the fatigue, uncertainties, challenges, and sometimes discouragement on either side, we can now say that it has been an effective experience of solidarity and growth.

People often ask, “Why did you decide to go to Madagascar?”

In fact, it was a rational decision, based on the location and on what we thought would happen there. Obviously, we wanted to help people, but my ego was secretly flattered by this “altruistic gesture.” Perhaps I should not have admitted this, but the ego (the *little “I”*) makes a habit of surfacing in all the wrong places.

The outcome of our decision did not match our predictions. In reality, I went through a conversion, not a “on the road to Damascus” type, but the signs were obvious.

Amazement was the first sign. We were astonished at the courage of some consecrated women, men and of some lay people. These selfless individuals live among the poorest of the Earth. I had never in my life seen such dire physical poverty. These noble hearts are providing the population with the means to live in dignity. They make available things that we often take for granted: education, clean water, health care, food, electricity and more.

They live daily and with devotion, the exhortation for corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

We saw poor people, generously sharing the little they had with less fortunate ones.

We witnessed people with such deep faith; Mass was not just a passive ritual for them. They walked barefoot, over 30 Km, during the rainy season to hear Mass and receive the Sacraments.

I saw living communities sharing with God and with each other their sorrows and hopes, their love and animosities, their resources and their impoverishment. They shared all that is beautiful and unappealing in human nature.

Detachment, from unimportant things, became the next step of the journey. Detachment is a difficult skill to master. I’m still struggling with it because detachment also means letting go of the *little “I”*.

Jesus stands at the door of our hearts, He knocks and waits to take His place in this most personal part of ourselves. To make room for Jesus, we must evacuate the *little “I”*.

This is the journey of our hearts. *I have died, but Christ lives in me. Gal 2:20*

In Madagascar, I understood that as God’s children, we are all dearly loved, especially the poor, the wretched and the sinful. The acceptance of His love operates the changes that help us become tools in His Hands. Perhaps the idea of being a tool is not an interesting proposition to a pragmatic, individualistic mind. But if God is not our centre, then we become our own centre. I don’t want to live in this private self-centered world. It is the wide door leading to emptiness and nihilism. I do not want to be burdened with finding an individual significance, for a fragile ego that must be constantly over-boosted and over-padded. I prefer the inherent dignity in knowing who I am in God.

Volunteering in Madagascar started a new chapter in our lives. God has been good to us and so we wanted to return some of His blessings. We have been committed to bringing some relief to the Malagasy people. Our Mother has been leading the way. With the help of VIDES-Canada, the DBMO-Montreal, our Italian community and so many valued partners, we have successfully completed many projects for the FMA’s missions in Madagascar. We have helped to build and renovate schools, mini farms, water wells, hygienic facilities and we have sent containers filled with books and pharmaceuticals.

When Our Ausiliatrice is in charge, She operates miracles. In Her gentle and loving way, She teaches that to be charitable to one another is to touch the face of God.

I like to compare our journey to Madagascar to the biblical Jonas in the Belly of the Whale. In mystery and solitude, God has altered the way we see the world and ourselves in relation to His world. Madagascar has been the catalyst that helped us become the tools that God can use. I thank God for the lessons that we have learned and for the changes brought by this profoundly transformative experience.

May our Good Mother bless you and protect you!

Maria and Richard Lee

NB. The readings of Richard Rohr and Ronald Rolheiser have helped me immensely in navigating through this journey.

PHILIPPE IN MEXICO

In January 2016, I left my home to go on a volunteer trip to Tuxtla Gutiérrez, México. Although it has been extremely difficult to adapt to the million different things around me (the language, the food, the weather, the poverty and the schedule; just to name a few), I am feeling home, and already know that leaving will be really hard. Here, I live at the Albergue Infantil Salesiano, where 32 boys aged from 5 to 14 live. Although they have been through some really hard situations, all those boys manage to put a smile upon their faces. I still remember my first day at Albergue, how the children welcomed me with a mix of hugs and interesting questions. It only took me 9 days to learn all their names.

It took me at least two months for me to feel entirely comfortable here. Nowadays, I don't feel lost anymore and the cultural shock is finally over. Now, when I go back to my room at night, I feel home, a comforting feeling. I am comfortably installed and my roommate is nice too. In other words, I believe I have adapted to my new life, and I absolutely love what I do here.

Although the days start early and end late, I manage to get up in the morning to head (usually looking like a zombie) to the laundry room at 6 AM. The children wash their clothes (by hand) and go to the dining room. On week days, I usually get in the back of the truck with a bunch of children, leaving for school. Once the children come back, I go to the laundry room one more time. We eat lunch around 2 PM, to clean afterwards. I then have to go in a closet where we keep the brooms and mops we use to wash the house. I stay there an hour and a half to wash everything once the children finish the chores. From 4 to 7, I play an hour of soccer with each one of the three age groups. Later, I help with homework and eat around 8. Usually, we are so exhausted that we go to bed directly after eating.

On weekends, we spend full days with the children, from the time they wake up to the time they fall asleep. Those two big days are always amazing and filled with surprises, but very tiring.

Although what I have to do here is far from what I got told before leaving, I don't regret being here. After getting used to the schedule and my responsibilities, I was able to enjoy my experience a lot more. Obviously, my Spanish got a lot better too. My biggest challenge was to learn how to conjugate verbs in the past. At least, now, I can say I'll come back from Mexico trilingual! Another big challenge, here, is the

heat. Never have I ever thought I'd have sweat beads working their way down my face from sweeping floors for 2 minutes. In general, it is about 35 degrees Celsius here! It is very fun when I'm in the shade, but a lot less pleasant when I'm running with children in the sun, or when it's time to go to bed. It doesn't matter if I take a hot or cold shower; I'll be just as sweaty five minutes after washing myself. The heat makes it hard to sleep at night, when it barely becomes colder.

Here, unlike the other volunteers, I don't have a particular age group assigned to me. Instead, I'm a gym teacher during the week, which gives me the amazing opportunity to interact with all the children of the Albergue. Every day, my friendship with them gets stronger. Those who know me well also know that sports are not my specialty. If the older ones often



laugh at me for trying to kick the soccer ball (and failing as it passes in between my legs), the younger ones enjoy playing with me. On the weekends, I am also a guitar teacher for the older group. This gives me more opportunities to learn about them, each and every one really talented and affectionate. Lately, I got asked to teach drums to a few children that have a good rhythm. I never thought I'd give drum lessons, but I'm glad to do it and to make the children happy!

...PHILIPPE IN MEXICO CONTINUED

At first, it was very difficult for me to accept some of the ways some people interact with the children. At times, I have felt extremely small, knowing that it is unacceptable to say certain things to a child, in a certain manner. However, I am starting to understand that, sometimes, we need to speak louder or be firm with the children. After all, they are not being educated by their parents, and we have to assume that difficult role. We can't forget that we have about thirty children in our care, and it is of our responsibility to keep everything under control and provide a safe environment for them to live in.

In the first place, the children were the reason why I wanted to come here. They're also the reason why I stayed here, even after a very difficult first month. And when the time will come for me to leave, in June, they'll be the reason why I'll bawl my eyes out and want to come back to Tuxtla Gutiérrez one day. I already know



it'll be hard; I always miss the children on my free day, excited to spend time with them the next day. Each and every one of the 32 boys have horrible stories, different behaviours and abilities, yet many things in common. It's hard to explain the happiness that lives in those children's hearts.

They might not have a lot. But they're richer than every single one of us, comfortably sitting in our living room, with a 70 inch TV, complaining that there's nothing good playing (although we get to choose between hundreds and hundreds of different channels). Each child has a dream, and I believe in them, hoping they never give it up.

About two weeks ago, two new children – brothers – arrived to the Albergue Infantil Salesiano. Élias and Alejandro, respectively 7 and 8 years old, have never been to school. This means that, despite their age, they do not know how to read, write or count. Because they still cannot go to school (because they are horribly behind), I was personally asked to be their private teacher and make sure they catch up as much as possible before I leave. This new challenge motivates me a lot, and we have already started working together. They are two little boys always eager to learn and discover more things about the great big world they live in. I am lucky that our paths crossed each other, and am looking forward to June, just to see all the progress they will have accomplished.

To end this update about my trip with a beautiful moment that occurred to me about a month ago. I was



simply washing a mop, squeezing all the chlorinated-water it was containing when I told to Kevin Gerardo, 10 years old, that he had a nice smile. I asked him: what else do you have? Spontaneously, as if it was obvious, and that I should have been able to guess it myself, Kevin answered, with his beautiful smile on his face: I have happiness.

Philippe (Felipe) St-Arnaud

CARINA IN SOUTH SUDAN

My name is Carina, and I volunteered in Wau, South Sudan, for three and a half months in the fall of 2014 with VIDES. In South Sudan, I lived with the Salesian Sisters and volunteered at the dispensary run by the Sisters. Daily hundreds of people would come and receive medical care at the dispensary. I worked alongside the midwives caring for pregnant mothers in the prenatal clinic. I also taught a midwifery course to first year midwifery students at a local college nearby a few days a week. I found it particularly enriching hearing the stories of the people I worked with and cared for. I certainly received so much from them. My experience in South Sudan has left me changed.

Before going to South Sudan, I was afraid and unsure about what my time there would be like. However, I am so grateful that I went. The Sisters and other volunteers were my family away from home. While I was there I was filled with God's peace and my fears were gone. It was a gift to get to know the locals I worked with, the women I cared for, the Sisters, and the other volunteers. My time in South Sudan was so much more than the outward work I did but more about what Jesus did with me interiorly. It took a stepping out in faith to go on this mission because I was fearful but trusting that He was calling me to serve there. It was a time of relying on Jesus more deeply and growing in confidence in Him. I experienced in a tangible way that Jesus shows up every single time. My faith was strengthened!

Upon returning I've had the gift of sharing with others about my experience in South Sudan. This year 2016 teachers and students at my former high school, St. John Brebeuf, were inspired by my story and were moved to fundraise money for the work the Sisters do in South Sudan. The students put on a Variety Show Night where they creatively put on a talent show for parents and students. They raised \$900, which I know will directly have a lasting impact to the people the Sisters serve in South Sudan.

Carina



NATALIE IN ARGENTINA

My experience with VIDES Argentina was three months filled with love and learning. I really believe the children and the community welcomed me wholeheartedly for which I am so grateful. Sharing stories, meals and journeys with so many was what made this for me not a tourist expedition but a time spent taking part in people's lives, and them in mine. I lived with five Sisters and one volunteer from Argentina. Each day we had lunch and dinner together, went to Mass together, and served at the *Centro de Día* (Day Centre). The kids would come after school at 1 pm, we would give them a small lunch, then we would help them with their homework for a few hours. I mostly helped with English homework, but I did a little math as well. We had a recess time where we would play soccer (the kids love soccer!), and finished the day off at 5 pm with bread and jam, and either hot chocolate or a warm drink called *mate cocido*. My favourite part of the day was working one-on-one with each student and getting to know their personalities, tendencies and the things they were good at as well as things they struggled with. I loved working at the *Centro de Día*, as I am a prospective teacher and I was able to combine my love for being with children with practicing in a real educational setting. I learned that teaching requires a lot more patience than I had previously thought — especially if the teacher and the student speak different languages!

I struggled most with language. Let me explain: I practiced a lot of Spanish before I arrived in Argentina, but having never taken Spanish in school I was limited to what I had taught myself, and I was not exactly mentally prepared for speaking with people all in Spanish without much option for English. I could function in a basic way, and I learned so much as time passed, but with the language I felt the most vulnerable. I read a book by Jean Vanier that helped me a lot called "Becoming Human," and he addresses this feeling of loneliness. Not always understanding things that people were trying to communicate to me was profound loneliness, and so was trying to communicate things to people without all the vocabulary to do so. What helped me a lot was practicing with Spanish exercises everyday, watching tv shows and listening to music in Spanish, as well as taking breaks from having to think so hard by chatting on Skype with family and friends back home. I am now happy to say that I often use the language skills I learned to communicate with Spanish-speaking friends here in Canada, but it wasn't easy!

What I loved most about being in Argentina was the loving community I encountered. Though I couldn't always grasp every word, the Sisters, volunteers, children at the *Centro de Día*, and my wider neighbourhood welcomed me with smiles, hugs and lots and lots of food! I must say that I did witnessed poverty and family conflict, and I don't want to paint a picture of the place and the people as perfect, because none of us humans are.

However, looking back at the hospitality and love that I felt, and my growth in the particular virtues of love, joy and patience, have helped me recognize Jesus in all people and situations. I can say for certain that going to Argentina for that particular time in my life was in God's plan for me, and I hope that I am a better human being and a better Christian because of it.

May Our Lord, and Mary Help of Christians be always close to your heart.

Con amor,
Natalie Doummar



Photos from Madagascar





May 13-15, 2016 was our formation weekend for future volunteers. Both animators and participants felt at home and were happy to mingle with past volunteers who shared their own experiences and how it has changed them for the best. All enjoyed the session on the Oratorian Heart given by Sr Patrica Melanson. On Saturday evening Natalie invited all to pray the Rosary in the chapel at 11:30pm honoring Mary in a special way. We thank Rina for providing the delicious food especially her homemade lasagna and Joseph for our super Saturday breakfast. Also for the wraps given by Patricia Soscia. On Sunday Fr Vincenzo invited past and future volunteers to join him in the entrance procession at the 11AM Eucharist. After the homily he blessed the future volunteers and presented them with a cross as a symbol of bringing Christ to others by their service to the poor. After mass the family of the future volunteers were invited to join us for lunch which ended our weekend. We thank God and His Holy Mother Mary who inspires these young people to give of their time and talents to share with others in our FMA missions. We accompany them with our prayers.

May 7th meeting with Sr Chantal Mukase FMA

Some of VIDES members met with Sr Chantal Mukase FMA General Councilor from Rome who was visiting our communities in Canada. The encounter took place after the 5pm parish mass. Thanks for your presence and words Sr Chantal.



MISSION

VIDES CANADA
VOLUNTEERS SHARE
THEIR TIME AND TALENTS
AND OFFER THEIR SERVICE
TO HELP CHILDREN, YOUTH,
AND WOMEN WHO HAVE
LITTLE OR NO ACCESS TO
EDUCATION OR
OPPORTUNITIES FOR
DEVELOPMENT IN
AFRICA, ASIA, AND SOUTH
AMERICA.

YEAR 2 ANNIVERSARY OF OUR ERITREAN FAMILY

Feb 24, 2016 was a special day: it was the 2nd anniversary of the arrival of our three Eritrean refugees, Veronica, Rita, and Hermon. Two years ago Rina and I went to Pearson airport in the early morning to meet them for the first time after three years of waiting and corresponding back and forth with ORAT, Immigration Canada and with them in Karthoum,



Sudan. Their big smiles showed how grateful they were to have finally reached their goal: to arrive in Canada. Sister Alphonsine, Sister Jeannine, and Sr Pierrette were happy to celebrate with them at their apartment. They welcomed us in the traditional way with the coffee rite as you can see on the photos. The man in red is the husband of Veronica, the

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