



"It is a peace program that works, not in a big sweep, but one small ripple at a time, each ripple enlarging with every expanding circle." ~ Doreen Harms



Coming up:

IVEP Year-end
Conference:
July 26—31
Ontario, Canada

Mennonite World
Conference Assemblies at
Harrisburg, PA
Global Youth Summit:
July 16—19
Assembly Gathered:
July 21—26

Traveling together

The International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) is administered by Mennonite Central Committee in Canada and the U.S. This newsletter sets out to connect hosts, partner agencies and IVEPers in the U.S., creating space for the cross pollination of ideas and a greater sense of community.

Articles and new readers are welcome. Please email Helen Yocum at HelenYocum@mcc.org

Staff insights

Most of my time at work is spent in front of my computer sending and receiving emails. I also prepare visa documents. Currently I'm preparing Canada visa documents for our Year-end Conference in July and also U.S. visa documents for the new group arriving in August. As much as I enjoy details, preparing visa paperwork multiple times a year does get tedious. Sometimes the work is frustrating and boring, but there is one way to give me energy again...to look at the faces of the IVEP participants. The energy and love of life



that they bring is uplifting and encouraging. They challenge me to see things in a new way and celebrate both small and large accomplishments in life. The photo of them throwing snow in Alberta is a good reminder to find joy in life, no matter the circumstances.

Andrea Geiser, IVEP U.S. Coordinator

Participant insights: an attention-grabbing issue

I have been working in VORP (Victim and Offender Reconciliation Program) as a Case Manager for the last seven months. VORP is a nonprofit organization that works alongside Juvenile probation to help youth offenders reconcile their injustices with the community.

The VORP mediation process seeks to do three things:

1. Recognize the injustice.
2. Restore equity to the victims of crimes.
3. Declare future intentions of the offender not to commit crime.

It's a kind of holistic approach to stop criminal acts—mainly they are working to establish restorative justice. So far it's been a wonderful experience to work in VORP. I have spontaneously been gathering knowledge and skills about restorative justice. It has become an attention-grabbing issue to me. I have really been amazed to see how restorative justice works

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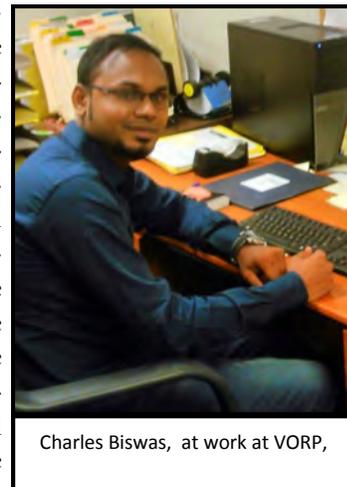
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for a juvenile. In the criminal justice system, restorative processes give victims the chance to explain to offenders how the crime has impacted their lives, to get answers to their questions, and receive an apology. Restorative justice holds offenders to account for what they have done, helps them understand the real impact of what they've done, to take responsibility and make amends. Restorative justice gives children and young people the insight and skills to deal creatively and positively with conflict. An assumption that underlies restorative justice is that crime violates people and relationships. Justice should identify needs and obligations so that things can be made right. Justice encourages dialogue and mutual agreement, gives victims and offenders central roles, and is judged by the extent to which responsibilities are assumed, needs are met, and healing (of individual and relationships) is encouraged.



Charles Biswas, at work at VORP,

We can see lots of examples of restorative justice in the Bible. The Bible points out that this is God's way of working with conflict (Mathew 18:15, Acts 15). He wants to reason with us, cleanse our hearts, minds and lives, and keep them clean, and see us experience the fullness of his love, and not his judgment. He offers to set our hearts and circumstances with others right again. In the scriptures, we are given clear examples of how to face and deal with conflict with people and within our institutions. Through mediation, VORP is a place to encourage and model for youth, how their commitments (to make things as right as possible) can benefit others. Hopefully, with their parents' and the community's ongoing support they can promote the kind of values that make for safer people to live with and safer communities to live in. This is how VORP can help when crime occurs in a community.

It's been an honor and pleasure for me to get a chance to work for VORP. Such a wonderful organization has given me a significant platform to learn about the magical consequences of restorative justice.

Charles Biswas, Bangladesh—VORP, Fresno, California

Partner insights: IVEP Program at EMU

I have been working with IVEP volunteers at Eastern Mennonite University for more than 15 years. EMU's relationship with this program is probably twice as long as my involvement. I have worked with volunteers from Bolivia, Paraguay, Colombia, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. My wife and I have had the privilege of meeting six returned IVEPers in their home countries of Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Mexico.



IVEPer Gavi Luna Ibarguen from Colombia working with two EMU students with Don Clymer looking on

At the end of each semester, our Spanish students are asked to evaluate the course they just completed. Year after year, we get a significant number of students who say that meeting for conversation sessions with the IVEPer was the highlight of the course. There have been many lasting friendships made and even a few marriages.

A number of our Spanish students

“Spanish students who are ‘culturally as well as linguistically fluent.’”
~ Don Clymer

choose to go to Spanish-speaking countries for their cross-cultural requirement. The people that host our students have observed that because of the IVEP program, our students are more at ease entering a Spanish-speaking environment, especially with their host families.

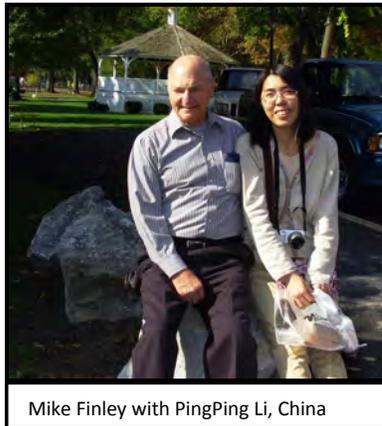
We are very grateful for how the IVEP program has aided our department in training Spanish students who are “culturally as well as linguistically fluent.”

Don Clymer, Spanish Professor, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia

Host insights: a loving relationship is the first step

We are a retired couple, having had four children who are married with families and who live near us. All five families are Christians, attend our respective churches regularly and are deeply involved with each others lives and families. As a couple, we volunteer at a homeless shelter and for a local food pantry.

The IVEP program was clearly not on our minds when we were asked to be a host family. So then, we were clueless as to just what a host family does and what kind of problems might come up. We were anxious and a little nervous about the pending relationship and didn't realize what we were getting into.



Mike Finley with PingPing Li, China

When Ping Ping arrived, the relationship developed quickly and we concentrated on getting to know each other. We soon concluded that IVEPers join the program to grow, mature and resolve some important aspect in their lives as well as to exchange cultures. Within a few weeks, as the relationship matured, Ping Ping revealed her hopes for improvement during her visit.

One important goal of the host family should be to identify the underlying concern of the IVEPer and to make the discovery as soon as possible.

A loving relationship is the first step in the discovery process. The love should be open, pure, spiritual and expressive. A loving relationship quickly opens the door to revelations, the problem discovery and a plan to begin the work of improvement. The work becomes focused; progress follows.

Jesus said it: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Mike and Doris Finley, New Philadelphia, Ohio, hosted PingPing Li from China for the first semester

Alumni insights: IVEP had a huge impact on my life

It's always a blessing to share what God has done and continues doing in our lives and I feel honored to be selected in writing an article about the years after serving as an IVEPer.

There is no doubt that my time in IVEP had a huge impact on my entire life; it changed the prospect of life and provided me with new tools, which I could not get elsewhere.

Once I returned to Angola, I shared with the church what I learned while in America. But the dream of becoming a doctor never left me alone because I believed that the only way to achieve real freedom, stability and



Bernardo Lopes MD, Angola

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Pray for . . .

** IVEP provincial and regional coordinators conference mid April*

** the new IVEPers who still need placements*

** the new IVEPers applying for visas*

success is through education! So I stayed home for three years and in 2006 I left my country again to Rostov on Don, Russia, to study medicine, and graduated seven years later.

In 2013 I returned home, this time packed with my Diploma and, once home, I took a week of rest to reconnect with family, friends and the church, after seven years abroad, without going home!

In August of the same year I headed to my home province to follow my desire and God's call in helping my people, providing them with health care as a physician and since that time I have never stopped—I find myself busier each day and every day.

So it does not matter what situation you are dealing with, where you come from or which family you belong to, just choose GOD; let Him be in charge of your life and having faith and determination you will achieve anything.

God blessings to us all, without exceptions!

Bernardo Lopes MD, Angola, worked at Jubilee Ministries in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, in 2002-2003

IVEPers in action



International Worship Festival at mid-year conference, Calgary, Alberta



Zabee, Laos, at work at Hartville, Ohio



International potluck



l to r: Gavi, Luis and Whitney, all from Colombia

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