

AMA UPDATE

OCTOBER 2021



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TORI - WORCESTER REFLECTION

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"Love places us at the service of God!"

-St. Marie Eugenie



A Road to Everywhere

VICTORIA BORRUSO - WORCESTER, MA

A question I have been asked and have lacked a real answer to is the reasoning behind a year of service. For many, it is an abstract idea to take a path into solidarity with a community. A road less traveled on but paved in a way that even if uncertainty lies along the bend, a sense of trust and belonging burns hotter than the fear of uncertainty.

Letter from the Director

Dear AMAs, RAs and AMA Families and Friends

What a joy it is for me to be sending out an AMA Update again! Over the past 18 months, with the Covid-19 virus plaguing our world and our country, some days it felt like we might never get back to a sense of normalcy. The Sisters and I were very happy that we could invite young people to serve in AMA in Worcester and England this coming volunteer cycle. And wow! How fortunate we are to have two remarkable young people to reignite the gift of service in these two sites!

Welcome, Tori and Tyler, to the AMA family! We're looking forward to watching you in action as you start up at your volunteer sites. In Worcester, Tori has many programs on her schedule - ESOL classes, after-school Mentoring, and Girls with DREAMs. Tyler's main focus will be at Kids Kabin in Newcastle, an after-school program for school children.

While the future always remains uncertain, we're confident that your openness, generosity, and compassion will carry you through the months ahead bolstered by the love, support, and prayers of our RA Sisters, your family, and the many Assumption/AMA friends.

Blessings on this life-changing journey! - Sandy



Tori making apple tarts with the Girls with DREAMS group.

The start of my path began as finishing my undergrad studies slowly approached. This would be the first time in my entire existence where the stresses of schoolwork did not bear weight on my mind, body, or soul. It was too abstract of an idea to imagine a world that existed outside of a university bubble!

As time continued to come to an end at school, a yearning for something more than work to sustain my lifestyle was calling for me. A yearning to practice being in the present moment and living a mindful life. Looking back, it's more like AMA found me. I had received an email to my school account about an organization that was centered around building trust in the community. Traveling down the path towards AMA was my first step in the right direction.

The path I have chosen to walk was not a lonely path, but sometimes it was a narrow one. Coming from a summer camp for people with intellectual disabilities, I felt ready to start my year with AMA from the gifts I gained at camp. There I was able to build upon my patience and learn how to relate to a population of people that others tend to avoid. The qualities I had built upon and the newer outlook I had for life allowed me to build trust within myself, helping me transition from one community to another.

"Looks of care and gratitude are all over the faces of the volunteers and the community members."

Life as an AMA began with the food pantries on Wednesday mornings. I am not much of an early riser but have become delighted to get up on those days to meet with community members in Worcester. The food pantry, through St. Peter's, is a place in which time exists on a different plane. Everyone there is in the present moment, helping to fill carts and cars with groceries. Looks of care and gratitude are all over the faces of the volunteers and the community members. It's not a time to worry about what's missing or what's wrong, but a time to see what's right. The little moments of stopping and wishing one another a good day, staying present in the moment to enjoy the passing smiles, and being able to connect on a personal level with some of the weekly members. All of this has shown me a new side of the beautiful city of Worcester and the city's colors continue to show through the different services I am a part of.

Being in Mentoring has been a new experience for me because in the past I would be the college student sitting in the chair waiting for my mentee to arrive. Now, I get to experience the other side of creating a program that both the mentors and mentees are excited to show up to. Having a place that is filled with trust, love, patience, and acceptance is a place that allows for new growth. In the few weeks of Mentoring, I have seen the change of strangers becoming friends and the growth of relationships blossoming.

The narrower parts of the path were a time for me to look ahead at the steps furthering my adventure. Feelings of the uncertainty of not doing the right thing or being left behind burned at the back of my mind. Yet the fire to do better in a world ignites me to see that although I am one person, all things start with one and it is a part of the journey to widen the path and gain more people to a life of serving. Although the path is narrow, people who have done this journey before or those ahead, reached out to help me cross the trenches of doubt and see the light ahead. Being an AMA has persisted in showing me that change is a good thing and to welcome it is the first step in accepting growth into my life, I am right where I am supposed to be.



Left: Sampling some cookie dough!
Right: A recent outing to West End Creamery.



A year of service is a path that's less traveled on. It's also a path that allows for more growth to come from the knowledge already gained through the pathways of school, social life, and other communities. A year of service is allowing me to become a better version of myself for the future, the community, and those who are also looking for a path already paved with compassion and spirit. I believe a year of service found me so that I could continue to discover the light of the universe and help support the community of Worcester, a city that is a part of my heart forever. So, to answer, "Why a year of service?", I come to you to say: why not?



TYLER REESE - NEWCASTLE, ENGLAND

One of my easily achievable goals for this year was to write a journal entry each day, starting each entry with the heading "day x," and as I write this reflection I am shocked that my journal entry for today reads "day 55". On the one hand, it feels like I just began my journey a week or so ago because each day there are still so many places I see and things I experience for the first time. Yet on the other hand, I feel like I have been here, particularly with the community I live with, for several months. I think that is a testament to just how amazing and welcoming the other volunteers have been. Right from the very beginning, I felt a strong sense of belonging, which was one of my greatest worries upon arriving since three of my fellow volunteers had already been here for ten months or more.

All three - Jude, Junee and Sasha, always made an effort to get to know me, take me to explore new places, and meet their own friends as well. I feel incredibly blessed for the warm welcome that they have given me and extremely sad that they will all have to leave soon.

"I consider each member of my community to be a very close friend that I will remember, and hope to stay in touch with, for the rest of my life."



Tyler with his community on a recent trip to Scotland!

There are two aspects of this type of community of volunteers that I find very different from a community of roommates, like the ones I had while in college. First, while in college, typically your roommates are friends that you choose to live with; a community like this one is essentially chosen for you; there is no guarantee nor requirement that we must be friends at all. Fortunately for me, I consider each member of my community to be a very close friend that I will remember, and hope to stay in touch with, for the rest of my life. Second, unlike the community I formed with roommates in college, each of us here have such different life experiences, come from such drastically different backgrounds and vary quite drastically in age, with an 11 year age difference between myself and the oldest volunteer in our community.

Of course, this could be seen as a challenge to some, but I think it is one of the biggest blessings from my year of service experience. Two of my fellow volunteers are from the Philippines, one is from Russia, and the newest member of our community is from Namibia. Not to mention, one volunteer's best friend, who has become a very close friend of mine as well, is originally from Iraq. Typically, if you hear "an American, a Russian, and an Iraqi walk into a bar," it sounds like the start of a bad joke, yet for us, it is a weekly experience. I have learned so much more from living and being with people from different backgrounds and cultures in less than two months than I ever did living with my friends in college.

Above all the things I've learned from them, the most important, as cliché as it sounds, is that we are all the same at our core. Though this is something I believed before arriving here, I do not think I grasped what it truly meant. When it comes down to it, we all love and miss our family and friends from home, aspire to help others, and simply want to leave the world in a better place than when we arrived.



Tyler with fellow volunteers Hortensia and Sasha



Tyler with his community, plus one new friend from Iraq and co-worker Colin from Kids Kabin

I have been fortunate to have deep conversations with them about the problems facing our countries at home as well, and, for the most part, those problems tend to be the same: an economic elite that controls the majority of politics, a vocal minority of people that are quite “stuck in the past” and tend to only think about their own country rather than the world at large, and an excess amount of our tax dollars going towards our country's military. Moreover, not only are we, as humans, very similar at our core, but the problems facing our homes tend to be very similar as well.

"We simply enjoy being around each other, which I think is more than a lot of communities can say, and for that, I am truly grateful."

While the lessons I have learned from my community will stay with me for life, the memories we have made, already in these first two months I have been here, will stick even longer. From our nights out on the town, to going to the beach, to traveling to Edinburgh at five o'clock in the morning and not arriving home until after midnight, the experiences are truly priceless and I thank God each day for them. Above all, we simply enjoy being around each other, which I think is more than a lot of communities can say, and for that, I am truly grateful. While it is great that my fellow volunteers and I have become such good friends, it will only make it harder for us all to go our separate ways, and this day is soon arriving, as everyone but myself will have to leave by mid-January. Though watching them leave will certainly be tough, even though they all live so far away I am confident that we will keep in touch and see each other again someday in the future. For now, however, we just have to take advantage of the limited time we have left together and I am sure we will make the most of it.



***Stay tuned for more reflections from Tori and Tyler!
Our next newsletter will be coming out in early December!
We wish you a joy-filled Thanksgiving!***

