

The gift of listening



Kat Heavner rarely had a free minute when she lived in Cuernavaca, Mexico. When she wasn't teaching English to preschool and elementary students, she was preparing lunch at a community center for older adults or helping with a dance class, among other things.

That's exactly what Kat, from Clemson, South Carolina, was looking for when she decided to spend a year as an ELCA young adult volunteer. She wanted the chance to dig in deep, explore her faith and be open to new experiences that came her way.

Granted, there were challenges. Kat worked in communities struggling with poverty and domestic violence. She often felt pushed beyond her comfort zone.

But what Kat discovered was that the greatest gift she could offer to the people she met was just to sit with them and "listen to whatever ... they needed to share with me."

Heidi Torgerson-Martinez, the ELCA churchwide staff member who directs young adult volunteers working in other countries, says the way Kat approached her year of service is exactly what the program is about.

"Our volunteers are asked to meet people where they're at, to learn the daily joys and struggles of each individual's story ... [They] are challenged to enter into the whole world of people from whom our volunteers tend to be very different."

Kat says she learned a lot of patience and how to have a conversation in the absence of a shared language.

It's the small moments she'll always treasure and remember. "When I sat sharing a bottle of Coca-Cola with a woman as she told me about her home life, or struggled to learn a new embroidery stitch from an 80-year-old man, or just watched children playing soccer, I thought, 'That was when I was with you the most.'"

The gift of listening



Kat Heavner rarely had a free minute when she lived in Cuernavaca, Mexico. When she wasn't teaching English to preschool and elementary students, she was preparing lunch at a community center for older adults or helping with a dance class, among other things.

That's exactly what Kat, from Clemson, South Carolina, was looking for when she decided to spend a year as an ELCA young adult volunteer. She wanted the chance to dig in deep, explore her faith and be open to new experiences that came her way.

Granted, there were challenges. Kat worked in communities struggling with poverty and domestic violence. She often felt pushed beyond her comfort zone.

But what Kat discovered was that the greatest gift she could offer to the people she met was just to sit with them and "listen to whatever ... they needed to share with me."

Heidi Torgerson-Martinez, the ELCA churchwide staff member who directs young adult volunteers working in other countries, says the way Kat approached her year of service is exactly what the program is about.

"Our volunteers are asked to meet people where they're at, to learn the daily joys and struggles of each individual's story ... [They] are challenged to enter into the whole world of people from whom our volunteers tend to be very different."

Kat says she learned a lot of patience and how to have a conversation in the absence of a shared language.

It's the small moments she'll always treasure and remember. "When I sat sharing a bottle of Coca-Cola with a woman as she told me about her home life, or struggled to learn a new embroidery stitch from an 80-year-old man, or just watched children playing soccer, I thought, 'That was when I was with you the most.'"

