

Two years later, US volunteer reflects on her time at ARI

*Rachel Buller, 2011-2013 Volunteer
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I GREW UP IN GEORGIA IN AN INTENTIONAL CHRISTIAN community non-profit called Jubilee Partners. Jubilee shaped me in a lot of ways, and its overall mission is to work with refugee resettlement agencies to provide ESL & basic life skills training for refugee families. As a child, I got to go swimming, pick blueberries, and play with young children my age from other countries. As a Cambodian-American, I learned to value diversity and seek out community. As a result, I went to a small college and almost all of my closest friends were international students.

Near the end of my senior year, I was faced with the now familiar question of what I wanted to do next with my life. Since I love travelling and volunteering, I decided to apply to Brethren Volunteer Service, which is a Christian organization that connects volunteers with service sites both domestically and internationally. I was most interested in ARI because of the prospect of living in such an international community—even though I was going to stay in Japan, I would still get to meet people from all over the world. I was accepted through BVS, and discovered after I arrived at ARI that it felt wonderfully like home.

Though it was familiar, ARI was like no place I had ever been before. People from over 20 different nationalities live and work together, learning and sharing their knowledge about sustainable agriculture and building a community over a 9-month training period. I learned how to take care of ducklings, how to prepare rice in a huge industrial cooker without burning my eyelashes off, how to plant potatoes using ‘nice’ or ‘mean’ parenting methods, and how to build a greenhouse, to name a few: all useful skills. But most rewardingly, I was able to share my knowledge of English with international trainees in exchange for their life stories and friendship. I was accepted as part of the ARI community, and I strongly felt that I belonged and that each person was important to the rest of the group. To me, ARI’s most important ministry is people—bringing them together, and modeling a way of life based on kindness and respect. ARI’s mission statement says that their work is ‘rooted in the love of Jesus



Christ.’ I found this to be clearly evident on a daily basis, and it is one of the things I miss most from the time I spent living at ARI.

I have been back in the US for two years now, and I’m currently living in Washington, DC. Since I’ve been home, I’ve bombarded people with descriptions and pictures of daily life at ARI. I had such a wonderful experience as a volunteer, and I wanted to capture those feelings and express to others what a special place ARI truly is. I’ve also developed a mysterious passion for sustainable agriculture.

The nation’s capital doesn’t have farms, but it does have a lot of nonprofits!

For about a year I worked part time at Green America, an environmental and social justice organization that advocates ethical consumerism. Green America supports legislation that protects the rights of small farmers, whether by promoting fair trade or fighting against the exploitation of children working in the cocoa industry. Because I have lived at ARI, it was especially meaningful to be part of an organization that is dedicated to speaking out on behalf of marginalized people and also to protecting the Earth for future generations. Like many non-profits world wide when funding decreases, staff decreases and they could no longer pay for my position.

I now work as Development Associate at Sojourners, a Christian social justice nonprofit and nationally circulated magazine. The majority of my first year back in the US was spent interning at Sojourners, so I’m happy to have found a position working with an organization that I honor and trust. I’m especially thankful to be involved in the work of bringing diverse communities together for the purpose of peace building.

Although I don’t know where life will lead me next, I’m certain that I will cherish all of the things I’ve learned at ARI, and that they will continue to guide and influence me throughout the rest of my life.