

Camphill Village Minnesota

Finding a Home and My Best Self

OLIVIA TARLTON

I found Camphill Village right when I needed it most. I had just moved back into my parents' house after my plans had fallen through elsewhere. I was stuck, feeling unhappy, and more than a little lost about how to move forward.

While talking with my dad one day, he challenged me to think about the things I'd done in the past that made me feel most uplifted. That's when I began reminiscing about how community has brought me comfort and joy over the years. Though I didn't know what I wanted to do next, I knew I needed a place where I felt a sense of belonging. I knew if I could surround myself with people who challenged and inspired me, I could at least feel supported until I figured out what came next.

As I searched for my path, I made sure to keep up with my journal, capturing snapshots of my journey and my daily experiences and feelings.

Journal Entry, 12/10

I don't know that I can be fully happy, or even satisfied, with a "normal" life for myself... work during the week, then back home, with hobbies & friends & church, etc., etc., etc., sprinkled in where they fit.

I need meaning & community & rest & faith & laughter & good food & activities & celebrations ALL THE TIME, IN WORK & IN PLAY.

So began my search for a place that I could call home, even if just for the time being. While browsing the website **Backdoorjobs.com**, I came across an advertisement from Camphill Association of North America:

"Spend a year developing yourself. Discover your deeper purpose and share your life and gifts in a thriving intentional community with Camphill!... Camphill Volunteers live and work alongside children, youth and adults with developmental and other disabilities in rural communities throughout the U.S. and Canada..."

As I sat reading the description, I reflected on whether this type of place would be right for me. Rural lifestyle? Well, I sort of knew how to garden and farm. Intentional living? I had taken part in some week-long service trips during high school and college. I did have some experience working with people with disabilities from substitute teaching a few special education classes, and I have a close family friend with autism. On paper, it wasn't an exact fit. Still, something about the ad spoke to my soul.



“IT’S JUDGMENT-FREE—THE PERFECT PLACE TO WORK ON IMPROVING YOURSELF IN ALL THE WAYS YOU POSSIBLY CAN, WHILE STILL BEING CELEBRATED FOR WHO YOU ARE AT THIS PRESENT MOMENT.

JOURNAL ENTRY, 1/3

Why Camphill MN sounds like a good (great?) next step...

- Live in community
- Incorporate spirituality & intention into daily life
- Cherish the little things
- Give back, care for others daily, do something important
- Reconnect with nature
- Slow down
- Celebrate life in all its forms
- Develop greater patience & selflessness

Above all, Camphill sounded like a wonderful opportunity to learn all that I could. And, when I visited Camphill Village in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, that’s exactly what I found: a place where everyone can learn and grow. It’s judgment-free—the perfect place to work on improving yourself in all the ways you possibly can, while still being celebrated for who you are at this present moment.

I came to Camphill Village Minnesota for a three-day visit before accepting a residential volunteer (Camphill calls this a coworker) position. But it only took a few hours of being here to know that this is what I had been looking for.

After touring the village set amidst picturesque snow-covered hills and frozen streams, visiting the pigs and cows, exploring the colorful weavery, and savoring the laughter-filled harvest kitchen, we arrived at the home where I would stay for the next few days. I was greeted by the house members, who gifted me with coloring pages exclaiming, “Welcome to our community,” and embraced me in warm hugs. I remember not being able to sleep my first night because I couldn’t believe how incredible and right this place felt for me.

JOURNAL ENTRY, 3/21

I’ve been here for two days & I’ve already been shown immense love & acceptance, laughed a lot, been treated to two fun outings, & cheered others on. I have been humbled & excited to learn all I can from everyone I can, & felt genuinely happy.

Before coming to Camphill, I wasn't sure what it would be like to share a home with folks with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Would they respect my personal space? Would I feel burnt out immediately? Would I have enough patience for the job? What would the learning curve be like?

What I didn't anticipate was just how honest and genuine my housemates would be. I especially love how true they are to themselves, and how they've taught me to embrace who I am, too. I've never been appreciated this much, or made to feel so good about myself. In this community, made up of people with and without disabilities, every day is viewed as a new opportunity to remind each other just how special we are.

JOURNAL ENTRY, 4/9:

Here

We dress in our best for outings to Dairy Queen

Here

Where we are comfortable in our bodies, which are able & determined & filled with goodness

Here

Where we look forward to Thursday visits to the library

Here

Where we are thankful for our food & our community & the planting of Easter grass

Even though snow's on the way,

We feel warmth

Here

With each other

While each day looks somewhat different at Camphill Village Minnesota, most weekdays have



a certain schedule that we follow. For example, my Fridays typically look something like this:

7:30 - 8:00: Wake up and get my housemates moving. Cook oatmeal, make coffee and tea, and set the table.

8:00 - 8:30: Say grace and eat breakfast together. Talk about what we did last night, how we slept, and where we all will work today.

8:30 - 9:00: One housemate does the dishes, while everyone else brushes their teeth. I get dressed and get myself ready for the day. Everyone puts on their coats and heads out to their workplace.

9:00 - 11:30: I work in the weavery this morning. As a crew, we finish setting up one loom, weave red and white placemats on another, and weave tites out of recycled grocery bags on a third loom.

11:30 - 12:00: Leave the weavery, check the mail, chat with the staff in the office, and walk over to the harvest kitchen. Catch up with friends before lunch.

12:00 - 1:00: Enjoy a homemade pizza meal with the rest of the village. On Fridays, that means around 30 people!

1:00 - 2:00: Relax at our house for Rest Hour.

2:00 - 4:30: Housekeeping time! Together we sweep, mop, vacuum, and clean bathrooms. We never forget to break for tea and nonsense jokes.

4:30 - 6:00: Pick up my housemates from their workplaces, and head home for some down time. I cook dinner for our household and someone else sets the table.

6:00 - 6:30: Eat and chat some more at the supper table.

6:30 - 7:00: One housemate does the dishes. Then, we all get ready for community movie night. Don't forget flashlights!

7:00 - 9:00: Enjoy a movie night with friends.



9:00 - 10:00: Help my housemates get ready for bed. Read *Little House on the Prairie* with one of my housemates before he falls asleep.

10:00 - 11:30: I have some time to myself before enjoying a peaceful night's sleep.

JOURNAL ENTRY, 8/9

So far Camphill has taught me to be less intimidated to try new things, less stressed over small things, less quick to judge others, & more comfortable in my skin. I accept that I'm a goofy dancer & horrible singer & am not perfect ever, but I can always be better.

Through all of this, I am learning a lot: how to weave on a loom, how to preserve vegetables, how to confidently cook a meal for large groups of people, how to bake bread and make homemade yogurt, and how to grow apples. Along with these skills, I am developing less-technical—but just as important—life skills, too.

My housemates have taught me a lot about healthy communication. I distinctly remember knocking on a housemate's door and entering before she gave me permission during my first week at Camphill. Later, she told me

that she would appreciate it if I would wait for her to tell me to enter her room. Since then, I've found myself working harder to be upfront and honest about my feelings with other people. It's a process. But my housemates are teaching me more each day about being genuine, setting boundaries, and both asking for and giving forgiveness.

I've also learned to be patient by observing the patience of those around me. It helps that things move at a slower pace in our community. I know that it will take us fifteen extra minutes to get through the line at the grocery store because we're all paying with checks, and I'm okay with that. In fact, I have begun to enjoy it! I'm constantly reminded fast does not equal better. When we go slower, we have more time to talk with the employees and to enjoy each moment more fully.

JOURNAL ENTRY, 7/24

How special is it to share a meal together. Don't take it for granted; acknowledge the sacredness each time.

One of my favorite parts of daily life at Camphill Village is mealtime. The food we eat is incredible because it is fresh and grown on our land. I can

“ IN THIS COMMUNITY, MADE UP OF PEOPLE WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES, EVERY DAY IS VIEWED AS A NEW OPPORTUNITY TO REMIND EACH OTHER HOW SPECIAL WE ARE.

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volunteering at camphill

Residential volunteers are an essential part of daily life at the fifteen Camphill communities and affiliates in North America. Called coworkers, these volunteers live, work, and enjoy daily life alongside fellow community members with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities, such as autism and Down syndrome.

While living in Camphill communities, coworkers undertake diverse responsibilities and learning experiences, from assisting in pottery, weaving, or woodworking studios to helping out in biodynamic farms, gardens, and bakeries; cooking community meals; sharing household duties; and leading excursions to nearby towns and cities.

“Many volunteers describe their time at Camphill as transformative—a chance to discover themselves; develop lasting friendships; and gain creative and interpersonal skills in a diverse and supportive environment,” says Leila Kaplan, Camphill Association of North America’s Volunteer Outreach Coordinator.

In 2019, Camphill Association of North America launched a College Loan Support Program to help make it possible for more young people to work as live-in volunteers at Camphill communities in North America, while continuing to meet their college loan repayment obligations. Camphill volunteers who meet eligibility requirements can receive up to \$250 a month—or \$3,000 a year—in loan repayment support. Select Camphill communities offer additional college loan assistance to accepted applicants who have education debt in excess of this amount.

In addition to loan assistance, coworkers’ basic living needs are met. During their tenures, they receive medical insurance; a monthly stipend; a private room in a beautiful environment; wholesome, mostly organic meals; and other essentials. Camphill’s volunteer program also includes education and mentorship for those who wish to develop their inner mindfulness practices, whether creative, spiritual, or intellectual.

To learn more about the program and residential volunteer positions at Camphill communities in the United States and Canada, visit camphill.org/clsp or e-mail leila@camphill.org.

think of multiple Saturdays during the summer where at least ten of us—people with and without disabilities alike—harvested green beans together. We shared stories and sang songs as we went, taking time to appreciate the beans that had grown from seeds right before our eyes, the sun that warmed our bodies, and the company of one another.

Similarly, meals are made with love in our community. And enjoying this food alongside wonderful people makes it even more special. As we eat, we talk about how our days are going and what we’re looking forward to. We joke around and tease one another. We play games at the table where we roll our napkin rings to the person across from us and take part in races to be first to blow out the candle.

At the table, we strongly resemble a family. Like any family, our time together is not always light-hearted and fun. Some meals, we’re quiet because we’re still waking up or unable to escape the gloomy weather’s hold on us. Some meals, we’re grouchy or annoyed. Some meals, we just don’t have much to say. Despite our moods and the weather and chaos of the day, we still sit down together and take part in this important ritual, which speaks lengths about our commitment to one another.

JOURNAL ENTRY, 12/8

I wish all people could experience a place as beautiful as this; a way of life so loving, peaceful & intentional... so full of laughter & compliments & dancing. I didn’t know I was signing up for something that will be so hard to leave. 🏠

Olivia Tartton joined Camphill Village Minnesota as a coworker in March 2019. Hailing from the suburbs of Dallas, and more recently, Green Bay, Wisconsin, Olivia enjoys reading, biking, and picnics. She is learning to enjoy the winter. After leaving Camphill, her next adventure will be obtaining her master’s degree in order to become a middle school English teacher.