

Action Reconciliation Service For Peace (ARSP)

Learning from history · Taking a stand today · Building a positive future

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Welcome to Action Reconciliation Service For Peace's June Newsletter!



ARSP Volunteers this past May comparing five memorials on the Washington Mall (Holocaust, Lincoln, Vietnam War, Korean War, World War II) and discussing the nature of remembrance in Germany and the United States.

Photo by Sebastian Stahlke

Dear Friends,

I hope you had a wonderful Memorial Day weekend and had a chance to enjoy the (mostly) wonderful weather!

It is a pleasure to send you this greeting and update you on the latest developments here at ARSP. First and foremost **I would like to welcome Mark McGuigan to our staff!** He has been working with us since January, in the field of development and public relations. Mark is from Philadelphia, and as he has worked both in the non-profit sector and in the field of German-American relations for many years his experience is an excellent fit for us.

In welcoming Mark, **I also want to take a moment to thank his predecessor, Katrin Bahr**, for her three years of invaluable service to ARSP. Katrin laid the groundwork for a more professional approach to outreach and fundraising for our US program. She is leaving us to pursue her studies - here in the United States I am happy to report. Thank you Katrin, for everything, and best wishes for your new endeavor! This spring has been especially busy for us. We've sponsored several interesting and well-attended lectures/discussions in New York and Washington, the last as part of our annual spring retreat (Länderseminar) with all of our US volunteers.

The Länderseminar itself was a little different this year. For the first time our own 23 German volunteers were joined by five volunteers from an American volunteer service, **AMIZADE** (the word means "Friendship" in Portuguese). It was an opportunity for our volunteers to evaluate their experiences here, and have in-depth discussions about issues of remembrance and reconciliation - not only amongst themselves, but with young Americans, who themselves have spent some time abroad as volunteers. This intercultural experience culminated at the Goethe Institute where we organized a well-attended panel discussion on German-Jewish dialogue.

In closing, **I want to extend an invitation to participate in two special ARSP international programs.** The first is one of **our annual Sommerlager** (Summer Camps) at the end of August, where a small group of 15 individuals from the United States, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland will live together for a week and help to restore a small Jewish cemetery on the Czech/Polish border. Along the way they will have the chance to explore important inter-cultural topics and get to know the local area. This program is open to four American participants.

The second program is a special training this fall for professionals working with young immigrants in the United States, Germany and France - eight participants from each country. It's title: ***From Melting Pots to Tossed Salads: Practical challenges of ethnic plurality and cultural diversity in the work with youth.***

You can read more details about both programs in this newsletter, and we invite you to be in touch if you are interested in more information or would like to participate!

On behalf of ARSP, I want to wish all of you a wonderful summer, and hope to have the chance to see many of you in the coming months.

Magdalena Scharf (Executive Director U.S. Program)



Travel with ARSP: Sommerlager (Summer Camp) at Cesky Tesin

ARSP's Sommerlagers are a unique opportunity for our friends to travel to Europe and participate in our work of building understanding across cultural and national boundaries.

Each camp brings together participants from different countries to undertake a hands-on project that also promotes intercultural understanding and reflection about the past. It is a chance to meet new people, and for many, to have an encounter that can be very profound and healing.

This summer's Camp at Cesky Tesin in the Czech Republic is a perfect example. Cesky Tesin lies in the farthest eastern region of the Czech Republic, in Moravia at the Polish border. ARSP was asked by a Holocaust survivor originally from the area, now living in the U.S., to help with the initial clean up of a local Jewish cemetery. So ARSP has planned a summer camp with participants from Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic and the U.S.

Like so many cemeteries in the country, this one is in very poor condition, making it difficult for descendants of the Jewish community that once existed here and other visitors to make their way to the graves of their ancestors. The participants will clear out the first section of the cemetery, cut back the vegetation and perhaps even begin to create paths and clean the moss off of gravestones.

Since the cemetery belongs to the next largest Jewish community in Ostrava, an excursion there is also planned. Excursions to Olomouc or to Polski Cieszyn, the Polish companion town to Cesky Tesin, located in nearby Poland, can also be made. Bike trips, museum visits and other activities in the nearby surroundings are also possible.

In smaller groups and discussion circles, the participants will address Jewish life in Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic and the U.S. - both in the past and today.

ARSP works to keep the costs of participating low. While participants need to pay for their own travel to and from the Sommerlager location, once there the €130 (approximately \$182) fee covers both food and accommodations for the 12 day stay. There is also a lower rate of €100 (approximately \$140) for those with low incomes. The dates for the Sommerlager don't include travel time - so plan extra time for arriving and departing.

Are you interested in joining us? Let us know! Contact us at 215-241-7249 or write us at info@actionreconciliation.org. If no one is in the office, leave a message including how best to get in touch with you.

Dates: Sunday, August 21 - Friday, September 2, 2011

Participants: 15 individuals from Germany, the United States, Czech Republic and Poland.

Focus: Clean-up of Jewish cemetery on Czech/Polish border

Camp language: English

Accommodations: Small, simply furnished cabins

Costs: \$150 per person - includes food and accommodations. All travel costs to and from the Sommerlager location are the responsibility of the participants.

In Memoriam: Reverend Robert Helm of Trinity Church, New York

With deep sorrow we want to share with you the sad news that our friend and colleague, Reverend Robert Helm, passed away this past Easter Monday, April 25th.

Reverend Helm and the Trinity congregation he led is the oldest current project partner for ARSP in the United States, taking a volunteer each year since the 1970s. It is also one of the most challenging for our volunteers, in which they are exposed both to real poverty and need, and a deeply-felt political and spiritual commitment to show solidarity with and provide assistance to people of all backgrounds. Their work is all more amazing for the very limited resources within the community itself. And for a 19-year old volunteer newly arrived from Germany, it can be quite a daunting, but almost inevitably, rewarding experience.

At the center of this was Reverend Helm. An admirably committed person, he was dedicated to his parish and spent a lifetime working tirelessly for social justice. He was humble, yet headstrong; chaotic at times but also keenly focused on the physical and spiritual needs of his community, his country and the world. His commitment also to ARSP and our work was total, and as the head of one of the poorest congregations in Manhattan, he faithfully contributed to our work just as our volunteers contributed to his.



Reverend Helms is the rare individual who stands out for the intensity of his faith and his dedication to transforming that faith into action in a world that can be so very materialistic, violent and cynical. He will be missed by us but perhaps more importantly by the community that he sustained with his leadership and love.

A former ARSP volunteer commented on Reverend Helms passing on-line. You can read his comments [here](#).

Volunteer Voices: Encounters with an Immigrant

Ruben Staffa, ARSP Volunteer

Each year our volunteers have a chance to encounter people and situations outside of their everyday experiences in Germany. Nowhere is this more true than with the volunteers who serve in Camden, NJ. In this story, ARSP Volunteer Ruben Staffa writes about his encounter with two brothers - both illegal immigrants from Guatemala - and what he learned about the plight of many undocumented workers in the United States.

I will never forget the night about a month ago, when I sat together with another German volunteer and the Bermudez brothers (the names have been changed to protect their identities) - two Guatemalans who had survived the dangerous journey to the United States and entered the country illegally.

Six months had passed since I came to the United States, more precisely to Camden, New Jersey. In retrospect, I am glad that I was placed here - though in the beginning I had my doubts. Camden seems a bleak place, judging only by its records. In 2009 it was rated the most dangerous city in the United States and this year it has the nation's highest rape rate. I must admit that these statistics at first intimidated me, to put it charitably, but now I love living here, because the place contains so many remarkable people - many with equally remarkable stories.

The Bermudez brothers are two such stories - illustrating the staggering challenges and dismal fate that so many other illegal immigrants share with them.

I first met Hector Bermudez one Sunday morning, when I managed to leave my cozy bed to listen to the sermon at the Christus Lutheran Church which runs my project. Judging from the attendance, it seemed that other folks were also grappling with the unfortunately early hour chosen for worship. However, in one of the pews sat an apparently Latin American man whose roaming eyes were taking in the church with curiosity. His eyes were in stark contrast to his worn out physical state. The pastor briefed me quickly about him. His name was Hector Bermudez and he had arrived a month ago from Guatemala.

Glad to refresh my Spanish I took a seat next to him and we quickly got into a conversation. This friendly guy had spent more than a year of incredible deprivation to get to the United States. Only one month earlier, he had crossed the desert with many other Latinos on their voyage to a better life. He had made it, many others hadn't. I searched back through my memory and realized that this

was one of the unfortunate illegal immigrants we talked about so much in our Spanish class in Germany.

We invited him for dinner the same night and he happily accepted, bringing his brother, Ricardo, who he lives with. I don't think I will ever forget that night. The sight of Sebastian and me having German Pfannkuchen with the two Guatemalans was itself pretty unique, but their story was even more compelling. I didn't want to be rude, assaulting them with questions, but finally I just asked all the questions that were bouncing around in my head, and they answered them patiently.

[more ->](#)



Ruben Staffa is an ARSP Volunteer from Berlin, Germany doing service with the Christus Lutheran Academy in Camden, NJ.

Volunteers Serving: Holocaust Survivor and Native German Come Together for Talk at Pittsburgh Area Junior High School

ARSP volunteer Jan Phillip Hamm often goes with Holocaust survivors to schools in the Pittsburgh area to engage students with the topic of the Holocaust - bringing to bear his own perspective as a young German. A local newspaper covered one such talk in its May 28, 2011 edition..

Story and photo by **Stephanie Rex**, editor of the **ForestHills-RegentSquare Patch**



Harry Schneider and Phillip Hamm are bridging a gap between generations and sides to form a united front to promote peace and the preservation of history.

Schneider of Churchill survived the Holocaust as a baby in exile from his native country of Poland. He spoke with Hamm, with whom he connected with at the Holocaust Center in Squirrel Hill, at Woodland Hills Junior High School Friday morning in the auditorium to a group of eighth graders.

"I am a child Holocaust survivor and was the same age as you when I came to the United States," Schneider said. "I was placed in eighth grade and couldn't speak any English, had a very good

English teacher who spent many evenings with me. After a short period of time I was able to understand and get along and even at this time I am still learning."

Hamm, 20, of Hamburg, Germany, refused to serve in the German military and chose to serve his country instead by staying in Pittsburgh for a year through the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace program, created to help his native country reconcile with all of the countries affected by the Nazis.

"When my parents were alive, I didn't ask them too many questions about the war," Schneider said during the first half of the program. "Every time I tried, they said, you're in America, make the best of it - we don't want to talk about the past." Before World War II began, he described life in Poland as difficult, but peaceful. "No one could have envisioned the horrors that awaited the Jewish people," Schneider said. "Once Hitler invaded Germany and spread anti-semitic hatred to our country, their army invaded Poland and life was changed forever."

Schneider lived in a small village near the capital of Poland, Warsaw. He was two and a half years old when the Germans invaded Poland on Dec. 1, 1939. On Dec. 3, France and Britain declared war on Germany, thus beginning World War II.

In 1939, Schneider's father was in the Polish army. "He came home and took my mother and I into the forest and we escaped before the Germans arrived," he said. [more ->](#)



Jan Phillip Hamm is an ARSP Volunteer from Brunsbüttel, Germany, doing service with the Holocaust Center in Pittsburgh, PA.

Practitioners Invited to Attend First ARSP Tri-national Colloquium on Immigration, Youth and Integration Berlin, October 16-October 23, 2011



Do you work with immigrant youth here in the United States?

Are you interested in sharing your experiences with colleagues from the United States, Germany, and France, while in turn learning about their own on-the-ground experiences?

Consider applying for the first of three planned colloquiums organized by ARSP on this topic. Eight American practitioners will be chosen to participate.

The \$600 participation fee includes airfare to Berlin, shared accommodations, and two meals a day. A special lower rate is available for those with special circumstances.

Globalization and mass migration have put issues of immigration, integration and citizenship front and center around the world. ARSP's tri-national colloquium, *Melting Pots to Tossed Salads: Practical challenges of ethnic plurality and cultural diversity in the work with young adults - a comparison of France, Germany, and the United States*, will bring experienced practitioners together - eight individuals from each country who work with their respective immigrant communities - to compare and contrast current approaches and experiences with immigration and integration. Our goal is to learn from each other and improve what we do.

The Berlin colloquium is the first in three - the second and third taking place in France and the United States. Participants at the seven day conference will consider how different belief systems and historical narratives in each country have shaped that nation's current approach to integration. They will look in-depth at relevant case studies and best practices from all three countries; and visit actual projects that address these issues in the host city of Berlin. Two future conferences will continue the discussion at locations in France and the United States.

Those selected to participate in the conference will work with the organizers to shape the final program agenda. The tentative agenda for the Berlin program in October 2011 is discussion around the topics of Identity, Integration, Migration, Culture, Ethnicity and Inter-religious Dialogue; Exchange of work experience amongst each other; visiting projects that work "on the ground" in Berlin; and discussions with politicians, academics and activists.

This program is intended for professionals, volunteers and activists (including those in education,

social work, law, etc.) that work in the field of immigration and integration. If you are interested in participating send us a short e-mail of interest describing your work and reasons for wanting to participate. E-mails can be sent to Mark McGuigan at mmcguigan@actionreconciliation.org

Volunteer Voices: Coming to Terms with Domestic Abuse

by Sarah Johannsen, ARSP Volunteer

Even though I was already very familiar with gender-related issues like sexual harassment and sexual assault, it wasn't until I worked for Women Against Abuse (WAA) in Philadelphia that I could fully understand why women didn't just leave abusive relationships.

As a feminist, I had, of course, never blamed women for not leaving - and I did see a couple of reasons for staying. For example, financial dependence or the involvement of children could make it hard to leave even an abuse relationship. But still, I always wondered how a person could let anyone treat them so badly.

Then, in December 2010, I attended an intensive training on domestic violence that everyone who works for WAA has to complete. I learned that there is not only physical or financial abuse but also emotional and sexual abuse, abuse through technology, and abuse through immigration status. Often, all of these are happening at the same time.

The training made much clearer to me just how desperate the situations are that the women in our shelter are fleeing, and the many reasons why leaving is sometimes an almost impossible step for a victim of abuse to take. We heard stories during training that I could have never imagined before; most of all, I was surprised about how easy, cheap and legal it is to download stalking tools on the internet even without much computer knowledge.

For example, we heard the story of a woman, let's call her Anna, who simply couldn't leave because her violent partner was so controlling that he didn't let her leave the house, make a phone call or use the internet without his permission or him watching. He installed cameras throughout their apartment so he could watch her while he was at work. The only place Anna thought she would be alone and could talk freely was in her car when she was picking up the kids from school. But when she came home, her husband knew all the things she talked about in the car with her kids or while on the phone.

After Anna was finally able to leave him, she brought her car to the police and told them that he must have done something to it, and that she wanted them to find out what it was. It turned out that her husband had hidden a cell phone in the glove box and connected it to the car battery. From the internet, he downloaded a tool that sets the cell phone to answer incoming calls automatically without any sound. Whenever he knew that Anna was in the car, he would call the phone in the glove box and listen to everything that was being said.

During the our days of training, we learned that there are an endless number of similarly insane stalking tools for computer, home and cell phones that none of us had ever heard of before. It has not only made some of us feel more paranoid than ever, but it has also made me think more seriously about how people - myself included - present themselves on-line.

Almost half of the women who come to the WAA shelter bring at least one child with them. I work with kids from the age of two to five at the shelter, and that has helped me recognize that for these women, the fear of losing their children made them wait so long before they left for good. Their partners often threatened them with taking away their children and fighting to deny them custody. All in all, getting to know these women at the shelter over the last few months has helped me to understand their situations - and their decisions - much better than before.



Sarah Johannsen is an ARSP Volunteer from Berlin, Germany, doing service with Women Against Abuse (WAA) in Philadelphia, PA.

The End of the Draft and the Future of Volunteer Service in Germany

**By Dr. Christian Staffa, Executive Director
Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienst/Action Reconciliation Service for Peace**

Last year the German government ended mandatory military service. One important source of volunteers for Action Reconciliation in the past has been conscientious objectors who chose to do alternative service overseas, rather than the standard Zivildienst (conscientious objector service) in Germany itself. The ending of the draft, therefore, has implications for the future of ARSP and similar volunteer services in Germany both in terms of volunteers and funding. Add to that the growing involvement of the German government itself in promoting its own new volunteer services, and there is a lot happening. This article appeared in German in the Spring edition of ARSP's quarterly magazine, "zeichen."

Even as recently as last year no one would have predicted that an institution as central to the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany (or for that matter for the former German Democratic in eastern Germany) as compulsory military service would be eliminated - along with conscientious objector service and other volunteer service opportunities recognized by German law as a substitute for both.

Who would have thought that the "citizens' army" would depart the stage without so much as a peep - taking with it the service of 80,000 conscientious objectors who play such a critical role in caring for the sick and elderly? How ironic that precisely those volunteer services which for the longest time conservative draftees derided as the chicken's way out, are now being touted as a replacement for the "School of the Nation," (as the German Army was often called). These new "schools" of course, will no longer teach obedience and conformity as did the army, but rather will

promote social and intercultural abilities. And with that, a central demand of the protest movement against the rearming of Germany in the 1950s - and also of the peace movement in the 1980s - goes into fulfillment.

A Short Look Back

In the 20th century, volunteer services were founded to address conflict and to promote understanding between former enemy nations. Understanding across borders from shared activity forms the basis of a peaceful society went the credo of ARSP mentor Eugen Rosenstock-Hussey - the relationship to actual people in a former enemy country representing a turning away from old warpaths. This was all the more true following the Second World War, because of which the civilizing accomplishments of the interaction between individuals and groups was destroyed by the Germans. Slowly a new trust had to be won. And for that, non-state actors were central.

Service for Peace - a Model of Success?

In both East and West Germany, refusal to serve in the military was against the law until the end of the Cold War and was punishable by either a long conscientious objector service or a prison term. In West Germany, however, the idea of an in-country "year of social service" soon enjoyed broad societal recognition as an alternative to either.

The social movements of the sixties, seventies and eighties brought with them a new appreciation for the importance of volunteerism to society. A 1967 quote from constitutional law expert E.-W. Böckenförde, following a decade of deep societal conflict, had become by the 1990s an oft quoted maxim: "the liberal secular state depends on premises that it cannot itself guarantee."

Putting aside earlier claims by the church to be the sole arbiter of "societal values," the comment today is a proactive statement about creating a society with an engaged citizenry. Without the active participation of its people, the democratic institutions of society remain empty and the state without legitimate foundation. With their participation, government relies much more on discussion, public oversight, and even the sharing of governmental power with and to the benefit of civil society - which can promote societal change even in the face of governmental resistance.

Volunteer service also stands for this kind of participation in the political process. "Services for peace" - among others, those offered through ARSP - have clearly demonstrated their value to building understanding and have initiated societal processes that are having a meaningful effect up to the present moment in central Eastern Europe and in Israel. The same holds true for volunteer service in the developing world, which has grown the awareness for the necessity of a just global economic order. [more ->](#)



Dr. Christian Staffa is a trained theologian and executive director for Action Reconciliation Service for Peace in Berlin, Germany.

Three ARSP Spring Events Highlighted Remembrance, German-Jewish Dialogue

This past spring, ARSP held a series of well-received talks and panel discussions focusing on the transmission of trauma between survivors of the Holocaust and their descendents, ARSP's work with survivors, and German-Jewish dialogue between young adults three generations after the crimes of the Nazi regime.

In each case audiences of between 40-50 individuals came out to participate in events that informed and moved those in attendance. In early March, Dr. Kurt Grünberg, a psychoanalyst and research associate at the Sigmund Freud Institut in

Frankfurt Germany, spoke at the JCC Manhattan about the trans-generational experience of trauma from the Shoah within his own family. Son of a survivor who returned to his small village in Germany after the war and raised his family there, Dr. Grünberg spoke movingly of how memories of the Holocaust were often transferred to the next generation in a fragmented, non-verbal way.

Later that month, ARSP presented a panel about its volunteers' service with Holocaust survivors and the sometimes healing effect that this special relationship can have both on the survivor and the volunteer.

The panel was part of a 75th anniversary conference for the Selfhelp, New York, a non-profit that works extensively with survivors there and has hosted an ARSP volunteer for many years. The audience was made up of 45 professionals who themselves work with survivors in many capacities.

Current ARSP volunteers Christian Cramer and Annika Spiegelberg spoke about their work this year, while Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow, whose organization in Boston also hosts a volunteer each year, spoke about the healing power of that these relationships between young Germans and older survivors can have on others. She cited in particular members of the staff of her own organization, Hebrew SeniorLife, many of whom come from Latin America and the Philippines. Also on the panel were ARSP Executive Director Christian Staffa and Elmar Jakobs with the German Consulate in New York.

ARSP's US Director, Magda Scharf, reported the most gratifying part of the day was when numerous participants came up to her to ask how they too could get a volunteer to work with their clients.

And finally, in May, ARSP presented a panel on the topic of German-Jewish dialogue at the Goethe Institute in Washington, as part of its annual spring seminar (Länderseminar) for its volunteers. The panel which included both the grandchildren of Jewish survivors and young ARSP volunteers, considered the ways in which for their generation, the issues are evolving and a



cautious and sometimes enthusiastic contact is developing that would have been difficult to envision even 20 years ago. Björn Krondorfer, professor of religious studies at St. Mary's College of Maryland with a particular expertise in Holocaust studies, gave an overview and useful insights into German-Jewish relations since the end of the war. .

Online Newsletter

This newsletter provides you with information about ARSP's work in the United States. If you have questions or explanatory notes/remarks or don't want to receive our newsletter, please contact Mark McGuigan, Development & Public Relations, at mmcguigan@actionreconciliation.org or call **215-241-7249**.

If you want to support the work of ARSP please [click here](#) or send a check to Action Reconciliation Service For Peace (ARSP)-1501 Cherry Street· Philadelphia· PA 19102!