

Filled with the Malagasy spirit

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On her first night in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar, Minnesota native Erika Storvick felt overwhelmed by her decision to serve there through the ELCA's Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program.

"It's probably the place that is most different from Minnesota," she said of Madagascar.

Through YAGM, Storvick answered a call to spend a year volunteering alongside Malagasy companions teaching English to primary, secondary and deaf students, and growing in faith. But that night she asked herself, "Why have I chosen to live on the other side of the world for an entire year?"

Though she didn't have an answer at the time, Storvick knows now that the experience helped her become more open-minded.

While teaching was fulfilling, the Malagasy spirit—being intentional with others, to the point where time and schedules take a back seat as one focuses on relationships—really filled her heart.

"I was a very overscheduled, overinvolved person before, so at first, my life felt empty if I didn't have something scheduled for every minute of every day," she said. "[But] you have so many more opportunities to grow if you don't schedule every minute."

The challenges of living alone, walking an hour one-way to the deaf school where she taught arts and crafts, and overcoming a language barrier were at times daunting, Storvick said.

But she stuck with it, said Kirsten Laderach, an ELCA pastor and YAGM country coordinator for Madagascar. **Laderach's work with YAGM is primarily funded through Mission Support.**

"She ... just kept doing the work that you do when life's not easy, which I really appreciate about her," Laderach said.

Storvick said the community spirit she was shown by people she met helped make her year abroad one of lasting importance.

"I think I'm a better person because I did YAGM," she said. "It's taught me that [from] the places and people I least expect, you can grow friendships, and even in very humbling situations ... [when] you know nothing or none of the answers—those are the places I saw God."

