

# Might you become involved in L'ARCHE, EDINBURGH?

## - A PLACE TO BELONG

by Claire Wilson, Committee Chair.

At L'Arche Edinburgh we offer accommodation, care and support for people with learning disabilities in three shared houses and individual flats. It is a Christian community open to all, welcoming adults with learning disabilities to a life shared with employed assistants and others. We support people with a range of gifts and needs, including people with physical disabilities in addition to their learning disabilities.

A few years ago we completed a new purpose-designed house for people with learning difficulties who are ageing (called 'David's House' after Mgr David Gemmell). This group of people are particularly vulnerable. Often there is no-one left who can understand them when their own family carer dies. Some start to age in their 40s and 50s and there is very little homely residential provision available. L'Arche Edinburgh set out to meet this local need, and offer friendship and a home for life for some of society's most marginalised people.

L'Arche Edinburgh is part of the worldwide federation of 147 L'Arche communities. L'Arche was founded by philosopher Jean Vanier, the son of a former Governor General of Canada. He served during World War II with the Royal Navy. He resigned in 1950 to study philosophy and theology and went on to teach. In 1964, he became aware of the plight of thousands of people institutionalised with learning disabilities and, in that year, took the radical step of inviting Raphael Simi and Phillipe Seux to leave the institution where they lived to share their lives with him. Together they began L'Arche in a small house in Trosly-Breuil, France. L'Arche grew rapidly and in 1968 the first community opened in Canada. In March 2015, Jean Vanier was awarded the Templeton Prize in recognition of his advocacy for people with disabilities. The Templeton Prize, which has previously been awarded to Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama and others, is one of the most respected honours in the world.

Jean Vanier, and those who came to share his vision, learned two important truths in those early years, both of which remain at the heart of L'Arche today:

Firstly, people with learning disabilities have a great deal to contribute to society; secondly, by living in an intentional community with people with and without learning disabilities, living with diversity and difference, we open ourselves up to be challenged and grow.

There are eleven L'Arche Communities in Britain, including two in Scotland, Inverness and Edinburgh. Although grounded in the Christian religious tradition, L'Arche Communities welcome people of all faiths and none: our vision is a world where all belong.

Adding to the two established shared houses, in 2013 L'Arche Edinburgh helped four people move to new flats. David's House in Restalrig opened in 2014. In 2017, we are expanding what we offer people during the day.

**Could you become involved? Our activities are governed by a National Board who work with a local committee of 7-9 members. We welcome new expressions of interest by people who would like to serve as a member of the committee. Members meet 6-8 times a year, to review activities, and help set the strategic goals for L'Arche in its development as a community and service provider. Experience in social care, community life, voluntary sector, HR, business development, finance or legal are particularly welcome. Training is offered. Visit our website at [www.larche.org.uk](http://www.larche.org.uk), email us at [edinburgh@larche.org.uk](mailto:edinburgh@larche.org.uk) or telephone our office on 0131 553 3478**