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Living Out: A Study Exploring the Experience of Live Out Assistants in L'Arche

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LIVING OUT:
A STUDY EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF LIVE
OUT ASSISTANTS IN L'ARCHIE

by

Jennifer Christine Elkins
B.A. (Honors), the University of Western Ontario, 2005

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to qualitatively explore the experiences of live-out assistants in two L’Arche communities in order to better understand what these staff members perceived to be the benefits and challenges of community life in L’Arche. Live-out assistants support individuals with developmental disabilities in L’Arche communities, but do not live in a L’Arche home. This study incorporates theories related to the role of core values in uniting intentional communities and organizational change. Intentional communities face an ongoing challenge of adapting to internal and external changes, while retaining core values and a common purpose. An empowerment approach to change is suggested as one possible means for helping L’Arche communities address the challenges that participants in this study identified.

The incorporation of live-out staff in L’Arche represents an internal organizational change that requires L’Arche to respond to the needs of a new group of members. Since L’Arche is a network of intentional communities that are held together by strong core values, it is important to understand the ways that core values are influenced and experienced by live-out assistants. In addition, live-out assistants act as a bridge that connects L’Arche with the external environment. This connection may improve the organization’s ability to prepare for and respond to changes in the external environment as well as to influence that environment with its values.

The research design of this study reflected an interpretive narrative approach (McQueen & Zimmerman, 2006; Simpson & Barker, 2006) combined with some participatory methods (Stringer, 1996). Ten live-out assistants were interviewed and interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and analyzed. In addition, Official Documents of L’Arche were analyzed for themes related to the core values of the organization. Values identified in Official Documents were compared with interview data to see if and how participants were engaged in simultaneous processes of influencing, and being shaped by, organizational values. Furthermore, interview analysis also explored the role that live-out assistants played, or could play, in connecting L’Arche to the external environment.

Findings from this study suggest that L’Arche communities are successfully bringing live-out assistants into alignment with organizational values. Participants consistently shared experiences that illustrated core values being practiced in tangible ways and identified these experiences as increasing individual commitment and community unity. Still, there remain underlying questions that must be addressed regarding the relative value of live-out assistants compared to other community members and what their specific role in community is. In addition, live-out assistants may also be particularly well positioned to act as a bridge between L’Arche and the external environment, but L’Arche communities have not taken advantage of this potential link. While part of L’Arche’s mission is to work towards wider societal change related to equal rights and inclusion for people with disabilities, the priorities of live-out assistants remain inwardly focused on community life and resource needs. This focus limits the organization’s ability to promote change in wider society.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Diversity in Canadian society continues to increase as people from all over the world come here to live and work. As the makeup of our society changes so too does our understanding of who we are and what it means to be Canadian. The definitions that individuals construct to understand who they are and what it means to be Canadian contribute to whether people feel included as full citizens. In Canada today there are many people who continue to feel excluded because they experience isolation and marginalization on a regular basis (Lord & Hutchison, 2007). For example, many individuals with developmental disabilities live in community settings, but few are engaged in their local communities (Diers, 2004). This marginalization has historical roots in the mid-1800s when individuals considered to have developmental disabilities were removed from society and permanently placed in large institutions (Dunn, 2006). Removing individuals with developmental disabilities from community settings violates their rights to meaningful relationships and participation as full citizens. It also robs communities of the gifts and talents that excluded individuals would contribute.

During the 1960s, human and civil rights movements gained momentum and inspired a widespread shift in thinking about people with disabilities. At first, the deinstitutionalization movement advocated for the closure of large institutions and the relocation of previously institutionalized individuals to community-based settings (Dunn, 2006; Lord & Hutchison, 2007). Since the 1990s, the focus has evolved to developing communities where all individuals have the opportunities and supports they need to

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1 When the term ‘community’ is used in this document it refers to communities in general and not L’Arche specifically. In places where I am referring specifically to L’Arche as a community I have stated that it is the L’Arche community that I am discussing.
participate as full citizens (Dunn, 2006; Lord & Hutchison, 2007; The Roeher Institute, 1999).

L’Arche communities are examples of intentional communities that were founded to respond to the isolation and marginalization experienced by individuals with developmental disabilities (L’Arche Canada, 2008; Vanier, 1995). The organization, “seeks to build an inclusive and compassionate society by encouraging the recognition and development of all people’s gifts” (L’Arche Canada, 2008). L’Arche communities are a home or collection of homes where people with developmental disabilities and those who support them live together and are equally responsible for their home and L’Arche community. While L’Arche communities can be viewed as segregated communities that do not facilitate real inclusion beyond their borders, these communities provide a context in which diverse individuals can create a community together by sharing life and developing personal relationships. Previous research has shown that when individuals feel they have supportive personal relationships with others they also tend to feel more included (McKean, 2002; The Roeher Institute, 1999). In addition, one of the key factors that engender positive attitudes towards individuals with developmental disabilities is experiencing personal relationships with them (McKean, 2002; The Roeher Institute, 1999). The experiences of L’Arche communities provide important insights about the role of relationships in facilitating inclusion, but they also need to consider how they will respond to changing definitions of inclusion and promote an increasingly inclusive society.

Change can be a scary process, especially when it affects the core values that unify a group or society. Whiteley and Whiteley (2007) note that organizational vision and
values give employees a sense of who they are, how things should be done, and what their organization stands for. In a similar way, common organizational ideals also unify intentional communities. Many authors have noted the important role that commitment to a set of clearly articulated core values and a sense of common purpose play in holding intentional communities together (Berry, 1997; Boonyasopun, 2000; Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1989; Wood & Judikis, 2002). In addition, organizations exist within larger contexts that require them to change and adapt (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007; Wood & Judikis, 2002). The challenge for intentional communities is how to change and adapt over time while staying true to their original ideals.

L’Arche communities are examples of intentional communities where values are influenced by changing environments and membership. Live-out assistants represent a relatively new group of community members in L’Arche, and the purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore the experiences and roles of these assistants from their perspective. Having a greater understanding of the perceptions and experiences of live-out assistants can reveal how these assistants influence and adopt core values, connect L’Arche to the external environment and affect the organization’s ability to adapt to internal and external changes. The insights gained from this research may also contribute to explaining and understanding theory related to intentional communities and organizational change.

Although intentional communities are less popular today than they were in the 1960s and 70s, understanding how to maintain one’s personal identity while adapting to internal and external changes remains relevant for individuals, organizations, communities and
states (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Hornsey & Jetten, 2004; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007; Wood & Judikis, 2002). L’Arche communities are considered intentional because individuals choose to live together according to a specific set of values. Beginning in 1964, L’Arche is now an international network of over 130 communities that exists across Canada and around the world. One of the most significant changes within Canadian L’Arche communities has been the addition of live-out assistants. These staff members participate in life in L’Arche, but do not reside in a L’Arche home. Some of these individuals were live-in assistants for a number of years and then transitioned into a live-out role, but increasing numbers have never lived in a L’Arche home. Discussions with L’Arche community and organizational leaders working for L’Arche in Southern Ontario revealed their keen interest in knowing more about the experiences of live-out assistants and the implications of incorporating these assistants into L’Arche communities.

1.1 A Brief Overview of L’Arche

Before proceeding, a brief overview of L’Arche will be provided in order to give readers a sense of the organization’s history, values and what community life is like in L’Arche. The first L’Arche community began in 1964, when Jean Vanier felt compelled to respond to the poverty and injustice that he witnessed in a psychiatric institution (L’Arche Canada, 2008; Vanier, 1995). He invited two men with developmental and physical disabilities to share a home with him and they called the home L’Arche. Vanier continues to live in the L’Arche community in Trosly, France and his example has inspired many others to join L’Arche communities around the world.
In addition, L’Arche communities have always been faith-based communities with strong connections to the Roman Catholic Church. Jean Vanier has written extensively about how his faith contributed to his decision to start L’Arche. While today L’Arche communities welcome people of all faiths, the Catholic roots of the organization are still evident in L’Arche’s values and practices. For example, the *Charter of the Communities of L’Arche* (1993) states that L’Arche communities are to be communities of faith and spiritual rituals such as group prayer and worship are regularly practiced in both the L’Arche communities that participated in this study.

Today, L’Arche has grown into an international network of over 130 communities in 35 countries (L’Arche Canada, 2008). Vanier’s original vision was to create a community where those with developmental disabilities would be at the centre, where their gifts would be celebrated, and where they would feel a sense of belonging (Vanier, 1992; White, 1993). The purpose of the organization is not to be a long-term care facility that ‘helps’ people, but rather to reveal the gifts of individuals who are marginalized and rejected in society and show how diversity can enrich community life (L’Arche Canada, 2008; Pascal, 2002; Vanier, 1989). This vision is modeled in L’Arche by individuals from diverse backgrounds and with different capacities who share a home and daily life together. L’Arche communities in Canada are funded through a combination of government funding, fundraising and private donations. The national organization is completely financed through donations (L’Arche Canada, 2008).

The specifics of life in L’Arche communities vary depending on the cultural, religious and geographical context of the community, however, all L’Arche communities share a common set of core values that guide and unite them internationally. These ideals
are found in the *Charter of the Communities of L'Arche* (1993) and the *Constitution of the International Federation of L'Arche Communities* (1999), and can be summarized into five main points: 1) everyone has unique and sacred value, 2) human beings need an atmosphere of trust, security and mutual affection in order to grow, 3) core members are at the heart of community life, 4) spirituality is an important part of daily life and 5) L’Arche communities strive to be increasingly integrated into society.

The belief that everyone has **unique and sacred value** requires that all community members in L’Arche be given the same dignity and rights. An organizational commitment to this principle is reflected in the language used in L’Arche communities. Many of the traditional terms used in society to describe people with disabilities have devalued and marginalized them. Terms such as ‘patient’ or ‘client’ implied that they were recipients rather than contributors. In L’Arche, the term ‘core member’ is used to refer to individuals with developmental disabilities and ‘assistant’ is used to describe those who support them. This language acknowledges that core members are at the centre of community life in L’Arche and should be equally valued.

L’Arche communities also believe that **human beings need an atmosphere of trust, security and mutual affection in order to grow**. Communities provide a place for individuals to be together and learn from mutually-enriching relationships. Personal growth is facilitated through sharing life together and being encouraged to make choices and try new things. Warm and accepting relationships provide the support that individuals need to develop their talents and abilities fully.

In addition, L’Arche communities recognize that **core members possess many gifts** including, “welcome, wonderment, spontaneity and directness” (*Charter*, 1993, p. 2).
Core members use these gifts to teach others about the value of diversity in community and honesty in relationships. Living together with those who are different than ourselves provides us with the opportunity to consider alternative perspectives and to grow in our respect for all peoples’ gifts.

**Spirituality** plays an important role in daily life at L’Arche, as each L’Arche community encourages members to discover and deepen their spiritual life in accordance with their tradition. Core members are believed to demonstrate God’s presence and the inner freedom that understanding one’s spirituality can provide. While L’Arche communities were originally founded as Christian communities, they seek to be open to people of all faiths and thus emphasize the common spiritual needs of all humans, rather than the practice of a particular religious faith.

Last, L’Arche communities endeavour to be integrated into society by building connections with friends and neighbours as well as critically interacting with their external environment. They desire to be open to the culture in which they live, contribute to changing wider societal perceptions of people with disabilities, and foster increasingly inclusive communities.

The five values discussed above provide purpose to the organization and guide structures and practices. While the particular make up of L’Arche communities varies, there are some common features. L’Arche communities consist of one or more homes where individuals with developmental disabilities live with those who support them (L’Arche Canada, 2008; Pascal, 2002; Vanier, 1995; Vanier, 1992; Vanier, 1989). Live-in assistants commit to residing with core members and are responsible for providing personal support to core members and managing and maintaining the home. Home life is
modeled upon a family-like structure where members share meals, conversation, prayer, recreational activities and games (Pascal, 2002; Vanier, 1995; Vanier 1989).

1.2 Purpose of this Study

This study seeks to explore the experiences of live-out assistants in two L’Arche communities in order to better understand what these staff members perceive to be the benefits and challenges of community life in L’Arche. The decision to focus on the experiences of live-out assistants resulted from conversations with individuals in leadership positions at L’Arche who expressed a desire to better understand the needs of live-out assistants and what they bring to L’Arche communities. In addition, L’Arche’s core values provide a lens through which the experiences of live-out assistants and the organization’s ability to adapt to change can be better understood. The incorporation of live-out staff in L’Arche represents an internal organizational change that requires L’Arche communities to respond to the needs of a new group of members. Core values play an important role in unifying intentional communities like L’Arche, so it is important that L’Arche communities understand how live-out assistants influence and experience organizational values in order to maintain unity. In addition, live-out assistants can act as a bridge that connects L’Arche with the external environment. This connection may improve the organization’s ability to prepare for and respond to changes in the external environment as well as influence society with its values.

There is currently no research related to the experiences of live-out assistants in L’Arche, the implications that they have on L’Arche’s core values, or how they affect the organization’s ability to interact with the external environment. Research related to the experiences of live-out assistants in L’Arche is important because L’Arche communities
are depending more and more on live-out staff to achieve their goals. L’Arche seeks to respond to the continued social exclusion of individuals with developmental disabilities by giving them dignity, respect, and a valid place in society (L’Arche Canada, 2008). In order to fulfill this mission, the organization must provide core members with dignity and respect within its communities as well as the opportunity to participate in wider society. The time and energy required to support core members in both of these tasks has required the incorporation of live-out staff who relieve live-in assistants in the homes, coordinate day program activities and support core members to connect with jobs and friends outside of the L’Arche community. By providing additional support, live-out assistants can potentially help to make life in L’Arche communities more enjoyable for everyone and strengthen L’Arche’s ability to achieve its mission.

However, because having assistants who do not live in a L’Arche home is a departure from the original organizational ideal of sharing life in a home, live-out assistants may be seen as a threat to the organization’s unity and sustainability. Research into the experiences of live-out assistants can help L’Arche communities understand the process through which live-out assistants adopt core values, so that they can bring these members in line with organizational ideals and maintain unity.

In addition, live-out assistants can connect L’Arche communities to wider society because they play an active role in L’Arche communities, but do not reside in a L’Arche home. This potential connection is an important one to consider because of the need for organizations to continuously adapt to external changes in order to grow and sustain themselves (Schabracq, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). Research into the experiences of live-out assistants can help to increase understanding about the ways in
which these individuals connect L’Arche communities with the external environment. It can also explore whether live-out assistants are influencing L’Arche with external perspectives, promoting the message of L’Arche outside of L’Arche communities, and/or how live-out assistants might help L’Arche to prepare for and adapt to external changes.

1.3 The Relevance of this Study to Social Work

In addition to being a relevant study for L’Arche communities, this research is also pertinent to the field of social work. Community development and sustainability are important areas of social work research that recognize the role of social networks in determining individual health and quality of life (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics (2005) requires that social workers act to reduce and eliminate the oppression and marginalization of vulnerable individuals and reveal how diversity can enrich communities and individuals’ lives. This study fits well with the CASW’s vision to demonstrate the benefits of embracing diversity in communities by exploring the experiences of individuals who work for an organization seeking to build inclusive communities. At first inclusion in L’Arche related to welcoming and celebrating the value of people of differing abilities, but over time a commitment to inclusion required the organization to also embrace differences in culture, religion, sexual orientation and other factors that often result in social marginalization. The experiences of L’Arche communities may provide useful examples of how to create and maintain communities that can adapt to increasing levels of diversity and integrate new perspectives in a beneficial way. Theories related to intentional communities tell us that these communities must be able to incorporate new ideas into their core values in order to maintain unity (Berry, 1997; Boonyasopun, 2000;
Shotton, 2003; Smith, 1994; Wood & Judikis, 2002). In addition, organizations must be able to continually adapt to changes in the external environment, like growing diversity, in order to be successful over time (Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Gershon, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). Understanding how L’Arche creates inclusive communities may also provide some instruction to social workers who want to advocate for more inclusive communities and design programs that are welcoming to all individuals.

Second, the CASW’s Code of Ethics states that, “the profession has a particular interest in the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and/or living in poverty” (CASW, 2005, p. 3). This interest includes individuals with developmental disabilities as most remain isolated and unengaged in their communities (Rioux & Valentine, 2006; Diers, 2004). Therefore, social workers have a responsibility to engage in research that explores and responds to the continued marginalization of individuals with developmental disabilities. Social work research then should include investigating models of practice that seek to eliminate the continued exclusion of individuals with developmental disabilities. L’Arche has created an integrated model of support that combines live-in and live-out assistants in order to provide individuals with developmental disabilities the opportunity to engage in both L’Arche and the broader community. It is important to examine models that seek to integrate marginalized individuals into society and create a more inclusive culture.

Furthermore, the third value listed in the CASW’s Code of Ethics (2005) is “Service to Humanity” (2005, p. 5). This value requires that social workers use their power and authority to promote social justice and serve those they are working with in a professional way. In designing and carrying out this research project, I have attempted to give voice
to a population that has not previously been heard in academic research. By providing live-out assistants with an opportunity to share their experiences, I hope to draw attention to the value of these experiences and increase understanding about how live-out assistants influence L’Arche’s core values and its ability to respond to change. The findings of this study may encourage L’Arche communities to include the perspectives of live-out assistants more in planning and decision-making processes. They may increase live-out assistants’ understanding of the power that they have to voice their opinions and increase their participation in L’Arche communities. Making the distribution of power more equitable and ensuring that all members participate as full citizens in the organization improves member satisfaction, productivity, and innovation (Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Gershon, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). Thus, creating a research project that is empowering and advocates for greater participation not only honours Social Work values, but also improves L’Arche’s ability to change and adapt successfully.

This research is also important because the actions of live-out assistants directly affect whether core members are treated in a just and respectful manner. Research related to the perspectives of live-out assistants can provide insights into how these individuals view the people that they support and the role that live-out assistants could play in changing societal perceptions of people with disabilities. Such research is one means by which social workers can use their power and authority to serve the needs of a vulnerable population and promote social justice.

1.4 Researcher Position in Relation to this Study

My own position in relation to this study and live-out assistants grew out of personal experiences with individuals who have developmental disabilities and volunteering at a
L’Arche community. My interest in L’Arche communities, and their ability to provide core members with a valid place in society, began in 2004 when I participated in an international cultural immersion program. As part of this program I lived in Eastern Europe for three months with a family who had an autistic son. This family was involved in an organization called Faith and Light, which was a sister organization of L’Arche. Faith and Light communities do not consist of residences, but hold the same values as L’Arche around the gifts of individuals with developmental disabilities and the value of building community. They provide individuals with developmental disabilities and their families and friends the opportunity to meet regularly, share joys and struggles, and celebrate together. The Faith and Light community where I lived was started by a Canadian woman who had previously lived in a L’Arche community. She had initiated a number of programs throughout the city including workshops where individuals with developmental disabilities could learn crafts such as weaving, wood-working and jewelry-making, as well as gather for drama activities, conversation groups and local outings. I assisted in one of the workshops during the week and also accompanied a number of the core members to and from the programs that they were involved in.

Through this cross-cultural experience I was able to spend time with many individuals with developmental disabilities and hear their stories. These stories increased my understanding of the issues facing individuals with developmental disabilities and I became aware of how isolated and marginalized people with disabilities continued to be in Canada and the country where I was working.

Witnessing how L’Arche’s values were fostering community and changing social perceptions overseas, and hearing about the L’Arche communities that existed in Canada
motivated me to connect with a L’Arche community when I returned home. I
volunteered for a L’Arche community one day a week, sometimes spending time with a
particular core member reading magazines, doing puzzles, or playing piano and other
times going swimming, sharing meals, and attending worship nights that involved the
whole L’Arche community. There was a combination of live-in and live-out assistants in
this L’Arche community and my conversations and observations while there alerted me
to some of the challenges this L’Arche community was facing. One of the predominant
difficulties that this community faced was maintaining long-term staff. A combination of
live-in and live-out assistants attempted to compensate for a shortage of live-in assistants
and provide more consistency, but there were questions about the implications that live-
out assistants had on L’Arche’s values and life in this L’Arche community.

When I decided to pursue a graduate degree, I saw an opportunity to explore these
questions and address the gap in understanding related to the experiences of live-out
assistants and the implications that these assistants have on L’Arche communities. The
experiences of live-out assistants and the roles that they play in L’Arche communities are
best understood by these individuals themselves. Thus, I was compelled to use
principles of participatory research in this study and create a collaborative research
process that understood participants as the experts on their own experience and involved
them in identifying issues and recommending possible solutions.

My hope is that this research will lead to a better understanding of the role that live-
out assistants play in L’Arche communities so that these communities can more
effectively respond to the needs of all members, change and improve over time, and have
a greater role in influencing societal perceptions of and actions towards difference.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Before beginning to research the experiences of live-out assistants in L’Arche, literature was reviewed with the purpose of understanding relevant theory, previous research related to this topic, and the context within which L’Arche exists. A greater knowledge of 1) intentional communities, 2) the nature and aspects of organizational change, 3) social theories of disability, and 4) previous research related to L’Arche will help to make sense of the circumstances within which live-out assistants are working and experiencing L’Arche.

2.1 Intentional Communities

Intentional communities are collectives of individuals who live according to an articulated set of values which differ from those of mainstream society. These ideals usually revolve around solving a specific set of cultural or social problems (Brown, 2002). Intentional communities continue to exist in Canada, and are important because they illustrate on a small scale how humans can join together to respond to social injustice or promote a certain way of living. Examples of intentional communities can be found throughout history, but the most recent resurgence of interest and growth in these communities occurred during the 1960s and 70s (Brown, 2002; Conover, 1978). Civil and human rights movements led to a reassessment of social values that compelled many individuals to create communities that would allow them to live by an alternative set of values. Joining with other like-minded individuals in an intentional community also provided a platform for advocacy and created a model that illustrated how proposed changes might look (Brown, 2002). L’Arche communities are examples of intentional communities that are held together and directed by a clearly articulated set of values.
In Canada today, individualism and independence are highly valued, as each person is encouraged to be true to him or herself and strive for self-sufficiency (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004; Vanier, 1989). Communal values are often portrayed as paternalistic, and relying on others in a community setting as promoting dependency. Nevertheless, within this individualist context, there remain many examples of individuals who share common interests forming communities in order to pursue a more egalitarian and interdependent lifestyle.

Indeed, authors writing on community theory have identified the need of everyone to have friends and companions that provide them with a sense of belonging (Diers, 2004; Shotton, 2003; Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1995; Wood & Judikis, 2002). The question then becomes how to explain the seemingly contradictory existence of both a culture of individualism and a desire for community. Hornsey and Jetten (2004) make some helpful insights into this question by identifying two fundamental human motivations: the need to experience group belonging and also feel like a differentiated individual. While self-categorization theory would argue that the more a person identifies with a group the more he or she becomes like other members of the group, evidence from Hornsey and Jetten suggests that a loss of self-identity is not necessarily a consequence of joining a group. In fact, membership in a community can be a liberating experience in which individuals discover, and learn to love, their uniqueness (Boonyasopun, 2000; Shotton, 2003; Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1995). In fact, having a secure place in a community can enable an individual to take risks that lead to personal growth and improved community functioning. Moreover, communities are better able to respond to changes when their
members are encouraged and enabled to develop a broad range of talents and abilities (Diers, 2004; Siegler, 2002; Wood & Judikis, 2002).

Due to the inherent human need for community, it is not surprising that there is a continuing interest in how to build strong and sustainable communities. Understanding how smaller communities, like intentional communities, work may help to develop ways of fostering more inclusive and connected communities in wider society. Intentional communities are defined as, “small, localized, often rural communities of persons or families pursuing common interests or concentrating on certain basic values” (American Heritage Dictionary, n.d.). What makes communities “intentional” is a deliberate choice to share life together and adherence to a common set of beliefs and/or purposes (Brown, 2002; Juckes Maxey, 2004; Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1995; Wood & Judikis, 2002). L’Arche communities represent examples of intentional communities where individuals make a conscious choice to live together by a defined set of core values to achieve particular goals. The desire of L’Arche communities to value all members comes from a religious conviction that people who are poor and oppressed are close to the heart of God and possess many gifts (Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1995). Thus, L’Arche makes a conscious decision, “to create communities which welcome people with a [developmental disability]... and to give them a valid place in society” (Charter, 1993, p. 1).

Core values play an important role in unifying intentional communities and giving them direction. When people are drawn together by a shared identity, maintaining the values that constitute that identity is essential to the community’s continued survival (Andelson, 2002). Many authors note that commitment to shared core values and a common sense of purpose fosters a spirit of unity (Berry, 1997; Boonyasopun, 2000;
Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1989; Wood & Judikis, 2002). Core values are unifying because they provide a common link between all community members and so it is important to ensure that all community members adopt these values and put them into practice.

Studies show that when members have attitudes congruent with community ideals they are more productive and satisfied while those who do not become frustrated and quarrelsome (Porter-O’Grady, 2004; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). Ensuring that potential community members have at least a basic adherence to core values before joining the group can also help prevent a community from becoming bogged down with the responsibility of acculturating new members (Smith, 1994).

Each intentional community is unique and formed around a particular set of beliefs, however, there are some values that are consistently noted as present in successful intentional communities. These include 1) the equitable distribution of resources, 2) a sense of mutual responsibility and commitment to one another, and 3) respect for diversity (Berry, 1997; Boonyasopun, 2000; Francis, 1992; Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1989; Wood & Judikis, 2002). Each of these factors will be explained in the following paragraphs and can later be compared to the values experienced by participants in this study.

First, successful intentional communities are characterized by cooperation and are places where resources and participation are shared. Cooperation fosters a sense of individual value because all people are seen as worthy contributors to community processes and functioning (Juckes Maxey, 2004; Wood & Judikis, 2002). It can also promote trust as respect is shown by allowing individuals with differing viewpoints to share their perspectives (Francis, 1992; Wood & Judikis, 2002).
Hart (1992) presents a ladder of participation where eight rungs represent different levels of participation that can exist within a community. While Hart related his ladder to the participation of young people in communities, the idea is transferable to other groups as well. The first three rungs of Hart’s ladder do not represent real participation, but are situations where participants have little understanding of issues being addressed and their comments, if heard, are not considered in decision-making. The fourth rung is where the kinds of participation that would be characteristic of cooperative intentional communities begin. The fourth rung represents a situation where leaders make most of the decisions, but other community members are informed about issues and decide how they will be involved in enacting the decisions that are made. The fifth rung is achieved when community members give some advice on projects and are informed about how their input has been used in decision-making. The sixth rung occurs when community leaders initiate community processes, but decision-making is shared with all members. At the seventh rung participants direct projects and decisions with leaders available for support, and the top rung is where participants contribute the initial ideas, but decision-making is a collaborative process of all community members.

While indicators of meaningful participation often focus on formal processes of discussion and decision-making, individuals can also participate more informally (Juckes Maxey, 2004). The role of participation in fostering a sense of value and mutual trust among community members suggests that cultivating opportunities for meaningful participation is an important aspect of maintaining a unified and cooperative community.

Second, successful intentional communities often make note of the need for a strong sense of mutual responsibility and commitment. Indeed, many community theorists have
noted that cooperation in community results from caring for one another (Berry, 1997; Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1989). Care is demonstrated through daily acts of sharing resources, managing conflict and working together (Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1989; Wood & Judikis, 2004). The security that comes from knowing that one is accepted and cared for in the community allows one to take risks and grow (Pascal, 2002; Shotton, 2003; Smith, 1994). Thus, one becomes increasingly rooted in the community knowing that they are growing individually and making meaningful contributions.

Last, communities that remain unified over time are those that learn to respect diversity. When individuals are able to share and consider differing perspectives in a community they feel a sense of security and self-assurance that increases their commitment to the group (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Shotton, 2003; Wood & Judikis, 2002). Including all individuals in community life reveals that each one has skills, knowledge, creativity, and personalities that enrich life for everyone (Diers, 2004). Considering multiple perspectives can lead to many positive outcomes for intentional communities, like more innovative approaches and solutions to issues, greater insightfulness about how to achieve the community’s mission, and more satisfying experiences for all community members (Diers, 2004; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Siegler, 2002). However, openness to differing views can also lead to conflict in communities, so leadership has an important role to play in ensuring that interactions are respectful and conflicts are resolved (Boonyasopun, 2000; Porter-O’Grady, 2004).

The need for respectful interactions is also supported by research that shows communication to be an important determinant of quality of life in intentional communities. Mulder, Costanza, and Erickson (2006) found that residents of intentional
communities identified the quality of community dialogue as a key determinant of quality of life. Indeed, Wood and Judikis (2002) also found that communication was central to the community process, but noted that it did not determine whether or not community existed. Instead, communication determined a community's effectiveness at fulfilling its purpose and increased the desirability of being a member. Effective leadership can facilitate the kind of communication that allows for the consideration and incorporation of new ideas, while still maintaining a common community vision and set of values. With a clear purpose and direction, conflicts around questions of identity are minimized and communities are better able to address disputes when they arise.

Therefore, the literature on intentional communities indicates that these communities are unified around a sense of common purpose and clearly understood core values. The equitable distribution of resources, a sense of mutual responsibility and commitment, and openness to diversity were all values commonly held in healthy intentional communities (Berry, 1997; Boonyasopun, 2000; Francis, 1992; Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1989; Wood & Judikis, 2002). Still, there continues to be a need for research related to how intentional communities can remain relevant and open to new ideas while still preserving core values and overall unity. It is my hope that this study will provide some insights into this area by exploring how L'Arche communities have responded to the growing diversity and organizational change caused by welcoming live-out assistants. Investigating the experiences of live-out assistants can help to determine whether L’Arche communities have been successful in bringing these community members into alignment with organizational values and whether their presence has strengthened the organization’s ability to achieve its mission.
2.2 Relevant Organizational Theories

Organizational theories can also contribute to an understanding of the contexts within which organizations exist and the role that core values play in holding them together. Establishing a strong set of core values is one way that organizations like L’Arche can encourage certain behaviours and foster overall unity. Members of an organization can understand the structure and meaning of their work based on the group’s values, rather than through the enforcement of rules and regulations (Bolman & Deal, 2003). They can also be inspired by the vision of what life could be like if those beliefs were practiced (Elsdon, 2003; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). In contrast, rules and regulations keep people focused on the challenges that prevent the organization from realizing its vision (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Gershon, 2007). Therefore, a focus on values and vision can help individuals achieve their maximum potential and organizations adapt successfully to ongoing change (Elsdon, 2003; Gershon, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007).

While L’Arche is an international network of intentional communities, that network is unified by an over-arching organizational structure that gives all L’Arche communities common direction, values, and goals. In addition, L’Arche communities and the organization as a whole exist within larger environmental contexts that require them to change and adapt. This section will explore what organizational theory tells us about the role of core values in holding organizations together and the need for organizations to change and adapt while preserving their values. The incorporation of live-out assistants in L’Arche provides a concrete example of how organizational changes affect values and community functioning.
To begin, a primary concern for organizations is how to create corporate unity over time. One of the ways that organizations can resolve confusion and provide direction is through the use of symbols like values, myths, and vision (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Research related to maintaining long-term organizational unity reports that commitment levels and productivity are the highest when members are inspired by the organization’s purpose, have a clear understanding of their role in fulfilling that purpose, and are highly engaged in the organization’s activities (Elsdon, 2003; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007).

Over time, all organizations develop a set of values that embody what they stand for and give them a distinct identity (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Hasenfeld, 2000; Schabracq, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). These values can be formally documented in such forms as Mission Statements, Constitutions, and Charters but are often most meaningful when they are outside the awareness of the organization’s members (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Schabracq, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). Thus, it is important to consider not just written records of values, but also the perspectives of members within an organization.

One of the ways that values can be conveyed within an organization is through the use of a specialized language (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Indeed, Gergen and Thatchenkery (2004) note that language influences the way that reality is understood, and thus plays a role in shaping that reality. L’Arche communities have developed a specialized language to describe members that honours their values. L’Arche communities use the term “core member” to describe individuals with developmental disabilities and “assistant” for those who support them. The use of these terms helps to define the roles of different members while avoiding the traditional power-dynamics implied by words like client, staff, patient and caregiver. Changing language can change perceptions which, in turn, can help to
ensure that community members behave in a way that reflects organizational values (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007).

Myths can also contribute to organizational unity by inspiring members to continue working towards a shared goal (Bolman & Deal, 2003). They represent important stories about the history of the organization, such as its founding and heroic members. In L’Arche many individuals are emotionally moved by the personal example of Jean Vanier, the organization’s founder. Members of L’Arche are motivated by Vanier’s willingness to give up his position as a professor in Toronto and the security that went with it to pursue a life that modeled principles of social justice and everyone’s need for community (Bowling, 2005; Currie, 2005; Cushing, 2004; Pottie & Sumarah, 2004; Vanier, 1995; Vanier, 1989). This story still provides inspiration to members of L’Arche, reminding them of why they are there and encouraging them to remain committed to the L’Arche community.

Last, a common vision can play an important role in unifying an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Vision turns an organization’s values into a picture of what the future might look like. This image gives members a sense of what they are working towards and can help them understand the rationale behind decisions and behaviours of the organization (Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Gershon, 2007).

As well as fostering internal unity, organizations must also respond and adapt to changes in the external environment that surrounds them. All organizations are part of larger environments that they are in constant interaction with (Hasenfeld, 2000; Mohr, 1992; Schabracq, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007; Wood & Judikis, 2002). Thus, organizations need a clear and well-understood purpose and approach that allows them to
integrate organizational goals and the needs of the external environment in a way that benefits everyone (Hasenfeld, 2000; Schabracq, 2007). Cawsey and Deszca (2007) find that organizations that consistently demonstrate a capacity to innovate, manage change, and adapt over time are the ones that remain influential and prosperous. Therefore, successful organizations are those that create processes which promote adaptability, while still preserving core values (Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Gershon, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007).

Gershon (2007) presents an empowerment model of change that gives insights into how organizations can become adaptive while still maintaining common vision and values. Change can be seen as a threatening process, yet it can also foster overall unity if members feel that the organization is improving its practices and ability to achieve its overall mission. Gershon’s model can be divided into two broad stages: developing a culture of learning and growth and applying the empowerment model. A culture of learning and growth creates an atmosphere where members are expected to regularly question the status quo and pursue changes to improve the organization (Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Gershon, 2007).

There are six components that work together to create this culture: self-responsibility, authentic communication, trust, learning and growing, interpersonal process skills and caring (Gershon, 2007). **Self-responsibility** occurs when individuals actively work to make their job, team and organization the way they want it to be. **Authentic communication** describes dialogue that is open, honest and transparent at all levels. **Trust** exists when individuals are willing to experiment with new behaviours and take risks. **Learning and growing** occurs through supervision that provides opportunities to work on
developing skills and changing behaviours. *Interpersonal process skills* describe the procedures by which organizations manage and resolve conflicts and *caring* exists when leaders regularly dialogue with and respond to the concerns of other members.

Once a culture of learning and growth exists, the organization is then able to pursue practices that support continual and successful adaptation. There are four components that result in an ability to successfully adapt and change. The first is to have a strong knowledge of the internal and external environment as well as what is desired by various members of the organization (Schabracq, 2007). Participation at all levels helps to avoid misconceptions between leaders and the rest of the community, increase support for decisions, and find more innovative solutions (Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Gershon, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). Understanding the diversity of perspectives within an organization also helps to ensure that changes are relevant and will achieve their intended goals (Schabracq, 2007). Thus, a broad knowledge of both internal and external contexts is gained through participation at all levels and is essential for organizations to successfully adapt.

Second, organizational leadership must take the understandings that they have of internal and external conditions and translate these understandings into a vision that will motivate and inspire members (Gershon, 2007). Next, they must create a plan of how to work towards this vision that will prompt members of the organization to support the change process. Last, leaders must reinforce that change is a constant and ongoing reality by continually engaging in dialogue with people at all levels and refining their practices based on this dialogue (Gershon, 2007). Gershon’s model presents one method of practically responding to the challenge that values-based organizations and intentional
communities face to adapt and change while also maintaining unifying ideals. Participation from all levels of the organization is a key feature of this model as it gives members a sense of value and helps to ensure that changes result in the expected outcomes.

The fact that organizations exist within a larger environment also means that they have the potential to influence that environment. However, the literature reviewed for this study that related to organizational theories made little mention of ways that organizations could exert or increase their influence over the external environment (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Gershon, 2007; Hasenfeld, 2000; Schabracq, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). This area of theory is important for organizations like L’Arche that have a vision of changing perceptions and behaviours in wider society. Live-out assistants live in the external environment and therefore may be able to increase L’Arche’s ability to connect with, understand, and influence that environment. Their position of being part of L’Arche but living externally makes them well positioned to bring outside perspectives in and take L’Arche’s values out to wider society. It is hoped that this study will raise awareness about the role that organizations can play in influencing external environments and highlight the potential ways that live-out assistants could help L’Arche achieve this goal.

2.3 The Disability Movement in Canada and Social Theories of Disability

L’Arche’s values emerged from a particular theoretical and historical context related to changing perceptions of human rights, difference, and people with disabilities. The core values of L’Arche reflect a belief that disability is secondary to humanness and that the greatest challenge facing people with disabilities is not biological differences, but
social rejection (Bogdan & Taylor, 1993; Bryant, 1993; Pascal, 2002; Vanier, 1989; Williams, 1999). This aligns well with social theories of disability that understand disablement to be an ever-changing concept whose definition depends on the political, economic, social and cultural contexts within which individuals live (Jenkins, 1998; Lord & Hutchison, 2007; Marks, 1999; Rapley, 2004).

The recognition that environmental factors influence ablement relocates the 'problem' of a disability within society, rather than within particular individuals (Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Rapley, 2004; Williams, 1999). While social theories of disability originally focused on disability as a social construction, they have since evolved to consider both the social and biological aspects in their understanding of difference (Beckett, 2006; Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Williams, 1999). In addition, social theories of disability are, as Devlin and Pothier (2006) point out, intentionally political theories concerned with empowerment, lived equality and structural transformation. Adherents to social theories advocate for achieving measurable change in society with respect to increased accommodation and celebration of difference. Such changes have not yet occurred in our society in a substantive way as most individuals with developmental disabilities remain isolated and marginalized (Diers, 2004; Edwards, 2001; Lord & Hutchison, 2007; Rioux & Valentine, 2006).

Social theories of disability emerged from the human rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, which raised awareness about social injustices and human rights violations (Dunn, 2006; Lord & Hutchison, 2007). Society became increasingly aware of the isolation and loneliness experienced by individuals living in mental health institutions and the need for all human beings to have meaningful natural relationships with other
individuals (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006; Hornsey & Jetten, 2004; Shotton, 2003). During
the 1960s and 70s many advocacy groups came together to pressure governments in
North America and Western Europe to close large institutions and move people into the
community (Dunn, 2006; Dunn, 2002; Lord & Hutchison, 2007;). In Canada, the
Community Living Movement began in the 1960s when parents of children with
developmental disabilities fought for the inclusion of their children in publicly funded
education and recreation programs (Dunn, 2006). Their appeal was inspired by the
Scandinavian concept of normalization, which promoted the participation of people with
developmental disabilities in culturally normative behaviours and activities (Beart, Hardy
& Buchan, 2004; Jenkins, 1998). Principles of normalization originally focused on the
rights of people with disabilities to self-determination and community integration;
however, the focus shifted in the 1990s to quality of life issues (Dunn, 2006). Today,
disability advocates are focused on issues like identifying individual strengths, building
friendships and strong social networks, empowering consumers and promoting
individualized planning (Dunn, 2006; Lord & Hutchison, 2007).

Governments in Canada incorporated concepts of independent living into new
policies and programs in the 1980s. These programs were to provide people with
disabilities the supports they needed to live as independently as possible in the
community and help them develop and manage their own programs and support services
(Dunn, 2006; Hutchinson et al., 1997). While L’Arche supports many of the principles
around equal rights, individual strengths, self-determination and the value of strong social
networks, the organization is also critical of some aspects of normalization and
independent living philosophies. The values of L’Arche focus on being with people as
they are (Bryant, 1993) and so normalization philosophies are viewed with caution because they could result in individuals being pressured to conform to socially dictated standards of practice. In addition, L’Arche is concerned that concepts of independent living may devalue the benefits of living in community and growing through interdependence (Pottie & Sumarah, 2004; Sumarah, 1987).

In sum, social theories view disability as being both a physical and social experience. Over the past 30 years, disability movements have been successful at advocating for the rights of individuals with disabilities and changing government policies and programs. However, individuals with developmental disabilities remain isolated and few are engaged in community life (Diers, 2004; Edwards, 2001; Rioux & Valentine, 2006). L’Arche presents a model of community where people with developmental disabilities are actively engaged in home and community life (Pascal, 2002; Vanier, 1995; Vanier, 1989) yet previous research related to L’Arche is minimal. Further research that examines the experiences of live-out assistants and other members in L’Arche can help to increase knowledge related to the L’Arche model of creating community. Future research about L’Arche can also be used in combination with understandings of other models of support to improve the integration and participation of people with disabilities in wider society.

2.4 Pre-Existing Research Related to L’Arche

Indeed, while information about L’Arche is published regularly in the organization’s magazine, Letters of L’Arche, academic research pertaining to life in L’Arche communities and/or the experiences of members is limited (Currie, 2005). One recent study conducted by Pottie and Sumarah (2004) looked at four friendship dyads of
L’Arche community members. Each dyad included a person with a developmental disability and a person without, both individuals were of the same gender, and both had known each other for at least one year. While this study revealed key aspects related to the relationships between these individuals and the nature of their friendship, it did not explore if and/or how the relationship changed when the individuals stopped living together. Furthermore, it did not specifically look at how these relationships had impacted the assistants involved and/or their relationships with others in communities outside of L’Arche. Further research would help to explore these areas and better understand how not living in L’Arche affects one’s capacity to build friendships with core members and understand L’Arche’s values.

Currie (2005) also conducted a study related to L’Arche that explored the experiences of children who had grown up in Canadian L’Arche communities. This study explored issues that participants had faced, what growing up in L’Arche meant to them personally, and how they felt they had been changed by the experience. Currie’s work was the first to explore the place of children and families in L’Arche and she notes that the role of children remains unclear within organizational policy and practice. Further research is needed that draws attention to the diversity within L’Arche and considers how individuals experience and contribute to life in L’Arche communities. A study of live-out assistants adds another dimension to understanding the dynamics and complexities of L’Arche communities, but does not complete the picture. Currie identifies that parents and other members of L’Arche need to be involved in the research process to fully comprehend the experiences of children in L’Arche. Likewise, interviews and/or focus
groups with other members are also needed to gain a varied understanding of the experiences and impacts of incorporating live-out assistants into L’Arche communities.

In addition, a recent dissertation by Bowling (2005) explored the question of what qualities motivate people towards altruistic behavior. Bowling compared L’Arche assistants who had made a commitment of more than three years (experienced) to those who had been involved less than three years (novice). Findings showed that novice assistants tended to speak in terms of individual characteristics, personal achievements and commitment to core members, while experienced assistants more often described unity, togetherness and the contributions of core members. This study suggested that over time L’Arche assistants come to adopt organizational values and perceptions related to community and individuals with developmental disabilities. Jean Vanier has also described his personal journey from understanding himself as a helper to realizing his own weaknesses and need to belong to a community (Vanier 2002; 1995; 1992; 1989). Assistants who come to L’Arche today, however, may also be different from those who came in the past because of changing social and cultural philosophies related to people with disabilities. These philosophies may influence values and practices in L’Arche as assistants create an integrated understanding of the two cultures. Further study would help to explore how L’Arche is influenced by its external environment and the role that assistants play in this process. In particular, assistants who continue to live in the external community may play an important role in connecting L’Arche to that environment and helping the organization adapt and influence it effectively.

Cushing (2003) explored a similar topic when she looked at the nature and differing perceptions of relationships in L’Arche. Like Bowling, Cushing studied the reasons why
assistants chose to live in L'Arche communities and their experiences while there. In particular, she notes that assistants are often drawn to L'Arche because of its counter-cultural philosophies related to community and people with developmental disabilities. Many assistants come to L'Arche hoping to be involved in creating wider socio-political change, but once there do not get sufficient opportunities to do so. This limits the organization’s ability to influence societal perceptions and policies.

2.5 Summary

In sum, L’Arche communities are examples of intentional communities that are held together by clearly articulated and practiced core values. Organizational theory can help to explain the role of core values in unifying communities like L’Arche as well as the need for communities to continually change and adapt over time. All L’Arche communities share and are guided by five core values: all people possess unique and sacred value, safe and secure communities facilitate personal growth, spirituality is an important part of individual and community life, core members are at the heart of L’Arche communities, and L’Arche communities seek to become increasingly integrated into society. These values reflect a belief that people with disabilities possess many gifts and that diversity enriches community life. Only a small body of literature exists concerning the ability of L’Arche communities to achieve their mission and adapt to ongoing internal and external change. Until now there has been no research that specifically explores the experiences of live-out assistants or the implications of their presence in L’Arche communities.

More research into the experiences of assistants and staff at L’Arche will help to better understand how life in L’Arche communities can change one’s perspective of
relationships and individuals with developmental disabilities. Previous studies related to L’Arche have focused on live-in assistants, but other members exist who experience and help shape community life in L’Arche. This study will explore the experiences of live-out assistants in L’Arche and draw attention to how these members influence and adopt core values as well as the role they can play in connecting L’Arche communities with wider society.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe the methodology that was used in designing and carrying out this research study. Topics to be covered include the theoretical framework used, methods for gathering and analyzing data, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Review of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the question: What are the benefits and challenges of having live-out assistants in L'Arche communities from the perspective of these assistants? In answering this question, I hoped to give voice to live-out assistants in L’Arche and begin sharing their experiences and perspectives with L’Arche communities and a wider academic audience. There is currently no academic research related to the experiences of live-out assistants in L’Arche, yet the actions and perceptions of these individuals may directly influence the ability of L’Arche communities to practice their core values and respond to change effectively. This study provides an opportunity for live-out assistants to share their thoughts so that these assistants' contributions to and experiences of L’Arche communities can be better understood.

3.2 Naturalist Paradigm

The desire of this study to explore how live-out assistants interpret their experiences in L’Arche reflects a naturalist paradigm which believes that knowledge is created through lived experience, reality is socially constructed and research is a collaborative process. First, the naturalist paradigm places value on the lived experience, also called tacit knowledge, of individuals and sees people as the experts of their own experience (Westhues et al., 1999). In addition, knowledge is created in natural settings and
situations rather than in artificially controlled environments. Thus, naturalist research seeks to gather information from participants in their natural environment.

Second, a naturalist paradigm considers knowledge and truth to be socially constructed by individuals depending on how they experience and interpret their world (Marlow, 1998; Neuman & Kreuger, 2003; Westhues et al. 1999). Therefore, the way that individuals view their reality reflects subjective interpretations of events and experiences rather than one objective truth. Meanings are built through one’s interactions with his or her surroundings and these meanings help the individual to make sense of his or her experiences.

Furthermore, according to this paradigm, research is a collaborative and interactive process that involves the researcher and participants throughout. Processes of data collection and interpretation are designed by the researcher in partnership with participants (Marlow, 1998). The naturalist principles of valuing lived experience, considering the meanings that participants attach to their experiences, and conducting research in a collaborative way will be evident in the approaches and methods used for this project.

This study was also inductive as knowledge, meaning, and conclusions emerged through data collection and analysis. An inductive approach gives participants the position of expert rather than assuming that the researcher is the authority in the research process. This aligns well with the naturalist principles of valuing lived experience and a collaborative process. An inductive approach also lets participants share what their experiences have meant to them, rather than the researcher inferring what the meaning of
3.3 Methods

Research Design

My desire to design a study that would gather information related to how live-out assistants in L’Arche interpret their experiences led to the selection of qualitative methods. Qualitative methods allow participants to express experiences in their own words and choose how they respond to the questions they are asked. Giving participants the room to interpret questions and respond as they wish allows their perspectives to come through and be better understood. Qualitative methods also provide the researcher with the flexibility to ask open-ended questions and additional probing questions to gather more detailed and descriptive data. Asking open-ended questions is useful in an exploratory study like this one, which seeks to examine a specific issue in its context (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). Understanding the experiences and implications of live-out assistants in L’Arche was identified by some members of L’Arche as an area of interest that needed to be explored. Qualitative methods give participants in this study the opportunity to share stories that will teach others about their experiences and increase overall understanding of the roles that these individuals play in L’Arche communities.

Interview Format: An Interpretive Narrative Approach using Semi-Structured Interviews

An interpretive narrative approach was employed to collect and analyze data in this study. McQueen and Zimmerman (2006) describe the interpretive narrative research method as one which seeks to collect narratives and analyze themes in those narratives by using a formulated set of questions related to a specific overall query. Simpson and
Barker (2006) go on to discuss how the interpretive narrative interview process is dependent upon the ability of the researcher to have meaningful conversations with participants where participants are compelled to share in-depth and detailed stories of their lived experiences.

This method was chosen because it gave participants the opportunity to share stories of their experiences that expressed the benefits and challenges that they faced. While I needed to structure this research project around a particular topic, I did not want to control the responses that participants gave or the way in which they interpreted the questions. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask participants open-ended questions and probe for further details when needed. Probing questions helped to increase the detail and depth of information shared because I could use these additional questions to inquire further about topics and experiences participants discussed. A predetermined set of questions would not have allowed for this kind of flexibility. The adaptability of this interviewing approach fit well with the exploratory nature of this study. As a researcher coming from a place of ‘not knowing’, it was extremely helpful to be able to use probes in addition to the pre-determined interview questions. In designing the research schedule, I did my best to create a set of questions that would allow the participant to share experiences that were relevant to the overall research question of this study without determining what they chose to disclose. However, over the course of each interview additional questions encouraged participants to elaborate on the ideas and experiences that they described. I was continually learning throughout each interview and found that the utilization of probes brought forth much richer and more pertinent data than would have emerged from simply following the interview schedule. It also made the
interview process more collaborative as responses from participants influenced what
probing questions I asked.

Data collection and analysis also included the Charter of the Communities of L'Arche
(1993) and the Constitution of the International Federation of L’Arche Communities
(1999). The interpretive narrative approach encourages the use of a variety of resources
in data collection and analysis, including written documents (McQueen & Zimmerman,
2006). Official documents of L’Arche were used to determine the core values that guide
the organization. More about the use of these documents will be discussed in the section
of this chapter entitled “Data Analysis”.

A Participatory Approach

As a social worker committed to anti-oppressive practice, I was compelled to make
this research process as collaborative and empowering as possible. Although this project
was not Participatory Action Research, some participatory methods were incorporated
characterized community-based (participatory) research as beginning with a genuine
interest in the problems of a group, seeking to engage community members as equal and
full participants in the research process, and increasing community members’
understanding of their situation so that they can respond to issues in an effective way.
Participatory methods were important in this study because they helped to ensure that the
data collected accurately reflected what participants had experienced and intended to say
(Marlow, 1998). Participatory methods also helped to reduce power differentials
between the researcher and participants, because I emphasized the value of participants’
lived experience when designing the project, presenting it to participants, and before
beginning each interview (Marlow, 1998).

This study reflects participatory principles in a number of ways. For one, the topic of
study was arrived at inductively out of my own observations of one L’Arche community
and collaboratively in consultation with community and regional leadership of the
organization. Members of both participating L’Arche communities made suggestions
about what areas of research would be most relevant to them and were eager to
participate in the research process. In addition, the results of data analysis were intended
to help inform L’Arche communities about the experiences of live-out assistants, which
of L’Arche’s values were most important to them, and what role they might play in
helping the organization influence and adapt to its external environment.

The methods used to make this project more participatory were: providing
participants with the Interview Guide prior to their interviews, sending participants a
copy of their interview transcript, discussing preliminary analysis results with
participants, and providing both of the L’Arche communities where participants worked
with copies of the final dissertation. First, I provided all participants with the interview
schedule at least two days before their interviews took place. Thus, they were able to
think through what they might like to share and comment on or clarify the wording of the
questions if needed. Second, when interviews were transcribed, each participant was sent
their transcript via mail or email, so that they could look it over and check that it was
accurately recorded. Mailing transcripts to participants also gave them the opportunity
to identify any parts that they did not want included in the final research project. Third,
after data analysis the preliminary results were discussed with participants individually or
in groups, permitting them to comment on these initial findings (please see Appendix C and D). These discussions helped ensure that I was drawing conclusions that participants felt reflected their experiences and that participants could offer feedback on those findings. Furthermore, I felt that sharing preliminary results with participants was a way of showing appreciation and respect to them for being part of this study. Last, a final copy of the dissertation will be given to each L’Arche community that was involved in this study so that it is accessible to participants, other members of L’Arche, and organizational leadership.

Participatory methods increased equity between the researcher and participants throughout this study, reduced the possibility of misrepresenting the opinions and ideas of participants, and allowed for participants to revisit and reflect on what they shared during their interviews. These key elements reflected participatory principles and were an important part of making this study as participatory as possible.

Participants: Engaging L’Arche Community Members

As outlined previously, my interest in conducting research that would be relevant and useful to L’Arche originated from my experiences volunteering for a L’Arche community. It was the Community Leader (the person responsible for overseeing the well-being of the L’Arche community and all decisions made within it) from this L’Arche community whom I first contacted in order to discuss the possibility of completing a thesis related to the experiences of assistants in that L’Arche community. The Community Leader agreed that this was an important topic and that research into this area would be helpful to her L’Arche community and the organization as a whole. She was supportive of having participants from this L’Arche community participate in the
study and suggested that I follow up with the House Respondibles (individuals who oversee issues and decisions related to the daily functioning of a particular L'Arche home) when I was ready to gather participants. I then connected with one of the House Respondibles and spoke to her about the purpose of the project, participation criteria, and what would be expected of participants. She then presented the research project to other leaders in her L'Arche community and they discussed who in that L'Arche community might qualify as a participant and be willing to take part in the study. Following that meeting, the House Responsible provided me with contact information for potential participants and I spoke with each one individually.

The Community Leader from this first site referred me to the Regional Coordinator of L'Arche in Southern Ontario in order to discuss the project and seek organizational approval for the research. The Regional Coordinator also voiced support for this project and suggested bringing a second L'Arche community into the research. His feeling was that involving a second L'Arche community would provide perspectives that could be compared and contrasted with findings from the first L'Arche community. Of particular interest was that at the regional level L'Arche was engaging in an exploratory study of how past and present members of L'Arche were living out L'Arche's values in different ways and settings. It was thought that my research would complement this larger organizational project. I was given contact information for the Community Leader of a mid-sized L'Arche community in Southern Ontario in order to add a second L'Arche community to this study.

Due to the limited time available for this project, it was decided that the best approach would be to select a very specific population from which to draw participants for this
study. As a result, this project was designed to focus on the perspectives and experiences of live-out assistants with the hope that future studies would look at the experiences of other community members in L'Arche. A focus on live-out assistants was chosen for a couple of reasons. First, there was an absence of research related to live-out assistants in L'Arche. In addition, live-out assistants were a relatively new and growing group of community members in L'Arche. They were somewhat controversial because they helped L'Arche communities to meet their staffing needs, but did not fit into the original L'Arche model of community that stressed living together. It is important that L'Arche communities understand the implications of including live-out assistants in order to respond to this internal change and maintain organizational unity.

The second L'Arche community that I contacted was also willing to participate and the Community Leader suggested that I come to the next meeting of all the community's assistants to talk about the project and recruit participants. Thus, I traveled to this L'Arche community and presented my research proposal to many of the assistants and leaders there. After hearing my presentation, they were invited to ask questions, share ideas and suggest anyone, including themselves, who might be eligible and willing to participate. After this initial meeting I had a list of potential participants who I then contacted and invited to participate.

While initially making contact with potential participants in both L'Arche communities was difficult, I was able to speak to each participant, provide them with an overview of the project, and give them copies of the Interview Guide and consent forms before beginning interviews.
Once enough participants had been identified, I arranged to spend a week in each L’Arche community so that I could conduct interviews. Both L’Arche communities were extremely supportive and provided me with accommodations for the entire time. The reason for staying in each L’Arche community was to allow me to conduct interviews with all of the participants without having to make multiple trips. Participants had widely varying schedules and so having the flexibility of being in the L’Arche communities for several days helped to make interviews possible. Staying in each L’Arche community also meant that I was able to participate in life there and get to know some of the members of those L’Arche communities while working on this project. I was not acting as a Participant Observer during this time, but being in each L’Arche community did give me the opportunity to better understand the context in which each participant worked.

As a researcher and an outsider in these L’Arche communities I realized how important it was to develop trust with participants so that they felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me in an open and honest way. I believe that by contacting participants individually before their interviews and by staying in each L’Arche community for a period of time I was able to establish some rapport with participants and foster a relationship of trust that strengthened the interview process. My presence in these L’Arche communities also meant that I could respond to any questions or concerns that arose outside of participants’ scheduled interviews.

Community Selection

The sample for this study was drawn from live-out staff currently working at two L’Arche communities, one considered small and the other mid-sized. I had volunteered at one of these L’Arche communities a few years ago, so it was the first L’Arche
community that I contacted about participation in this study. In consultation with the Community Leader from this L’Arche community and L’Arche’s Regional Coordinator, I decided that it would be best to include two L’Arche communities in this study. This decision was made because involving two provided the possibility of examining each L’Arche community individually as well as drawing comparisons between the experiences of staff at each one.

In addition to being different sizes, these L’Arche communities also differed somewhat in their membership and structure. A brief description of each participating community will be given here to give the reader some understanding of the context within which participants in this study worked.

The L’Arche communities that participated in this study represented small and mid-sized L’Arche communities located in large urban areas. The smaller L’Arche community began ten years ago and consisted of two homes and a facility rented for day program activities. There were eight core members in this L’Arche community, four of whom lived in each home. Most core members in this community were nonverbal and in general required a higher level of support than core members in the mid-sized L’Arche community. The number of live-in assistants in this L’Arche community varied, but there were usually three or four living in each home. The majority of live-in assistants were international visitors who came to the L’Arche community for one year or university co-op students who completed four month placements there. Each home was led by a House Responsible who coordinated household tasks and made sure the needs of residents were being met. Everyone living in the homes was single and had a room of his
or her own. They were free to decorate and furnish this space as they chose and the L'Arche community also provided some furnishings if individuals needed them.

Live-out assistants had always played a number of roles in this L'Arche community, including coordinating and running day programs, providing additional support in the homes on evenings and weekends, and covering night shifts. These individuals were scheduled for specific shifts and lived outside of the L'Arche community. They were often people who had partners and/or children and therefore could not live in a L'Arche home. Live-out assistants would sometimes come to L'Arche gatherings such as potlucks and prayer times outside of their scheduled shifts.

The mid-sized L'Arche community had been around for 30 years and consisted of 5 homes, one assisted apartment, and a building that housed offices and day program activities. There were six to nine individuals, including both assistants and core members, living in each home who shared day-to-day activities like household chores, preparing and enjoying evening meals, and relaxing together. These individuals all had a room of their own as well as shared kitchen, living, and bathroom space. Much like in the smaller community, many of the live-in assistants in this L'Arche community were from overseas or on short-term co-op placements. This meant that few stayed in the L'Arche community for more than one year. Many of the people who held leadership positions in this L'Arche community were individuals who had transitioned from a live-in to a live-out role. Because of the larger size of this L'Arche community, it received additional government funding that enabled it to have a number of leadership positions that were not possible in the smaller community. These positions included a Spiritual Guide, Homes Coordinator, and Assistants Coordinator. Extra leadership staff relieved
the burden on the Community Leader and House Responsibles who would otherwise have had to oversee these aspects of the L’Arche community. A number of live-out assistants were also involved in this L’Arche community providing support in the homes, coordinating day programs for adults and seniors, and covering night shifts.

The differing make-up and structure of these L’Arche communities meant that participants held varying roles, which influenced the nature of their experiences. Thus, looking at two L’Arche communities revealed a broader and more diverse set of perspectives.

While including a third L’Arche community considered large in size would have added further dimension and depth to the data collected, it was not possible due to time and resource constraints. Most L’Arche communities in Canada would be considered small or mid-sized, so the communities selected for this study were representative of most Canadian L’Arche communities. As well, the size of the communities selected made it possible to interview a significant portion of qualifying staff, so the perspectives of most of eligible live-out assistants were included.

In addition, both L’Arche communities selected were geographically accessible to me and the Community Leaders at these locations had approved this research project. Thus, two L’Arche communities were selected for this study that varied in size and composition. The perspectives shared by live-out assistants in these two locations provided insights into how their experiences of L’Arche and its values were similar and different.
Participant Selection

A total of ten participants, five from each L’Arche community, were chosen for this project because ten participants was a manageable number considering time and resource constraints. This number allowed for most qualifying individuals in each L’Arche community to participate and permitted a variety of perspectives to be included.

The participant sample for this study was a purposive sample drawn from two specific L’Arche communities where there were only a small number of live-out staff. Yegedis, Weinbach, and Morrison-Rodriguez (1999) suggest using purposive sampling when a researcher is looking for cases that will give insight into a particular problem, situation, perspective, experience, characteristic, or condition that they wish to understand. This study sought to document the particular experiences of live-out staff and looked specifically for assistants who had never lived in a L’Arche home and had been an employee of L’Arche for at least one year. This approach could also be described as criterion sampling because participants were required to meet the aforementioned sampling criteria in order to participate in the research. The reason for using a purposive sampling technique was to help ensure that data collection generated a set of stories that could be analyzed for themes related to the research question. I did not set out any criteria to stratify the sample as most of the live-out staff in each L’Arche community participated. The possibility of finding participants based on specific stratifying criteria would be difficult, if not impossible; therefore this element was not included.

The criterion of never living in L’Arche was chosen to provide consistency within the sample and focus on how organizational values were understood and adopted by
individuals who had never been live-in assistants. While all participants met the first criterion, two participants in this study fell slightly short of the second, being employees for at least one year. Through consultation with committee members, it was decided to include two participants who had only been on staff for ten months. This decision allowed for both male and female participants and an equal number of participants from each L’Arche community. Individuals were not selected based upon gender, but having both male and female participants made the sample more representative of live-out assistants. The two participants that did not meet this criterion had worked in one position since coming to L’Arche and were able to reflect on life in their L’Arche community and their personal experiences there. It was felt that not including these participants in data collection would mean the loss of rich and informing data relevant to this study. All participants had a wide variety of experiences from which to draw upon and had had time to gain an understanding of the rhythms and philosophies of their L’Arche community.

Five participants were chosen from each L’Arche community on a first-come-first-serve basis. Each participant completed an in-depth semi-structured interview that lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and followed the questions stated in the Interview Guide (Please see Appendix A). Taking participants on a first-come-first-serve basis helped to diminish any perceptions that I was pursuing a hidden agenda or preferencing certain volunteers over others in the research process. The size of the L’Arche communities that participated in this study makes it impossible to give many specific details about participants without revealing their identity. However, I can say that of the ten
participants in this study, three held leadership positions, four organized day program activities, one covered night shifts, and two covered shifts in homes as needed.

Data Collection

Data was collected in narrative form from in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant. Interviews were composed of a series of open-ended questions prepared in advance to guide the interview (Please see Appendix A for the Interview Guide). Probes were used where needed to gain additional details and descriptions on the topic being discussed. Probes allowed me to pick up on verbal and nonverbal cues and encouraged participants to elaborate on specific issues. These interviews were designed to be flexible and allow for natural interaction between participants and myself, thus providing space for unexpected insights and detailed descriptions of experiences to emerge and be discussed. Attention was paid to body language participants exhibited during their interviews and only what was discussed during the interviews was considered to be part of the data from participants.

Participants were able to choose where they wanted their interview to take place so that it would be as convenient and comfortable as possible. All locations were places where the participant felt secure and where privacy and confidentiality could be ensured. With the consent of each participant, I recorded interviews using a digital recording device and then later transcribed them based on the audio recording. A recording device was used so that the participant and I could engage in a more natural conversation. Each of us could speak freely without having to pause so that I could manually record what was being said. A digital recording preserved the conversation and allowed me to take more note of body language and nonverbal cues. If I had attempted to manually record
interviews it would have hindered my ability to engage participants in conversation and much of the verbal and nonverbal information shared would have been lost.

Compensation was provided to each participant at the completion of the study in the form of ten dollars cash and a thank you card. Holding a celebration was considered, but the schedules of participants as well as the timing for the L’Arche communities made such a celebration impractical in this case.

Official documents of L’Arche were also used in data collection in order to understand organizational values and purpose. These documents were downloaded from the official website of L’Arche International and analyzed along with interview data.

Data Analysis

Data collected for this study was transcribed and analyzed following the principles of the interpretive narrative approach to research. This type of analysis requires the researcher to interpret the narratives shared by participants and written documents in order to develop insights into topics that are relatively unknown and/or poorly understood (McQueen & Zimmerman, 2006; Simpson & Barker, 2006). In this study, semi-structured interview data and official documents of L’Arche were analyzed for themes. The first step of my analysis involved reading through each interview and making notes in the margins about the key ideas being shared. These notes were then compiled and a number of common themes emerged. Themes were colour-coded so that results could be organized into thematic groupings and compared within and between the participating communities. The interview data collected in this study provided a large amount of rich data about participants’ experiences in L’Arche that needed to be organized into a coherent structure. While the original intention of this research project was not to study
the core values of L'Arche, these values were an appropriate tool for organizing and understanding interview data. As a result, I analyzed L'Arche's Charter and Constitution and from this analysis composed five core value statements that clearly articulated the main principles expressed in these documents. I then organized the themes that emerged from interview analysis under relevant values to determine what these themes said about the role of core values in L'Arche communities and factors that contributed to or hindered these values. The idea that live-out assistants can act as a bridge connecting L'Arche communities to the external environment emerged from this analysis.

Preliminary results from data analysis were presented to participants from each community in order to share with them the themes that had emerged through the analysis process. This also gave participants the chance to provide feedback on the results before the final report was written up. While not part of data collection, these meetings kept participants involved in the research process and confirmed that analysis results reflected the experiences shared by participants. After this consultation, I wrote up the results and discussed them in the form of this thesis project.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

In any research study it is important to do everything possible to ensure the protection of participants' well being. Participation in this study was voluntary and no one was forced to take part.

In this study I made every effort to ensure that all participants were informed of ethical considerations, both verbally and in written form, before consenting to involvement. Each participant was informed of the goals, expectations, and procedures of the research and was required to sign two consent forms before beginning the
interview process. I also gave each participant opportunities to raise any questions or concerns that he or she might have before agreeing to participate. Consent forms explained that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The first form related to the individual interview, and the second to the discussion of preliminary research results. Each participant’s signature was also required on both forms to indicate consent to participate and be quoted in the study. Please refer to Appendices B and D for the Participant Consent Forms.

In addition, I conversed with each participant about the goals and processes of the research before beginning data collection. The value placed on the lived experience of the participant was also made clear before any of the interviews began. Due to the risk that a participant might have shared personal information that caused them to become distressed, I was mindful of pausing and/or stopping interviews if participants seemed upset and allowing them to decide if they wanted to continue. A list of local support services was given at the beginning of the interview in case the participant wanted to contact a local support service following the interview.

I was also aware that a power differential existed between participants and me because of my position as a researcher and a Master’s student. Participants could have been intimidated or threatened by my position if they perceived me to be an authority or expert. Therefore, I made sure that those interviewed understood my position in relation to L’Arche before they consented to participate. Each participant was informed that I was neither mandated by nor funded through L’Arche and was not conducting this research to further an organizational agenda. It was important that each participant knew that his or her job would not be threatened because of participation in this study and that
the intention of this research was not to devalue or eliminate live-out staff in L’Arche. Rather, this research was meant to inform L’Arche community members and wider society about the experiences of live-out staff so that their position and role would be better understood.

Confidentiality was another important consideration when designing this research project. Efforts to ensure confidentiality was maintained included conducting interviews in private locations, providing participants with a copy of their interview transcript, replacing identifying information with pseudonyms, and keeping data in a secure location. First, all interviews took place in a location chosen by participants where they felt safe to discuss their experiences without being overheard. Second, participants were given the opportunity to look over their own interview transcript once it had been completed. This gave them the opportunity to withdraw any information that they did not want included in the final research report or that might jeopardize their anonymity. Third, all identifying information was removed from the data and replaced with a pseudonym and/or generic term in order to protect anonymity. Fourth, all documentation collected for this research which contained personal/identifying information was viewed only by me, Jennifer Elkins, and my Faculty Supervisor, Peter Dunn. Interviews were transcribed by me in a location where confidentiality could be ensured and interviews were not replayed at either of the research sites. Digital audio files were saved so that file names did not reveal participants’ identities and all files will be deleted within one year of the completion of this study. A list of names and pseudonyms was kept by me for use during the project and was stored in a secure
location (a locked box) with all other identifying information. This information will also be destroyed within one year of the completion of the study.

Compensation was offered in thanks for participation, but was not be used to attract participants to the study. In addition, a small gift was given to each house where I stayed while conducting interviews.

3.5 Limitations:

When considering the results of this study, it is important to keep in mind some of the limitations of this research. First, as a Master’s Thesis this study was constrained by time and resource factors as I was also obliged to complete course and practicum requirements for my degree. Thus, a focused and specific research project was designed that could be completed within the time period of the program. As a result, it was decided to only explore the experiences of live-out assistants in L’Arche rather than compare the experiences of a wider variety of L’Arche’s members. During initial meetings and conversations with each L’Arche community, members of those communities voiced concerns regarding the limited scope of this project and were interested in seeing a broader study completed. Further research involving more of L’Arche’s members could add to the findings of this study and lead to a greater understanding of how life in L’Arche is experienced and understood by various members. Despite these concerns, the specific focus of this project allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of live-out assistants in the two participating L’Arche communities.

In addition, only two L’Arche communities were chosen for this study, both located in Southwestern Ontario. This limits the generalizability of these findings, as it cannot be assumed that they reflect the experiences or roles of all live-out assistants. Nevertheless,
the sizes of the communities included in this study were representative of the size of most L'Arche communities in Canada. Also, focusing on two L'Arche communities allowed for a larger body of data to be collected at those sites. Similarities between the themes that emerged at both sites in this study indicated that future research involving live-out assistants in other L'Arche communities might yield more generalizable results. This study begins to build a base of knowledge around the experiences of live-out assistants and the role that they play in L'Arche communities in hopes that others will continue to expand on this research.

3.6 Strengths:

There were several benefits to participation in this research study. Participation gave live-out assistants the opportunity to recount some of their experiences in L'Arche and have a voice in the literature on L'Arche communities. Some participants expressed thanks for the opportunity to recall experiences and remember the joy and lessons learned from them. In addition, by articulating their experiences, participants had a chance to reflect on those experiences and better understand the meanings and emotions that they had attached to them. An increased understanding of one’s own experience can help to facilitate the development of a more secure sense of self in the community (McKean, 2002).

This study also adds to the literature on L’Arche, as very little is presently known about the experiences of live-out staff despite their presence in many L’Arche communities. Participants may also realize their own power to influence L’Arche communities by being given the opportunity to share their experiences in a safe environment. These experiences can help L’Arche communities to better meet the needs
of their members and effectively respond to change. Similarly, the opportunity to share experiences demonstrates to participants that they are valued in L’Arche and that they possess knowledge which can help to improve life for everyone in their L’Arche community. Participants expressed excitement and pride when they saw the preliminary research results for this study and realized that their experiences were going to be used positively for the betterment of their L’Arche community and L’Arche as a whole.

L’Arche as a whole will also benefit from this research because additional perspectives will be available to help inform decision-making and problem-solving processes. The findings of this research reflect how live-out assistants experience community life in L’Arche and what recommendations these participants would make to their L’Arche communities.

The academic community can profit from the new insights that this research will provide related to the how intentional communities can respond to changes in the external environment while retaining core values. This study may also stimulate further academic research related to L’Arche, intentional communities, and organizational change.

Last, society will benefit from research into the experiences of those who support individuals with developmental disabilities because many barriers still exist that hinder the meaningful involvement of these individuals in Canadian society. Individuals with developmental disabilities possess unique gifts that can enrich the lives of those around them and the communities where they live. L’Arche is one organization that seeks to facilitate and model a more inclusive community so understanding the experiences of those directly involved in supporting marginalized individuals and modeling more inclusive communities is required and useful.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter begins with a diagram that illustrates the findings of this study. This diagram clarifies how L’Arche’s core values have been experienced by live-out assistants and how these assistants can connect L’Arche to the external environment. Next, an overview of L’Arche’s core values based on statements found in the *Charter of the Communities of L’Arche* (1993) and the *Constitution of the International Federation of L’Arche Communities* (1999) is given. L’Arche’s core values provide a useful framework for understanding the experiences of live-out assistants and what they say about community unity and member commitment in L’Arche. Following this overview, the experiences of participants will be shared as they relate to each core value. The experiences of participants tell us about the roles and expectations that these members of L’Arche have and what they consider to be the most meaningful and challenging aspects of life in L’Arche. Many of these ideas were related to participants’ interpretations of core values and how they should be practiced. They revealed what factors contributed to or impeded the practical application of L’Arche’s values to life in L’Arche communities from the perspectives of participants. This chapter concludes with a brief summary and two additional themes that relate to fostering unity and how live-out assistants are influencing perceptions in L’Arche.

*Representing the Role of Core Values in Live-out Assistants’ Experiences and Live-out Assistants as a Bridge*

Figure 4.1 illustrates L’Arche’s core values as they were understood by live-out assistants. It also shows how live-out assistants are positioned between L’Arche and the external environment. Each of the small lightly-coloured circles represents a core value of L’Arche. The area within the larger circle that surrounds five of these values
FIGURE 4.1: CORE VALUES CONNECTED TO COMMUNITY UNITY AND THE ROLE OF LIVE-OUT ASSISTANTS
represents a L’Arche community (or the organization as a whole) and the area outside of it is the external environment. The five core values within the larger circle are those that participants experienced being practiced and contributing to greater unity and individual commitment in their L’Arche communities. Community integration is drawn outside of the L’Arche community since intentional organizational efforts to interact and become more integrated into society are not occurring. Live-out assistants are positioned between L’Arche and the external environment because they work in L’Arche communities but live outside of them. This position shows how live-out assistants provide L’Arche with a connection to the external environment, which gives the organization access to external ideas and an avenue for influencing wider society. Live-out assistants connect with community integration because they are drawing friends and family members into L’Arche communities.

The Core Values of L’Arche International

Through an analysis of the Charter of the Communities of L’Arche (1993) and the Constitution of the International Federation of L’Arche Communities (1999), five statements were composed that express the main values of L’Arche. The first value was a belief in the unique and sacred worth of every individual, which required that all of L’Arche’s members be given the same dignity and rights. Second, membership in a community allows and encourages members to grow by providing an atmosphere of trust, security, and mutual affection. Third, core members possess qualities and gifts that teach others and touch hearts. Core members teach others what their priorities and values should be in relationships and as a community. Fourth, core members reveal God’s presence in community and individuals find inner freedom by discovering and
developing their spirituality. Last, L'Arche communities seek to become increasingly integrated into society by building connections with neighbours and critically engaging the wider community. These values were used to organize findings during analysis and make sense of the relationships between participants' experiences and organizational values. L’Arche’s second value, being a safe and secure environment where personal growth is encouraged, was broken into two categories, a need to belong and personal growth. This division was made because participants shared a number of experiences related to each of these concepts. While a sense of belonging is necessary for personal growth, creating two separate categories clarified how each was experienced and contributed to unity and commitment. The six categories used to organize results were: all people are valued, a need to belong, personal growth, spirituality in daily life, core members are at the heart of L’Arche communities, and community integration. Within each category factors that contributed or limited the practice of that value are presented and where relevant examples of ways that live-out assistants act as a bridge between L’Arche and the external environment are noted.

4.1 All People are Valued

To begin, L’Arche believes that all individuals have unique and sacred value and should be given the same dignity and rights. Live-out assistants represent a relatively new group in L’Arche whose relationship with the L’Arche community differs because they do not live in a L’Arche home. Findings from this study indicated that participants felt like valued members of their L’Arche community, but questioned their worth relative to other community members in L’Arche. Based on the experiences shared by
participants in this study, this section presents factors that foster and hinder a sense of self worth among live-out assistants.

*Actions that Fostered a Sense of Value*

To begin, several participants mentioned examples of actions that made them feel valued such as meaningful relationships, positive affirmations, others showing a genuine interest in their lives, and ongoing consistent communication. Many of the experiences that made participants feel valued were directly related to the relationships that these participants had with other L'Arche members. Maxine described how important relationships were to her sense of value in the L'Arche community:

> Yeah, there are years worth of bests. All, all of the ones that I can sit here and think about are directly related to a core member showing me I'm valued. A core member showing me they needed me or, um, telling me that they loved me or it's all directly related to that at one time or another because that has meant so much to me.

Three participants also talked about how relationships with core members taught them that commitment, rather than personal achievements or physical appearance, was most important in relationships. Colleen talked about what she had learned about relationships:

> Um, like when you're interacting with a core member, they really don't care if your hair looks good, or what kind of car you drive, or what you're wearing, you know, uh, that kind of thing or, like, even like, they don't really even look at how smart you are or what your accomplishments and your credentials are. It really just comes down to like, ok, does she treat me well or does she not treat me well? Like it's a very, I wouldn't say there's, you know, no judgment in L'Arche, because there is, but it's on a different level, a more meaningful level. It's all about how you relate with people and, um, it's, yeah, so the values are very important.
Receiving positive affirmations from other people in their L'Arche community also made participants feel appreciated. Sheila commented on the importance of positive affirmations by stating:

[People] see the negative things, because we don't like them and we tend to comment on that and just to emphasize the positive stuff that people are doing and to give them lots of positive reinforcement so that when we do need to talk about improvements you know that it's balanced by lots of really strong affirmations.

In addition, three participants appreciated when other L'Arche members showed an interest in their lives outside of the L'Arche community. Examples given included remembering an individual's birthday, asking about how an assistant's family members were doing and inquiring about vacation experiences. For instance, Ryan noted his experience after returning from a recent vacation:

Everyone was saying, 'oh I missed you', 'it's good to have you back' and, you know, asking me how my trip was or, 'oh, what are you doing this weekend?' you know, 'how was your weekend?' So yeah, certainly things like that show me that I'm appreciated...

Finally, five participants said that opportunities to give input and be heard made them feel like important members of their L'Arche communities. Rosa described how community support and opportunities for dialogue made her feel valued:

And that's part of the, that's the good thing about community, you're never, you're never alone type thing. You've always got somebody, um, that'll help you and that'll offer you support... through providing the means for, uh, open and...genuine conversation, so that you actually know that you're being listened to and heard.

Thus, these experiences made participants feel like valued community members in L'Arche, however, there remained a sense that they were less valued than live-in members. Sometimes this recognition was in the form of a passing comment, such as when Tessa remarked:
I'm a part-timer, but I'm considered part of the community, not as much as a live-in, but still part of the community.

Jacob elaborated on how he felt annoyed that the experiences of live-in assistants were considered more valuable than those of live-outs. A similar idea was raised by Grace who used the metaphor of live-in assistants as family and live-outs as friends to describe her understanding of the different assistant roles in her L'Arche community:

...It's really similar to that I mean in terms of, your family's at home, it's their house, you know? You may have really close friends that visit or come over and they may feel almost like family, but it's just not quite the same, you know, like it's a very slight distinction, but it's still there.

Experiences and Actions that Hindered Feeling a Sense of Value

The perception that some community members in L'Arche were more valued than others sometimes led to feelings like disappointment and envy that negatively impacted relationships. Exploring where feelings of lower-status came from may help L'Arche communities address this challenge and foster unity. Participants' comments suggested that feelings of lower status may have come from the belief that negative perceptions of live-out assistants exist in L'Arche communities, being asked to do other people's work, being excluded from L'Arche community events and decision-making, and unclear roles. For example, participants thought that live-out assistants were viewed as less committed to the L'Arche community because they did not live there. Jacob said:

A lot of times there's a perception that, from the people who live-out, er, the perception of the live-out people that when they go home at night they don't think about community...It's, um, until the next morning, but often, everyone that I've talked to that has either never lived in or has lived in and then taken a live-out role it doesn't stop. You carry on with your other roles, with your other, your life, but in the back of your head there's always that community, community, community. You, you can't shut it off, but there's the perception that, yeah, it's a door, it's locked, it's fine until the next morning. We don't care enough to live in.
In addition, three participants talked about being asked to do work that was the responsibility of live-in assistants, which strained relationships and made these individuals feel less valued. Tessa shared:

So...yeah, it is a challenge sometimes, especially when the live-ins are, you know, working on their last day before they get a day away, so they're very tired, and you come in, and you help out, and they just ask you to do this, and you do it, and then they ask you for something else, and you do it, and it's like they're relaxing and you're doing all the work. But that's community right?... Sometimes I get frustrated, but it's not like it happens everyday...

Nevertheless, all three participants were also empathetic, showing that they understood being part of a L’Arche community meant sometimes covering for each other. Ryan said:

So I always just try to do as much as I can for [live-in assistants], uh, and, you know, just so that it's, you know, I know that I'm going to be off at a certain time. I can go home and, you know, put my work attitude or, you know, my 'hey' attitude on the shelf and I can just clear my mind of stuff, whereas live-in assistants can't necessarily do that.

The empathetic statements made by these three participants revealed an awareness that being part of a community was sometimes difficult and a desire to help out where they could. Still, being asked to take on additional work was tiring and made participants feel less valued than other members of their L’Arche community.

Furthermore, participants from the mid-sized L’Arche community voiced concern that they were not given enough opportunities to attend trainings, workshops, or meetings that live-in assistants were participating in. Peter talked about how important it was for everyone to be given a voice and place in L’Arche communities when he said:
It's a little bit more, uh, [L'Arche] seem[s] to like have a better understanding, they seem to care more for the community and for what everyone can bring to the table, what everyone can offer, and it also allows a chance for everyone to be heard. Like, no one's really talking over one another and not given the opportunity or a channel to... basically when they want to say something, their speech is not being ignored, which is great because that is a positive aspect of L'Arche that I have not seen anywhere else.

While Peter's statement implied that everyone's voice was being heard in L'Arche communities, other participants shared concerns about not being included as much as other members. Jacob wanted to participate in retreats and other events in his L'Arche community:

Um, even just opening things up to [live-outs], like retreats and community holidays, you know, maybe there are some things that [live-outs] really want to do and we need to, uh, yeah, maybe some things you're gonna have to, you know, put someone else in our role during that time of our retreat, but let us experience that.

Colleen also wanted more opportunities to attend trainings and meetings, but there was no one to cover her position while she was gone:

It's always kind of a challenge to get um... uh, just time in for like training and that kind of thing. Like going to workshops, um, I guess it's partly cuz there's just one of me, like at the other day program where there's 3 or 4 assistants, like if one person goes to a training session or something like that, or even an all assistants meeting, then the others that are there can sort of pitch in, but if there's like only one assistant like it's harder to do that... So there are a lot of, um, all assistants meetings and things like that just, that I just don't get to because they're often from like 10 to 12 kind of thing and I need to be here...

Colleen went on to discuss efforts that had been made recently to help her attend more meetings, such as someone from the leadership team filling in for her during the meeting or having meetings where she was working. In addition, Sheila described personal efforts to give those she supervised more opportunity to communicate with leaders:
But it takes a lot of work to keep that up, it's constantly, uh, making sure that people have input. Uh, listening to what's going on in the houses, what's good, but what's chal...really challenging you, and to support the assistants in that real that front-line work that they're doing for us, for L'Arche, for, well yeah, for us, for L'Arche, for the core members, for everyone and valuing them.

Still, efforts to include live-out assistants in meetings and decision-making processes remained fairly inconsistent and ad-hoc, so the perspectives of these individuals were often unheard. While the theme of participation was not as apparent in findings from the smaller L'Arche community, participants shared that they sometimes felt left out of meetings. Meetings were generally scheduled during the day when live-out assistants were supporting core members and therefore not available to attend. Being excluded made participants feel like their perspectives were less valued than those of other L'Arche community members.

The last factor that hindered feeling a sense of value was the existence of differing opinions about the roles of live-out assistants. Participants expressed various expectations of what their relationship and involvement in L'Arche should be. For example, Jacob wanted to be included in happenings in his L'Arche community even during his off-time:

And also, as I've said earlier, with the communication, you know, the live-out people aren't told when things are happening or, um, like if say one of the core members from here, say [---] is in the hospital...nobody calls and says 'A core member has] fallen and broken her nose again, she's in the hospital'... you find out like a week later, and sometimes even later than that, or say on a Monday if it happened on a weekend. Well, we could've helped, or we could've gone to the hospital and visited...

Two other participants, however, enjoyed the freedom that they had to decide when they would and would not be in the L'Arche community. Colleen put it this way:
I appreciate the flexibility that I have as a kind of live-out person, because there's no way that I could do live-in at this point, so with being a live-out kind of person I'm having, I feel like I have a bit of the best of both because I have an opportunity to experience L'Arche and, uh, a commitment load that works for me kind of thing.

The contrast between what different participants expected and desired their role to be even after being part of a L'Arche community for over a year implied that these communities need to clarify the roles of these assistants. Defining live-out roles could help resolve negative perceptions of live-out assistants that exist in L'Arche communities and demonstrate to live-out assistants that they are valued members of L'Arche.

4.2 A Need to Belong

Furthermore, in addition to fostering a sense of value among individual members, L’Arche’s core values also recognize that all individuals have an innate need to belong to a community. This section outlines what participants’ experiences revealed were factors creating or limiting their own sense of belonging in L’Arche. While a number of participants spoke of times when they had felt like outsiders in their L’Arche communities, all said that over time they felt a growing sense of belonging. Sheila shared that she had an increasing awareness of her own, and others’ need to belong:

So that, that sense of people needing to be valued, and to belong, and just taking that awareness into my other life... So, again, I'm not sure how successful I am at embodying that in the rest of my life, but [laughs] I have an awareness!

Factors Contributing to a Sense of Belonging

Participants identified three factors that contributed to their sense of belonging in L’Arche: clear and consistent communication, time with core members, and being part of a team. Annette highlighted the relationship between communication and belonging when she said:
"So the communication was very good and I felt, I felt accepted. I didn't feel just, you know, 'oh, she's just coming in a few hours a week and you don't really have to learn about her too much'.

Seven participants discussed issues of communication in their interviews and five linked good communication to feeling connected to their L'Arche communities.

Participants recommended that communication be an ongoing focus in their L'Arche communities. Ongoing and clear communication kept participants informed, helped them be more sensitive to the needs of core members, helped ensure that all perspectives were heard in decision-making, and allowed teams to coordinate and handle difficult situations more effectively. The importance of communication to one's sense of belonging was evident in the findings of this study, but maintaining consistent ongoing communication can be challenging. Grace knew that even when the best communication tools and procedures were in place it was still up to individuals to use them:

And...to sort of work towards that sense of open communication, I mean it's really good that I can tell this person that I had the greatest day ever, but that, that you did something wrong, or I feel like this should have happened, or I'm upset about this and, you know, what can we do about it? That's harder to do, even though we try and make that happen.

Spending time with core members also created a sense of belonging for participants and six spoke specifically about how meaningful their relationships with core members were. Grace talked about the acceptance that she felt in these relationships:

Um, now my relationships with the core members are like my relationships with anybody else, um, they can be, I can have struggles in them, you know, people can get angry at me, I can get angry at other people, it's...you know, I have friendships, I have love for these people, um, and it's really...I guess matured and is very much more relaxed...

Participants knew that they could express their feelings openly in relationships without a fear of being looked down upon and this gave them a sense of security and freedom.
within their L’Arche community. However, maintaining relationships with core members was sometimes difficult for live-out assistants, because they did not see all core members regularly. Peter described this challenge and how he responded:

*Some core members I see often, whereas other core members I don’t see as often, so sometimes the challenge can be keeping up with that rapport cuz over time sometimes that rapport can be lost. So it’s about trying to keep that sort of energy and also make myself known by the assistants. Either me making a visit to the other, uh, residential houses, where the core members get a chance to see me, or maybe attending common worship, or going to different functions or activities of the organization.*

Peter recognized that he needed to make intentional efforts to build and maintain relationships with other members of his L’Arche community so that he remained connected and aware of what was going on beyond the L’Arche home where he spent most of his time.

Relationships with core members gave participants a sense of belonging and effective communication tools helped improve these relationships. Descriptive, easy-to-use communication tools helped participants respond more appropriately and sensitively to core members’ needs. Annette talked about how a new method of recording the daily activities and health of core members had improved assistants’ ability to provide them with the right kind of support:

*And the communication between the house and the day program assistants is just so much smoother and better and clearer, so since that new method [the binders] was introduced things are going really well because we can see right away, ‘oh my gosh, she had a really bad week, she didn’t sleep well all week, so it’s no wonder that she’s cranky’.*

All participants from the smaller L’Arche community described written communication methods as well as quick conversations that helped them remain informed about what had happened since they were last in the L’Arche community.
Last, being part of a team contributed to feeling a sense of belonging. Teamwork was a dominant theme in the smaller L’Arche community where many participants were part of a team offering day program activities to core members. Four participants talked about the benefits of belonging to a team, especially in terms of having extra support during difficult situations. Ryan commented:

> Like, I know that there have been times where somebody just can’t physically or mentally deal with a crisis at the time when it’s happening, and I can tell right away, and I’ll say, you know, ‘get out of here for a little bit, recollect yourself and I’ll take care of it, or at least I’ll take your place and do what you would do,’ you know.

Working collaboratively with others also developed communication skills and understanding among participants, which helped them be more sensitive to each others’ needs. Rosa described how teams in her L’Arche community had learned verbal and nonverbal communication:

> And here it’s [two assistants] and myself, and at [the other house] it’s [two other assistants], and [these teams] have, they know each other’s quirks, they know each other quite well ... And, uh, they, they’re very, they’re very compatible with one another, and they’re very intuitive, and they’ve become very in tune with one another, and, uh, things happen now without even words.

Strong communication and team cohesion produced a sense of belonging as each member knew they made important contributions to the group. Annette summed it up in this way:

> That’s what is very important for me, just that common goal and working towards it. Because some things I have to offer [are] good for the team and then other things other people have to offer, we just bring our skills and our knowledge together and as a team we make it work and that’s a beautiful way of working together.

Annette valued the experience of being part of a team and knew that by working together everyone was able to achieve more.
While the theme of teamwork was not discussed by participants from the mid-sized L’Arche community, participants shared a desire for increased collaboration within that community. Sheila noted how important a collaborative atmosphere was to unity in her L’Arche community when she said:

_So the idea of bringing people together and listening to what’s going on. There has been in the past, I don’t think it’s going on right now, but I have, um, seen the community very divided at a few points between the management team and the assistants. And this is going back a few years, but there was a real division and I think that there’s a lot more collaboration going on now and communication and that’s really positive. But it takes a lot of work to keep that up, it’s constantly, uh, making sure that people have input._

Collaboration can also create a sense of belonging, because it indicates to individuals that their contributions to their L’Arche community are important and beneficial.

**Factors Impeding a Sense of Belonging**

Participants noted that they were not being adequately included in L’Arche community events or processes of decision-making and this exclusion hindered their sense of belonging. Being included in events and processes makes individuals feel like valued contributors in L’Arche communities. Peter shared that when he was included in dialogue he felt like he was both contributing and benefiting:

_... Therefore, being able to be where my voice is being heard, uh, and basically people are maybe giving me advice back or, um, basically taking an idea and putting it to use is, to me that’s receiving something in return, so, which is good._

Grace discussed how live-outs were not able to attend meetings, which sometimes made communication between members of L’Arche difficult and confusing. Annette shared that she used to feel like an outsider when she was not included in the assistants’ meeting at the house where she worked:
And some Mondays, you know, I would just be upstairs and vacuuming or cleaning the bathrooms, or something like that, doing the laundry, and I would hear them laughing and talking downstairs, and I would think, ‘oh geez, I just wish I could be with them right now and, I have things to say, I could tell them how I felt the last week. So, um, I felt left out a lot in those situations

While good communication tools could help to keep live-out assistants informed, they did not address the feelings of being left out and excluded that came from a lack of participation.

4.3 Personal Growth

A third value of L’Arche is personal growth, which takes place in environments of trust, security and mutual affection. Participants from both L’Arche communities identified personal growth as a priority in L’Arche. Maxine talked about how personal growth was facilitated in her L’Arche community:

You know, L’Arche is clearly a place about helping people to grow, helping the core members to grow, helping the other assistants to grow, so teaching me how to help people to grow and helping me to grow as a person. And helping people, like my job is to help people to grow as who they are, and as who they want to be, and the direction that they want to be. [The Community Leader’s] job is to help me to grow in the direction that I don’t want to grow [laughs], so, I mean there’s definitely things like that that help.

In his L’Arche community, Jacob also knew that individual growth was a priority and described how the leaders of his L’Arche community encouraged learning and growth through relationships between diverse individuals. This section describes the different ways that personal growth was supported and deterred in the experiences of participants and also provides some examples of how participants grew through their experiences at L’Arche.
Factors that Facilitate Personal Growth

According to L’Arche’s values, personal growth occurs in safe and secure environments where individuals feel able to take risks and try new things. Participants in this study shared a number of examples of actions that helped create the kind of safe and secure environment needed for personal growth. These actions were: group prayers, positive affirmations, celebrating personal events, taking time for family commitments, feeling listened to and heard, and being accepted despite mistakes. The similarity between these factors and those that promote a sense of value and belonging support the belief that a nurturing environment permits personal growth.

Five participants made comments that suggested they felt safe and secure in their L’Arche community. This sense of security developed from caring actions shown towards participants and being accepted despite making mistakes. Peter shared that participating in group prayers made him feel cared for:

Um, well, it’s just, everyone in their lives always have, may it be a personal problem or may it be a, um, different conflicts in their life that need resolving. And then of course L’Arche, you find that L’Arche as a whole always, sort of, uh, having that face and having that, a chance to actually speak amongst prayer and talk about how everyone wants to see everyone do well. That was maybe a piece that I was missing was that, you know, not having that chance to sit and think, you know, ok, so people do care, you know.

Rosa added that she felt more appreciated at L’Arche than she had at her previous job because of affirmations that she received:

I would have called in at [my previous job] too, had I been off and known that they were in, you know, a teetery [situation]. but, uh, nobody would have said ‘thank you’. So, here you very definitely know that you’re doing it because they’re a part of you, so...and, uh...I guess it’s the feeling of making a difference and having it appreciated that I was looking for...

Ryan thought that remembering personal events made people feel cared for:
When anybody’s away on vacation, or a birthday, or any kind of thing, like we always, in the kitchen there’s a happy birthday sign for [one of the assistants], you know, uh, people wouldn’t do something like that if they didn’t want you to know that they appreciated you or that they cared, right?

Last, Jacob also shared that he had felt supported by his members of his L’Arche community when he was given time off to be with his family because a relative unexpectedly passed away:

...It’s a very, at times it’s been a very supportive environment, um, if you’re having an issue, like a personal issue or a family issue, you can go to someone and say, ‘hey, this is what I’m going through’ and there’s always that support or if you need time off ... for example when my wife’s father died, he had gone in for some surgery and we went down to the hospital and he hadn’t come out of surgery. So, I called [the Community Leader]... And he says... ‘take the time that you need and if you need more than that call me, no problem’.

He went on to say that his experiences in L’Arche had taught him that his membership in L’Arche was secure despite making mistakes:

And if you made a mistake you got feedback too, um, but then it was more a case of ‘ok, don’t do it again.’ You know, ‘yes I’m angry that you did that when you knew better, but I still love you, we’re still family, we’re still community.’

A feeling of safety was also evident in Peter’s description of L’Arche as a second home:

Um, well I find we all seem to, like we have that sort of family sort of atmosphere we like to try and keep. Uh, keeping things sort of in the community sort of where we’re all a part of something. And that’s what it feels like, you know...it feels like home away from home, but not necessarily your home, but you do have that connection with the other assistants and the other core members.

Therefore, the findings of this study do indicate that participants feel safe and secure in their L’Arche communities. Moreover, participants shared a number of areas of personal growth that they attributed to their experiences in L’Arche. These areas were: patience, perspectives of people and/or situations, and understanding of community. To begin, the most common area of growth for participants was developing patience. Four participants described improvements in this area that resulted from their experiences at
L’Arche. Annette shared that she had never wanted or needed to be patient, but since coming to L’Arche her ability to be patient had grown. She now considered herself to be calmer in all situations. Two other participants talked about their growing ability to cope with daily challenges and remain relaxed. Grace said:

Um, to remain relaxed, and to remain calm, and to remain patient when, you know, it’s minus 40, and you’re standing outside, and you’re trying to get somebody inside, you know, I mean that can, I think that, like to do that, and then to go away, and to go in the next day and try to say this is a new day and maybe it’ll be easy today, you know, because it has been easy before, so maybe this day will be good. And to walk into the room without that, that there with you, that yesterday was awful and today’s going to be awful.

Another area of growth that resulted from being at L’Arche was changing perceptions of people and/or situations. Jacob came from a background where knowing what was in a client’s file was heavily emphasized. He described L’Arche as “culture shock” because the approach was to develop relationships rather than memorize the medical/history files of core members. Sheila noted that she had grown more aware of interpersonal dynamics and now understood experiences with other members of L’Arche differently:

One of the things that has been helpful is I’m more aware of people’s insecurities. Um I, I see my own insecurities and I think that helps me be aware of other people’s insecurities and realizing that sometimes when I think other people are doing things to me it’s got little to do with me, it’s got more to do with what’s going on inside of them and so to try to be empathetic.

Colleen gave an example of how she viewed a current family situation differently than her relatives, and thought that the influence of L’Arche may have shaped her view:

I have an aunt who was a very brilliant woman, and now has Alzheimer’s, and is in a nursing home... but a lot of my relatives feel that her situation is a huge tragedy, while I kind of think, well, she’s had five really unhappy years and she deserves better. But, like, on the other hand, like, you know, [the core member that I support] is her age and he’s been living this life his entire life... Yeah, I guess, like, I’m not sure that, you know, before I came to L’Arche that I would have seen that situation quite the same way.
Two participants also shared that experiences at L’Arche alerted them to their own need to belong to a community. Ryan talked about seeking out positive relationships and considering people to be more than just a “face”. Grace acknowledged her increased appreciation for community:

*I think that it’s really made me realize the importance of having some sort of community around you. Um... I have, I’m much more aware now of my relationships with my own family, uh, my fiancé’s family, and how really important that is for me, to have those connections in that community.*

The personal growth that resulted from experiences at L’Arche not only changed participants’ behaviour within L’Arche, it also affected how they acted when they were not in the L’Arche community. Tessa shared how patience improved her relationships outside of L’Arche:

*Yeah, so... I’m a more patient person too now, um. I’m definitely more understanding with other people outside of work, um, with my parents. I respect them more now. I think in general it’s made me a better person... now if me and my boyfriend have a fight, for example, before I started L’Arche I wouldn’t let him explain to me his side of the story, it would be my side and that’s all I saw. Um, and it would be very hard from him to get through to me that, you know, he’s got a point too or something, and now we don’t, barely ever fight because I listen to him, I understand his side, so, you know, we work, we work something out in between something he wants and what I want, and I think [laughs] if I had never come to L’Arche it would have never happened.*

Maxine also remarked that her father had noticed that she was responding more calmly to stressful situations in her personal life and both Peter and Ryan discussed taking values that they had experienced in L’Arche and applying them to their own lives outside of the organization. Peter said:

*L’Arche has kind of made me, in my own personal life, a little more accountable, a little more responsible for my actions. Cuz seeing the way that L’Arche sort of runs the community, um, I may not know it, but I’ll be out in the community, you know, I find that I can be a bit more respectful to others who I may not even know. It may just be waving at a passing vehicle that allows me to cross the street...*
Therefore, participants in this study were connecting their L’Arche communities to wider society by transferring what they learned in L’Arche to their actions outside of the L’Arche community and influencing external perspectives.

Factors that Limit Personal Growth

Even though personal growth was evident in the experiences of participants, three still said that providing ongoing accompaniment to all members of L’Arche would help foster growth. An accompanier was described by Jacob as:

*What it is is basically someone who has been, like an older assistant, not necessarily in age, but someone who’s been around awhile and lives, lives L’Arche. And it doesn’t have to be a live-in person, it can be a live-out person who has been around awhile to sort of mentor.*

Tessa remembered how talking to a more mature member in her L’Arche community had helped change her view of a difficult situation and Maxine shared how new assistants benefited from a consistent mentor during their first few months at L’Arche.

In particular, accompaniment helped participants resolve interpersonal conflicts, which hinder personal growth and damage relationships. Five participants in this study talked about experiences of conflict with other assistants and Rosa described how accompaniment continued to help her work through difficult situations in L’Arche:

*So, [another staff member] and myself formed a really close friendship very quickly into this whole thing and we can identify outside of L’Arche too...And so, I was going to her for advice and things...And, uh, we’ve got, she’s my best friend, so [she] has always been a really strong support system for me, but, uh, [the Community Leader] is, she’s very good at, uh, at trying to support any given situation, whether it’s a core member or whether it’s staff, um, she tries to offer her support. Not as, I’m over you so I’ve got to do this, but, I’m concerned, like do you want to talk?*
While some accompaniment was occurring in the L’Arche communities where participants worked, many noted that formal processes for ensuring ongoing accompaniment were lacking. Sheila said:

“So, it’s mainly that, making sure that people are accompanied in their roles. Um, that’s something that’s not in good shape right now, um, personal outcome measures. [One of our leadership team staff] does first year stuff, but, um, people who have been in the community more than a year, a lot of people, um, don’t have accompaniment yet, so we’re working on that.

Making accompaniment a priority in L’Arche communities could increase unity considering the role it played in helping participants resolve conflicts and overcome difficult situations. The ongoing accompaniment of live-out assistants may also increase L’Arche’s influence in the external environment, because the personal growth that it facilitates affects how live-out assistants act outside of the organization.

4.4 Spirituality in Daily Life

The fourth core value of L’Arche is to create communities of faith that are founded upon religious principles and model, “the spirit of the Gospel and the Beatitudes that Jesus preached” (Charter, 1993). As such, L’Arche communities wish to provide members with the opportunity to explore and practice their spirituality in their own way. They believe that spirituality gives individuals the chance to experience inner freedom and union with God. Participants discussed a number of experiences related to this value and how it was promoted or hindered in their L’Arche communities.

Factors that Promote Spirituality

Based on the experiences shared by participants, two factors promoted spirituality in daily life at L’Arche: rituals of prayer and common worship and linking with external religious organizations. First, spiritual rituals were present and regularly practiced in
both the L’Arche communities where participants worked. Seven participants mentioned prayer or common worship in their interviews, suggesting that spirituality was a meaningful part of participants’ experiences in L’Arche. Sheila described how her L’Arche community had made establishing a tradition of household prayer and community worship nights a priority:

...When I first came here we didn’t have weekly prayer, and prayer in the homes was not in good shape, and that’s one of the reasons that they were looking for a Spiritual Guide... it was less than a year before we had established a real strong tradition of prayer in the homes...and community worship, like it’s a given that we come together on every Monday night.

Tessa described how the rituals of prayer and common worship took place in her L’Arche community:

...Usually towards the night, and you, uh, turn off the lights, and you light a candle, and you read from a little... 'Walk with Me' book, and it’s just little stories from the Bible...But, if the core member can read it, then the core member reads it, and then we discuss it, and then we say a prayer. So, we go around and everybody, you know, prays for someone, or is thankful for something, or talks about their day, and then we say the ‘Our Father’ together.

...[Common worship is] when we all gather as a community...and we just gather for an hour on Mondays from 7 til 8 and [our Spiritual Guide], um, she leads it in prayers and singing, and we sing songs, we read... but there’s always a message and [our Spiritual Guide] talks about it and, uh, we all pray.

These rituals seemed to be an effective way of encouraging participants to explore their spiritual beliefs and bringing them into alignment with this core value. Peter voiced his support for spiritual rituals and also said that he felt they were unifying:

...With L’Arche being so built on faith and prayers and, um, very into, you know, the spirituality of God, I find that’s also a good element to have cuz then you’re able to sort of join in as a whole group, and have that experience, and all be able to pray for one another whenever there’s a wrongdoing.

Three other participants shared how their view of spirituality and comfort with the religious aspect of L’Arche changed after spending time in a L’Arche community. Tessa
described growing up Catholic and being "forced" to go to church. She was concerned about once again being required to attend mass as part of her job, but was surprised when she found the experience enjoyable. On the other hand, Ryan did not consider himself to be a religious person, but did say:

...I believe in God. I haven't figured out what God to me is perhaps, but that might not have been something I would have said before starting with L'Arche, because it just, I've never been, I've never chosen or been given the opportunity to be around a place based around spirituality...

All three participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to re-examine their spiritual beliefs and admitted that this probably would not have happened if they had not come to L'Arche.

In addition, both Annette and Tessa said that participation in spiritual rituals had made them more thankful. Annette confided that she thanked God daily for the good things in her life. Tessa shared that learning to be thankful had increased her commitment to L'Arche:

And uh, I think the best experience was one time at common worship, [the Spiritual Guide] was, she was talking about how to start your day with a thank-you, and to always end your day with a thank-you, and I think that message stuck in my head. And I think that's what made me stay here so long...

Second, connecting with an external religious body also helped participants and other members of L'Arche communities grow in their spirituality. Maxine spoke of the different faiths of core members in one L'Arche home and how they were all accommodated to connect with external religious communities:

Yes, so in this home, um, [two core members] are Catholic, one of them is Pentecostal, and the other one is, um...believes in God...And currently in this house I can think of other people who are Presbyterian, and Anglican, and that are assistants. So we have quite a few different religions in this home alone and we definitely make sure that everyone gets to church.
Factors That Can Hinder Spirituality

One factor that could hinder L’Arche’s ability to encourage the spiritual growth of all members is a lack of openness to faiths outside of Christianity. The level of openness L’Arche communities have towards members of non-Christian faiths was described differently between the two sites in this study. In the smaller L’Arche community, Maxine expressed her view that the spiritual aspect of L’Arche made members more accepting of one another, but also seemed to connect this with sharing a common religion:

*I think it makes people even more accepting of each other...Um, more committed to each other, and more open as well. And, I mean it give us all common ground, right? I mean, we may not all be Catholic, but we definitely are all Christian people who are at L’Arche, and if you’re not, you need to be a person who’s tolerant of other religions like Christianity...*

By contrast, a participant from the mid-sized L’Arche community recalled examples of assistants who held other faiths (Judaism and Islam) being encouraged to grow in their beliefs. Sheila acknowledged the tension that is sometimes felt around the issue of encouraging members of L’Arche in faiths other than Christianity:

...*Um, there’s always this dilemma around, you know, all of our core members are Christians, are we going to confuse them if we introduce other spiritualities. I think that we’ve discovered that the core message of most faiths is the same thing, and that it’s the core message that is important to the core members, and if we can show how other faiths have that same core message than that’s not a negative.*

Still, if L’Arche communities hope to achieve their goal of being open and encouraging to people of all faiths then they must accept and support members who are not Christian.

4.5 Core Members are at the Heart of L’Arche Communities

The fifth value of L’Arche is to acknowledge the gifts of core members and the value of friendships with them. All participants spoke of how much they valued their
relationships with core members, and many saw these relationships as the most meaningful and educational aspects of their experiences. What participants learned from their relationships with core members increased their understanding of L’Arche’s core values and how to put them into practice. This section describes factors that contributed to or deterred core members from having a central place in the L’Arche communities involved in this study.

Factors that Give Core Members a Central Role in L’Arche Communities

Participants in this study shared two factors that helped to give core members a central role in L’Arche communities: relationships and language. First, relationships between core members and other members of L’Arche helped to keep them at the centre of community life in L’Arche. When participants in this study talked about their relationships with core members they noted how much core members had taught them through these relationships. Six participants said that they viewed core members as the main teachers in L’Arche communities, which suggests that these relationships give core members the opportunity to influence values and practices within L’Arche. Annette remarked on how assistants’ perspectives often changed when they spent time with core members in a L’Arche community:

...Sometimes people come to L’Arche and say, ‘wow, I’m so excited, I have so many things in mind that I can teach the disabled people.’ Usually it’s the other way around, the disabled people teach us.

Annette’s point reveals the important role that relationships with core members play in influencing assistants’ perspectives and ensuring that core members are treated with dignity and respect.

Sheila noted some of the particular gifts that core members modeled:
And the core members are very much our teachers and our forgivers, and, you know, they are the ones who accept us so readily and, uh...yeah, so it makes a difference.

Two participants also felt that core members demonstrated how to be welcoming. Ryan commented:

...Getting a hug from [one of the core members] every morning or if I'm at [the other house] [one of the core members there] gives you a big hug every morning, every time she sees you. When she first sees you and when you say good-bye, I mean if there's a better way of showing your appreciation than that, I don't know.

In addition, core members were seen to possess insight and understanding about relationships. The honesty found in relationships with core members was recognized by two participants as the main reason why these friendships were so valuable. Grace explained:

I mean I've had good experiences in community with the assistants, but, um, the things that really stick out are the times with [the core members]...I think, I think because of the honesty, um, in the relationship...it's just, I mean you don't, you don't experience it with many people and there's something so amazing about it. With...and there's no subtleties, you know, there's no, um, disguising really the emotions or the feelings.

Maxine shared similar thoughts by saying:

Um, I think it's because, you know, they're true, they're not tainted in any way, they don't have any ulterior motives. Um, you know, they're very pure and I think that's why they mean so much more for people.

Other lessons taught by core members were related to the importance of being together rather than doing for one another. Annette had spent a lot of time one-on-one with nonverbal core members in her L'Arche community. Despite being a very social person, she learned to enjoy and better understand the meaning of being with a friend in silence:

You don't need a thousand words, you just need their body being, you know, very close to your body and just enjoying that feeling of closeness.
Colleen was touched by being able to share music with a core member in her L’Arche community. She talked about how this core member valued being with her regardless of whether she played a particular piece perfectly or not. She described the core member as someone who, “loves the music and is grateful for anyone who provides that for him”. This gratefulness and appreciation made the experience particularly rewarding for Colleen.

Therefore, participants learned to see core members as teachers through their relationships with them and these relationships gave core members the opportunity to play a central role in shaping life and values in L’Arche communities.

Second, L’Arche has developed a specialized language that implies the central role core members play in L’Arche communities. Instead of the traditional dependency dyads like “patient-caregiver” or “client-staff”, L’Arche has chosen to use the terms “core members” to describe individuals with developmental disabilities and “assistants” to describe those who support core members. The term “core member” clearly reflects L’Arche’s belief that core members should play a central role in community life. While giving core members a central place in L’Arche communities involves more than just using different terminology, empowering language can change perceptions and influence behaviours. Peter talked about the implied meaning he saw in terminology by saying:

"...Over time, I got accustomed to saying ‘core members’ and got accustomed to saying ‘assistants’...Which I also think is something great because, because there’s a little more respect there even though it’s still sort of terminology there, sort of wording staff and client you’re sort of putting the two up against each other and they’re going to square it off in a boxing match."
Factors that Keep Core Members from Having a Central Role in L’Arche Communities

Although relationships with core members and the use of alternative language helped to ensure that core members had a central role in L’Arche communities, additional accompaniment would have also been beneficial. A lack of such accompaniment sometimes made it difficult for participants to cope with challenging behaviours that negatively impacted their relationships with core members. Since relationships are a key means through which core members maintain a central role in L’Arche, supporting factors that contribute to these relationships is important.

Three participants talked about experiences where core members acted in abusive or annoying ways. Two of these participants referred to situations where they were spit at, slapped, and kicked when assisting a core member. These actions were both physically and emotionally hurtful to the assistants involved. They described feeling surprised and confused by abusive responses because they were trying to support a core member with basic needs. Ryan reflected on where abusive behaviours that he experienced may have come from:

...Some of the folks that you support, they can’t talk, if they could tell you 'I don’t want to be bothered right now' they probably would, but if kicking or spitting is their only option for getting their message across, well, hey, at least I can talk and tell you to get out of my face if I don’t want you around, but they can’t, so what, you know, they’re probably frustrated to death.

Furthermore, when a new core member came to live at one of the houses where Tessa worked, she found understanding and adjusting to this core member’s personality challenging:
...And the greatest challenge was dealing with [a core member], because I'm a person [who] does not like people coming close to me, and personal space, I always have to be far away. I'm claustrophobic, so I don't like small spaces, um, I, not a lot of things annoy me, but I get really annoyed when people repeat things all the time. That's just who I am and [this core member], unfortunately for me at the time, had both those things...And that was my biggest challenge... I had times when I just wanted to go for a walk and, you know, get away from it.

These situations made relationships between the participants and the core members involved difficult, but participants also recognized that they still had a responsibility to treat core members with respect. Grace noted this responsibility when she defined the role of assistants in L'Arche:

*L'Arche assistants are there to support people in their daily living activities and not to I guess control or, um...force them to do whatever, but it was very much, there is a sense of an individual choosing, and that the choice is there for them, I guess spoke to me in a way. Um...just really the respect for the individual was a huge thing for me.*

Grace’s statements indicate that her commitment to L’Arche was strongly influenced by how core members were treated by assistants. Ongoing accompaniment can help assistants see situations differently and ensure that core members are shown respect. In addition, accompaniment can also help restore relationships between core members and assistants by helping assistants understand challenging situations differently and overcome hurt feelings. Tessa described how talking to a more experienced assistant helped her respond better to behaviour that she found challenging:

*And it lasted for about a month, and then I talked to [the House Responsible], and she got me to realize that it's hard for me to adapt to [this core member], but you have to consider him, and it's probably really hard for him to adapt to us too, cuz he's been with his mom and dad for his whole life and now coming here to something that's so free... And after a month he started settling in and now, you know, everyday I come in here and it gets better and better...*

The support of a team may also provide reassurance during difficult situations and allow assistants to trade-off if they are becoming overwhelmed and frustrated. The advantages
of teamwork were described earlier, but they also apply here as the team members can provide each other with advice and support during and after difficult situations.

4.6 Community Integration

Last, the final value that L’Arche articulates in its Charter is a desire to be increasingly integrated into society. This means both building relationships with friends and neighbours externally as well as challenging societies to become more community-minded and respecting of vulnerable individuals. This section describes what participants experiences said about factors that contribute to and hinder community integration.

Factors Contributing to Community Integration

Participants’ experiences suggest that the main factor contributing to L’Arche becoming more integrated into society is the connection that live-out assistants have with the external environment. Participants in this study played an important role in helping their L’Arche communities connect with the general public. Five participants spoke about introducing outside individuals into L’Arche. In particular, two participants talked about the benefits of bringing their kids with them to the L’Arche community. Maxine shared:

Yeah, we have people with disabilities, or some people with disabilities, who really enjoy children, so it's very good and healthy for them to spend time with the kids. And actually desired by some of their families...and it's something my kids look forward to, to come and play with new toys...to hang out with their friends...to watch 'Tree House' with their 'larger than their other friends' friends.

Three other participants had encouraged friends and family members to volunteer for L’Arche. Tessa described how her stories of experiences at L’Arche sparked curiosity in her friends, who then asked if they could meet some of the core members. Rosa’s mother
had also become a volunteer at L’Arche since she had started working there. Jacob
talked about getting his wife involved in L’Arche:

So I brought my wife to community... and that's how she's gotten her role, and
she's gotten to know everybody, and she's formed her own relationships and
things...

These examples confirm that participants were successfully drawing people into their
L’Arche communities and acting as a bridge between L’Arche and the external
environment. Participants were helping their L’Arche communities build relationships
with friends and neighbours and become more integrated into society.

Factors Limiting Community Integration

While L’Arche communities were building relationships with friends and family
members who had not previously been part of a L’Arche community, integration with
wider society did not seem to be a priority for participants in this study. Participants did
not mention any desire for social action and the comments that they shared suggested that
the main factors limiting L’Arche’s ability to become increasingly integrated into society
were: a lack of external awareness about L’Arche and no formal processes for engaging
wider society. Participants in this study did voice a desire to increase local awareness of
their L’Arche communities, but the only efforts being made to do this were the result of
individual initiative. For example, Maxine shared about her own efforts to increase local
awareness of L’Arche:

...We had a really neat day at the end of June where we went to a Christian
camp and talked to the counselors there about what L'Arche is. And...I
feel that the [---] churches in our area don't know enough about L'Arche right
now. So I'm currently, I've already been to their [church] meeting, where all of
the ministers in our area meet, talking to them about going to each individual
church to talk to them about L'Arche...
In addition, Grace referred to an integrative program organized by a volunteer from her L’Arche community:

[Music Club] was started in like a church basement, and there was a woman who used to work here, who started it, who is very musically inclined. Um, and they invited different people, from different organizations that they had contact with, so gradually it just grew to be huge... And, I mean, the connections that, I mean, because people from other local organizations, individuals who are at home, I mean, so it's really a wide range of organizations and people that come, so that's nice to see.

Two participants from the mid-sized L’Arche community also mentioned that the candle workshop in their L’Arche community gave core members the opportunity to represent L’Arche at local events. Going to local events provided an opportunity to meet new people, advertise about L’Arche, and receive newspaper publicity. The efforts participants described all raised awareness of the organization, but none of these occurred as the result of formal organizational processes seeking to make L’Arche more integrated in society. Thus, it did not seem that participants in this study or the L’Arche communities where they worked viewed community integration as a priority or important to their experiences.

**Summary and Other Themes:**

In sum, the experiences shared by participants in this study help us to understand what factors foster or impede the practice of core values in L’Arche communities. Understanding these factors is important because core values unify intentional communities like L’Arche. When participants experienced practices in L’Arche that reflected the organization’s core values they became more committed to the organization. Findings from this study suggest that L’Arche communities are bringing live-out assistants into alignment with organizational values and incorporating those ideals
successfully into internal practices. However, creating connections with the external community and becoming increasingly integrated into society did not seem to be an organizational priority. Live-out assistants provide L’Arche with a constant connection to wider society, but this connection has not been recognized or used to benefit the organization.

In addition to the themes already discussed in this chapter, there are two more that I would like to mention here: live-in assistant turnover and the role of live-out assistants in influencing L’Arche’s values. First, implementing values more effectively is one way to improve unity and commitment in L’Arche communities, however, six participants also noted that frequent live-in assistant turnover was a significant challenge to cohesiveness in their L’Arche communities. Turnover created instability in both L’Arche communities that participated in this study because it disrupted relationships and routines. As noted earlier, forming relationships with core members takes time, but these relationships are also the primary means through which L’Arche’s values are communicated. Annette was one participant who described how turnover disrupted relationships between core members and assistants:

*I think the most difficult thing for the core members is that whenever they, they start a friendship with a live-in, that person leaves after a few months. Like the co-ops are there four months, the other ones are there for a year, which is much better, but the four months ones, you just get really comfortable with them and then they leave. And it’s the same for the rest of the assistants too, you know, it takes a few weeks to get warmed up, a few more weeks to hug, a few more weeks to talk, and then you’re talking really well with them, and you’ve established confidence in your relationship, and then they leave.*

Participants wanted to see concerted efforts made to decrease the frequency of live-in assistant turnover and made two recommendations about how to do this. One recommendation was to work on attracting more live-in assistants from local sources.
For example, Grace and Tessa noted that high rates of turnover occurred because most live-in assistants had one year visitor’s visas or were on four month co-op placements. Grace thought that raising public awareness of L’Arche locally might give individuals who could make a longer-term commitment the chance to hear about L’Arche. The second recommendation for decreasing live-in assistant turnover was made by Colleen who suggested having an apartment that live-in assistants could use during their off-time:

*I was involved in the mandate committee this past spring and one of the things that came out of that process was, um, the suggestion of, uh, an assistants apartment that assistants could use for days away ...Especially for the international people, like often they just sort of end up spending their days away within the house, or maybe going to another house or something, but they’re not really out of L’Arche as much.*

Frequent turnover also disrupted routines and two participants talked specifically about how live-out assistants were sometimes needed to fill in for a shortage of live-in assistants. While live-out assistants enable L’Arche communities to temporarily cope with the challenge of being short-staffed, they do not provide the same kind of consistency in L’Arche homes as long-term live-in staff. The number of participants who considered live-in turnover to be a significant problem in L’Arche communities indicates that turnover is a serious issue the organization needs to address.

Last, although findings from this study suggested that live-out assistants were adopting L’Arche’s core values, there was also evidence that they were influencing those values. Two participants who hold leadership positions in their respective L’Arche communities commented on how the growing presence of live-out assistants in L’Arche was causing the organization to consider this group’s needs and value. Sheila commented that her L’Arche community had been working hard over the past couple of
years to make assistants feel more valued. Maxine also shared that she felt the

appreciation for live-out assistants was growing regionally:

Yes, and I think that’s, my point of view is that, um, [L’Arche] Ontario as a
whole, not just [our community], has become more accepting of live-out
assistants over the past eight years. I definitely feel that there’s been a change in
the perception of our abilities and our commitment. Sometimes there are people
who are very committed, but don’t live in or don’t, yeah, don’t live in.

The comments made by Sheila and Maxine suggest that organizational perceptions of
live-out assistants are improving because of the ongoing presence and contributions of
these assistants in L’Arche communities. Thus, their remarks reveal one way that live-
out assistants are influencing organizational values.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how community life in L’Arche was experienced from the perspective of live-out assistants. The incorporation of live-out staff in L’Arche communities represents an internal organizational change that requires L’Arche communities to respond to the needs of a new group of members. In L’Arche, like other intentional communities, strong core values are used to create and maintain community cohesion. These values are influenced by internal and external forces that require organizations to change and adapt over time. Therefore, it is important to understand how core values are influenced and experienced by live-out assistants so that L’Arche communities can maintain those values and successfully adapt to changing circumstances. This chapter will discuss how participants experienced and understood each of L’Arche’s core values as well as how the presence of live-out assistants may be influencing those ideals. In addition, the notion that live-out assistants act as a bridge connecting L’Arche communities to wider society will be discussed.

To begin, in their book *Reframing Organizations*, Bolman and Deal (2003) discuss several ways of creating successful organizations. One way is to articulate and adhere to a strong set of values, which is particularly relevant for intentional communities. Whiteley and Whiteley (2007) add that research has shown employees who hold views that are congruent with an organization’s culture tend to be more productive and satisfied in their work. Intentional community theorists also acknowledge that when community members feel that organizational practices mirror values they tend to have more positive experiences and make longer-term commitments (Berry, 1997; Boonyasopun, 2000; Shotton, 2003; Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1989; Wood & Judikis, 2002). Thus, understanding
the different ways values are influenced and experienced in intentional communities is essential to the survival and health of these communities. Findings from this research help us to understand whether L'Arche communities are effectively putting their core values into practice and what the presence or absence of these values means for those communities.

In addition, L'Arche communities exist within larger external environments that require them to change and adapt. In this study the relationship between L'Arche and the external environment involves three aspects: how to build connections and integrate programs and ideas, how to influence values and practices in the external environment, and how to respond effectively to changes in external circumstances. Live-out assistants act as a bridge that connects L'Arche communities with the external environment. This connection may improve the organization's ability to integrate external ideas successfully into practice, influence wider society with its values, and prepare for and respond to changes. This study gives some insight into how live-out assistants can and do connect their L'Arche communities to the external environment.

5.1 All People are Valued

The first core value of L'Arche is that all people have unique and sacred value. This section discusses the importance of fostering a sense of value among live-out assistants and some potential challenges that may impede that process.

A sense of value was shown in the data to be fostered by a variety of factors like meaningful relationships, consistent and clear communication, and expressions of appreciation. Participants expressed feeling valued as individuals and staff members, suggesting that their L'Arche communities were successfully fostering a sense of worth
among live-out assistants. Evidence in the literature on organizational theory also suggests that showing people they are important as individuals and part of the group maximizes their potential and increases commitment, involvement, and adherence to core values (Brown, 2002; Elsdon, 2003). Therefore, creating a sense of self worth in all community members is an important value in holding intentional communities like L’Arche together. Identifying actions that contribute to feelings of worth and finding ways to practice those behaviours will help L’Arche communities maintain high levels of member commitment and unity.

While participants did say that they felt valued, they also questioned their worth relative to live-in assistants. Participants felt that negative perceptions about live-out assistants existed within their L’Arche communities and they wondered if they were considered to be less committed to L’Arche because they did not live in a L’Arche home. Being able to leave the L’Arche community and go home after a designated shift may create the impression that live-out assistants are only part of the L’Arche community at certain times or that they have less stress and responsibility than live-in assistants. It is important to consider perceptions that may exist in L’Arche communities because they can have a significant impact on actions and emotions regardless of whether they reflect reality or not (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In this study participants said that being asked to take on additional work and excluded from participation in L’Arche community events and decision-making led them to believe that negative perceptions about live-out assistants existed in their L’Arche communities.

Furthermore, findings indicated that the roles of live-out assistants were poorly defined in L’Arche communities, which contributed to feelings of lower status. If roles
are not clearly defined, then understandings of those roles can vary considerably between individuals. Unclear roles increase the likelihood that individuals’ expectations of their roles will differ from the reality that they experience. For example, participants seemed to have varying levels of satisfaction with the type and amount of participation that they were offered in L’Arche. Some wanted the opportunity to participate more in processes of decision-making and communication when they were scheduled to work, while others wanted to be kept informed and included whether they were working or not. Clarifying the roles of live-out assistants would give L’Arche communities the opportunity to explain and justify why live-out assistants are given fewer chances to participate in some of the processes that live-in assistants are involved in. In addition, L’Arche communities would be able to consider how to define the roles of live-out assistants so that these assistants could participate in planning and decision-making processes. Clarifying why levels of participation are different and working to make L’Arche’s internal processes more participatory will contribute to increasing live-out assistants’ sense of value in L’Arche communities.

It was evident that a lack of opportunity for live-out assistants to participate in some processes like planning and decision-making also made live-out assistants feel less valued. These functions did not usually occur at times when participants could be involved and special accommodations were not made for them. Not including live-out assistants in planning and decision-making processes challenges L’Arche’s wish to include all of its members as much as possible in decisions that concern them (Charter, 1993). It can also lead to gaps in communication that cause misunderstanding and confusion. Literature shows that strong and growing communities are those that include
all members (Diers, 2004) and that participation helps community leaders understand the perspectives of other members, making processes of change smoother (Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). If L’Arche communities gave live-out assistants more opportunities to share their perspectives and participate in meetings and decision-making, it would demonstrate that the opinions of live-out assistants are valued. It would also provide L’Arche with additional perspectives that could help the organization develop more innovative and effective responses to issues.

In addition, live-out assistants may be able to provide L’Arche communities with external perspectives because they live in the external environment. By not including them in planning and decision-making processes, L’Arche communities lose access to both the perspectives of live-out assistants and their potential knowledge of the external environment. The perspectives of live-out assistants are a resource that L’Arche communities can use to help them understand and respond effectively to both internal and external circumstances. L’Arche communities should recognize this valuable asset and work to make L’Arche’s community processes more participatory.

Furthermore, live-out assistants in L’Arche can and do influence the organization and its values. Stating a desire for greater involvement in decision-making processes is one example of how they can have influence. The inclusion of this group in decision-making pushes L’Arche to a more horizontal organizational structure that reflects giving value to the perspectives and roles of live-out assistants. In his book *Community and Growth*, Vanier (1989) discusses how over time communities change from a situation where the leader decides everything to one where he or she submits the ‘project’ to the group. The origins of L’Arche reflect a traditionally hierarchical structure headed by a charismatic
leader (Jean Vanier). Furthermore, research shows that intentional communities founded by a charismatic leader tend to be hierarchical in their power structure (Andelson, 2002). Hierarchy, however, limits the participation of most community members and hinders the development of a sense of value. It also prevents the organization from hearing a variety of perspectives that could lead to more innovative solutions to problems and ways of adapting to change. Findings from this study suggest that increasing opportunities for live-out assistants to participate in meetings and decision-making processes would contribute to their sense of value in L’Arche and strengthen the adaptability of L’Arche communities.

5.2 A Need to Belong

The needs to belong to a community and develop a distinct individual identity have been viewed by some authors as opposing desires (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004). However, L’Arche’s core values suggest an alternative perspective on this issue where belonging to a group provides the security necessary to discover one’s identity (Vanier, 1995; 1989). L’Arche’s perspective suggests that individual identity and group membership are not opposing needs, but rather work hand in hand. When participants in this study were affirmed, included in meetings and community events, supported through difficult situations, and kept up-to-date through communication they felt a sense of belonging. They did not grow and develop independently, but through relationships that made them feel safe and secure. This section discusses the main factors that contributed to a sense of belonging in the experiences of participants. These factors were: strong communication, relationships, and being part of a team.
First, communication was discussed by seven participants and five indicated that good communication contributed to their sense of belonging. Therefore, creating structures and tools that facilitate ongoing and clear dialogue within L’Arche communities will help L’Arche communities honour their values and remain united. Communication appeared to be particularly important to live-out assistants because of their time away from the L’Arche community.

Participants made several recommendations to help improve communication in L’Arche communities. The first was for leaders in L’Arche communities to provide all members with consistent and ongoing opportunities to talk to them about concerns. Second, leaders could facilitate the development of processes that improve communication and participation. In addition, members must keep written documentation up-to-date and organized so that it is easy for people to read and understand. Considering the link made between communication and feeling accepted, developing effective means of communicating with live-out assistants will improve the cohesiveness in L’Arche communities.

Second, relationships played a meaningful role in giving participants a sense of belonging. An examination of literature on intentional communities reveals that feelings of unity and togetherness are important ideals for sustaining these communities (Berry, 1997; Boonyasopun, 2000; Vanier, 1989; Wood & Judikis, 2002). Fostering a sense of belonging among live-out assistants may be more challenging because they spend less time in the L’Arche community than live-in members. Therefore, live-out assistants require more time to develop close relationships with other members of L’Arche and special accommodation to participate in functions in their L’Arche community. For
example, some live-out assistants are hired to work night shifts and so when they are in
the L’Arche community most other members are asleep or away. It was especially
difficult for these assistants to feel connected to the L’Arche community. Special
accommodations to participate in meals and occasionally work during the day were noted
by two participants as helpful in forming relationships and increasing personal
commitment to L’Arche.

More generally, many live-out assistants only interact with a certain segment of the
L’Arche community (a particular house or program) and, therefore, struggle to maintain
relationships with other members and keep up-to-date about what is going on elsewhere
in the L’Arche community. The role of relationships in fostering a sense of belonging
has been well established in the literature (Berry, 1997; Boonyasopun, 2000; Vanier,
1989; Wood & Judikis, 2002) and relationships, especially relationships between
participants and core members, were described as particularly meaningful by participants
in this study. Fostering relationships is an important priority for L’Arche communities
considering the connection between relationships and participants’ commitment and
sense of belonging in L’Arche.

Last, teamwork was a dominant theme among participants from the smaller L’Arche
community who felt that being part of a team contributed to their sense of belonging.
Team members learned each others’ strengths and weaknesses and how to communicate
verbally and nonverbally, which helped them respond well to difficult situations and
remain confident in their work. Being part of a team also provided individuals with the
opportunity to build strong and close relationships, created a context where team
members could voice their perspectives and make decisions, and provided people with
the security they needed to take risks and grow. This supports literature that indicates
being part of a team can be both rewarding and unifying (Schabracq, 2007).

Surprisingly, the theme of teamwork was not present in the interviews from the mid-sized L’Arche community, but there did seem to be a desire for increased collaboration within this community. The absence of an emphasis on teamwork could be due to a number of factors including differing leadership style, a larger population, and/or more differentiated job roles. The fact that participants from the smaller L’Arche community linked their sense of belonging to being part of a team indicates that L’Arche communities may benefit from encouraging a more team-like atmosphere. These communities may also benefit from making sure that teams integrate a variety of members and have processes for inter-team communication. The teams that participants described were currently based upon roles in the L’Arche community (i.e. day-program teams, house teams, leadership teams, etc.) and did not integrate a variety of members well. For example, live-out assistants were not part of house teams even when they regularly worked in a certain home. Integrated teams would help L’Arche communities avoid gaps in communication and ensure that important insights from different members are heard.

5.3 Personal Growth

The third value of L’Arche, personal growth, is closely related to the previous two values discussed as it builds individual confidence and is nurtured through interaction with others in a safe community environment (Shotton, 2003; Vanier, 1995). According to L’Arche’s Charter (1993), the organization wants its communities to be safe environments that encourage individual and mutual growth. Thus, personal growth is
another value that may contribute to unity in L’Arche communities. This section will
discuss the importance and benefits of fostering personal growth within L’Arche
communities.

Participants from both L’Arche communities involved in this study reported that
personal growth was a priority in their L’Arche communities and shared changes in their
own lives that resulted from being part of a L’Arche community. Some of these changes
included developing patience, perceiving people and/or situations differently, and
appreciating community more. Participants felt a sense of pride when their growth was
acknowledged within and outside of L’Arche, which increased their commitment to their
L’Arche community. The fact that participants attributed their personal growth to
experiences in L’Arche and gave specific examples of how they had grown indicated that
these L’Arche communities were successfully fostering personal growth.

Personal growth was occurring mainly through relationships with core members, but
also could have been encouraged through regular accompaniment (supervision) from a
more experienced assistant in the L’Arche community (Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007).
Findings suggested that participants understood consistent and ongoing accompaniment
to be part of making personal growth happen and that providing this support to live-out
assistants would improve their experiences in L’Arche and support for L’Arche’s core
values.

Furthermore, the growth experienced by participants through their experiences at
L’Arche also impacted their behaviour outside of the L’Arche community. Transferring
knowledge gained through experiences at L’Arche into noticeable behavioural changes
outside of the L’Arche community demonstrates how live-out assistants can act as a
bridge between L'Arche and the external environment. This connection provides L'Arche communities with access to the external environment and perspectives that exist there. A more in-depth discussion of this connection is provided in the section of this chapter that covers community integration.

5.4 Spirituality in Daily Life

Recognizing that spirituality is an important element in personal and community life is the fourth value of L'Arche. The meaning and importance of spirituality in daily life at L'Arche was discussed by seven participants. This section will discuss how participants felt about the spiritual aspect of life in L'Arche and how it impacted their experiences.

To start with, rituals of prayer and common worship were regularly practiced in both L'Arche communities and talked about by participants. Bolman and Deal (2003) also noted that ritual and ceremony were stabilizing elements in communities and organizations held together by strong core values. Participants in this study expressed a growing interest in and understanding of their own spiritual beliefs. They also said that spiritual rituals contributed to stronger relationships and overall unity in their L'Arche communities. These perspectives suggest that L'Arche communities are successfully encouraging live-out assistants to explore and practice their spirituality.

One thing that was surprising in the findings of this study was that even those participants who did not consider themselves to be followers of the Christian religion were thankful for the opportunity to reflect on their own spiritual views and considered spirituality to be a unifying element of life in L'Arche. Because L'Arche is a faith-based organization, rooted in Roman Catholic traditions, it may be that people who are not comfortable with the spiritual aspect of the organization do not get involved. Therefore,
participants in this study may be individuals who were predisposed to openly exploring and experiencing spirituality in daily life and that is why they viewed this aspect of L'Arche so positively. Not all participants, however, were happy about the religious aspect of the organization when they first arrived, yet over time they grew more supportive of this aspect of L'Arche. Participants experienced spiritual rituals as fun times to be together and an opportunity to be thankful for one another. Participants’ growing appreciation for spirituality implied that L’Arche communities were able to conduct spiritual rituals and encourage individuals to explore their spirituality in an inclusive and welcoming way.

While no participants spoke about negative experiences related to spiritual practices and beliefs at L’Arche, statements made by two participants suggested that there were differences in the level of openness particular L’Arche communities had to people of other faiths. One participant said that her L’Arche community had only ever had a few members who were not Christian and that any member would have to be open to Christianity to be a part of L’Arche. By contrast, in the mid-sized L’Arche community another participant recounted examples of individuals from other faith traditions like Judaism and Islam who had learned about their respective faiths because of encouragement received at L’Arche.

It is important to consider how communities like L’Arche can be rooted in a particular faith yet remain inclusive. In L’Arche this seems to be achieved by understanding the difference between spirituality and religion. Spirituality is based on relationships with others, learning about each others’ beliefs, and discovering common links whereas religion is focused on specific laws and ways of doing things that divide
people and create conflict. In general, L’Arche is interested in fostering relationships where differences are seen as enriching rather than threatening and so continuing to encourage members to explore and share their particular faith is essential to remaining inclusive.

Moreover, the need to live peacefully despite differences is an important reality in our increasingly mobile and connected world. L’Arche communities are examples of communities that are attempting to model how differences can be enriching rather than threatening to community life and can provide useful insights to wider society.

5.5 Core Members are at the Heart of L’Arche Communities

The fifth value of L’Arche is that core members possess many gifts and should have a central role in community life. This section discusses the important role that relationships and language played in changing perceptions and ensuring that core members remained central actors in L’Arche communities.

All participants in this study discussed how much they valued their relationships with core members and referred to lessons that they had learned through these relationships. In the Charter of the Communities of L’Arche (1993) it states that core members possess, “qualities of welcome, wonderment, spontaneity, and directness that teach others and touch hearts” (p.2). The values expressed in this Charter represent a written account of what core members have taught other members of L’Arche through relationships. It was clear that participants in this study viewed core members as teachers and learned lessons about welcome, honesty in relationships, and the benefits of belonging to a community from them. Relationships provided core members with the opportunity to teach others and influence life and values in L’Arche.
Participants also said that seeing core values practiced strongly influenced their commitment to their L’Arche community. Literature on commitment within intentional communities and organizations shows that people are drawn to organizations that have values congruent with their own, but long-term commitment and organizational legitimacy also require that ideals are regularly practiced (Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). Providing live-out assistants with ongoing accompaniment may improve their relationships with core members by helping them to work through difficult situations and respond to challenging behaviours respectfully. If relationships with core members teach live-out assistants about L’Arche’s values and also help put their fifth value into practice then L’Arche communities should work hard to ensure that live-out assistants are given as many opportunities as possible to develop these relationships.

Second, using the word ‘core member’ to describe individuals with developmental disabilities in L’Arche reflects the organization’s desire to give core members a central role in its communities. This terminology can help to change live-out assistants’ perceptions of core members and their actions towards them. Indeed, our society continues to view people with disabilities as deficient and two participants in this study noted that assistants often come to L’Arche with a desire to ‘help’ core members. If assistants view themselves as helpers it hinders the ability of L’Arche communities to be places where all members are respected as equals. Therefore, these assistants must be given opportunities to develop relationships with core members and learn empowering language to ensure that L’Arche’s values continue to be practiced.

In addition, as members of both L’Arche and wider society, live-out assistants have the unique opportunity to experience meaningful relationships with core members and
share these experiences outside of L’Arche. Live-out assistants exemplify how individuals transition from viewing themselves as helpers to becoming students and friends through relationships with core members. If live-out assistants talk about the gifts that core members bring to their lives with people outside of L’Arche they can influence and help transform societal perceptions of people with disabilities.

5.6 Community Integration

The final core value of L’Arche that will be discussed is community integration. This value states that L’Arche communities wish to become increasingly integrated into society and consists of two parts: 1) building friendships and connections with the external environment and 2) critically engaging society to change perceptions and policies related to individuals with developmental disabilities (Charter, 1993; Constitution, 1999). Findings from this study suggested that community integration was not a priority for L’Arche communities and this section discusses some of the implications of not putting this value into practice.

To start off, findings from this study did show that the L’Arche communities where participants worked were making some external connections. Participants talked about their own role in bringing friends and family members into L’Arche. They also said that connections to the external environment were made through attending local events and starting a music program that attracted people from all over the city. However, there did not seem to be any formal processes for ensuring that external connections would be built or maintained.

In addition, there was no evidence that critically engaging wider society was a priority for participants in this study or their L’Arche communities. When participants
spoke about their experiences in L’Arche it was clear that they valued integration within their L’Arche community, but there was no indication that they realized the importance of external integration. For example, participants frequently discussed the importance of individual relationships within L’Arche, but not of L’Arche existing in relationship with wider society. Theory related to intentional communities and organizations, however, consistently notes that these communities and organizations exist within larger external environments that pressure them to change and adapt (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007; Wood & Judikis, 2002). If L’Arche communities ignore their position in relationship with the external environment, they will not be able to effectively interact with it or respond to external pressures.

L’Arche’s position in relationship with the external environment is also important because the external environment is filled with resources and perspectives that L’Arche communities can use and influence. First, connecting with the external environment can give L’Arche communities access to additional resources like funding and volunteers, which will allow them to grow and expand. The external environment also contains many perspectives that L’Arche communities can use to change and improve themselves. By considering additional perspectives, L’Arche communities can create more innovative programs and solutions to address internal and external challenges.

Second, live-out assistants provide a natural connection between L’Arche and the external environment because they are members of L’Arche communities, but reside externally. Live-out assistants improve L’Arche’s ability to influence the external environment and begin putting the value of community integration into practice. In particular, live-out assistants can play an important role in critically engaging wider
society and challenging oppressive and unjust social values and behaviours, but L’Arche communities have not utilized them in this way. When L’Arche communities participate in critically engaging wider society, they contribute to substantive social changes that will give core members a valid place in society.

Turnover

Participants in this study did share a desire to raise external awareness about L’Arche, but they framed their desire in terms of attracting more long-term live-in assistants to L’Arche communities rather than influencing or critically engaging wider society. This section briefly outlines some of the implications that high live-in assistant turnover has on L’Arche communities.

To begin, high rates of live-in assistant turnover created inconsistency and instability in both of the L’Arche communities involved in this study. Turnover in these communities was high because most live-in assistants were either coming from overseas on a one year visitor’s visa or were co-op students who had, at most, a four month placement. Although one participant acknowledged that turnover provided the opportunity to get to know a variety of individuals, others noted that it significantly disrupted community life and relationships in L’Arche.

Coming to a L’Arche community for a fixed amount of time like international visitors or a co-op students do is much different from the kind of life-time live-in commitment that was modeled by L’Arche’s founders. When the majority of live-in assistants only make short term commitments, L’Arche’s ability to create stable family-like homes and bring assistants in line with core values is hindered. Participants in this study noted that assistants often came to L’Arche communities thinking they were going to ‘help’ core
members and it was through relationships with core members that this perception changed. When most live-in assistants have been at L’Arche for under a year, there is a risk that oppressive perceptions will predominate and create inequalities in L’Arche communities. Decreasing assistant turnover would create greater stability and unity in L’Arche communities by increasing the number of experienced assistants who understand and practice L’Arche’s values. Therefore, it is important L’Arche communities work to address the issue of high live-in turnover rather than simply using live-out assistants to cover for a shortage of live-in assistants.

Additional Thoughts

Based on the experiences of participants in this study, there are five core values that work together to foster unity in L’Arche communities. These values are: all people are valued, a need to belong, personal growth, spirituality in daily life and core members are at the heart of L’Arche communities. Community integration is also a core value of L’Arche, but did not seem to be a priority for participants or contribute to unity. These findings are supported by literature that talks about what values unify most intentional communities. Values that are regularly cited as important in holding intentional communities together are the equitable distribution of resources, commitment to a set of ideals and a sense of common purpose, and unity and togetherness (Berry, 1997; Boonyasopun, 2000; Smith, 1994; Vanier, 1989; Wood & Judikis, 2002).

First, the equitable distribution of resources is similar to the idea of equitable participation and choice for all members of a community. Live-out assistants want to be able to access the supports and resources they need to attend meetings and participate in
decision-making in their L’Arche communities. When live-out assistants are included in meetings and decision-making they feel a sense of value and belonging in L’Arche.

Second, commonly held ideals and purposes were important to live-out assistants who said that their commitment to L’Arche depended upon seeing core values practiced. Putting core values into practice ensured that all of L’Arche’s members felt a sense of value and core members remained at the centre of community life in L’Arche.

Last, the values of unity and togetherness were important to participants in this study who said that relationships were the most meaningful part of their experiences in L’Arche. In particular, relationships with core members gave live-out assistants a sense of belonging and kept core members at the heart of L’Arche communities.
CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have a number of possible implications for theory, practice and future research. Theoretically, this study confirms the role that shared ideals play in unifying intentional communities and how challenging it can be for these communities to adapt to and influence their external environment. For L’Arche, implications relate to how to respond to the issues raised by participants and other internal and external changes while maintaining core values. In terms of future research, several potential areas for further study related to theory, L’Arche, and social work are suggested. Lastly, a short conclusion gives a final summary of the main points made throughout this paper.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

To begin, the experiences shared by participants in this study demonstrate that when core values are clearly articulated and practiced they increase individual commitment and unity in L’Arche communities. The practice of core values, and participants’ commitment to them, was evident in the narratives collected for this study. These findings suggested that L’Arche communities were successfully bringing live-out assistants into alignment with organizational ideals.

Findings also indicated that L’Arche communities may not be carefully considering the implications of internal organizational changes like the addition of live-out assistants. The role of live-out assistants remains unclear in L’Arche’s official documents and among participants in this study. For example, findings from this study suggest that live-out assistants provide extra support that increases core members’ opportunities for internal and external community engagement and also bring resources into L’Arche communities. However, participants also questioned whether the availability of live-out assistants
assistants delayed serious organizational efforts to reduce high rates of live-in turnover. Participants from both L’Arche communities shared that most live-in assistants were being drawn from sources where they could only make a very short-term commitment. Live-out staff who can cover for a shortage of live-in assistants and tend to stay in L’Arche communities longer may inadvertently distract attention away from the urgent need for long-term live-in assistants.

Understanding why and how live-out assistants have been included in L’Arche communities could help to clarify their roles and position in L’Arche. Clear roles are essential because they give live-out assistants a sense of purpose and place in L’Arche communities. Unclear roles lead to confusion and disappointment because they allow live-out assistants to form their own expectations of what rights and involvements they should have in L’Arche communities. Live-out assistants feel disempowered because they are not given the same opportunities to participate as other members of L’Arche or an explanation of why. Clarifying the roles of live-out assistants in L’Arche communities would show live-out assistants that they are valued members and improve overall unity.

Furthermore, organizational theory highlights that organizations face constantly changing external environments and that their ability to adapt and influence these environments determines their long-term success (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007; Wood & Judikis, 2002). In this study the relationship between L’Arche and the external environment involves three aspects: how to build connections and integrate programs, how to influence values and practices in the external environment, and how to respond effectively to changes in external circumstances. The findings of this research suggest that live-out assistants can act as a
bridge between L'Arche communities and the external environment. They may be particularly well positioned to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas between L'Arche and the external environment. This knowledge can help L’Arche communities and the organization as a whole develop innovative practices, influence wider society, and adapt to change more effectively. Findings from this study, however, did not show that L’Arche communities were integrating ideas from the external environment into organizational practices or contributing to the evolution of those ideas.

6.2 Practical Implications for L’Arche Communities

Live-out assistants who participated in this study identified a number of challenges that they faced in their L’Arche communities and made recommendations about how those challenges might be addressed. Challenges experienced within organizations and intentional communities often reflect differences between member expectations and community realities (Schabracq, 2007; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). Table 6.1 summarizes the challenges participants identified and the recommendations they made. This table allows L’Arche communities to better understand the central issues facing live-out assistants and consider the perspectives of these assistants more in future planning and decision-making processes. Possible vision statements are also included that go along with an empowerment model of change presented later in this section. It is hoped that this model will provide L’Arche communities with a practical framework that can be used to address current and future concerns at a community and organizational level.
### TABLE 6.1: SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Issue</th>
<th>Factors Contributing to the Issue</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Possible Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Conflicts</td>
<td>▪ Personality differences</td>
<td>▪ Remember core values and community purpose/mission</td>
<td>▪ A team environment where leadership keeps the entire community focused on overall purpose and mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Poor communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Opportunity to Attend Trainings and</td>
<td>▪ No coverage to attend daytime meetings, retreats, etc.</td>
<td>▪ Take meetings to where live-out assistants are</td>
<td>▪ All community members have the opportunity to grow in their skills and self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in Community Holidays</td>
<td>▪ Hierarchical leadership structure</td>
<td>▪ Allow scheduling/ work out coverage that will allow live-outs to attend where relevant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Assumptions that live-out assistants are not interested</td>
<td>▪ Clarification of roles and boundaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Not included on teams with live-in assistants or leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining One’s Role/Fit in the Community</td>
<td>▪ Infrequent/ inconsistent contact with some community members</td>
<td>▪ Clarifying the role/place of live-out assistants in organizational documents and practice</td>
<td>▪ Community members feel confident in their roles and clear boundaries are set by leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Time needed to form relationships</td>
<td>▪ Creating a procedure to help more isolated community members develop relationships within the community</td>
<td>▪ Communities that are intentional about including more isolated individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Poorly defined roles for live-out assistants</td>
<td>▪ Further research into what perceptions exist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Perceptions of Live-out Assistants</td>
<td>▪ Poorly defined roles for live-out assistants</td>
<td>▪ Clarifying the role of live-out assistants</td>
<td>▪ Communities where roles are clear and well understood by all members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Dealing with Difficult Behaviour Respectfully | • Conflicting personalities  
• A lack of accompaniment | • Provide accompaniment/supervision to assistants  
• Foster a team environment | • Communities where all members receive accompaniment and supervision  
• Communities where all members work as a team and support one another |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Communication | • Not being included in team or community meetings  
• Poor communication between teams  
• Being away from the community between shifts  
• Unclear processes for communication | • Provide regular and non-threatening opportunities for community members to voice concerns  
• Have tools that are clear, accessible and easy to read  
• Hold community members accountable for using communication tools  
• Foster a team environment  
• Make teams more integrated | • Communities where communication happens effectively at, and between, all levels  
• Effective tools for communication keep everyone informed  
• All members work as a team and support one another |
| Live-in Assistant Turnover | • Relying on international visitors and co-op students  
• A lack of local awareness about L’Arche  
• Few options for live-in assistants who want to leave their L’Arche home during time off | • Try drawing assistants from alternative sources by raising local and regional awareness about L’Arche  
• Have an apartment for live-in assistants to use during their time off | • Communities of committed, faithful, long-term members |
Gershon (2007) presented an empowerment model for organizational change that may provide helpful insights about how intentional communities like L’Arche can adapt and change in an ongoing and effective way. Gershon’s model combined with the findings of this study provides L’Arche communities with an example of how to approach and resolve challenges more effectively over time. According to Gershon, change is continuous and inevitable and organizations must develop an approach to change that reflects this reality. Since change is constant and necessary, L’Arche communities must consider how to respond to the specific challenges that they face today as well as how to create a culture where change and adaptation are the norm.

Empowerment is the central component of Gershon’s model, as he believes change requires organizations to shift their focus from ‘problems’ to ‘vision’. Vision is understood to be what the organization wishes to create and it motivates members to support and contribute to change. For all members of L’Arche, changing organizational focus means reframing the challenges that L’Arche communities face into vision statements and using those statements to work towards change (please see Table 6.1 for possible vision statements). It also means clarifying the roles of live-out assistants in L’Arche communities so that all of L’Arche’s members understand how they fit into the organization’s vision. Leaders play a central role in keeping everyone focused on and informed about L’Arche’s goals and plans.

An empowerment approach requires that all community members are actively involved in determining what the larger vision of an organization will be. Community members’ interpretations of core values influence their actions and their actions in turn shape the perceptions of leadership. Findings from this study suggest that the continued
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and growing presence of live-out assistants in L’Arche communities is influencing organizational perceptions. While having live-out assistants in L’Arche communities was initially seen as a departure from original organizational ideals, the ongoing contributions these assistants make to L’Arche communities seems to be shifting general perceptions. As a result, the organization is now trying to better understand the views of live-out assistants and the benefits of having them in L’Arche communities.

Nevertheless, findings from this study show that live-out assistants may not have adequate opportunities to participate in planning and decision-making processes. In order to create integrative and adaptive L’Arche communities where all members feel valued, live-out assistants must be ongoing participants in the change process.

The need to incorporate the voices of all community members in the change process brings us back to what an empowerment approach to change might look like in an intentional community like L’Arche. The first step in a process of change is to determine whether the organization or community has a culture of learning and growth. Such a culture is defined by Gershon as, “a set of practices established... [so that] individuals feel safe and trusting enough to risk true growth” (p. 526). These practices include: self-responsibility, authentic communication, trust, learning and growing, interpersonal process skills, and caring. While determining whether a culture of learning and growth exists in a L’Arche community requires considering the perspectives of a variety of members, the findings from this study can be used to begin exploring whether such a culture might exist.

The first practice that Gershon identifies as characteristic of a culture of learning and growth is self-responsibility. Self-responsibility requires that individuals intentionally
work towards making their community the way they want it to be (Gershon, 2007). Participants gave a few examples that suggested they were working to improve their L’Arche communities, such as raising public awareness about L’Arche locally, going to leadership with concerns, and supporting one another in crisis situations. However, not all participants indicated that they were actively pursuing the changes that they thought would improve life in their L’Arche community. For instance, a number of participants shared a desire to decrease the frequency of turnover among live-in assistants, but only two had made efforts to address this issue. In addition, participants may not have realized that they could play a role in changing their L’Arche community as they were often excluded from processes of decision-making and problem-solving. Their exclusion may have made self-responsibility seem like the role of other members.

The second practice that indicates a culture of learning and growth exists is authentic communication (Gershon, 2007). Authentic communication occurs when dialogue between individuals is open, honest, and transparent (Cawsey & Deszca, 2007; Gershon, 2007; Hart, 1992; Whiteley & Whiteley, 2007). Findings revealed differing views of the type, quality, and quantity of dialogue occurring between participants and leaders in their L’Arche communities. For example, participants described communication as both good and challenging. They said they were comfortable bringing concerns to leaders, but also that gaps in communication led to feelings of discontentment and dissatisfaction. This discrepancy suggested that authentic communication may exist at the individual level, but not as often at a program, house, or community level. In particular, an inability to attend meetings and difficulty in cross-team communication may contribute to communication gaps and misunderstandings. Miscommunication and being left out could lead to
skepticism about one’s value in the L’Arche community and the motives behind proposed changes. It could also decrease one’s support for change.

The third practice discussed in Gershon’s model is trust. Trust exists when individuals feel safe enough to try out new behaviours and take risks in the community. The fact that live-out assistants voiced confidence in taking their concerns to leaders suggested that a level of trust did exist in their L’Arche communities. In particular, Jacob talked about feeling like his place in his L’Arche community was secure despite sometimes making mistakes. Four participants also described how being part of a team gave them extra confidence and the ability to stay calm in difficult situations. These four knew that they could count on teammates to support them and all shared examples of times when a co-worker had backed them up in a crisis. Two participants also talked about sharing challenges related to a core member’s behaviour with a trusted co-worker, which resulted in their ability to better cope with the situation. These examples suggested that a level of trust existed between members of L’Arche communities that allowed them to discuss sensitive issues and work through vulnerabilities. One challenge that may have hindered the level of trust felt by participants was their sense that negative perceptions about live-out assistants existed within their L’Arche communities. Negative perceptions of live-out assistants could deter them from raising concerns or questioning organizational practices. Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggested that participants generally felt heard and comfortable when they raised concerns. Thus, a level of trust seemed to exist between participants and their L’Arche communities.

Learning and growth is the fourth practice emphasized by Gershon and is also a core value of L’Arche. Participants from both L’Arche communities described personal
growth as a priority in L’Arche and gave examples of growing in patience, how people
and situations were perceived, and appreciation for community. While growth resulted
mainly from ongoing experiences, the recognized priority that leaders gave to personal
growth and the examples shared by participants suggested that learning and growth were
encouraged and experienced in the participating L’Arche communities. A future priority
of providing members with greater accompaniment may also help to further learning and
growth in L’Arche communities.

Next, organizational cultures that support learning and growth foster interpersonal
process skills, which are formal procedures and individual expertise that allow for
effective conflict management and resolution (Gershon, 2007). Conflicts with co-
workers were described by five participants in this study and were recognized as an
inevitable aspect of community life in L’Arche. Participants talked about how they
resolved these issues, but did not indicate that there was a set protocol for handling
interpersonal issues. They did say that they received adequate support to work through
difficult situations, but no specific examples of set procedures were given. Thus, it was
unclear whether such processes were explicitly stated in L’Arche’s documents, were
individually determined, or varied between L’Arche communities. More explicit
interpersonal process skills may need to be developed to help ensure that issues are dealt
with consistently within L’Arche communities and throughout the organization.

The final practice that was needed for a culture of learning and growth to exist was
caring. Caring happens when the leaders of a community or organization demonstrate
genuine and tangible concern for others (Gershon, 2007). Strong evidence supporting
the presence of caring was shown in the findings of this study, as participants reported
that leaders in their L’Arche communities regularly spoke affirming and thankful words, asked them how they were doing, and gave them time off for family emergencies. Still, clarifying the roles of live-out assistants in L’Arche communities may make these assistants feel even more cared for. It was evident in the findings of this study that participants had differing expectations of what their role in L’Arche communities should be and when these expectations were not met participants felt disappointed and unhappy. Well-defined roles give individuals purpose and a sense of value in a community and are one way that leaders can be caring towards other members in L’Arche.

In sum, except for interpersonal process skills, examples that supported the existence of all of the practices needed for a culture of learning and growth to exist were present in the findings of this study. In some cases conflicting results made it unclear whether all of these elements are regularly practiced, but preliminary findings do imply that live-out assistants are experiencing opportunities to learn and grow. The strongest areas of practice seemed to be trust, learning and growth, and caring.

Gershon’s model is particularly well-suited for L’Arche communities because many of the practices needed for a culture of learning and growth to exist are similar to the core values of L’Arche. L’Arche communities do enact many of the practices needed for a culture of learning and growth to exist and can work towards addressing some of the challenges that still prevent this culture from being fully established. Most importantly, L’Arche communities must work to involve the perspectives of more members in processes of planning and decision-making. Live-out assistants’ perspectives represent a unique mix of their experiences at L’Arche and ideas from the external environment where they live. If L’Arche communities hope to adapt and change in innovative ways to
both internal and external pressures then they must develop more participatory planning and decision-making processes that give them a diverse understanding of internal and external perspectives.

In addition, fostering a culture of learning and growth could also help L’Arche communities influence the external environment and pursue social change. If L’Arche is able to successfully integrate new ideas and adapt to changing circumstances over time, its example may influence other organizations and communities. Being adaptive does not only mean being affected by external influences, but also learning how to respond to those influences in a way that promotes L’Arche’s values and mission externally. Therefore, developing a culture of learning and growth can help L’Arche maintain unity and have a greater influence in wider society.

Once a culture of learning and growth has been established, a community can begin to pursue behavioural changes that are in line with its vision. Making behavioural changes requires that communities stay focused on vision, view growth as continual, and integrate self-awareness into changes. First, it is important that vision is the central focus in the change process because looking at vision helps communities and organizations see past specific problems and identify root causes. Vision keeps everyone focused on the overarching organizational situation and goals (please see suggested vision statements in Table 6.1). For example, L’Arche communities need to concentrate on the vision of becoming communities of committed, faithful, long-term members instead of focusing on the problem of high live-in assistant turnover.
Second, growth should also be seen as continual, meaning that it is always in process and involves a variety of interconnected goals. Responding to change in an ongoing way involves identifying and building upon the factors that contribute to growth.

Last, communities must learn to integrate self-awareness into all aspects of their change process. Self-awareness helps to ensure that the changes being sought are actually going to help communities achieve their vision. Being self-aware requires that the voices of all community members are considered in organizational planning and practice. For L’Arche, a clearer definition of roles and boundaries in L’Arche communities and increased accompaniment of assistants could help improve individual and organizational self-awareness, as well as support changes in practice. To help identify the specific changes that need to take place, and articulate the vision statements that will guide these changes, Gershon suggests working through four questions. These questions are: 1) where am (are) I (we) now?, 2) where do I (we) want to go?, 3) what do I (we) need to change to get there? and 4) what is the next step?

Overall, Gershon’s model provides a useful guide for pursuing organizational change and encouraging the personal development of members in L’Arche. It is a useful tool that can help L’Arche communities determine if they have a culture of learning and growth. Principles from Gershon’s model can also be used to help L’Arche communities and the organization as a whole formally examine how they are being influenced by and responding to the external environment. In order for L’Arche communities to respond effectively to external changes they must understand the specifics of their local external environment as well as broader national and global trends. L’Arche as a whole should provide its communities with the broader knowledge that they need and also use this
knowledge to respond to theoretical questions about the organization's relevance, values, and overall structure. L'Arche communities, like all intentional communities, must be able to adapt to changes over time and Gershon's model can help them develop processes for responding to ongoing internal and external changes.

6.3 Implications for Future Research

In addition to the theoretical and practical implications of this research, findings also suggest several possible areas for future research. First, these findings clearly demonstrate that participants' commitment to L'Arche is linked to how well core values are put into practice. Therefore, L'Arche communities must understand the different ways that various members experience life in L'Arche and interpret organizational values in order to maintain unity. If broader studies involving a wider variety of L'Arche's members were conducted in several L'Arche communities, then overall understandings of which values and practices contribute most to community unity in L'Arche would be increased. Increasing knowledge in this area would not only strengthen the ability of L'Arche communities to put their core values into practice, but would also empower members by giving them opportunities to share their perspectives. Future research could also help clarify how live-out assistants are viewed by other members in L'Arche and be used to address any negative perceptions that may exist.

Second, literature on intentional communities and organizations states that they exist within larger environments that are continually influencing and changing them. The challenge for L'Arche, and other intentional communities, is how to interact effectively with the external environment so that they are able to change as needed while still retaining unifying values. This research did not ask participants specific questions
related to how they might connect L’Arche to the external environment, but one of the themes that emerged in analysis was the potential role live-out assistants could play as a bridge between L’Arche and the external environment. Findings from this study did not suggest that L’Arche communities recognized how live-out assistants could connect them to the external environment, but future research that explores this area could help L’Arche communities to increase and improve their interactions with wider society. The findings of such research would also be relevant to other intentional communities and organizations that wish to interact with and adapt successfully to their external environments.

Gershon’s empowerment model provides some helpful insights into how L’Arche communities can create a culture of learning and growth and successfully respond to changing internal and external circumstances. Future research that gathers the perspectives of more members could help L’Arche to apply this model and determine if a culture of learning and growth exists in its communities. Improving the ability of L’Arche communities to respond to ongoing changes like the incorporation of live-out assistants will increase the resources they have available for raising awareness in wider society, forming partnerships, and changing social perceptions.

This study also draws attention to the need for additional research related to creating inclusive communities. The Canadian Association of Social Worker’s Code of Ethics (2005) underlines the profession’s commitment to principles of social justice and anti-oppressive practice. L’Arche communities provide examples of communities striving to be inclusive and findings from this study shed some light on what factors help in this process. For example, spirituality in daily life was identified as a meaningful and
positive experience for live-out assistants in L’Arche. Participants said that spirituality contributed to a sense of unity and genuine care in their L’Arche communities. These findings signaled that spiritual beliefs and rituals could promote more accepting and empathetic attitudes among members of a community that enable communities to be more inclusive. Current literature on intentional communities and organizations pays little attention to elements of faith and how they promote or hinder inclusion, so future research into the relationship between spirituality and community unity is needed.

In our increasingly interconnected world there is a growing need to understand how to live peacefully despite differences. Professions like social work, that have an interest in promoting human rights and respect for differences, have an important role to play in conducting research that informs theory and practice related to building more inclusive communities. Research that looks at how L’Arche communities have responded to growing diversity could provide insights about how to foster more inclusive and accepting societies globally.

6.4 Conclusion

L’Arche communities represent interesting examples of communities working to adapt and change while remaining faithful to their core values. One of the main changes that has taken place in L’Arche communities over the past thirty years has been the addition of live-out assistants, yet there has been no research related to the implications of this change. The purpose of this study was to give live-out assistants from two L’Arche communities the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words. When looking at the narratives gathered from participants, it became clear that many of the benefits and challenges that these individuals faced related to how well L’Arche
communities were putting the organization's core values into practice. L'Arche's Charter and Constitution were used to create five core value statements that reflected the principles discussed in these documents. These values provided a lens for understanding what participants' experiences tell us about how core values shape individual experiences and unify intentional communities.

In addition, L'Arche communities exist within larger external environments, which require them to change and adapt. The challenge of L'Arche and other intentional communities is to respond to changes like the incorporation of live-out assistants while still retaining a common sense of mission and set of values. Findings from this study indicate that L'Arche communities are bringing live-out assistants into alignment with their ideals, but that extending core values to them requires intentional efforts. L'Arche communities are not currently providing enough opportunities for live-out assistants to share their perspectives or participate in processes of planning and decision-making. This limits the organization's ability to respond to internal and external changes in ways that strengthen organizational values and overall unity.

Last, this study demonstrates that live-out assistants are a potential bridge between L'Arche and the external environment. Live-out assistants have the unique position of experiencing life in L'Arche, but residing outside of the L'Arche community. Thus, they are particularly well positioned to bring external perspectives into L'Arche communities and critically engage wider society on behalf of the organization. However, L'Arche communities are not taking advantage of this connection or pursuing wider societal change. When L'Arche communities become internally focused they let core members and society down by not sharing the important knowledge that they have about how
people should be viewed, the value of relationships in understanding differences, and the
importance of living in community. Live-out assistants provide L’Arche communities
with a natural connection to wider society that gives those communities access to external
ideas and increases their ability to promote their values. If organizations like L’Arche
actively engage with others in wider society everyone benefits because diverse
perspectives are shared and integrated together to create more textured understandings
and inclusive practices.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Could you describe how you came to be a L’Arche assistant?

2. Could you describe your role in the community?
   a. How have you felt working alongside individuals who live in L’Arche?
   b. Have you ever felt like an outsider in the community because you do not live in?

3. Can you describe the best experience that you have had in the community?

4. What contributions do you feel that you have made to this L’Arche community?

5. Can you describe the greatest challenge you have faced in the community?

6. Could you describe any changes in your own life that have resulted from being an assistant at L’Arche?

7. Based on your experiences and observations of the community what are your recommendations for improving your life in and commitment to the community?

8. Is there anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTORY LETTER AND PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Living Out: A Study into the Experiences of Live-out Staff in L’Arche
Jennifer Elkins (Principal Researcher)
Dr. Peter Dunn (Thesis Advisor)

You are invited to participate in a research study looking at the benefits and
challenges experienced by live-out staff at L’Arche. The purpose of this research is to
learn more about the experiences of live-out employees who participate in two L’Arche
communities in Southern Ontario. Live-out staff have become a part of many L’Arche
communities, yet little research has been conducted regarding the experiences of these
community members and how they have been shaped by those experiences.

This study will be conducted by Jennifer Elkins, a Master of Social Work student at
Wilfrid Laurier University, under the supervision of Dr. Peter Dunn, a Professor in the
Faculty of Social Work. It will involve interviewing four to five live-out staff members
at each of two L’Arche communities in Southern Ontario. Your participation will include
completing an individual interview lasting between one and two hours and you will
receive compensation for your participation. You will be given a copy of the interview
questions to look over at least 2 days before the interview takes place. With a
participant’s consent, interviews will be audio-taped and the data transcribed and
analyzed. Written notes will also be taken by the researcher while conducting the
interview. Each participant will receive a copy of the transcript from his or her interview
to review before analysis begins. In addition, you can participate in a discussion of
preliminary analysis results, where you will be able to learn about and review the
findings of the researcher. The analysis will be written up into a report as part of the
researcher’s academic requirements and may be distributed to the public in various forms
such as, journal articles or conference presentations. Results may be available as early as
spring 2008 and a copy of the final thesis will be given to the community. In order to
participate, you must be a live-out staff member who has been a member of the L’Arche
community for at least one year and have never lived in a L’Arche community.

If you would like to be contacted regarding upcoming publications, please initial here ______.

If you would like to be involved in a discussion of the results of this study once
preliminary data analysis is completed, please initial here ______.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any
time. If you choose to withdraw, you may also choose to have any information that you
have shared removed from the study. Every effort will be made to keep all information
shared by participants confidential and any identifying information will be removed, and
replaced with pseudonyms, before the information is made available to the public. Due
to the small size of the communities, there is a chance that comments made by an
individual will be identifiable by other community members. However, the researcher will provide participants with a transcript of their interview to review in order to help ensure that any information the participant does not want included in published materials is removed. Identifying information will only be viewed by the principal researcher and her supervisor for the purposes of organizing and analyzing the data collected. All information will be kept in a secure location and any identifying documents will be destroyed one year after the study is completed.

While risks associated with this study are minimal, there is a small chance that you may become distressed when talking about personal experiences or fear that participation in this study will jeopardize your position and/or employment with L’Arche. If at any time you become distressed, you are free to stop the interview and decide if and when you would like to continue. Before the interview begins, the researcher will provide you with a list of local support services that you may contact if needed. Every effort will be made to keep information confidential as outlined in the previous paragraph and your job will not be threatened by participation in this study. The principal researcher is not funded or mandated by L’Arche to complete this study and will involve participants in reviewing the data that they provide in order to help ensure confidentiality and protection.

This study will give you an opportunity to reflect on your experiences at L’Arche, and through that reflection, better understand those experiences. You will also be contributing to building a bank of knowledge about live-out employees that will help L’Arche to more fully understand your place in the community and respond to your needs and concerns.

As a sign of appreciation for participating in this study, you will receive $10 cash compensation. In addition, a celebration will be held with participants when the study is completed. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion you will still be compensated with other participants.

If at any time you have questions or concerns regarding this study or procedures, or experience adverse affects as a result of your participation, please contact Jennifer Elkins at [contact information] or email [contact information]. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 2468.
Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information, have received a copy of this form, and agree to participate in this study.

Participant’s name ________________________________

Participant's signature ________________________________ Date __________________

Investigator's signature ________________________________ Date __________________

Please sign if you agree to:

Be audio-taped ________________________________

Be quoted without being identified ________________________________
APPENDIX C: GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION OF PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The discussion on preliminary analyses will begin with a review of findings that will begin:

After reviewing the transcript of each of your interviews with you, I looked through the data for themes related to your experiences at L’Arche and understanding of community. Some of the themes that seemed to be present were...

After reviewing the findings I will ask the group:

What are your thoughts on or reactions to these themes?

Do you have any suggestions to make about these results?

Would you make any additions or changes to the results?
APPENDIX D: CONSENT FOR DISCUSSION OF PRELIMINARY RESULTS

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY
DISCUSSION OF PRELIMINARY ANALYSES
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Living Out: A Study into the Experiences of Live-out Staff in L’Arche
Jennifer Elkins (Principal Researcher)
Dr. Peter Dunn (Thesis Advisor)

You are invited to participate in a discussion of preliminary research results that have been arrived at by the principal researcher, Jennifer Elkins, based on interviews with yourself and other live-out staff at L’Arche. The purpose of this discussion is to ensure that you remain informed and involved throughout this study. The researcher will open the discussion with a summary of key findings and will then invite participants to comment and make suggestions related to these results. This will give you the opportunity to learn about the direction that the study is taking and to provide your thoughts on findings before they are published. This discussion will take approximately 90 minutes and notes will be taken by the principal researcher.

This discussion will be conducted by Jennifer Elkins, a Master of Social Work student at Wilfrid Laurier University, under the supervision of Dr. Peter Dunn, a Professor in the Faculty of Social Work. It will involve participants who have completed interviews in your community. Final results may be available as early as spring 2008 and a copy of the final thesis will be given to the community.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw, you may also choose to have any information that you have shared removed from the study. Every effort will be made to keep all information shared by participants confidential and any identifying information will be removed, and replaced with pseudonyms, before this discussion and before information is made available to the public. Due to the small size of the communities, there is a chance that comments made by an individual will be identifiable by other community members. However, the researcher will provide participants with a transcript of their interview to review in order to help ensure that any information the participant does not want included in published materials is removed. Identifying information will only be viewed by the principal researcher and her supervisor for the purposes of organizing and analyzing the data collected. All information will be kept in a secure location and any identifying documents will be destroyed one year after the study is completed.

While risks associated with this study are minimal, there is a small chance that you may become distressed when talking about personal experiences or fear that participation in this study will jeopardize your position and/or employment with L’Arche. If at any time you become distressed, you are free to stop the interview and decide if and when you would like to continue. All participants will be provided with a list of local support services that you may contact if needed. Every effort will be made to keep information confidential as outlined in the previous paragraph and your job will not be threatened by
participation in this study. The principal researcher is not funded or mandated by L'Arche to complete this study and will involve participants in reviewing the data that they provide in order to help ensure confidentiality and protection.

This discussion will give you an opportunity to learn about what the final findings may be and make suggestions about the researchers analysis before the final report is written. This will help ensure that findings accurately reflect the perspectives of staff who were interviewed.

If at any time you have questions or concerns regarding this study or procedures, or experience adverse affects as a result of your participation, please contact Jennifer Elkins at [redacted] or email [redacted]. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 2468.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information, have received a copy of this form, and agree to participate in this discussion.

Participant’s name ________________________________

Participant's signature ______________________________ Date __________________

Investigator's signature ______________________________ Date __________________

Please sign if you agree to:

Be audio-taped ______________________________

Be quoted without being identified ______________________________
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