

A New Legacy of Service

Mother and daughter. SCU to JVC.

Brianna Hussey and Patty Houts-Hussey share their Ignatian journeys.

By Annie Wilkins
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This year, twenty-one Santa Clara alumni are dedicating a year of service to those in need through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest—the largest lay Catholic volunteer programs in the country. But for one of these Jesuit Volunteers, the call to serve stemmed from ties much deeper than her last four years of Jesuit education. In fact, you might even say Brianna Hussey was born—as the JVC motto goes—‘ruined for life’.



“I think I’d rather say ‘released for life,’” her mother Patty Houts-Hussey offers. “It’s a positive thing!” As a former Jesuit Volunteer herself, Houts-Hussey, SCU class of 1973, is familiar with the mantra, meant to reflect the lasting impact this unique program tends to have on the lives of its participants. “For me it means releasing my heart, mind, and spirit to better understand we are all on the same journey of life, whatever path one takes.”

After completing her undergraduate degree, Patty took the path from Santa Clara to the Pacific Northwest, where she served the rural, Hispanic community of Cornelius, Oregon with four fellow volunteers. 35 years later, her daughter Brianna Hussey, SCU class of 2008, is following in her mother’s footsteps, serving the low-income and homeless populations of Portland, Oregon at the Downtown Chapel.

Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest—predecessor and model for many national and international volunteer organizations—was formed in 1956, when the Jesuits of the Oregon Province and the Sisters of Saint Ann came together to open a school for native Alaskan children in Copper Valley, Alaska. Today, volunteers across the Northwest and across the country live in intentional communities, working to address issues of social and environmental injustice. The program is based on four core values—community, simplicity, spirituality, and social justice—which volunteers strive to incorporate into their daily lives.

While Brianna Hussey is just approaching the second half of her volunteer year, the JVC community has been a part of her life for as long as she can remember. “The JVs were always over for dinners and birthdays,” Brianna recalls of her time growing up in Yakima, Washington. “They would babysit my sister and I. It was

this ongoing community that my family was a huge part of.” That being largely due to the fact that Patty Houts-Hussey, with the help of local Jesuits and Yakima community members, spearheaded the effort to establish a JVC community there.

It was during her time in Cornelius that Patty fell in love with the Northwest, and after a stint in Portland and graduate school in Seattle, Patty found a community organizing job in Yakima, where she met her husband Pat, many Jesuits, and other people involved in social service programs. Patty worked with JVC Northwest area directors and other community members, and by 1984, the first four Jesuit Volunteers arrived in Yakima. JVC has been a presence in the community—and in the Houts-Hussey's lives—ever since.

With that kind of family history, JVC seemed like a probable post-graduate option for Brianna Hussey. However, she wasn't always so certain she'd follow in her mother's footsteps. “I didn't want to do it just because my mom had done it,” Brianna recalls. “Even though my mom went to Santa Clara before me, I still found my own niche. I wanted to continue to carve out my own path. I had other plans.”

But during the course of her last semester, Brianna's plans began to change. After spending the majority of her college years rowing for the Santa Clara women's crew team, Brianna made the decision to quit in order to open herself up to new experiences. One opportunity that had particular impact was an Appalachian service trip, organized by the Santa Clara Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education.

“I decided to go on this immersion trip to West Virginia to learn more about mountaintop removal and the high percentage of poverty in that part of the country.” Being exposed to these kinds of issues, particularly in the United States, had an impact. “It sparked something. I was intrigued by what I could do to change things and be more actively involved. So I filled out my application.”

Brianna hoped to return to the Pacific Northwest with this renewed perspective, and so when JVC Northwest offered her a position in Portland Oregon, she jumped at the chance. “I think it's a really great fit.”

As Food Pantry coordinator at the Downtown Chapel, which primarily serves the homeless population of downtown Portland, Brianna embraces the challenges that greet her and fellow staff members each day. “There are a lot of situations that none of us quite know how to handle, but we handle them anyway, because we have to!” Brianna explains. “We just put one foot in front of the other. And that's a lot easier when you have a staff that's got your back. I couldn't ask for a better staff. They are incredible.”

It's the emphasis on community—both at work and at home—that Brianna feels sets JVC Northwest apart. Currently, she lives in a house with seven other volunteers. "It's an adventure to say the least!" she explains, "But a good one. It's just huge, this built-in support. I think that's so wonderful."

It's this same sense of community that Brianna and her mother Patty can trace back to their years at Santa Clara. "Santa Clara made me who I wanted to be," Brianna explains. "They are really good at that too—allowing you to do what you want to do, and giving you the tools to ground yourself, to question."

Patty sees her own JVC experience, and her continued effort to live out the core values, as an extension of that. "I know I wouldn't be part of the tradition if it weren't for the Jesuits." she explains. "I am very thankful."