Going to L'Arche Mobile was such an amazing experience! We truly learned so many things! Although our group had varying ranges of experience working with adults with disabilities, we all learned and grew as individuals tremendously. There was a big emphasis throughout the week on building relationships with the core and team members. We got to hear about the history of L'Arche and what this place means to everyone involved. L'Arche truly focuses on what the individual needs and wants, emphasizing their goal of finding jobs for the core members and helping them contribute to society. By the end of the week, our group talked a lot about how we can treat the core members just like anyone else we come into contact with. Many times, we found ourselves talking down to the residents although they were much older than us! All in all, we came to the conclusion that we're not going to be able to interact with adults with disabilities perfectly after five days but we can pay attention to our tone of voice and work towards treating them just as we would any other elder we may know. I think it's safe to say, we all walked away realizing how much we learned from the L'Arche community whether it's appreciating the slow path of life, learning how to better interact with others, or polishing up our dance moves at the going away party. I am so grateful to have gone on this trip as it has allowed me to plan on working in a L'Arche community one day in my life.

-Aubrey
How did the experience shape my understanding of my vocational journey?

Visiting L’Arch Mobile shaped my understanding of my vocational journey in a profound way. I had heard of L’Arch before the trip, and wondered if God might be nudging me towards working with people who have disabilities. My younger brother John has Down syndrome, and has always been a huge part of my life. I’ve always been excited about the communities that John is a part of, especially communities of people with disabilities. I am especially drawn to communities of people with cognitive disabilities, and because of growing up with John, I have a training that would, in my opinion, probably put any program to shame—I was trained to love my brother, whether I liked it or not. I had to see John as a whole person from the moment he was born, so hearing about Jean Vanier and L’Arch’s founding vision: We make explicit the dignity of every human being by building inclusive communities of faith and friendship where people with and without intellectual disabilities share life together. Visiting L’Arch was like hearing the window of opportunity rush open with the sound of wind. While in Mobile, we visited with the core members of community and heard stories from the team members, stories of brokenness made beautiful, stories of humility, stories of how God is at work in worship at the activities center, what God did in Marty’s life to prepare him for L’arch, and more. Jean Vanier once said "Life comes from the recognition that we can’t do it alone. It comes from our impotence, our powerlessness." This resonates with my life, and I have experienced just how full life is when shared in communities like L’Arch. I hope to spend at least a year in a L’arch community, and plan to visit L’Arch Orange County with my brother John this summer.

Annette Brouwer