

# Answering God's call to be a YAV in the Philippines

Akilah Hyrams

For years I have felt one call — to serve abroad. Whether it was to further my education or to volunteer, I sought countless opportunities to travel and learn about cultures different from my own. Before graduating, I spent hours researching different programs that would offer a gap-year experience, knowing this would be my last chance to travel before I spent the next seven years in medical school. Little did I know the opportunity to apply for a Young Adult Volunteer year was about to fall into my lap, just two weeks before final applications were due. As soon as I heard about the YAV program, I knew I had to apply.

Although I interviewed with national and international sites, the Philippines was not on my radar. When I learned the Philippines had open spots in an email from the YAV office, I decided to interview. And I thank the Lord that I did. During my interview with the site coordinators, I saw so much potential to serve in the Philippines. I was given the opportunity to incorporate my love of medicine by accompanying the community near the Silliman University Marina Mission Clinic, which provides low-cost medical care for people in rural areas. Surely I was led to be a YAV in the Philippines by God's will for my life.

I didn't come to the Philippines with many expectations, and I wasn't familiar with the YAV program's core tenet of



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On Christmas day, Akilah Hyrams, a Young Adult Volunteer in the Philippines (right), celebrated the baptism of the youngest member of her host family, 6-month-old Karis.

simple living. As I reflect on my year, I remember being very optimistic about my ability to adapt to life in the Philippines, and yet, it has had its challenges.

Simple living, the practice of living abundantly while spending and consuming less, has been challenging — physically, emotionally and culturally. But these are necessary challenges. They require me to be creative and resourceful. As I continue to challenge myself, I am learning to examine the way I live and how to assess my point of view. This has helped me to define basic human rights and the things that can be categorized as excess.

This has also led me to examine how I see God. I have gained more clarity of how God speaks to me. There is nothing more encouraging to me than strengthening my relationship with God. Seeing God in the work I do and in the people I meet motivates me to seek more opportunities to grow as a person and as a child of God. Knowing that I can rely on that relationship as I go through the ups

and downs of medical school, and life in general, has me excited to see what God has in store for my future.

My fellow YAVs also have been a huge source of motivation during my time in the Philippines. We have seen the best and the worst in each other, yet we encourage one another to push through and live each day to the fullest. We urge each other to think outside the box and leave our comfort zones. No matter how far away from each other we may go, God has blessed us and allowed us to form an amazing family, and that has been incredible.

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*The Young Adult Volunteer program is a year of service for young adults, ages 19–30, in 22 sites around the world and in the United States. The application season for the 2018–19 YAV class opens Oct. 1. Encourage young people you know to consider taking part in an experience like Akilah's that will help them form faith toward a lifetime of change. Follow @yavprogram online and visit [youngadultvolunteers.org](http://youngadultvolunteers.org).*

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