

College Church Missions News

Shine as Well as Serve? STARS Light the Way

The STARS STAMP France team dramatically broke new ground. Most obviously, the May 19–31 adventure was the first in which members of our disability group—paired with their parents and a sibling plus several leaders—participated. They pulled it off remarkably well—staying with French host families; introducing themselves in French to their audiences; singing, playing and acting; and leading a Sunday evening worship service.

The nine STARS and their fourteen fellow team-members met the objectives for every College Church short-term mission team. Primarily they went to serve our missionary, Sara Klopfenstein (daughter of church members Dick and Pauline Epps). Through music, she serves in youth evangelism with Youth for Christ. Both in Nancy and in Strasbourg, the STARS sang and played hand chimes and autoharps with the Nancy Gospel Choir that she directs. The team also met other standard STAMP (Short-Term Adult Missions Project) objectives: learning more about the world, growing in Christ, and advancing ongoing missions involvement in their own lives.

But Sara Klopfenstein's ambitious goal for this unique STAMP team was to help launch an attitude shift among French disciples of Christ. The motivation behind her request to College Church was partly personal. She is married to French national Emmanuel (Manu). And the eldest of their three children, Olivia, age 11, shares disability status with the STARS.

To an unprecedented degree, the STARS team increased awareness in a country that has a 96 percent abortion rate for unborn children with Down Syndrome, and a secular society that has largely ignored the spiritual needs of those with cognitive disabilities. (STARS is an acronym for "Seeking To Always Reflect the Savior.") Our STARS eagerly demonstrated their faith and how fully they can be incorporated into both the church and society in general. They toured and performed for two government-sponsored workplaces for adults and one school for teens with intellectual disabilities. And at *Festival P'artage*, a week-long secular effort to encourage the integration of those with disabilities, the more than one hundred attendees responded to the STARS performance with a standing ovation. A psychologist who was a director at one of the workplaces had stated her view that those with intellectual disabilities were not equipped to make religious choices. After attending the concert, she admitted, "I think I need to reconsider."

The team leaders and parents supported the STARS by sharing testimonies and addressing how a church can conduct a disability ministry. Sara and Dawn Clark were interviewed by a journalist from a Protestant national newspaper and were part of a panel that showed how the church can meet spiritual needs of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. The entire team was interviewed for two

hours by two leaders of a Paris-based Christian organization to learn why and how College Church launched its disabilities ministry, and what lessons it has learned as the ministry has grown. This ministry wants to be more intentional in providing opportunities for their residents to be disciplined in Christ and learned much from the STARS team.

Our STARS and parents clearly established that short-term teams can play a strategic role in global missions, creating receptivity to new concepts. Implementation of that awakened vision, however, is a long-term process. In the case of disability ministry, Julie and Lance Clemen's pioneering efforts in Bulgaria provides a great example. But the STARS STAMP team likely helped pave the way for a similar effort in the French church. An unplanned but powerful affirmation occurred in the service they led in the Nancy church, As the STARS sang "We Are One Body in Christ," Sara and Manu's Olivia crawled up to join the STARS on the platform, as if to say, "Me too!"

The STARS STAMP France 2011 raised the bar a notch for our short-term teams. While STAMP and World Impact teams will continue to focus on serving our missionaries, a new challenge has now been added. Can they shape *how* they will serve so that people in their host country catch a vision of what *they* could make happen?