



Australia hosts 2011 Asia Pacific Youth Conference

Months of intensive preparation by a network of volunteers led up to the IofC Asia Pacific Youth Conference, held near Melbourne in July. Donations in support came to almost \$60,000, including funding from three levels of government (AusAid, the Victorian Government and Bass Shire). It was, according to one participant, "one of the best-run conferences I have been to... in spite of the weather." Bek Brown was there and reports:



Aunty Carolyn Briggs, a Boonwurrung elder, giving the Welcome to Country. Photo by Francis Deng

136 delegates from 17 countries gathered on Phillip Island, Victoria, 18-24 July 2011, for the 17th Asia Pacific Youth Conference (APYC). Some had responded to invitations through their universities; others were already involved with IofC in their home countries.

It was the first APYC to be hosted in Australia and started with a traditional smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country led by Aunty Carolyn Briggs, a proud Boonwurrung woman. She spoke about the need to focus not on our differences but on the things that connect us, to learn from the people who have gone before us and to celebrate our strengths and beliefs. "You young people are our future... You will bring the change."

The nine Indigenous participants included three young men from Tennant Creek. One had done the Life

Matters course at *Armagh* at the start of the year, and now came back to the APYC with two friends who had not left the Northern Territory before. The Indigenous participants showcased their culture for the conference – sharing their traditional dance, music and language. For non-Indigenous Australians and for the international guests it was a highlight to learn about this land from its traditional owners.

The need to know ourselves – our strengths and our weaknesses – was reiterated throughout the conference. "We need to develop our strength vocabulary," said keynote speaker, Monique Toohey. "When you know your strengths you're more able to see the opportunities around you and go for them." She pointed out: "Contribution comes long before leadership. Not all of us will become leaders, but we can all be contributors and we should never underestimate our contribution to the world."

Global change and personal integrity

During the sessions exploring "Global Change" and "Personal Integrity", facilitators Nigel Heywood and Syahrul Azmi introduced "quiet time" as a space to empower us to be the people we are meant to be, with moral absolutes as tools of liberation and a framework to understand our lives. One young Australian woman appreciated "the chance to look at my inner-self and explore what my unique purpose on this earth is". At the end of the week a number of participants committed to practising quiet time daily.

The theme of the conference was "Action for Global Change through Personal Transformation". With each story shared it became clear that "big things swing on very small, personal changes" or put simply: when people change situations change. Time and again the sharing of stories was the catalyst for personal change. We were

able to see how the little dramas of our lives are played out as big dramas on the world stage. As the week progressed we became more aware of how our lives are connected to the big picture.

Two plenary sessions titled "Experiments in Practical Change" introduced us to six outstanding individuals. The stories of Stephanie Woollard, Shanaka Fernando, Inala Cooper, Benny Callaghan, Saara Sabbagh and David Vincent – and more – will be in the full APYC report which will soon be available.

There were other significant stories. I was inspired by the youth from the Mekong region who have come together to create the Cambodia/Thailand Exchange Program (CTEP), to break down barriers and prejudices. I was devastated by the stories of the Sudanese participants, but heartened when David Vincent declared, "While I'm still alive, I will do whatever I can to stop someone else from going through what I went through." I was encouraged by the Indonesian delegation - six young people bursting with ideas and passion to work for change in their country and communities.

Hearts were changed over the course of the week. A Thai, who confessed his hatred towards Pakistani people, met a young Pakistani in his discussion group and realised he was a person needing love. He committed to being more understanding and forgiving. A young Indigenous woman said, "It feels like I was meant to be here. I have realised the direction I want to have in my life." A Burundian now living in Melbourne shared from his heart, "I have never joined the community in Melbourne because they ask me who I am – Hutu or Tutsi? I have decided to let them know that I am both, and to join them and contribute what I can." There were many decisions like these.

For me personally, APYC was about being reminded of the things that really

matter, a time to be reenergised by the good in the world and by those who are committed to making a difference. The song chosen for the Australian performance at the cultural evening was Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly's

"From little things, big things grow".

My hope is that the seeds planted at APYC will produce fruit for generations to come.

Bek Brown

Indonesia, Australia and Timor-Leste – healing the relationships

There were substantial discussions at the APYC between the Indonesian (6) and the East Timorese (3) delegations.



The Indonesian delegation with other APYC participants. Photo by Francis Deng

The East Timorese detailed the full history of the relationship to the young Indonesians who did not know. The East Timorese had been through a process of forgiveness leading to a desire to build friendship with the new generation of Indonesians, inviting their help. Following a time of quiet listening, there was commitment by all to work for the next steps in the process of healing trauma, and reconciliation

through IofC programmes such as Peace Circles on the border with West Timor.

There is considerable mistrust in Timor-Leste towards Australia too, due to Australia's advocacy and action for the Indonesian occupation in 1975; and later Australia's apparent greed over claiming oil and gas in the Timor Sea. This has played its part in keeping Timor-Leste poor.

I apologised for this suffering to the East Timorese as an Australian.

Another large issue is the relationship between Indonesia and its ethnic Chinese population. Aris, a Chinese Indonesian from Melbourne, spoke in public about the forgiveness that was needed on both sides, and how through the dialogue at the APYC they had forgiven each other. The Indonesians have invited Aris to speak at a Youth Camp in Garut in December and also to meet Chinese Indonesians to help them understand the past so that it does not happen again.

Barbara Lawler

Breakfast conversation

The conversation at breakfast was around the different faith groups within Indonesia.

Nenden, a young Muslim, was proud of the positive relationships between the different religions in her country. However, a passing comment had been made about Jews not being so accepted within Indonesia.

One of the women at the table came back to this point and asked Nenden, "So you would welcome a Christian or Hindu to your home but you wouldn't welcome a Jew?" Nenden looked uncomfortable; she shrugged her shoulders. "I'm not so sure about Jews."

Unbeknown to her, Judy, a Jewish woman, was sitting next to her.

After breakfast Judy asked Nenden, "Have you ever met a Jew?" "No, never," replied Nenden.

Judy extended her hand. "Pleased to meet you. I am a Jew."

Nenden was shaken to the core. "Where had these prejudices come from?" she wondered.

Later, during the plenary session the two women sat together. A speaker talked about being proud of who you are and about an individual's right to choose which culture they identify with. Nenden turned to Judy, and with tears streaming down her cheeks, she whispered, "I'm so sorry."

Judy embraced Nenden and replied, "Whatever you are sorry for, I forgive you."

Nenden is now determined to return home and share what she has experienced in the hope of breaking down the prejudices that exist towards Jewish people.

Bek Brown

Call for a memorial to the stillborn

I recently proposed to Liverpool City Council (NSW) dedicating a special area for the memory of still-born babies, those who never had a chance to have a voice.

We need to give them a voice and to recognise and acknowledge them, and to allow their mothers especially, and their fathers and other relatives as well, to sit down in quiet, and reflect, contemplate and meditate in semi-privacy and dignity.

I had an interview (with photo) in the local *Liverpool City Champion* on 11 May 2011. The Council has not yet reached a formal decision.

*Yousif Suliman,
Sydney*

Workshop in Sydney

Hosted by Sydney
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Yiwaji – working together in Tennant Creek

Last year Jabez Phillpot was managing African and East European workers on construction sites in London. Now he has started work for the Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation (JCAC) at Tennant Creek, five hours north of Alice Springs, managing 150 houses in the town and camps and mentoring a crew of young Aboriginal men doing building and maintenance work.



Cultural board member from Tennant Creek, Geoffrey Shannon, presents a painting by his wife to Rob Wood for the Armagh community, with Michael Jones (left) and Jabez Phillpot (centre).

“They all have issues: alcohol and drug issues, family pressures, racism,” says Jabez. “But one of these days they will all be board members.”

Jabez has had a few “issues” himself. He grew up with indigenous people in Pitjantjatjarra lands (where his father worked with various communities) and was given a skin name (Japaljatarrri). But it was going to high school in Canberra that got him onto drugs. Once he was picked up unconscious, barely alive after an overdose.

In 2000 he attended an Effective Living Course at *Armagh*, the IofC centre in Melbourne. New motivation, a spell in rehab and six weeks back with the elders in the Pit lands got him back on track. At *Armagh* he met his future wife, Natalie from the UK, herself a recovering addict. They married and

moved back to Britain, where their twin girls were born.

Jabez’s father, Stuart, has been involved with indigenous affairs all his life. Known to the senior men in Tennant Creek, he was recently employed to assist the JCAC. One problem was that, while millions of dollars were spent on the Strategic Indigenous Housing Initiative Programme under the Federal Government’s “Intervention”, it has produced no houses in Tennant Creek, and provided training or work for only six indigenous people.

Jabez was getting emails about the situation from his father. After nine years in the UK “I knew it was time to come home. I just knew how white ‘carpet baggers’ drift around these communities from one organization to the next. They needed honest people.”

Honest people

Besides housing and services in Tennant Creek, Julalikari (which means “many people”, i.e. the many language groups congregated in the town) also has to maintain 38 remote communities in an area roughly a quarter of the Northern Territory. But housing and life on these “outstations” – where alcohol is banned and people are closer to their traditions – is much better than in town.

The senior men of Tennant Creek, assisted by Stuart, appointed new directors to Julalikari and restructured a number of local organizations around a common vision: *Anininigi Manu Anyula Parkamarri Wilyanka* (Our country we will hold each other strongly). Building on the teamwork of the “night patrols”, they have designed a programme they call *Yiwaji Pinangkaltinjiki* (a pathway

forward for both worlds, Aboriginal and white). The central idea is *Mappingka-marputjitj anuyal maputarri* (together we will build). “That’s my philosophy – working together,” says Jabez.

For years 300 people have been working-for-the-dole in CDEP (Community Development Employment Programme). With CDEP being phased out in 2012, the challenge is to transition those 300 into meaningful employment.

Jabez has selected a core group of 16 young men, doing basic building and maintenance. “I’m teaching them construction, but I know it’s much more. I’m teaching them to think for themselves, to fix the problem. I explain how to hang the door, and then let them do it. When I come back in a couple of hours, it may not be perfect but their confidence is built. I tell them, ‘You can live off CentreLink or go to prison. Or you can work this way.’” When one of his team had to go to court for alcohol-induced violence, Jabez suggested they all go to the hearing in their work uniforms. “They weren’t used to thinking that they had a right to walk into court, but they were all there for that young man.”

Recently Jabez was in *Armagh* with cultural board members Geoffrey Shannon and Michael Jones discussing plans for a training centre in Tennant Creek. They appreciated the impact the Life Matters Course made on two of their younger leaders in February, and want more young people to come to *Armagh*, to learn to be “responsible for their lives and for other people, to look after themselves and their values”.

Interview by Barbara Williams and Mike Brown

Apology’s continuing effect

Australia’s apology three years ago to its indigenous people has continued to have an effect internationally as well as at home.

In March a meeting in Moscow to launch a project for “healing the past” ended with a viewing of the DVD of the Australian Prime Minister’s speech to the Stolen Generations, translated into Russian. A convenor of the meeting,

Natalia Baranova, who has been at Caux conferences, wrote in her blog: “It was hard to suppress the emotions, because although the Prime Minister’s apologies might be seen as a formality, in fact the opposite was the case. People embraced each other and wept. At that moment in Australia the mystery of healing, liberation and renewal took place.”

John Bond, former Secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee, writes from UK: “The DVD of the apology has been used in courses in Washington, including courses for US State Department officers. It has been seen across Africa. A courageous

peacemaker in Lebanon wrote me saying that sometimes when she despairs, she watches that DVD.

“I have been invited to speak and show it in numerous British universities, including three times at Oxford. Last month Mark Bin Bakar (Aboriginal of the Year 2007 and West Australian of the Year 2008) and I spoke and showed the DVD as part of the City of London Festival. Our talk was entitled, ‘The Power of Public Apology’. The Festival Director drew particular attention to this event in the official programme.”

New Preamble to IofC International's Constitution

Initiatives of Change International is the name of the international association affiliating Initiatives of Change and Moral Re-Armament national bodies and international programmes. In 2010 there was an overhaul of its organisational and leadership structures. In 2011 the statement of mission and principles as expressed in the Preamble to its constitution was reviewed in a consultative process. On 23 July 2011 the new Preamble (below) was adopted by IofC International's Global Assembly.

Introduction

Initiatives of Change (IofC) is a world-wide movement of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, who are committed to the transformation of society through changes in human motives and behaviour, starting with their own.

Many of the world's problems – and their solutions – are rooted in human nature. Fear, hate, greed and indifference perpetuate injustice, poverty, conflict and environmental destruction. Yet it is also in human nature to be compassionate, courageous and creative. People can live the change they wish to see. Each person has something unique to contribute to building a just, peaceful and sustainable world.

IofC focuses on the vital link between personal change and global change, and aims to inspire, support and equip people to play their part in building a better society.

Approach

Recognising that it will take more than human reason and ability to solve the problems of the world, IofC places the search for inner wisdom at the heart of its approach. When people listen to what is deepest in their hearts, insights often come which lead in unexpected directions. Many understand this experience as guidance from God,

others as the leading of conscience or the inner voice. The regular practice of silence can give access to a source of truth, renewal, inspiration and empowerment.

Also integral to IofC is a commitment to:

- › **Start with oneself:** An honest look at one's own motives and behaviour is often the start of personal transformation. Cultural and religious traditions across the world offer moral standards as guides for individual and community living. Of these, IofC singles out absolute honesty, unselfishness, love and purity of heart and action as practical tests for motives and daily actions.
- › **Listen to others:** Honest conversation, undertaken in an open spirit, builds bridges of trust and community between people of similar, different, and even antagonistic, backgrounds. These enable healing, partnership and common action.
- › **Take focused action:** IofC's people and programmes seek to strengthen the moral and spiritual foundations of society and to
 - › bring healing and reconciliation where there is conflict;
 - › build bridges of trust between different communities and countries;
 - › embed ethics, justice and transparency in the global economy;

- › empower leadership to act with integrity, serve unselfishly and be effective agents of change.

Origins

Initiatives of Change grew out of the work of Frank Buchman (1878-1961), an American Lutheran minister. Buchman affirmed that there is a divine purpose for the world and everyone in it, and demonstrated the connection between faith and change in society. Over the years his outreach expanded to include people of different religions and none. In the 1920s his work became known as the Oxford Group and in 1938 was named Moral Re-Armament (MRA). It changed its name to Initiatives of Change in 2001.

Initiatives of Change International

Initiatives of Change International is an association incorporated in 2002 under Swiss law which brings together IofC's national associations and international programmes. Member bodies commit to act in accordance with the constitution and with the principles of the movement. In all other respects, they are autonomous. Initiatives of Change International is a non-profit Association, independent of any and all political, religious or economic entities or organizations. Where appropriate, it partners with others working for change.

Afghan interns at Asia Plateau

Since our story "A Hope for Afghanistan" (Newsbriefs April 2011) two more Afghan interns have spent time at the IofC centre in India.

In his report before returning home Abdul Tamim Alam wrote: "Coming from an Islamic country and unaware of other cultures and religions, Asia Plateau was a big eye opener for me. I learned to live in a multi-cultural environment and made very good

friends. This gave me hope that in this century there can be peace and dialogue.

"For the first time in my life I sat quiet for a whole day. I realized that I was not paying attention to my studies, how is my relationship with my friends and families, and where am I heading to in my life. After this realization I used each quiet time in the morning to reflect on these thoughts and think about how to put things right. I have clearly understood that radical change

starts with myself, as a first step toward the larger goal."

Meanwhile Mahboba Rawi of "Mahboba's Promise" is visiting Afghanistan again and will select a further two interns. Caroline Edwards cedwards@tpg.com.au is heading up the fundraising drive for this. \$1,800 is needed by the end of August.

A four minute Youtube film about the Interns program can be seen at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGcReGBg-is

This issue of Newsbriefs edited by Peter and Rosemary Thwaites. Contributions, news and comments welcome.

Next deadline: Monday 26 September 2011, to The Editor, NEWSBRIEFS, 65 North Terrace, Port Elliot SA 5212.

E-mail mike.brown@iofc.org New subscriptions and address changes: NEWSBRIEFS, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak VIC 3142