



Discovering the other side of Sydney: 'simple, inspiring and encouraging'



Prasanthi and Soma, hosts for the day; The welcoming committee, Nmah, Yarie and Vivi (left to right). Photos by Shoshana Faire

On a cold, rainy Sunday afternoon, 50 Sydneysiders braved the weather to attend the first Sydney presentation of the *Initiatives of Change* community-development programme, *Discover the Other*, hosted by Creators of Peace Sydney, and conducted by Mike Lowe and Liz Weeks from Melbourne.

Linda Burnie, Deputy Leader of the NSW State Opposition and local Member, commended everyone for gathering to workshop such an important subject. Listening, and the need to walk in another person's shoes, she said, were essential in her job of representing thousands of people in parliament.

The multicultural audience was given an overview of the *Discover the Other* programme, which uses four building blocks, each illustrated by the life experience of a Sydneysider:

» **Stepping out of your comfort zone:** encouraging people to risk reaching out to new people and situations, rather than staying stuck with the tried and true in which they feel comfortable. *David MacLaurin, a sixth generation Australian, spoke of Aboriginal people being the country's greatest asset. Trying to find his way in the bush, he learnt that 'you don't conquer the landscape with maps, but by paying respect to the*

spirituality of the land.'

» **Listening.** Sometimes called 'deep listening', this principle encourages us to give our full attention to those with whom we communicate, not only with our ears but by looking them in the eye, reading their body language and giving feedback, encouraging them to continue. *Rosemary Kariuki-Fife, a Kenyan Australian, shared how a new relationship had come with her sons and grandson when she listened rather than getting angry and telling them what to do. 'If you don't listen to your family, you will lose them,' she said.*

» **Focusing on what is right, not who is right.** The key to solving conflicts and building bridges of understanding with those with whom we have some disagreement. Saying how sorry we are for being part of a conflict can build a foundation of trust and friendship with the other person. *Ramphay and Chantanith Chittasy came straight from a function at the Lao Buddhist Temple in Sydney to share their wisdom on how this approach has helped their marriage.*

» **Change, starting with yourself.** This principle follows the wise words of Mahatma Gandhi: 'Be the change you want to see in the world.' *Zobra Aly spoke of the Shia*

Prayer Centre in Annangrove her family had created and overcoming huge community resistance to this project: 'Today we have good relations with all our neighbours.'

Working in six groups of eight, attendees discussed what had been presented to them and participated in role plays, acting out the *wrong* way to deal with a difficult neighbour, resulting in a negative response from the neighbour. When the right, more empathic way was used, it resulted in a more positive resolution. 'One of the most rewarding and wonderful gatherings ever held,' wrote one participant on the feedback sheet. Noted another: 'This was...educational in a common sense sort of way, and fun.' And another: 'Simple... inspiring... encouraging.'

The workshop ended with 'Stranger at your Door', a song by David Mills;

*Turn away all the fears 'cross the borders of our mind
 As the old world disappears, there's a richer one to find
 Come and see the stranger at your door
 Welcome them inside, see the stranger at your door.*

Ken Harrison and Jane Mills,
 Sydney

Creators of Peace launched in Nepal

'I have just returned from Kathmandu, where I had the most heartwarming and wonderful experience,' writes Shoshana Faire from Sydney. With her friend, Susanne Rix, she ran the first Creators of Peace Circle and facilitator training in Nepal.

It all came about through the support and sponsorship of *Search For Common Ground, Nepal*, an international peacebuilding organization* whose Director, Serena Rix Tripathee, is Susanne's daughter. She was aided through the committed groundwork of SFCG staff Meena Sharma and Rajendra Manandha.

Thirteen amazing women were selected on the basis of their diverse ethnic, caste and religious backgrounds, their ability to speak English and their potential to continue CoP Circles in Nepal.

The women opened their hearts in a way that was new for them – discovering that 'everyone has a story'. Deep connections were made. Many tears were shed as we heard the impact of being a girl-child, being unwanted by fathers, and struggling to gain an education. We shared the pain of losing loved ones through

war and suicide, were inspired by stories of survival and achievements against huge odds, and laughed over the cultural experiences of a Western woman married into a Nepalese family.

The women expressed emotions of inner peace, forgiveness and healing, lightness and connection. They keenly participated in a facilitation training that followed the two-day Peace Circle and left inspired to share their experiences in their families, workplaces and communities.

Susanne, a skilled facilitator, is staying in Nepal for several months, during which she and Meena plan to hold another Peace Circle (with a translator).

As for me, I am missing the chaos and challenges of Kathmandu, and the beautiful Nepalese women in their colourful flowing saris – definitely one of life's special experiences. I remain deeply touched, including by emails I have received, such as: *'The next morning I could not help but shed tears thinking how much we as women have suffered and endured, how we were loved and, above all, understood during those three beautiful days.'*



In Nepal, a new light for peace. Photo by Shoshana Faire

**SFCG works to bring people together from across ethnic, caste and political dividing lines to facilitate their involvement in peacebuilding at the community level.*

Caux: the match that lit our hearts

Liz Brumer from Melbourne joined the IofC conferences in Caux, Switzerland, for the first time in July. Some of her experiences:

I have a passion for assimilation and inclusiveness. To be part of a global meeting in Caux was a dream come true. It surpassed all my expectations.

Many magical moments brought a spiritual connection with others. One was on my first day, arriving in my room to a vista of snow-capped mountains and Lake Geneva; and a knock on the door introduced a smiling African woman carrying a pot of bright yellow Begonias. Hospitality at its best!

Another was meeting a group of passionate Egyptian women, hoping to return to the country with skills of conflict resolution and experiences of lives changing.

I elected to attend the training session on 'Mature leadership'

facilitated by Monica Bauman from The Netherlands. She led us on a study of the international service and intellectual legacy of former UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjold.

Using selected texts from *Markings*, his spiritual diary, we learned his theories and practices: how to *understand* through silence, *take action* through silence, and *benefit* from silence. In fact, with silence as a guide, the interchange of thought and heart over three days moulded the spirit of each of us in this small diverse group into one entity.

With all this I have made a commitment to continue my involvement in reconciliation, building bridges of trust and understanding with indigenous Australians.

Caux has been a gift – the match that lit up our hearts!

Watch the eyes

Having sprained my ankle and lost my credit card in a shopping centre, I hobbled to the centre management office to reclaim it. The woman asked for some identification. I spilled out various cards on her desk, including my Creators of Peace business card. Her eyes lit up as she read 'Creators of Peace' and said, 'That's interesting.'

'Yes,' I said, 'and we are having a Creators of Peace Circle in this area shortly. Would you be interested?' Tanya has not only attended a Peace Circle but now has done facilitation training.

(If you notice a light in a woman's eyes when she hears 'Creators of Peace', know she is a potential running mate.)

Trish Macdonald Harrison, Sydney

Asia Pacific youth get into action following conference

Though only 136 young people were selected for the actual event in Victoria during mid-July, the Asia Pacific Youth Conference attracted wide interest. Its website collected 47,000 hits. And in the two months since, messages have flowed between about the effect it had on them.

True to the APYC theme, 'Action for global change through personal transformation', the emails and meetings tell of both: acts of personal change and action in communities.

Muhammad, named 'Volunteer of the Year' in Pakistan, made one of those website 'hits' which brought him to the APYC. On 3 October, International Peace Day, he is organizing a debate between college students on how they can play a role in bringing peace. Much impressed by *The Imam and Pastor*, the IofC film about two Nigerian peacemakers, he showed it at the office of a national organization, to both Christians and Muslims. Now he is planning to visit cities of the Punjab showing the film to create 'a network of youth to bring communities closer'.

Kevin from Papua New Guinea is another who found the APYC through the website. 'I have been reflecting a lot on the experiences shared by the speakers (who) challenged me to reconcile with my relatives and friends - which I have done.' He and his friends had formed a group 'who go about helping out with whatever community work we come across'. At their monthly meeting he shared his experience of the APYC and now 'five of my friends are gearing up to join me at next year's APYC in Japan'. Meanwhile Kevin is heading off to the 'Pacific Emerging Leaders Symposium' in Samoa to find 'ways to help us islanders' address environmental challenges in the Pacific.

In another Pacific nation, the Solomon Islands, Christina works with United Nations Development Program. Through meeting Chinese at the APYC she formed the idea that there needs to be a national apology to Chinese in her country for the losses suffered during post-election burning and looting. She approached one of her father's Chinese friends. He was cautious, feeling 'a lot of

Chinese will not be willing to come out and reconcile'. Christina is not discouraged: 'I made one move; and even though it's like hitting against a brick wall, I am seeking God's direction on the next.'

Her friend, Gabriel, writes how quiet times for seeking God's direction have become 'part of me since the APYC. I always look forward to them.' Doing community work with unemployed boys, he is raising funds for 'small livelihood projects' in agriculture, cloth-dyeing and carpentry. Another friend, Methodius, has been given logs and land to establish an IofC Centre in his village in Malaita Province. Village boys have cleared the land while Methodius is trying to find the petrol to mill the logs. His hope is to integrate IofC programmes with his training work under the government's Youth Council.

Two-way conflict

The review process has brought many of the 90 Australian APYC participants to meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Melbourne student Aris, from a Chinese-Indonesian background, told how he had a breakthrough with Indonesian Muslims at the APYC, forgiving them and asking forgiveness for 'the two-way conflict' in which his family had lost property in troubles years ago. Now he is responding to the request of his Indonesian friends to attend an IofC Youth Camp in December.

Lucy, one of the students sponsored by Victoria University, was inspired by those who are working against conventional ideas and social pressures: 'The most rewarding aspect of the conference was the

opportunity to network amongst other like-minded social groups. In Melbourne we can fall into the trap of isolating ourselves from other people with similar values and ideals about creating a change.'

Similarly James Black, a social worker in Sydney, used the 'open space' sessions at the APYC to network with a former Offender Development Manager in the Victorian prison system, to get insights from a gang member in New Zealand 'who wants to make a change and help his community', and to convene a discussion on 'what motivates young people to drink and how we address the issue'. Finding many 'motivating moments' himself in that discussion, James started what he calls 'Hello Sunday Morning' which involves 'choosing not to drink for a three month period and sharing the experience through an online blog' (see www.hellosundaymorning.com.au). Among his recent postings:

'This is going way better than I would have expected. Things are happening. Feeling more focused and driven. And I remember stuff (woohoo)... Enjoying little things more... touch footy, getting motorbike licence, dancing sober, helping a girl who stacked it down nightclub stairs, driving a mate home... meaningful conversations, more time with family, yoga, reconnecting with old friends, Sunday morning breakfasts!.. Been finding new ways to spend money... Feel as though I've developed a better understanding of the kind of person I am ... how I'm going to make a difference...'

And 'making a difference' seems to be the message coming from most APYC participants.



Finding our spiritual identity through life's challenges

Songwriter and IofC worker David Mills has been undergoing treatment for myeloma over 18 months. At the National Gathering of IofC in Melbourne, last week, he gave these reflections:

I have always struggled to understand – let alone predict – why things happen the way they do, both to me and others. But I have come to the conclusion that, as part of life's purpose, there has been an individual identity for me to find, if not a destiny. And as little pieces of this identity have been revealed I have experienced a sense of spiritual growth that I can only describe as being part of God's amazing grace and redemption. I should add: this is still a work in progress.

Many of us have had health challenges or lost loved ones. They produce many kinds of emotions: from frustration to real suffering. I have found it very difficult to accept my own fallibility because of my illness. But in doing so it has focused my own attitudes of judgment and



David and Jane Mills. Photo M Brown

blame. Instead, I am learning a lot more about compassion – the link with another human being or group of people who have also suffered. This suffering may feel like nothing else but a very difficult burden. Yet I believe it can lead us into deeper points of contact with others as they begin to find a new spiritual identity.

In 1986 I travelled to South Africa with Kim Beazley, Snr., (former Minister for Education). I was struck by his compassion in that situation seething with feelings and suffering. He was able to understand and touch people's deepest emotions because

years earlier he had found his own spiritual identity in Australia where the indigenous people had been denied their dignity as a race. As he told people in South Africa, it came with one God-given thought: 'If you will attempt to live in absolute purity, you will be used towards the rehabilitation of the Aboriginal people.'

That thought had opened his heart and mind to a new spiritual identity and a new basis for politics. It was not just finding a moral conscience, but what someone called 'a moral imagination'. This not only affected many aspects of Aboriginal affairs in Australia but also set a high standard for political life and service – as the tributes from MPs on both sides of politics showed after Beazley died.

Through my illness I have begun to see that every challenge and every new encounter, be it unsettling or otherwise, is an opportunity for God to work and for us to grow. I have become more aware of my shortcomings and learnt to ask forgiveness from a gracious God. I have watched my friends and colleagues in IofC doing amazing things and have felt a longing to be there in the action with them. But haven't been able to. Yet I have come to feel tremendously grateful for the new phases we are embarking on.

Physically I've needed to accept a 'new normal' – which involves accepting that my identity is no longer based on what I did before. This has been hard: to feel I have been denied something that I thought was me. Thoughts of missing opportunities, letting colleagues down, or old age advancing prematurely were all hovering around unhelpfully.

I began to see that identity is like culture – it has to change to grow and be fruitful. Otherwise it dies. It is not a matter of choice but of accepting this new phase – which is more easily said than done. In order to accept, I have needed to review what I was called to in the first place. God was merciful and patient in allowing for my initial sense of youthful enthusiasm and activism.

People don't become spiritual

because they are persuaded to be. It happens by recognizing in oneself a longing to be compassionate towards others, to find an inclusive spirit, to have open and loving relationships. Many Australians have these qualities. But there are many, sadly, whose hearts and minds are closed. How, as a nation, can we find an identity that features generosity of spirit to those around us? Are we ready to change our nation's Constitution to recognize Australia's indigenous people in all their fullness? Relationships with our neighbours in the Pacific and Asia have often caused them to feel resentful towards us.

We have had ground-breaking IofC conferences where such people have taken inspired initiatives. With renewed thought for the issues they face, we may see clearer our spiritual identity.

Mowanjum partnerships

Recently I had the privilege of a week-long visit to the Mowanjum Community near the coastal town of Derby in the Kimberley.

Despite the neglect, disruption and massacres experienced over 200 years, the original inhabitants maintain their cultural heritage. Aboriginal-owned art and craft centres are scattered all over the Kimberley.

The Wandjina spirit-beings, depicted in numerous cave paintings and their contemporary art, are central to the three tribes in Mowanjum.

I had been invited by a group who, in consultation with the elders, have set up a resource centre training children in computer skills and a large vegetable garden. Nearby, a newly-erected church sign depicts a logo with two hands, black and white. Alongside are three large painted Wandjina. I came away feeling that, with this spirit, they have every chance of building ongoing productive partnerships into the future.

Doreen Walters, Perth

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