



*Collaroy exploration in progress.
 Credit: Jonathan Lancaster*

‘Exploring the essence of IofC’

From 11-13 November, 60 people from across Australia met at Collaroy, on the northern beaches of Sydney, to focus on ‘the essence’ of IofC and look for what may be built over the next three years. Delia Paul’s report provides some flavor of the wide-ranging discussions:

Over two and a half days, amid lush greenery and a view of the Pacific Ocean from the Collaroy Retreat Centre, participants reflected, shared and brainstormed possible directions for future work, while also examining the ‘core’ of IofC’s principles and practice.

Indigenous community leader, Susan Moylan-Coombs, gave a welcome to country, opening the program on Friday evening. Born in 1964, Moylan-Coombs was one of the ‘stolen generations’ of Indigenous Australians. Taken from her mother at birth in Darwin Hospital, she was later adopted by John and Jan Coombs, thus becoming an adoptive granddaughter of H.C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs, one of Australia’s most influential public servants.

Moylan-Coombs reflected on her childhood and experience of Indigenous peoples’ needs in the wider context of public education and community leadership in Australia. She observed that Indigenous peoples, once among the healthiest people on the planet, now rank among the unhealthiest. With a nod to the young children in the room, she issued a challenge: ‘What are we doing to grow them up?’

As context for the weekend IofC’s Executive Officer, Athalia Zwartz, highlighted the work that has been

accomplished in the Cultural and Structural Change process – operational values, a clearer organization structure and a budget framework – and the current Roadmap process to discern IofC’s future direction in Australia.

She opened the discussion by urging all concerned to move from the IofC story now to ‘emerging the future’, based on an understanding of the distinctive element of IofC which needs to be preserved and reframed for today’s world.

Facilitated by visiting human resource coach and trainer Bhav Patel, the participants agreed that, while the organization may change and evolve, the IofC approach remains that of a stool with three legs: personal development, focused action, and dialogue with diversity.

One participant reflected that, if we remove any one of the ‘legs’, the stool topples over. Holding all three legs together is the space for reflection and the search for inner wisdom.

Bhav noted that some healthy tensions will remain: between being and doing; between understanding the values and living them out; and in the sequence of acting first, then reflecting – or vice versa. He commented that, while it is important to clarify the scope of IofC’s work, ‘some of the magic is in the madness!’

The weekend provided opportunities for the more experienced practitioners in IofC Australia to share their personal stories with others.

Drawing on her experience of 60 years with IofC, Jean Brown described the essence of IofC as the belief that the seeds of the problem and the seeds of the answer lie within every human heart. To explore that belief, IofC recommends personal examination of one's own values, and spiritual enquiry through a practice of listening. The outcome of this process is transformation in the life of an individual, leading to their action in the life around them – sometimes resulting in 'a new story' for communities and nations. The task then is to share the new stories with the world to give hope and vision, inspiring further action.

Nigel Heywood, reviewing his 16 years experience with the movement, highlighted how IofC had helped him overcome various addictions and had trained him to 'listen for the right question.' For him, one key question was 'the secret whispering of God in the ear: "Lord, what would you have me do?"' This had convinced him of his own responsibility to begin addressing problems in the world, leading him to work on peace building initiatives in the Solomon Islands and then in South Sudan. He summarized that IofC's strength has been its support for leadership development, building transformative community networks, and working on race relations.

Responding to this sharing Bhav, as facilitator, observed that IofC has a life and an evolutionary path of its own beyond individuals, and that both the personal and the collective paths are necessary.

Some participants expressed appreciation for the guidance and wisdom of elders in the IofC network. Others called for a move toward developing peer support networks, and for rethinking the old approach of 'giving all' to a scalable model that will allow for varying levels of involvement in activities.

It was noted that IofC Australia has not attracted many new members in recent years. By contrast IofC Indonesia – as Iskandar Finachiaro pointed out – has mostly single people under 35 years of age, many of whom move on after getting married. (*More from Iskandar below*).

Several called for an ongoing discussion about IofC's standards (honesty, purity, unselfishness and love) and how these are being defined, interpreted and applied today.

Suggestions for future work included: working with Indigenous Australians on a range of issues including marking 2017 as the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum; engaging with 'average Aussies' at a time when political leadership is lacking; following up on the success of the Creators of Peace 25th anniversary conference in Caux; and harnessing the power of Australians 'telling a new story'.

Some participants expressed appreciation for the international links that IofC has enabled, and called for continuing outreach, especially in the Asia-Pacific and African regions.

Several said that the weekend had inspired a 'recalibration' and rethinking of their own commitments, of 'what is core and what is not core.' As facilitator, Bhav encouraged everyone to consider how much we need to explain the history of IofC to others, and how we should share, review or scrap some of the practices that overlay the principles of IofC.

One participant questioned, 'Does the light of IofC in the darkness shine enough? Does it grow enough those seeds of respect, of care, of empathy, and of peace?'

A full report on the Collaroy weekend is available on request.

'My mind is becoming wider and wiser'

On 29 November, Iskandar Finachiaro from IofC Indonesia spoke at Armagh at the end of his three weeks as a guest of IofC Australia. Some of his remarks:

Until recently I was president of Initiatives of Change Indonesia. We are a developing team, mostly graduates and workers. The oldest is 36 years. We have 30 active members.

The new president, Irna Yugaswatie, is married, 31 years old, and will take responsibility for four years. I remain a Board Member.

Our annual National Youth Camp is our way to engage around 40-50 new people each year to introduce IofC's values and way of life, and we have an alumni of over 200 around Indonesia.

Our weekly program – 'Serabi' (meaning our sharing now to inspire tomorrow) – brings in people who have inspiration to share, often one

of our team. We have an English discussion club with UIN Jakarta students; and a trust-building program between Muslims and Christians. Then a School Leadership Program to present IofC values to students. Our upcoming plan is to introduce a Life Matters Course and an internship program linking Indonesia and Australia.

My other activities are as a Boy Scout teacher in Indonesian schools, and I teach refugees in Bahasa, English and maths. On the side I have a small laundry business, run as a social enterprise.

All these activities are coming from the positive values that IofC has given me, the four moral standards and this way of improving our character. They have shaped me to be a global person. Before IofC, I was very introverted and didn't want to interact with people from different backgrounds

or religions. But through knowing IofC, my mind is becoming wider and wiser – through applying these values in my daily activities and in different communities.

What impressed me about IofC was accepting people from many different cultures and backgrounds, doing something positive together and finding direction in life. Indonesia has people from different backgrounds living together with much diversity. Though we have six religions and many tribes, we are united by *Pancasila* (the five national moral principles of Indonesia). So, although Indonesia has the largest Muslim population of any country in the world, we are not a Muslim nation.

Thanks for this priceless time and the experiences you have given me. And thanks to all in IofC Australia who have supported me in spirit, material needs and program.

Sydney CoP women review a year of action

This has been a big year for the Creators of Peace network in Sydney. Tanya Fox reports:

Creators of Peace – the global women’s network now in 43 countries – celebrated its 25th Anniversary with a ‘Living Peace’ conference in Caux, Switzerland, in August (see October *Newsbriefs*). Eleven women went from Sydney.

On 30 October, at the Annual Creators of Peace (CoP) Celebration in Sydney, seven of them had 75 guests mesmerised as they reflected on their personal highlights and key learnings. They spoke of listening to stories of survival of women living in the middle of conflict and of bonding with amazing women of different faiths, colours and societies. (See also www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace).

Shoshana Faire continued with an overview of CoP activities internationally.

Closer to home, Wendy DeMeyrick reviewed some of the CoP happenings during the year in Sydney:

- » Conducted four Peace Circles and a Facilitator Training.
- » A CoP Sydney Facebook Page was launched www.facebook.com/creatorsofpeacensw
- » The Auburn CoP Network has continued to meet every month exploring a wide range of peace-building topics.
- » In March, CoP conducted ‘Talking Circles’ at an International Women’s Day event at the Auburn Centre for Community.
- » In April, an intergenerational dialogue was held.
- » CoP and IofC together hosted a Sydney Alliance ‘Table Talk’ event, ‘Changing the Conversation about Asylum Seekers’, where over a 100 people heard first-hand from asylum seekers and were challenged to examine their values and take action.
- » Presentations on CoP have been provided to schools, Rotary Clubs and interest groups.
- » A number of CoP women attended an Intercultural Competence and Diversity Education Training provided by the ‘Together for Humanity Foundation’.
- » CoP is also represented at Domestic Violence and Cultural Diversity groups in Auburn.

» CoP women attend the Welcome Dinner Project where ‘new’ Australians are invited to ‘established’ Australians’ homes to a shared meal.

» A memorial garden is being developed in memory of our departed sister, Trish McDonald-Harrison, in the grounds of the Auburn Centre for Community.

One of the most significant events was in September, on the International Day of Peace, when four CoP women were invited by Stand-Up (a Jewish social justice group of ‘effective change-makers’) to speak on highlights of the Living Peace conference in Switzerland.

Yarrie Bangura told how the conference had inspired her to involve other young people in working towards peace. Ros Kennedy shared how she connected deeply with Kenyan delegates at the conference, supporting a widowed mother of five by buying ‘a milking cow’. Zohra Aly spoke of two Lebanese women, one Christian and one Muslim, who had come together across the religious divides in their country. And Shoshana Faire related stories of women who are writing a ‘new story’ of hope through adversity, making a difference for social change and human rights.

The event included facilitated conversations in circles, asking each to decide on one step they could take towards living peace themselves.



Interactions at the Annual Celebration. Credit: Shoshana Faire

Cambodian farmers struggling to survive

Seventy Cambodian farmers – women and men – participated in the most recent IofC Farmers Dialogue, in Battambang, 26-30 November 2016. Phil Jefferys, pastoralist from Manila, NSW, was one of 16 international delegates who took part. Others came from as far away as Canada, India, Japan and France.

These Farmers’ Dialogues take place in many countries aiming to ‘recognise the dignity of farmers as feeders of the human community and to ensure the security we need to provide food’.

Phil Jefferys noted that 85 percent of Cambodians live on farms. They compete against unfathomable difficulties. Cambodian rice is

popular, but very low prices are paid by traders from Vietnam and Thailand, who repackage and sell it with high mark-ups. Many Cambodian farmers have left their farms to be tended by aged parents, while they go to work on farms in Thailand, Korea and Malaysia.

In one panel discussion Pol Ham, Chairman of the National Assembly Committee on Agriculture, spent most of the session listening to these difficulties, demands and hopes from farmers, and promising to relay them to the policy-makers.

As usual, the Farmers’ Dialogues moved onto the land for a day, visiting a farm in Samlaut, a vegetable plantation in a children’s home, and

the Kam Ping Pouy irrigation dam, built at huge cost of life during the Khmer Rouge period.

Another feature of the Dialogues took place each morning, with one hour dedicated to a period of silent reflection and sharing experiences of personal change.

A ‘Farmers’ Charter’ was agreed to by the participants, giving ‘the spirit and the content’ of their commitment to the role of farmers in the context of the industrialised and computerised world, and listing concerns ranging from secured access to land and markets to education to attract and train young farmers.



A range of valuable training opportunities are on offer through IofC, both in Australia and overseas.

Two are outlined below. Others are outlined on a schedule included with this Newsbriefs. Some funding support may be available for applicants from Australia. For more details, contact the People and Pathways Portfolio kirsty.argento@iofc.org

Life Matters Workshop in January

'What does it take to be a change-maker and community-builder?' asks the invitation to the 'Life Matters Workshop' to be held at Armagh, IofC's Australia-Pacific Centre in Melbourne, over the Australia Day weekend (from 26-29 January, 2017).

Information and applications through rob.wood@iofc.org or elisse.higginbotham@hotmail.com Registration before 2 January 2017.

First person to sign up was a Palestinian living in Perth. This workshop will bring together people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, between the ages of 18-35, to focus on the search for meaningful life direction connected to the needs and opportunities of our global community. The program will include inspirational panel speakers,

creative workshops, team building activities, story sharing, an entertainment night, inner reflection, group discussion – and more.

The facilitation team is, itself, a wonderful reflection of people who have made Australia home: Afghan, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Sri Lankan and South Sudanese. They also represent different generations and ways of looking at life. In November, a facilitators training was offered for them by Bhav Patel, a highly skilled trainer, facilitator, life coach visiting from Moldova.

New Caux training programme

The Caux Peace and Leadership Programme is now open for applications, closing 15 January.

This new programme combines the former Caux Interns Leadership Programme and Caux Volunteers, revamped to give participants an experiential learning environment in one of the departments at Caux and active participation in the Caux Forum main events over a month of the (European) summer. Two sessions run from 26 June, and then 21 July.

See www.caux.ch/caux-peace-and-leadership-programme

As an insight into the 2016 programme in Caux, Margaret Lancaster writes from Canberra:

This year the Caux trainee programme initiated an experiment. Trainees were linked up with someone, somewhere in the world, with experience of the ideas and practice of IofC. Thus the breadth of global experience and commitment could be harnessed, even though not all could physically be at Caux. Each trainee wrote three 'reflective essays' and the 'pair' was asked to comment, ask questions and share anything relevant from their own life.

I was privileged to take part in this, which did at least as much for me as for the trainee. I was paired with a young woman from Egypt. I was deeply moved by her honesty and

desire to see how to move forward in her faith, and by her passionate love for her country. Personally, it meant thinking out how to express what I deeply believed and to voice my experience in a way that would (I hoped) mean something to her.

After the programme, we decided to keep in touch and are now living into each other's situation in a way which I find enriching and faith-building. I look forward to the day when, somewhere, we meet in person.

Dara Sabry writes from Egypt:

During the Caux trainee programme, I was teamed up with a wonderful woman from Australia. My assignment was to write a reflective essay every week on a theme prompted by my trainers. This was an interesting experience for me because I was

able to connect with someone who comes from a completely different background and generation. One would think, what would these two women have to speak about? Little do people know, we connected on so many different topics and experiences. I felt matched up with a kindred spirit. This experience taught me that no matter where you're from, you can always meet someone from a place that is completely and utterly foreign to your demographic and culture, yet bond over what makes you similar. This was, and still is, a wondrous experience for me. One that picks at my curiosity every day and that I thoroughly enjoy. I would like to thank Caux for teaming me up with Margaret Lancaster and for her patience due to my crazy schedule!

See also the Initiatives of Change Australia website: www.au.iofc.org Facebook page: Initiatives of Change Australia
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