

Surprised in Melbourne

Rob Wood writes about the recent Life Matters course in Melbourne

A rainbow of people have just attended a nine-day *Life Matters* course at Armagh, the MRA-IC centre in Melbourne. The 13 people from 10 countries included several who took part in last year's Asia-Pacific Youth Conference (APYC) in Cambodia. Among the Australian participants was Kaylea Fearn, who works with the National Council of Churches in Victoria. Before leaving, she spoke of "the great sense of global community" she had felt at Armagh.

The course aims to develop skills and character strengths for those who want to bring change around them. This development was evident on the final evening of the course, when Melbourne residents came to hear from the participants.

A participant from China showed an artwork he had painted during the course, saying he wanted to use his artistic gifts to raise awareness of the environmental issues facing his homeland. To do this, he had to live with integrity. As one step, he had decided to ask forgiveness of two women who were his girlfriends for a year, neither knowing of the other's existence!

A Cambodian participant outlined her action following the APYC. At the time her father had estranged himself from her for 18 years. She wrote him a letter. He responded, and the relationship is beginning to grow. Previously, she said, she had so distrusted men that she had no hope of a faithful marriage. But the faithfulness of the married couples helping with *Life Matters* had given her hope.

An African student, a refugee for 18 of his 22 years, who arrived in Australia six months ago, spoke of the conflict that had forced him to flee from his country. He wants to contribute to healing, starting by bringing together people from both sides of the conflict who are resident in Melbourne.

Here are extracts from the speeches of two Asian participants:



Phlong Pisith

We are the younger generation of Cambodians, born to parents who continue to bear hatred in their hearts and show, by their behaviour, feelings they have harboured for decades.

Cambodia and Vietnam are neighbours. A turbulent history has left much hatred on both sides. Following the APYC I felt that the young generation could make a big change by forming a group of young people to work and build friendships with each other. As a result, Cambodians visited Vietnam last November for a relationship-building dialogue, and worked and travelled together. This created the feeling that we were brothers and sisters and that we were meant to care for each other.

Over Khmer New Year in April we will host a similar dialogue in Cambodia. About 20 Vietnamese friends will visit, work and do community service in our villages. We hope this time together can continue to help heal our past. We can learn more about the different features of our two countries' cultures and, through that, gain a deeper understanding of each other.



Pinky Hidayati

I used to think that Easterners were more polite than Westerners, and more religious. I was proud of this. So I have been surprised by this visit to Melbourne.

During the course my room-mates were from Australia and Poland. We shared stories about our families and life style, experiences, values and beliefs. I found that their way of life was not very different to mine. In fact, I found that they were dealing with certain issues better than we were. So I began to think, "What's the difference between East and West?" Easterners are polite, but Westerners are also polite. Easterners are friendly, but Westerners are also friendly. I have found something very interesting here.

I was touched by the honesty and kindness of Westerners. I dropped my watch when visiting a museum. I hadn't even realised this, when a man came and gave it back to me. He had found it in another part of the museum, and he had taken the time to find me.



I had dinner with a family whose father had worked in my country. He kept questioning me about my country's policies, and debated all my answers. The conversation became even harder when he questioned my religion. I was so upset, and kept thinking about this. I began to realise that I must learn a lot more about my country and my religion. I should have done this a long time ago. But now I have decided to "step out of my comfort zone" and do so.

From the farm to Taiwan

by Ian Heywood, farmer from Manilla in northern New South Wales

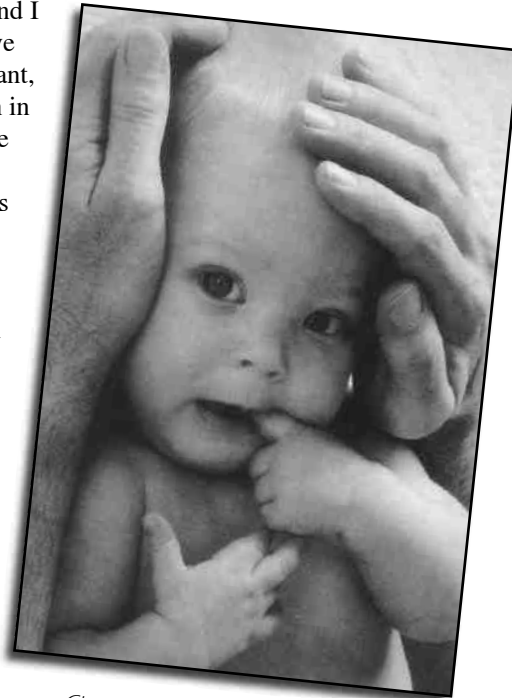
My wife, Faye, is a counsellor, and I am a farmer. Both of us believe that functional families are so important, and this conviction took us to Taiwan in January to take part in a family course run by Initiatives of Change (IofC) workers Ren-Jou and Grace Liu. This course helps individuals to examine their family life and improve relationships through new understanding. The course we joined was called "Training the Trainers", and brought together people who wished to learn how to conduct courses themselves.

To witness Grace and Ren-Jou's vitality, and to be exposed to the results of their labour, was a gift from God. They have developed a network of practitioners and trainers for the family program in many areas of their country. Some of them came and shared their experiences of leading others through steps necessary to becoming better husbands, wives, parents and community participants. It was evident to us that this initiative has brought much change in the "culture of families", as one Taiwanese person put it.

Our son, Nigel, had taken part in the family course last year. He was enthusiastic that we go back with him so we could experience the hospitality of the Taiwanese and our hosts, the Brothers of St John Priory, and be challenged to learn more about ourselves.

Do we want to make changes?

Eleven people from nine countries came together for two weeks of intensive teaching, reading, sharing and self-



Changing the "culture of families"

analysis. We were able to experience the deep troughs and high peaks of each other's lives. Each of us experiences varying levels of dysfunctionality in our families. The challenge we all face is, "Do we want to make changes?" and, if so, "Who should lead the process?" Our answers are "Yes" and "Us".

We returned to Australia better equipped for our roles as parents, grandparents and members of our community. With a little more experience and God's grace, we hope to be able to share our "gift" from Taiwan with people in Australia.

Under forties meet in Kenya

Gratitude, thanksgiving, discomfort, laughter, prayer, power, commitments, healing, inspiration, emptiness, re-charging, partnership, collaboration, acceptance, love, respect, resolutions...

These were just some of the sentiments expressed at the end of a 10-day

gathering of people "Under 40" (or almost!) involved in the work of Initiatives of Change. Forty one people from 26 countries and every continent met in Kenya to listen to and learn from each other, and to explore together the shape of IofC's message, fellowship and outreach in the coming decades. Nigel Heywood and Laura Vertigan represented Australia; both are spending more time in Africa before returning, so a fuller report will appear in the next issue of *Newsbriefs*.

Speaking out for peace in Africa

Jean Brown reports on preparations for a major gathering scheduled for Africa in April this year.

"We pray that the rains will be over," said Nigerian Amina Dikedi over the telephone, reporting on preparations for the Creators of Peace/Clean Africa Campaign conference in Uganda in April. The need of a marquee to shelter 300 prompted her prayer.

"Standing up and speaking out for peace in a clean Africa. Women accountable for the future – now." This is the challenging title of the conference, for which over 200 have already registered.

The small, dynamic Ugandan hosting team, mainly teachers, students and housewives, are operating out of an office in a garage with one computer and a lot of faith.

This is largely an initiative of women who are convinced that the enlistment of women, especially, in grass roots peace building is key to peace in Africa. The invitation talks of a "radical peace" where "every individual deals with the roots of conflict, corruption and injustice within their own hearts first and in the community around them".

Aboriginal representation

The wife of the President, Mama Janet Museveni, is conference patron. She has a particular interest in Australia's Aboriginal people, so the Australian delegation will have Aboriginal representation, including Jackie Huggins, co-chair of Reconciliation Australia. Two women from East Timor have been eagerly nominated to attend by President Gusmao's wife, Kirsty Sword Gusmao. A student from Indonesia, who met the *Action for Life* team in her country last year, is working hard to find support to attend.

Fundraising is going on all over the world to support women like these and the many African women wanting to be part of this event. The East Timorese women will need about A\$4,000 each. Currently five are planning to go from Australia. While we pray for the rain to stop we also pray that the financial contributions start pouring in!

Healing the Australian community

by John Bond, MRA-IC worker and Secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee

There was a flurry in the media last month over the Prime Minister's refusal to apologise to a mentally-ill woman who ended up in an immigration detention centre. *The Australian* asked "why the question of an apology obsessed so many commentators". Its answer was that there is a "subtle reconfiguring of politics in moral terms that has been the project of the cultural Left for a decade or more".

Not everyone agrees that the Left is responsible. Phillip Adams addressed the Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, in his column in *The Australian*. "You come from a Moral Re-Armament tradition, a belief system that energised your father's public life and was of fundamental importance to your own," he wrote. "It's time for some moral rearmament in the ALP, which in recent years has all but abandoned moral principles."

Sadly, many politicians on both sides have learnt the art of gathering votes by appealing to the worst attitudes in the electorate – fear and greed and envy.

But politics need not be that way. What is morally right can be politically attractive. In rural New South Wales, the Independent Federal Member Peter Andren is a man of firm moral

conviction. Polls show that most of his electorate consider him too compassionate towards refugees, but at each election his vote has increased. There are many such examples. Just as Aborigines and refugees can be scapegoated in an election, so electors can be won to the idea of a fair go for all.

But politicians can't work miracles. Some community attitudes are so ingrained that political leaders cannot turn them around in the three years of our electoral cycle. To shift them takes widespread community action.

Australia is a country with many hurting people. The wounds of the stolen generations have been revealed in the past few years. The wounds of the rest of the Aboriginal community are less understood. Many people sensed something of the agony of spirit which drove Aboriginal footballer Michael Long to walk to Canberra last December, but so far there is little to show for it.

Nor do we understand the wounds among the wider Australian community. Many of us are shocked at the cruelty with which asylum seekers are treated. Those of us who work with Aboriginal Australians see the racism they endure. Callous attitudes abound, and this is

hardly surprising, given our history – the cruel origins of white settlement; the harsh struggle for survival; the lies which brought thousands of "orphans" from Britain, only to discover years later that they were not orphans. Such events leave wounds, and unhealed wounds pass down the generations.

This year, in the National Sorry Day Committee, we have been discussing the idea of making Sorry Day a National Day of Healing. This idea has been taken up enthusiastically by many of the stolen generations. They have suffered as much as any in our country, and they want to give leadership.

Give everyone a chance

We want to use the day to expose the pain with which we live – among the stolen generations, among the wider Aboriginal community, among non-Aboriginal Australians. We want to give everyone the chance to think about the hurts which shape their attitudes, and find healing. We want to enlist the churches, the medical profession, sportspeople, entertainers, all who want to be part of healing the wounds of our people.

What impact we will make, I do not know. But we will do our best, and we invite everyone to take their own initiatives. I hope the Day will help create the national attitudes which can give our politicians a reasonable chance of winning votes through appealing to our best qualities, not our worst.

President of NCCA will attend Brisbane conference

Lesley Bryant, coordinator of the forthcoming MRA-IC conference in Brisbane, visited New Zealand last month to invite people to the conference. Lesley writes:

Glenns Wood and I embarked on an amazing journey. The people we met and their generosity, the connections that just happened, the beautiful places we visited, the depth of relationships and insight we gained ... my abiding impression is that there are many caring people who are keen to strengthen their connections with MRA-IC. Some have already indicated they plan to attend the Brisbane conference. Fortunately the dates fit with New Zealand school holidays.

Among the participants will be Rev Professor James Haire, President of the

National Council of Churches of Australia. James served as a missionary in Indonesia for 12 years, where he became a close friend of Abdurrahman Wahid, President of Indonesia from 1999 to 2001. Like Wahid, James can speak bluntly. His best-known address was given in 2003 at the end of his term as President of the Uniting Church in Australia, when he spoke about the "new depths of political depravity" which Australia had plumbed, "egged on by both political groupings", and challenged Christians to take a stand. He is an eminent theologian who brings his

theology to bear on the current issues of the day. He knows the Pacific well, and understands the challenge of confronting corruption and ethnic conflict in those countries. And his profound understanding of Islam will contribute much to a conference which aims to help build understanding between Australia and our Muslim neighbours.

The conference will take place at the University of Queensland, 1-5 July. For further information, please contact the Conference Secretary, 0414 271 859 or brisbane.conference@mra.org.au



Learning from Moldova

by Rosemary Thwaites, Sydney

Last year, two young women from Eastern Europe came to Australia to work with MRA-Initiatives of Change. When they arrived, I was eager to learn from their work and their countries as well as for them to experience Australia. But when one of them, Cristina Cojocaru, invited me to her country, Moldova, last October, I found myself wondering: Had I been as ready to learn as I had said? There were things I had vaguely heard and not appreciated. Had I been too full of my own life to really listen to them? This struck me when another young Moldovan, Liliana Robu, told me about the work of their IofC team in the orphanages.

Many of us will have seen television programs about the plight of orphans in Romania and Moldova – two of the poorest countries in Europe, where

totalitarianism for many years forbade voluntary charitable work. Liliana, aged 21, doing two degrees and holding down a job, told me that it had all started three years ago after the *Foundations for Freedom Visiting Course*.

She had participated in leadership, conflict resolution and communication training and was looking for a way of putting it all into practice. So, encouraged by their whole IofC community, five of them including Cristina – all busy students with little money – gave up their one free day in the week and went every Sunday for two months to an orphanage in Chisinau. They organised games, drama, drawing, embroidery, and talked with the children who were hungry for love and conversation. At the end of the project, each child received a Christmas gift.

Encouraged by this, Liliana and her friends decided to go to an orphanage in Straseni, travelling 30 km outside the capital by minibus. This time they had 40-50 children on their hands. They made eight visits there and also took the children to the theatre and the circus. The IofC community raised some funds. Two churches in UK and in Canada gave financial support.

Here is how Liliana tells the story: "We had a wonderful experience, but it was hard to tell the children that we could not come forever. The children started to trust us, telling private things about their families and teachers. We did not always know what to do with this information. They expected us to help, and we did not want to disappoint them. We tried to encourage them to believe in themselves, and to believe that they could have a good normal family without drinking, drug-taking and violence. Sometimes the children were more mature than we were because of all they had been through. We learned a lot from them."

Music treasures of Moral Re-Armament

Herb Allen, in conjunction with Day Ely Ravenscroft, is reissuing as CDs *Music Treasures of Moral Re-Armament*. The first two CDs, entitled *From the Ely Home to the World*, *MRA Music Treasures 1936-59* contain *Bridgebuilders*, songs sung by Cecil Broadhurst, Leland Holland, the Colwell Brothers and many others.

Also available (all are for non-commercial use only) are:
Constance Jennings Ely's Favorite Hymns
The Words and Music of Cecil Broadhurst,
The Vanishing Island (2 CDs and book, with script and directions)
Songs from Give a Dog a Bone (original London cast)
The Crowning Experience (featuring Muriel Smith)
The Glory of Christmas (with Muriel Smith)
The Caux Quartet
Christmas on Mackinac Island (radio broadcast with Muriel Smith and Chorus)
Merry Christmas to You All (*Up with People*, 1967)

Available soon:

The Colwell Brothers, the Early Years
Viva La Gente (*Up With People's* recording in Rome before a live audience)
The Words and Music of George Fraser
We Could Go In (Christmas musical by George Fraser with script & directions)
Herb Allen Plays the Xylophone

Grosvenor Books are happy to receive enquiries and facilitate ordering and payment (probably not more than A\$20 per CD). We hope to obtain full track listings for each CD soon. Please contact Joyce Fraser on **02 9559 2301** or Cheryl Wood on **03 9822 1218**, or write to **Grosvenor Books**, PO Box 53, BURWOOD, VIC 3125.

Canberra Autumn

Michael Thwaites' new book *Unfinished Journey*, collected poems 1932 - 2004 can be obtained from Grosvenor Books, PO Box 53, BURWOOD VIC 3125. Price \$25 post free

*Land of the singing light
Light that first I saw
Eighty years and more
Some pain but more
delight
What did I come here
for?
How soon will it be
night?*

*So many that I know
Like autumn leaves
they fly -
Wide over-arching
sky
Accept the pledge I owe
To live until I die
To thank before I go.*

