

Summary

Turning the Tide weekend residential: We can do that! Empowerment for Social Change

Friday 13th November 2009

by Hilary Cullen

Over the last 12 months, some of the 'year group' have moved on for various reasons, and a couple more could not attend the November weekend. In the end we had a small group – but lively enough for the weekend held at the cottages at Douai Abbey!

Denise facilitated the weekend, and was assisted by Rachel for Friday night / Saturday morning. Denise and Kiyo were the earliest arrivals and got stuck in to preparing the evening meal. When Rosie, Hilary and Rachel arrived on the 6:30 train, the kitchen was already promising a good meal, and we three had a cup of tea and 'caught up' while the appetising smells wafted us into an amicable state of mind. Knowing that Santi and Chris had let us know they may well be coming in on a later train – we eventually ate our delicious dinner and hoped to have them stroll up fairly soon! Having such a small group we agreed that it would be better to wait for us all to arrive before we started the workshop sessions – even if that meant leaving it till the morning if Santi and Chris arrived very late.

In the end it was well after 9pm when we started what was inevitably a short introductory session!

We participated in a classic session of 'leaving the week's stresses behind' in the 'Dustbin' activity. This involved writing down one (or more!) of the stresses we were leaving behind us as we headed into the weekend's activities. These notes were put into a 'dustbin' for disposal, and then we were each invited to speak about one of the things now in the 'dustbin'. This was a helpful way to demarcate 'the week that was', from the activities and focus of the weekend. There was little time for anything more – and the howling gales and stormy rain outside helped us *feel we were being bade 'welcome.... and settle in for the weekend!'*

Saturday morning 14th November 2009

from Denise's agenda notes

- **Rachel's object game – How does this connect to empowerment for me?**
Rachel spread out a variety of objects on the table. It was an absolute random mix including matches, a compass, a plastic toy dog, post-it notes ... We then took turns selecting an object and sharing how it connected to the idea of empowerment for us. A very interesting game. Rachel says it can be used for any number of topics and it takes people's thinking to a completely different level.

Continuing ... Saturday morning 14th November 2009

Seize the Day's video/song 'With my hammer'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSiGwOlarRI>

Next we watched a music video by folk/pop/rock group Seize the Day called 'With my hammer'. The song is about a three women who in 1996 broke into an arms depot and destroyed a jet-fighter plane which was destined for Indonesia's war against East Timor. More about the case can be read here -- http://www.inlap.freeuk.com/spring_96.htm

Although the song is about the activists destroying the fighter-jet, the images in the video gave us plenty to reflect upon the process of personal and social empowerment and the conditions necessary to unleash and feel and live our power.

Connecting the local to the global

Next we worked in pairs using active listening to draw together the morning's threads. We talked about

- a time when we felt empowered and did X -- what was that? what did that feel like? what conditions allowed you to do what you did?
- a time we didn't do something, almost did, but then didn't? What stopped you? an inner critic? resources? what would you have needed to overcome the obstacle? or was it just not the time? what did you learn?
- how does our activism link to into the local/global paradigm?

Soma games

Soma was originally developed in the 1970s by Roberto Freire as a therapy to support activists resisting the Brazilian military dictatorship. Freire drew from Gestalt therapy, Antipsychiatry studies, Capoeira Angola, Anarchy and Wilhelm Reich's psychoanalytic thought to create somatherapy. Soma was brought to the UK by Jorge Goia, a social psychologist and somatherapist who trained with Freire. Rachel, Denise and Kiyo have taken a soma course and all three helped out leading the games.

The intention of playing soma games with groups of activists in the UK is to help us develop an awareness of how economic, political and cultural systems have permeated and influenced our way of being in the world.

Saturday afternoon/evening 14th November 2009

by Santi Carvalhido-Cortinhas

The session on Saturday afternoon started around 4pm, just after lunch break. We were without Rachel who had left shortly after finishing the morning session. The first issue we took on board was a review of the whole year so far. Although for many of us this seemed somehow a daunting task to remember each monthly workshop and its particular intricacies, it turned out to be a rather enjoyable exercise of collective memory where we were able to remember a lot more than we had expected beforehand. This activity had us

traveling from January up to October in the search of those significant bits that left an impression on us all.

Immediately afterward we continued our yearly review by marking our understanding of the different topics of each workshop. In order to help us do that Denise had put up nine sort-of dart-boards on the wall each of them related to one particular workshop. We just had to give a score to reflect our current discernment. The evening followed on with a similar exercise but this time we had to express our personal feelings on each of those themes, in other words what we felt had inspired us for the better and what we thought could be improved. Unlike the previous task, on this occasion we were requested to write up our views and impressions on the wall-papers.

Then along came a lovely dinner—thanks Hilary for that lovely dish whose name I don't remember—that reflected so nicely the bonding spirit throughout the weekend. It feels compelling to mention our culinary creativity. Yummy!! People seemed to devote to the task of cooking and at the same time kept enjoying themselves. The day finished with an interestingly enough, unfinished task. We set ourselves on the mission of devising the December workshop or at least leaving something already on the table to be picked up the following morning. That was exactly what happened. For a while it was not clear enough as the day had been long and nobody seemed to come up with coherent ideas. Eventually we managed to draft something which would give us a head-start, or so we thought, on Sunday morning.

Sunday 15th November 2009

by Chris Wood

We started the morning session by exploring the theme of 'components of a nonviolent life' we had agreed upon the previous evening to frame our participant run workshop in December on 'celebrating nonviolence'. We began to brainstorm ideas around this theme, such as spirituality and activism, non-violent direct action, power relationships, and tools for running workshops such as forum theatre. Going deeper into the components of a non-violent life, we reflected upon the four roles of activists -social change agent, good citizen, rebel, and reformer- that we first explored in March's workshop. We then thought about ways in which these roles could be applied to the themes that we had begun to brainstorm in a workshop environment. Reflecting further on the march workshop, we recalled Bill Moyer's eight stage Movement Action Plan (MAP) for nonviolent campaigns, and thought about how this model could also be applied to the themes we had begun to consider around components of a nonviolent life. Both the four roles of activists and the MAP were written onto flip chart paper and hung up as a reference point for brainstorming.

Exploring the thread of power relationships and social change further, Hilary then suggested the idea of using a game to analyse this topic in a workshop environment. It was agreed that Hilary would get in touch with Carl to develop this idea further and feed back to the group. Chris suggested exploring the role of reconciliation and mediation work in restoring relationships through

the medium of children's stories. The example given was how the story of Red Riding Hood could be adjusted to highlight the perspective of both the wolf and the girl in the familiar narrative. Participants would take on these roles in the story and be encouraged to share their account of events, with a mediator attempting to nonviolently reconcile the two sides. Thinking more broadly, the group considered how this framework could be utilised to analyse gender roles and think about questions of children's education. Chris and Santi agreed to develop a workshop based on this model.

Rosie suggested leading a session on consumption choices: looking at the decisions we make on a everyday basis such as where do we get our food from and how do we support the growers? (Organic grocers? Veg box? Skipping? Etc..) Such a session would explore how everyday life relates to politics, or to what extent is the personal the political? It was also agreed that Anna and Adam could come up with a session, perhaps on food and growing or gender and power that would fit into the broader agenda, if they were happy with this suggestion. The group decided that it would be good if Hilary could act as the person responsible for holding the day together as the overall coordinator, to be confirmed with Hilary in Denise's e-mail. It was suggested that either Anna or Adam could act as a co-coordinator, but if neither of them were keen take on this role then Rosie said she would be happy to help. The group also decided that it would be good to think of energisers that could be used throughout the day. It was clarified that Bill Moyer's MAP and the related four roles of the activist would be used in each session, with the main emphasis resting upon one or the other, in order to provide the day with a coherency.

Finally, it was decided that as she would be unable to attend in December it would be good for Kiyo to be responsible for coordinating and overseeing the planning process for the workshop. The group would keep in touch via e-mail, feeding back the various sections in Kiyo who would look over them and make any changes or recommendations. It was agreed that the existing proposals would remain flexible until it became apparent that the workshop had an overall coherency, and in case any changes had to take place on the day. It was suggested that most of the creative work for the sessions should be done by the end of November, and that a near final draft should be ready by the 5th December, a week before the workshop.

The weekend was brought to a close with a classic Turning the Tide evaluation: the group assessed the weekend using the criteria of a smiley face, a frown, and bright ideas. The response of the group to the weekend's activity's was overwhelmingly positive with lots of smiley faces to round off nicely a great weekend of food, planning, and fun.