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Journal of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
January, 2002 / 158BE

Women's Weekend Retreat

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ANOTHER hugely successful women's residential weekend took place in the heart of the beautiful Carmarthenshire countryside at the Maerdy Cottages near Llandeilo, in October. Thirty-two women (of whom 24 were non-Bahá'ís) attended, with the majority coming from the Llanelli area; others travelled from London, Colchester, Kent and Somerset.



The smiles say it all! A happy group at the women's weekend

The weather was absolutely glorious, a real Indian summer, and this did much to offset the tiredness produced by long, tedious car or rail journeys. Once people's initial uncertainty had been overcome, and fears dispelled as to what to expect in the company of a large group of strangers (and this was achieved very quickly during the course of an excellent evening meal cooked by the owner of the cottages), people relaxed, opened up, and very soon found areas of common interest in that easy way that women seem to possess.

A full programme offered sessions on encouragement, building self-esteem, gaining confidence, taking practical steps for moving forward in order to effect changes in the family, in society and, ultimately, in world affairs; workshops opened up the way for informed discussions and exploration of ideas on various related topics. There were lighter sessions too: "Colour Me Beautiful" (finding out which colour suits you), Tai Chi (outside on the lawn) and how to make Tadik rice, plus all the usual (terrible!) jokes and funny stories. There was a lot of laughter and a lot of fun. To counterbalance all this, a Tranquillity Zone had been prepared; two sessions had originally been planned, but, by popular demand, three were put on and everyone attended at least one and was deeply affected by the experience.

This weekend, however, proved to be unique and very special, more so than any of the six preceding it, and it was for this reason: the weekend was presented, mainly by word of mouth during the course of daily conversation, not, as before, as a "Bahá'í Women's Weekend" but as a "Women's Retreat" sponsored by the Association of Bahá'í Women – and the key words are "sponsored by". So there was no overt teaching of the Faith and, similarly, no hidden agenda of sneaking in the precepts of the Teachings of the Faith by stealth. Great pains were taken by the organisers to gain and retain the trust of the participants. The weekend was for them and not for us – and there is a difference. In fact there was no mention at all of the Bahá'í Faith in two of the three talks and in the third very little, but the standards of behaviour and social interaction, the respect for and love for each other, ran like a thread throughout the weekend, pulling together all the seemingly unconnected strands into one cohesive whole. The non-Bahá'ís were irrevocably drawn to the spirituality underpinning every aspect of the programme – they couldn't help it. Who, after all, can resist the overwhelming, compelling attraction of Bahá'u'lláh?

As usual, when it came to going home time, nobody wanted to leave. Everybody had changed so much in 48 hours: happy, smiling faces replaced tired, stressed-out women.

Lasting friendships had been made, trust had been established and this time there was a tremendous bonus in that a core group of about seven ladies want to start meetings on a regular monthly, or fortnightly basis in their own homes to discuss issues relating to women. A ten-part evening class course put together by Tracey and Jan a year or two ago, and not yet used, owing to numbers enrolling not quite reaching the minimum of ten, will now form the basis of this informal home-to-home discussion group.

Before wending their way home, two ladies gave Tracey a Bahá'í book they'd bought, as a "thank-you" present and it was discovered that before coming, they'd looked up the Bahá'í web site to see what the Faith was all about. Since then there have been various telephone calls and emails saying "thank-you".



And so due to public demand, the next women's weekend will probably take place at the beginning of February. The reserve waiting list of 12 disappointed would-be attendees has already increased to 17 because some of the non-Bahá'í ladies can't wait until next autumn before they come again and have put their names down for the repeat weekend, even if it's the same programme! So, if you're interested in coming, contact either Tracey on 01554 741815 or Jan on 01554 776013 now. Don't leave it until a week beforehand or you'll be disappointed again. Numbers will be strictly limited to 24 next time.

[Practising Tai-Chi – or flying lessons?](#)

And for those who did come, don't forget: you are all princesses!