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Wetlands V

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'Working together to build a better World'

WETLANDS IS A gathering of the Bahá'í youth (and their friends) from the Wetlands countries: England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Belgium and Holland. Such is Wetlands' fame however that it attracts youth from further abroad: at this conference every continent in the world was represented.

The Five Year Plan has heralded new understandings in the Bahá'í community and its youth have a responsibility

"Build it and they will come..." Youth arriving at Wetlands

both to reflect and act upon the new mindsets that are being formed. Wetlands was a conference dedicated to delivering the concepts and actions to the youth, to enthuse and inspire but mainly to focus and deepen the vision of the youth of the wetlands region.

Did it work?

Well there have certainly been positive comments from the attendees (apart from the flu which knocked everyone out afterwards.) The real test of the efficacy of the conference is the actions and attitudes of the youth when they go back to their communities and localities. The conference aimed to arm them with the skills, knowledge and desire to affect real change locally.

The days spent in Carmarthen certainly produced a loving and beautiful spirit which permeated every attendee and the hearts of three youth were moved to join our endeavours by becoming Bahá'ís. There were 366 youth present so the event was very good in its own right! That bit worked!

We are trying to get a picture of the next step, the part where youth go off and do things locally. Certainly in England there has been a new enthusiasm for the study circle process demonstrable by the volunteers that have offered their services since. In Wales a new sense of community has been engendered and development is set in motion. We are eager to find out what is going on as a result of the conference and are compiling a study on its effects.

The Conference is now in its fifth year. Talks were given by many excellent speakers, including Counsellor Shahriar Razavi, on the important role youth have to play in the Five Year Plan, by Knight of Bahá'u'lláh Sean Hinton, who shared the extraordinary story of how he opened the country of Mongolia to the Faith, and by Fidelma Meehan, who

encouraged the youth to be inventive in their efforts to create an environment of growth in their communities. Mr Ali Afnan gave everyone reasons to get into the field of action.

There was also a variety of workshops to choose from, ranging from issues such as Prayer, Why Bother? through Love, Sacrifice, Study Circles, Science and Religion to in-depth study of the messages from the Universal House of Justice.

The arts were not neglected either: the afternoons were dedicated to workshops on Tai Chi, juggling, drumming, meditation, dance, singing... no one could complain that there wasn't something for them!

A one-woman play on life after death experiences performed by Arabella Velasco was a special treat, as was the spectacular audiovisual presentation on the trials the world is going through. And several participants reported confirmed sightings of Michael Jackson putting in an impromptu appearance to demonstrate his dancing ability (although it is possible that in fact it was an extremely talented look-alike).

As conference speakers reminded us every day, the main aim of the Wetlands Conference was not just to allow all the youth to have a good time: it was to equip us all with the tools we needed to return to our communities and "build a better world". The members of the European Bahá'í Youth Council did a fine job in reminding us of the importance of studying the message from the Universal House of Justice dated January 9, 2001 – which was described as the 'charter' for the next twenty years of Bahá'í activity.

The power of these conferences is astounding both in the effect it has on the youth of Europe and in the spiritual forces unleashed by such a mighty band of individuals. We are learning and developing; we are trying to create a healthy and growing community. In my humble opinion I think much positive work was done and that the lessons and questions raised by the dedication and selfless service of the youth means that in the present and the future we can act and make a real difference to our localities.

Tim Melville