

IOFC/MRA NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE ZIMBABWE



1 – 5 February 2017

Moving from a group to a team



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IofC/MRA National Youth Conference Zimbabwe

MOVING FROM A GROUP TO A TEAM

INTRODUCTION

Initiatives of Change

Initiatives of Change is a world-wide movement of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, who are committed to the transformation of society through changes in human motives and behaviour, starting with their own. Our vision is a just, peaceful and sustainable world to which everyone, responding to the call of conscience, makes their unique contribution

Initiatives of Change/ Moral Re-Armament Zimbabwe

Moral Re-Armament (MRA) has been active in Zimbabwe for several decades. Through key members such as Alec Smith, Ian Smith's son who was politically opposed to his father, MRA flourished in Rhodesia. Between 1975-1977 they launched a variety of initiatives aimed at 'building bridges of reconciliation' and finding a solution to the war that was devastating the country. MRA played a pivotal role in the peaceful changeover from Ian Smith to Robert Mugabe in 1980.

Since then, MRA has been through many struggles. Yet the committed team have pulled through and to this day groups meet in Harare and Gweru to bring transformation to individuals and their communities. Their two primary programmes are Creators of Peace and the youth programme which has been running, primarily to deliver leadership trainings in schools, since 1985.

IofC/MRA Youth Programme

The Youth Programme delivers workshops, school leadership trainings and encourages active citizenship through community outreach. It also ensures fellowship, mentoring and friendship for the expanding youth group.

The programme prioritizes the needs of young people with respect to education, well-being, economic participation and social cohesion. It explores individual change and creates safe spaces for young people to have honest and open dialogues about issues and topics that lead to positive changes in one's life, families and communities.

Mission

To empower youth towards individual change, based on moral regeneration, to lead a life of purpose whilst serving society to create a just and peaceful future.

Aims

- Equip young people with practical and inner skills to lead a moral and visionary-based lifestyle.
- Begin a journey of self-discovery, beginning with change within oneself.
- Create a connected community of empowered young people serving themselves and their community.
- Build just, peaceful and inclusive communities for all.

The need

Zimbabwe is a youthful country, with approximately 60% of its 13 million population under the age of 30, and this is estimated to the years. grow over

With Zimbabwe's economy at a worrying level, the youth take the brunt and face several socio-economic challenges. These challenges include: high unemployment (83% of youth are unemployed), poor educational opportunities, limited civic engagement opportunities, low access to skill development, high HIV prevalence rates, teenage pregnancy, and early marriage.

There are scarce opportunities for young people after secondary and even tertiary education. Angry with lack of opportunities at home, 40% of the Zimbabwean diaspora around the world are youth. There is a great need to nurture and help develop the potential that is in these millions of young people.

The youth conference – first of its kind

Initiatives of Change (lofC)/Moral Re-Armament's youth programme is gaining momentum, energy and people in Zimbabwe. There is a large, committed group who meet regularly and have conducted a number of outreach support in their local communities. The young people have encountered lofC/MRA in different ways, from being invited by a friend, to volunteering at a community outreach day, participating in a peace circle or coming to the regular fellowship meetings.

Their first national youth conference, held in Gweru 1 - 5 February, aimed to 'move from a group to a team'. It was the first chance for young people from both Gweru and Harare to come together to learn more deeply about MRA, to build their skills and strengthen friendships to work together for a just, peaceful and sustainable Zimbabwe. The occasion was created and delivered by youth to youth.

The first three days of the conference was held at a hall in an Anglican Church in Gweru. Then the group spent a day conducting community outreach with a partnering NGO putting their teambuilding and service skills to use. The final day was a graduation ceremony held at the home of longtime MRA members Mr and Mrs Katito. This symbolized the end of the conference and the start of a programme relationship for the team.

THE CONFERENCE

Day 1: Basic to basics – lofC principles

The first day focused on the introduction of lofC as some of the young people were still unfamiliar about the core concepts of the movement. Sessions included the history and philosophy of lofC and the programmes that the team are involved in, in Zimbabwe, told by Mr Abel Katito, Chairman of MRA Zimbabwe.

Mrs Angie Katito, [Creators of Peace](#) (CoP) Program Coordinator, told the group about the women's (and now men's) peace-building program and the peace circle activity that participants can get involved in. Many were inspired by what they heard; one outcome of the conference was to run a peace circle for some of the youth.

Youth Program Manager Victor Nyanhete and Coordinator Blessing Shuro introduced the two main activities of the youth programme: leadership training for school prefects and community outreach which many in the room had already been involved in.

"It felt good to do good It is this personal change that is building inside of me" – Youth member

lofC/MRA has been delivering one day workshop trainings to prefects (aged 16/17 years) since 1985. The aim is to equip leaders with lofC's four moral standards—absolute honesty, purity of heart, unselfishness and love—and personal and professional skills. Each lofC youth team member is given a chance to lead a session for the prefects, so that they build their facilitation skills. Blessing commented: 'For two years I have been avoiding joining the prefects' training because I was not confident to facilitate a session but my colleague Victor persisted in inviting me. Finally, last weekend I joined the team and co-facilitated a session and I was so happy! It was a fantastic experience that I definitely grew from.' It is the hope that others in the room will gain this experience of working in schools.

When asked what the group was struck by from the morning sessions, one young man commented: 'I was reminded by the four standards and I keep coming back to unselfishness in my mind. I think I need look closely at my actions and behaviour.'

People shared their lofC journeys; how they met the organization and what impact it has had on them. One youth came from an lofC family but it took him years to be involved. 'Sometimes when it is there you ignore it but my parents said they knew I would get involved when the time was right.' He got involved through joining the community outreach at a special needs school. 'It felt good to do good,' he commented. He explained he had never done a lot for others before and this was the first time. 'It is this personal change that is building inside of me.' The young man encouraged others to persist with it. 'I hope you can all experience this positive feeling as I have.'



YOUTH DISCUSSING IOFC ON THE FIRST DAY

One youth member got involved through being a participant at a school prefect leadership training. He was impacted specifically by the abuse of power session and soon after experienced a personal change in how he used his power as a prefect. He wondered if he would ever see the lofC team again. Two years later he did and then asked to join. 'I have been committed ever since,' he said.

After lunch the youth got into two groups to further explore the four moral standards, explaining what each standard means to them and sharing experiences around it. There was deep sharing. 'I learned above love through nearly losing my sister,' stated one young man. It was agreed that each standard is a journey: we are not born with them, we need to develop them, make mistakes and grow in each one.

It was an intense and powerful first day for the participants. People were beginning to open up and share, which is key in developing a team as it is one thing to join a group but quite another to perform as a team member. Teams don't work without teamwork and these five days were designed to empower such.

"As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others" – Bill Gates

Day 2: Leadership and Forgiveness

The second day started with a group reflection on inner guidance led by Mrs Katito, followed by group sharing. The youth also shared what thoughts had stayed with them overnight 'I was touched by the stories shared during the group reflection on the standards'; 'I was reminded that lofC is a fellowship, not a popular group to join and that we are a family.'

The Art of Leadership was led by Victor and lofC youth team member, Sensewell. It explored what a leader is. 'As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others,' Microsoft leader Bill Gates' quote was given. Sensewell presented on Situational Leadership, a model that can be beneficial as participants look to move from a group to a team. Role model leaders were explored: Zimbabwean ethical entrepreneur Strive Masiwa, the Dalai Lama, someone's mother and Pakistani activist and youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate Malala were some admired leaders.



Talia Smith, from lofC UK, is in Zimbabwe supporting the team. She led the group through a session with lofC's award-winning film '[Beyond Forgiving](#)'. A discussion followed on whether forgiveness is a religious attribute and the sharing of experiences, including one girl who has recently forgiven her brother. 'I have taken the step but I realise forgiveness is a long journey,' she said.

Later, many acknowledged how they were impacted by the film a few days after watching it. 'I still can't believe the story. It made me realise the role forgiveness can play in our lives, something I have never thought of before,' commented one young man.

'Express yourself' entailed a thirty-minute silent reflection in nature, seeking an object that made an impact on oneself and sharing the insight. One young man shared, 'I noticed an ant, it was moving aimlessly but then I realised it was on a mission with the other ants, moving things in unison supporting each other. I wondered why we humans can't do the same with the divisions and conflict in the world. We can learn from these simple animals in their unity.' It was a moving session, giving participants the chance to look at the world differently.

Talia led a session on purpose, speaking of her experience in discovering her purpose and how connecting the dots in life consolidated the discovery. 'For me, purpose is about two things—passion and making a difference,' she stated as she explained her journey.



TALIA SMITH FROM IOFC UK

Day 3: Conflict resolution and skills development

Three youth team members shared their recent experiences of being a [Caux Scholar in Asia Plateau](#), lofC India's conference centre, and a [Caux Intern](#) in the lofC international conference centre in Switzerland. Both were rich experiences. 'I learned things that I can bring back to my country to help Zimbabwe,' commented the young lady that had been a Caux Intern. Since being in Caux, she has started a youth development organization that works on justice and sustainability issues.

Mr Katito led a session on conflict resolution and showed lofC's documentary [The Imam and the Pastor](#). In the discussion that followed a young man commented, 'When we look at our country we see the rising pressures from the economic system. This causes conflict. We must remember the four standards even more in these times, especially unselfishness because it is easy to be led by greed in these difficult years.' The room learned further about Islam as many were not aware of the attributes of the religion due to misrepresentation in the media. Mr Katito urged the group to read other religious scriptures: 'Read the Koran, it does not mean you are less of a Christian.' He explained that Rajmohan Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi's grandson and lofC International's previous president, reads one important book from a different religious leader each year. 'We need to seek to understand each other and this comes from expanding our knowledge of those who are different to us,' he stated.

"We need to seek to understand each other and this comes from expanding our knowledge on those who are different" – Mr Katito

The first three days of the conference aimed to equip participants with skills as they move from a group to a team. After conflict resolution skills, there came a session on marketing: marketing yourself as a leader and tools to market the youth program, led by Talia. Other skill development sessions during the day included communication skills, networking, team-building and social media—all skills needed for the development of the youth team. There were lots of ideas, plans and high energy in the room.

Feedback from the day showed that meeting the goal of the conference was nearing. 'My experience these last few days has allowed me to make new friends and deepen my understanding of old friends. It has been a life changing experience which is ongoing.' Participants shared their wishes for the youth programme; one commented: 'My biggest wish is that we stay together, we grow and do more together. More meetings, more fellowship and more community outreach.'

Day 4: Community Outreach



CHILDREN USING THE TIPPY TAP

The fourth day of the conference focused on community service. The group spent the day at the youth programme's community outreach partner, Jairos Jirir Naran. Jairos Jirir is a school for children with hearing impairments, located in Ascot suburb 5km outside Gweru. The school is one of the biggest of its kind in Zimbabwe with an annual enrolment of 250 children. It operates with scarce resources and has many needs that lofC tries to support.

Guided by lofC/MRA elders, Mr Ncube and Mr Katito, to date the youth have built a [Tippy Tap](#) (an ingenious device that is used around the world to promote hand-washing, good health and hygiene), painted classrooms, helped with gardening and spent a lot of time playing with the children! Since the conference,

they have come up with further ideas to implement over the coming months at the school, such as an expanded water system for the Tippy Tap.

After an introduction to the school and its history by the live-in Boarding master, the group got to work and play! It is not often the children get visitors, especially not a bus full of people to play with them. They were ecstatic. It was not just the children who were smiling, the youth group were enjoying bonding with the children. 'I enjoyed putting a smile on the children's faces. I was also pleased we could help the school,' commented lofC/MRA youth member, Blessing Shuro who had a conviction to develop the partnership with Jarios Jirir.

"Community service brought out the absolute of love into the school and us" – lofC youth member

It is a simple way to make a difference to many lives. 'Community service brought out the absolute of love into the school and us. The outreach brought a huge momentum amongst the youths and a reawakening to how lucky we are,' commented one youth member.



BLESSING SHURO WORKING AT JAIROS JIRI

Day 5: Graduation

The youth and elder lofC members gathered for the final day of the conference. The graduation ceremony symbolized the end of the conference and the beginning of a team and programme relationship. The morning started with a reflection on what has changed in people's lives, minds and hearts over the five days. Many were touched by the outreach with the deaf and special needs children. They spoke of changed perceptions and understandings, and it helped one person find her purpose in life. A young man explained that he was most impacted by the forgiveness session: 'I was encouraged by Beyond Forgiving, as I am still on my journey of forgiveness.' Another young lady commented: 'I have been reflecting on who I am and what I have to offer Zimbabwe. I believe this is love and compassion and I want to share this with by country and team.'



IOFC/MRA ZIMBABWE YOUTH TEAM

Mrs Katito explained to the youth that several unfortunate struggles have happened to MRA Zimbabwe over the years, including losing the organization's farm which they are persisting to get back. She told the story of how, thanks to the MRA team, previous President Ian Smith and Robert Mugabe came together in dialogue the night before Independence. She urged the youth: 'Stay together, work hard and carry on the great things MRA has done for Zimbabwe in the past.' Mrs Katito explained that the youth conference really touched her and gave her hope for the future, something that she had been beginning to lose.

Before certificates were awarded and photos were taken in celebration, the two youth teams from Gweru and Harare each devised an action plan for the future. Activities included planning to meet on the last Sunday of every month, further ideas of support for Jairos Jirir and then to evaluate the work there and look for another local organization to support in community outreach. They started to think about the next national youth conference to be held in December 2017, who and how to implement their marketing ideas, hold a fundraising event, have a tree planting initiative, celebrate the various UN International Days, for example Day of Peace and Water Day, and many more ideas!

"There was certainly high energy and passionate ideas in the room. With friendships built and deepened, it is the beginning of great things for this budding team" – Watch this space!



YOUTH TEAM AT COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Testimonials

'Life changing experience, absolutely enlightening. It covered all the aspects of knowledge—education, spirituality. It really got us to think about the world and our communities.'

'I believe this conference helped us to see that it is possible to work together despite our differences.'

*'I'm really proud of being a member of lofC. It is shaping me into a better person.
We can make it Initiatives of Change youth team and fly high.'*

'Through lofC we can be better people and leaders.'

'I hope to continue in fellowship and increase the fellowship meetings.'

'The conference has been a wonderful experience. Many inspiring issues were shared that I hope will help change us as youths and we can bring it to other people as a whole.'

'The conference helped me to know my purpose and have a forgiving heart.'

'I wish to have a conference again later in the year and hope to have regular communication as a team.'

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Photos by lofC/MRA Youth team members