



Initiatives of Change

Changing youth in South Africa - Change in Progress 2016 youth camp

A group of 17 young people were led on a journey by three mentors (including one from Initiatives of Change, Zimbabwe) and three IofC team members at a campsite in the beautiful Heidelberg, Gauteng Province of South Africa from 5 - 10 December.



This rural spot was the location for the first five days of the intense programme. The following three days were spent with the young participants putting their skills into practice in their communities of Soweto and Noordgesig. The programme ended with an inspiring and joyful graduation on 15 December.

The aims of the fourth annual Change in Progress (CiP) camp were to:

- equip young people with practical and inner skills to lead a moral and visionary-based lifestyle
- to begin a journey of healing and self-discovery, starting with change within oneself and to create a connected group of empowered young people serving their community

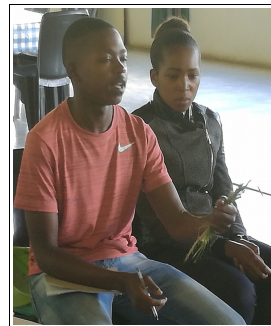
Workshop themes included Family, Heritage and One's Value ('Who am I'). Mentors and guest speakers facilitated sessions on Leadership and Entrepreneurship. There was also story-sharing, a hill walk in nature to deepen relationships, morning reflection sessions, time for recreation

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and creative arts and IofC's award winning film 'Beyond Forgiving'.



The participants told their troubled stories of broken homes, drug and alcohol issues, and worse. There is so much potential among the group, yet their youthful, optimistic spirits were dampened by community and family challenges. The camp was a safe place to be listened to and for their voices to be heard which was a first for many.



Several took their first steps along the journey of healing during an evening on the topic of forgiveness when each wrote a letter forgiving or asking someone for forgiveness. The next evening they painted what was

blocking them in their life. After each person had showed their painting and told the story relating to this obstacle, the group gathered around a fire and threw their pictures into the fire saying what they were throwing away; 'anger', 'hatred' and 'fear'. Dancing and singing followed in celebration of the symbolic and emotional release.

There were many highlights of the experience, including the friendships formed and the individual growth seen in the youth. For example, in the beginning one participant had low self esteem and was not able to speak in

front of the group. Each day the team saw a change as he began to share a little more and on the final day, with self-assurance, he gave a motivating speech to his peers! It was a delightful moment for all.



Participants and mentors

Outreach in the communities was in partnership with two non governmental organisations - 'Adopt a Grandmother', which saw an inter-generational exchange on topics the youth chose between them and the elders, and the 'Tokologo Centre' which supports HIV positive children. On both days, the young people planned, coordinated and facilitated the sessions putting to use the skills and confidence they acquired at the camp.

The intense, deep and powerful 10-day experience ended with a graduation ceremony in Soweto. Proud parents, beaming participants and the team were joined by two distinguished South African elders and changemakers – Dr Lillian Cingo, a South African Icon and founder and retired manager of the *Phelophepa Health Train* and Letlapa Mphahlele, former commander of the Pan Africanist Congress military wing, APLA.

Drawing from her own experiences Dr Lillian spoke of the importance of vision, determination and passion for your future. “I knew God had a plan for me. I went from walking miles to school to years later being awarded by the Queen of England for being a top neurosurgeon! So never give up.”



Letlapa spoke of pain and how many have to contend with pain everyday. Whether it is a good or bad thing, that depends on you, he said.

We learn much more from pain than we learn from pleasure, he continued. He said that 'opportunity nowhere' can be read two ways: 'opportunity no where' or 'opportunity now here'. It is all about attitude. IofC offers a rare platform in the world that gives the opportunity for people to transmit their pain, he said..

Some of the participant's comments at the end of the time were:

- * “I received more than I expected - I have learned to accept my sorrows and forgive, and I discovered much about myself.”
- * “I learned to connect with myself, to be patient and that I am unique and special.”
- * “I am changing the way I have been thinking - I learned to let go of hatred and anger.”
- * “I am going to change my life path to be more serious and not to repeat my mistakes. I want to stay positive and never give up on my dreams.”
- * “I want to help others more now, and have more time talking with family.”

As the youth were awarded their certificates for completing the camp, mothers gave speeches of gratitude whilst explaining the transformation they had seen in their children. One said, “I have seen a big change in my son, from the first day he returned. I hope he can stay with this organisation (IofC) and continue with his changes.”

Many lives were touched by the CiP programme, not just the direct beneficiaries but also their parents, the community and mentors, who gained valuable experience. (A follow-up Creators of Peace circle is being prepared for some of the parents)

On the last day of the camp, the participants put together an action plan which included giving back to the community (collecting clothes for deprived families, visiting elders and fundraising for an orphanage) and promoting CiP to other young people. An inspired and committed network of youth that aspire to make a positive change to their behaviours, relationships and communities now exists.

IofC would like to give thanks to all who were involved in making this camp a success; particularly the Irene Prestwich Trust because without their support the mentors and volunteers would not have been able to join the experience

We would also like to thank Mama Lillian and Letlapa Mphahlele and of course the IofC South Africa team.

Report by Cleo Mohlaodi, Portia Mosia and Talia Smith

Back to my roots!

Talia Smith was born in South Africa. Africa has always been in her heart she says. “Over the past few years I have developed a strong calling to return to my roots and give service to the continent of my birth.”



Talia worked in South East Asia in anti-human trafficking and community development work for four years after completing her Masters degree in International Development. Since then she has been working with IofC in the United Kingdom,

particularly with the Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy (TIGE) programme.

“My expectation and hope for this time in South Africa has been to support my friends and colleagues and to learn about and get connected to South Africa in a deeper way.

Looking back over the past 12 weeks she shared, “I feel more connected to the country of my birth culturally (I have (even) learnt a Sotho song!) I connected and built relationships with groups of South Africans that I have never done before which is hugely meaningful for me. I feel privileged to have been trusted with the stories told. I feel grateful to have been accepted and welcomed so openly by all. I feel I have grown as a person from the experience.

“On what I have learnt (during this time) I would say: I have seen the needs of young people, communities and women in SA - how to create and deliver programmes that address these needs. How to facilitate sessions on sensitive topics and hold safe spaces; how to build relationships with young people (with the balance of respect and fun). The different cultures in SA and probably more learning's that I have not fully recognized yet!”

During her time in South Africa she has done four volunteer training workshops, delivering training on professional skill development; participated in training and preparation for the mentors of the CiP youth camp; submitted grant funding applications for Creators of Peace and CiP to two financial institutions; prepared a volunteer handbook on organisational policy and development, decision-making and authority policy; and assisted with the preparation and running of the 5-day CiP youth camp and outreach, giving input on skills development and personal transformation (self-discovery) workshops; writing reports; helping prepare a template for an organisational database, among other things!

Caux Winter Conference

Most people will agree that the time between Christmas and New Year is



special. Not only because of candles, decorated trees and gifts, but also because it's a time that naturally seems to invite each of us to look back on what has been, to touch base with what is important in our lives and to prepare ourselves for the new year to come.

So what happens when 85 people from 16 different countries, 4 continents, various backgrounds and all age groups come together to take time and reflect on change and its impact on their lives?

This year's Winter Gathering in Caux, Switzerland, offered presentations, discussion groups, daily art projects, music, times of quiet and moments of fun while glorious sunshine provided the perfect setting for breath-taking views on Lake Geneva.

The reflection times and plenary sessions each morning set the tone for the day, giving input and food for thought that was picked up again in the lively community groups which met every afternoon.

These groups were precious moments for all participants – adults, teenagers and children- to get to know each other, work together, share personal stories and exchange ideas.



Photo: Diana Topan

In rapidly changing societies intercultural communication is more important than ever. In her keynote speech on day one, Sylvia Agbih (Germany), PhD candidate in a research project on health care for refugees in Germany, challenged the audience to reflect on the question of personal identity, awareness of others and how we deal with the clash of different concepts of culture in the society we live in. She underlined that even if human nature tends to simplify life in order to digest and interpret an overflow of information, we can learn to step back, reflect and let people tell their story in order to understand them better. Her conclusion was positive: We CAN change!

Her husband **Paul Agbih (Nigeria/Germany)** also gave a valuable lesson in intercultural understanding. He first shared negative experiences of his life as a Nigerian in Germany, only to interrupt himself saying: “But I *do not* believe in one-sided stories. They demonize the other and it limits us. You need the other side of the story to get the full picture of what is going on.” He then went on giving examples of positive encounters, leaving smiles on everybody’s faces.

Marie-Christine Nibagwire (Rwanda/United



Photo: Diana Topan

Kingdom), a Church of England minister and founder of 'Saferefugerwanda', came to Caux as a single mother with her children: “I had to leave Rwanda in 1994 because of the genocide where I lost my home and many family members. I came to Caux because every year my children would say: ‘How come we are on our own on Christmas Day? What was Christmas like when you were a child in

Rwanda?’ In the end they were becoming so frustrated by not having many family members on Christmas that even a Christmas tree did not mean much to them.

“When I heard of Christmas and the Winter Gathering at Caux, I felt it would be an answer to our prayers. We came, hoping to be part of the Caux extended family and our dream came to pass. We were about 60 people from more than 15 nationalities. We did the Christmas tree together, sang carols, played games and exchanged presents.

“My children and I came back home full of joy, thanking everyone who organised the event and all those who embraced us and made us feel like members of their families.”

On 31 December it was time to look back – and also ahead. A slideshow on the main world events of 2016 reminded the audience not only how much and how quickly we actually forget. It also pictured clearly that the world we live in changes all the time.



Photo: Diana Topan

2016 came to an end with every participant handing over a self-made party hat especially made for another participant. 85 different hats for 85 different people – a perfect way to show diversity at its best!

Report: Ulrike Ott Chanu

Wishing all our readers a new year full of hope, promise and peace.

Please note the change of our telephone number. Faxes can be sent to this number too if we are informed ahead.

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