

MRA CONSULTATION ON

PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLE

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA, 19-26 APRIL 1997

Amberley, 26 April 1997

Dear friends,

The 1997 consultation in Australia is drawing to a close and we are becoming increasingly nocturnal - last minute report writing, checking notes, changing drafts, snatching meetings with colleagues we may not see again for a long time, and even beginning to pack for the flights home.

Our neighbours are sometimes nocturnal too, here in the Australian bush. In a local sanctuary we met kangaroos and koalas, emus and wombats, a platypus and a potaroo. Some slightly dopey in the bright light of day with the bell birds ceaselessly chiming in the tops of the tall gum trees.

And perhaps we looked equally diverse to them! 33 of us from 21 countries. And a little dopey too after a week of intense and sometimes confusing discussions over the issues of participation and development of people in MRA. Perhaps kangaroos would make a better job of MRA, but we are people, with all the wonderful range of experience, language and perspective one would expect.

We had specific proposals to work through, gathered over the months prior to the consultation from groups and individuals around the world. As Buddhists, a Jain, Christians and Hindus, we were conscious that our Muslim friends were not represented, being engaged in the simultaneous conference called by the Emir of Kano in Nigeria. We appreciated the thoughts and prayers of these friends for whose conference we prayed too.

We likened ourselves to midwives, attending the birth of recommendations which, when implemented, will widen the embrace and inclusivity of this work which we all love. We spent some time identifying those things in ourselves which might obstruct the birth process, such as shyness in contributing, fear of not achieving anything, unresolved relationships, false pride and language restraints.

Indeed language did prove to be a real stumbling block for many, and those of us whose mother tongue is English (less than half the participants), were deeply grateful for, and humbled by, the charity of those who shared their anguish as the rush of words and complex concepts swept around them. We all needed to be reminded of the priceless contribution each one had to make, and the need for space and grace for that to happen. "Any time I want to speak my heart goes boom, boom, boom, and I wonder how will it come out", shared one Asian participant whose constant humour and honesty helped us keep perspective.

We have been meeting at a retreat centre in Amberley on the outskirts of Melbourne. The facilities have been excellent and the weather too. Through the picture windows of our conference room we gazed out on lovely gardens and trees perched high above the Yarra River, with kookaburras (laughing birds) for company.

We laughed a lot too, and sang and some cried. It was no holiday. Often the agenda seemed overwhelming and there were times of frustration and panic. Every now and again we had to stop and really get to the heart of the matter. Costly honesty created the way for understanding and healing. And our friendships became much deeper as a result.

The 12 participants under 35 were as fully engaged in the planning and chairing of sessions as

anyone else. The generational mix produced a healthy and creative dynamic.

We have spent a good amount of time in shared silence, listening and praying. In the mornings around the theme of 'the Disciplines of the Spiritual Life' such as meditation, confession, submission and celebration. And in the evenings by the light of a candle praying for people and places.

We have spent hours locked in discussion; literally in the case of one small group who had to have a plank removed from the door to let them out!

One night we met in a different way, playing games and learning some Aussie bush dances. Most memorable was 'The Drongo', named after a clumsy Australian racehorse whose legs collapsed underneath him when stressed. We have experienced some stress in these days but legs and nerves have held. And we have felt held also by the prayers of friends around the world.

We have clarified some new formulas to help us in the whole process of enlistment and development of people in MRA work. But it takes and will always take something more than formulas. One of us shared about resolving a difficult relationship. She applied all the right formulas, she said, yet nothing changed. Gradually, however, she became aware that she had been healed. The miracle had happened.

We pray for an enthusiastic application of the recommendations of this report, and then hope - for the miracle.

The consultation participants (see list of signatories at the end)

THE REPORT

Before addressing the extensive agenda of the consultation, we felt the need of focussing on why we were doing it – the purposes for which MRA exists. We re-read the 1993 Cyprus statement as one helpful expression of the world task of MRA. And we shared our experience and understanding of the spiritual heart of MRA.

The main sections of this report correspond to the five major themes communicated in the consultation announcement letters of September and December 1996. We were very grateful for the dozens of submissions we received in advance, all of which were made available to all participants.

A. THE CORE TRUTHS AT THE HEART OF MRA

We spent the greater part of the first two days delving deeply into the meaning of our own experiences of MRA. The following were among the varied expressions as we shared what is most precious to each of us:

“A spiritual platform where people of different faiths work together without compromise.” - “I matter. Things in me can be healed and transformed.” - “The caring and sharing process that leads to the releasing, blossoming and magnetising of ordinary people to do the unexpected.” - “It points me to where true meaning in life can be found.” - “A life-changing experience which is deeply relevant to myself, my community and nation.”

This sharing naturally led to a searching discussion on the core truths of MRA. Seven of us from Malaysia, Laos/Australia, Britain, Canada, Nigeria, Norway and Switzerland, between the ages of 20 and 50, then met to summarise these core truths. As a working group from three different religions and five continents, we were struck by the fact that the consultation arrived at the same truths -

ageless and still fresh and valid for today.

All of us at the consultation wholeheartedly agreed on the following simple expression of the essentials at the heart of MRA:

Every person is important and everyone has a part in renewing the spirit and lives of people around the world. This work of renewal starts with oneself.

It is a process of personal inner transformation based on the disciplines of:

Regular times in silence - practised through opening our hearts to new truths and to profound inner or divine inspiration.

Values of integrity - which can be expressed as absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.

Restoring for the past - where mistakes have been made and wrongs inflicted.

Working with others - in a selfless commitment to personal, social, economic and environmental change in society.

When people work together for change, a fellowship grows and a process of wider transformation develops.

Recognising that each person will express these truths differently in their own surroundings and tradition, we offer the following four contributions from among the many we shared together.

“MRA is an invitation to a life of commitment, a life of social responsibility, spiritual depth and moral integrity. It stems from the conviction that change in people starting with oneself is the logical key to change in the world. This is based on the belief that there is a source of wisdom available to all who will listen for it – to that voice of God that speaks in everyone’s heart.” - *Australian writer*

“MRA helps me a great deal through the secret of ‘deep listening’ to inner inspiration and following the path of: right views, right thought, right speech, right behaviour, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. These will help overcome suffering in one’s life and the world.” - *Lao-Australian businessman*

“MRA is a lifestyle that helps us become ‘whole’. If we can learn to love ourselves, and let go of the bad and painful things inside of us then we will make room for listening to something greater that comes from outside. We must live through absolute honesty, love and unselfishness and in doing this we can approach purity. If we practice these values then others will want what we have.” - *Norwegian student*

“After we distil out culture, language, religion, conditioning, habits and traditions the core truths of MRA are: listening to the inner voice, accepting absolute moral standards and change starting with myself; all aimed at taking responsibility globally.” - *Malaysian manager*

B. TRAINING COURSES

Those meeting were inspired to hear about the outreach of MRA-initiated training programmes for secondary students offered in Malaysia, Fiji and the UK and about courses offered for post secondary students in Australia, India, Taiwan, UK, Eastern Europe and at Caux. Additionally, we recognised that there have been regular youth conferences in different venues in Asia and the Pacific, as well as informal youth camps in Australia and Norway on a regular basis. A new course, modelled on the Caux Scholars Program is in the final stages of preparation in South Africa and a course for people from Eastern Europe concerned with business ethics is being developed under the auspices of the Foundations For Freedom programme. The annual Effective Living Course, offered initially only in Australia and more recently alternately in Australia and India, has been in existence for 20 years, largely due to the support and involvement of the whole MRA team in Australia.

Indicative of the inadequate communication and coordination which has existed amongst us up to now, many present were not aware of all these courses, nor of the content of those which they knew

about. A decision was taken to **circulate brochures, course outlines and/or curriculum materials, evaluations and lists of faculty, with area of expertise.** [B.1]* We also decided to complete a **compilation of training opportunities and other MRA youth initiatives**, as started by a German co-worker. It will be produced in a form which can be made available in Caux this year and circulated to our world centres. Rob Wood, with a team to be identified, has undertaken to see that this is done. [B.2]

The courses and training opportunities have often been quite successful in their aim of enabling people to find a selfless commitment and a new sense of purpose for their lives and jobs. The annual Asia-Pacific Youth Conferences and the youth magazine *Global Express* are among other outcomes of MRA training programmes. Commenting on the New Year camps in Norway, which have been taking place since the 1970s, Anja Snellman Orphelin noted that after any camp or training course the challenge remains of “how to create a living, inclusive fellowship throughout the year, which encourages putting into practice what you have discovered together”. In response, three British expressed their conviction to launch a *Global Club* in the United Kingdom, based on the model in Melbourne, Australia. *Global Club* is a monthly event which brings together young people from different communities to build friendships based on trust. It is a simple concept which can be implemented anywhere.

Individuals have at times gone from Australia to support courses in Taiwan; from Europe, Asia and the Pacific to support the Effective Living Course in India and Australia; and from the Caux Scholars Program to give training in Malaysia. The Foundations For Freedom Visiting Course takes a faculty team to an Eastern European country in response to an invitation. The possibility of using such visiting faculty in areas which lack the personnel or resources on the ground to offer courses could be more widely explored. [B.3]

Providing an adequate field experience for individuals wanting training with MRA, whether as part of a course, or as a follow on or alternative to a course, is something that needs more thought. [B.4]

Two present at the consultation, Rajendra Gandhi and Chanthanith Chittasy, plan to initiate leadership training for young people in India and young Laotians in Australia. [B.5]

C. FRAMEWORKS FOR PARTICIPATION

The consultation discussed the need and value of creating frameworks to enable those who would like to take part in MRA to see their role clearly. The Co-workers programme was presented as an example of a framework for training young people for a year, through full-time work with MRA. It seeks to address practical questions which were sometimes left vague, such as job description, financial arrangements and mutual expectations. In addition to the moral and spiritual training in this programme, the participants learn skills such as “running conference centres, organising conferences, public speaking, money management and mediation”, to quote Tomislav Majeric who served as a co-worker last year. Attached to this report as an appendix is a summary of the issues, in the form of a case study, which we felt focussed helpfully the areas that needed consideration in all our efforts to develop people. The need was highlighted for considerable human resources if Co-workers programmes were to be developed effectively.

We recommend that:

- 1) **Co-workers programmes, or the equivalent, be established in different parts of the world** (Australian friends reported that they are considering establishing one). [C.1]
- 2) **The programme and its accompanying ‘Charter of Expectations’ (see appendix for an example) be adapted according to each country and culture.** [C.2]

In addition, Duc Tran and others identified a need to work out how individuals who are committed to the ideas of MRA, but not called to full-time MRA work, can take responsibility and make their distinctive

* Recommendation reference numbers are for ease of identification.

contribution. Several expressed their appreciation of the opportunities they receive for fellowship and a deepening of their spiritual lives. But they sometimes felt frustrated at not being included fully. A greater sensitivity would make a difference. However, it is not only a matter of attitudes; it also involves our structures which are not always as accessible or welcoming as they could be. We realised that we need to find descriptions which can help bridge the gap between full-time MRA workers and others by describing them in terms of their commitment rather than their time availability. But, because of time constraints, we were not able to address the subject more fully. It is vital to improve this relationship, and it needs to be the subject of continuing dialogue and perhaps a future consultation. [C.3]

D. DEVELOPING PEOPLE

Many written submissions for this theme were gratefully received before the consultation, including responses of working groups and replies to advance papers. Out of these, and our own discussions, we reached the following conclusions:

D) Clarifying the roles, responsibilities and accountability of all involved in MRA

Section C of this report has already partly addressed the need for clarification of roles and responsibilities. In addition to its use in Co-workers programmes, **we recommend that Charters of Expectations can be developed for many in various phases of transition in their MRA involvement (particularly phases 1, 2 and 3 – see below).** This Charter would list points for mutual agreement between the individual and their support team.

We moved on to discuss how better personal support might be offered to all in MRA. Structures are no substitute for genuine relationships, but they are often a necessary support for those relationships and for each individual to feel rightly valued. In this section of the report, 'MRA' usually refers to the organised network and its activities.

Transition periods

There are different stages of involvement with MRA. We identified six possible transition periods:

- 1) From an introduction to MRA (eg. conference or course), to a greater involvement.
- 2) From an informal relationship to a period of full-time involvement for a specific period and/or project.
- 3) From a limited period of full-time MRA work to an open-ended, full-time engagement.
- 4) From a period of full-time MRA work to regular employment or studies.
- 5) From any of these into a combination of part-time MRA work and part-time employment, or vice versa.
- 6) From full-time work into a different phase of life such as marriage, parenthood, retirement, ill-health or caring for elderly parents.

There has often been little recognition of the challenges we face in moving through these transitions. There have sometimes been 'fuzzy transitions', with feelings of guilt, low self-esteem and abandonment. It is primarily the responsibility of the individual to find the support he or she needs; but as a world fellowship we are equally responsible, and we can all do better. While there are informal support teams among MRA workers, and levels of friendship within MRA are often exceptionally high, there is often a need for a more clearly-defined support team.

In the initial stages of a person's full-time experience with MRA, we suggest that a formal Support/Care Team be established [D.1], comprising:

- 1) An individual or small group of colleagues to whom they will be fully accountable; and
- 2) A person outside their regular work scene who can serve as their mentor (see below).

Mentoring

One way of people having more personal support is through the idea of 'mentoring'. The dictionary defines a mentor as a wise and trusted adviser. The mentor is chosen by the individual,

as a listening ear. He or she is a person of spiritual discernment, with compassion, understanding and a non-judgmental attitude, whose role is one of service and support. The relationship is confidential. A mentor can help in finding a vision and a development plan for the individual's life journey.

As we talked, we discovered that many of us already have a mentor. For some it is a person not involved in the work of MRA; for others it is a trusted friend within MRA. Some meet regularly with their mentors while some communicate largely by phone, letter and email.

We explored the concept of a mentor particularly in relationship to the development of full-time MRA workers. But others in the consultation who were not full-time workers expressed a similar need.

We would like to **encourage all full-time workers to seek such a support person or persons to assist them in their personal and spiritual development where possible.** [D.2] It is advisable for a mentor to have experienced a mentor first, and some training is useful in order to focus their communication and counselling skills.

Models of accountability

If we work together, we are accountable to each other. But our structures of accountability are often far from clear, as has been demonstrated when people have fallen into the gaps – particularly new people. We hope we can overcome vagueness, in order to be more welcoming and inclusive.

As one means of defining roles and responsibilities, we looked at various common situations, and tried to clarify lines of accountability in these situations. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate our conclusions in simple form. They represent flat structures best viewed from above! Please note that each person in these models would ideally have a mentor.

Figure 1: 'Cell Group'

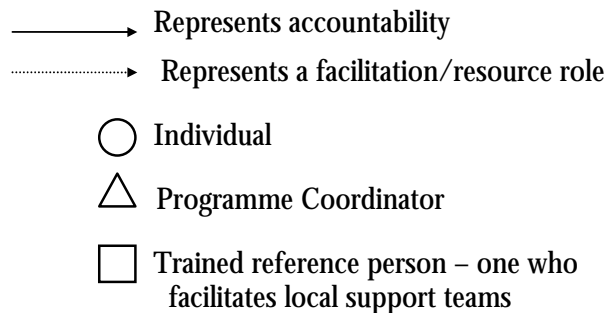
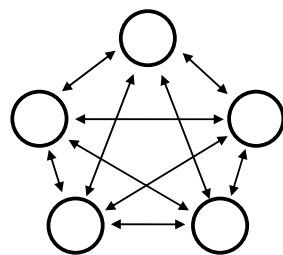
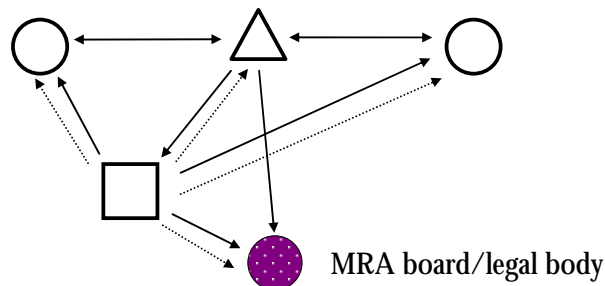


Figure 2: 'Programme Related'
 (eg. Co-workers Programme)



II) Creating a 'core curriculum' focussing both on spiritual and practical skills for all

A Guide to Exploring MRA

We discussed the proposal that, in this age of rapid change and greater diversity, the cohesion of

MRA would be helped by having available a simple guide for those who want to develop their understanding of the essentials of MRA. We decided **to produce this guide, initially in trial form.** [D.3] It would be especially useful to those designing courses.

Components of this *Guide to Exploring MRA* could include:

- 1) A basic understanding of different faith traditions
- 2) An understanding of the historical background and philosophy of MRA
- 3) The 'what', 'why' and 'how' of the basic elements of MRA
- 4) Understanding of current affairs - world and local
- 5) Development of teamwork, leadership and conflict resolution skills
- 6) Development of communication skills
- 7) Field experience in the practical application of MRA
- 8) Involvement in community initiatives

A reading list and other resources will accompany each component of this guide.

We hope that a trial draft of this guide will be available by mid 1998.

III) The ongoing and rounded development of full-time workers

Assessment and evaluation

One participant noted that "the most common source of bitterness is often disappointment because of unexpressed expectations". We believe that this situation could be helped if MRA workers were encouraged to assess and evaluate their work more systematically.

We acknowledged the difficulty of expressing spiritual aims in terms of definite goals. At the same time we believe that, as is already practised by many other spiritual fellowships, it can help greatly to focus on how people can achieve their objectives and fulfil their sense of vocation. One possible procedure for full-time MRA workers would be: once a year, with those to whom we are accountable including our mentor, to write a statement of what we are meant to be, what we want to do, and the outcomes we wish to achieve, in relation to our calling. This is our personal 'mission statement', expressed in terms of activities, goals and objectives. We can then see whether we have achieved these objectives. If we have not, we can ask ourselves why not. What is needed to accomplish this? Is my development plan relevant for the next twelve months? If not, what adjustments do I make? As we discovered by practical experience at Amberley, such an exercise can bring new and profound insights that may contribute to our personal growth, especially when done in an interactive form. Haridas Nair appropriately reminded us of the old ancient truth, "I tell you, you forget. I show you, you may remember. I involve you, and you understand."

Based on our discussion, we recommend that:

- 1) **Skilled personnel be invited to take us through different processes of evaluation as a workshop experience** so that we learn to measure outcomes in a way appropriate for our work in MRA. [D.4]
- 2) **A resource base be developed and made available where requested, describing methods and exercises** for goal setting, time management, visioning and writing a growth and development plan. [D.5]
- 3) **Everyone working with MRA be encouraged to develop a personal mission statement**, and seek ways of reviewing it annually to identify and meet their ongoing needs. This, we believe, will increase their effectiveness and sense of personal fulfilment. [D.6]

In-Service Training for full-time workers

Joan Holland recently sent out a questionnaire asking MRA workers for their views on a balanced program for the development of full-time workers. She received 76 responses from 25 countries.

Almost all said that they would value more opportunities to increase their skills and knowledge, and to go deeper in their spirituality. There was a high level of support for the concept of mentorship,

and many acknowledged the value of assessment. It was recognised that any framework for development would need flexibility if it were to be applied successfully in different environments and cultures.

We recommend that **national MRA bodies give priority and, where possible, financial support to the ongoing development of full-time workers.** [D.7]

E. THE FINANCING OF MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

MRA is largely financed through faith and prayer and, we hope, always will be. Many of us treasure experiences of unexpected provision when we needed it - experiences which have strengthened our faith, and encouraged us to choose careers on the basis of what the world needs, regardless of financial reward.

'Faith and prayer' applies equally to those in paid and in unpaid work, as it calls on us to look at the use of all our resources, and employ them as our commitment leads. Thus it addresses many motives such as fear and insecurity.

There are many aspects to the financing of MRA, and we go wrong when we take too narrow a view. Some MRA workers have suffered from a lack of money; and this has often happened because we assumed that what worked in one culture or situation would automatically work in another. We have had to develop ways appropriate to our differing situations. The consultation gave a chance to share some lessons we have learnt.

Faith and prayer is an active and expectant approach to finance. It challenges each of us to take mature responsibility for our financing. Many of us who receive little or no income have learnt to trust that our needs will be met. That does not mean simply waiting for money to come. We can all help build the spirit and friendships which undergird MRA's work, including its financing.

Several countries have established trusts as a simple means through which people can contribute to the needs of MRA workers. Some countries pay a small stipend to full-time MRA workers. These, we believe, are in accord with our principles, as long as we ensure that MRA work is clearly a calling and a privilege, for which we expect to sacrifice. Many MRA workers use their skills to supplement their income. In Malaysia, for instance, the team raised the money to send their MRA worker to Sweden for voice training. Not only has this enhanced his MRA work; he also earns extra income by teaching singing a few days a month.

In many countries, MRA is taking initiatives alongside other groups. They are introducing us to new methods of raising funds. Many of our projects - particularly those in education - are increasingly attracting funds from foundations and government agencies. The need to articulate these projects in terms intelligible to these funding bodies can help us express our message in fresh ways.

Money has the potential to be very divisive in the life of a team, and certain disciplines are needed to guard against this. Accounting must be thorough, and audited independently. Financial statements must be available to those who want to see them. [E.1]

Our care for each other is a crucial safety net when people confront a financial crisis. We also need to give enough forethought to the situation of older people in our work. One submission proposed that a small international pension fund be established, to help individuals in need in countries with slender resources. We urge the International Coordination Group to consider this. We must also look at the needs of the regions into which our work is expanding but where resources are limited. If people from such regions are to have access to MRA's training and development programmes, we may be called on to create international structures for financial support. [E.2]

F. FOLLOW UP

Following up the recommendations and decisions of this consultation is a process which needs the participation of all in MRA who would like to be involved. It cannot be left to a small group. Nonetheless, we felt a defined group was also needed to circulate information about the follow-up process, and act as a resource to individuals or groups wanting suggestions on how to implement the ideas in this report. This *Melbourne Consultation Follow-Up Group* (MCFUG) is charged with:

- 1) Circulating regularly to world centres information about (a) opportunities for participation and training, and (b) people wishing to participate in and assist with MRA programmes.
- 2) Facilitating an exchange of information about content, methodology and experience in the field of training courses and programmes.
- 3) Coordinating and publicising information about youth initiatives, and encouraging the development of written material specifically designed to reach young people.
- 4) Developing the *Guide to Exploring MRA* and encouraging the implementation of this and other recommendations for the development of people who work with MRA.
- 5) Encouraging and supporting the establishment of co-workers programmes (and other frameworks for people to work with MRA) in different parts of the world.
- 6) Seeking out 'best practices' (techniques and methodology) from outside MRA, and encouraging their application within MRA wherever appropriate.
- 7) Developing the dialogue on the relationship between full-time MRA workers and others who wish to take responsibility with them.

The group consists of Jean Brown, Joan Holland, Christine Karrer, John Mills, Haridas Nair, Duc Tran, Laura Trevelyan, Rob Wood and Edward Peters who will act as secretary (correspondence to: 73 Victoria Road, Oxford OX2 7QG, England; fax: +44-1865-311950; email: fff@mra.org.uk). It will report regularly through the World Bulletin, email conversations and other means. [F.1] It eagerly welcomes all ideas, and any offers of participation in the process of carrying forward the consultation's conclusions.

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If you have reached the end of this report we hope you feel, as we do, the potential of the challenges and suggestions that we have outlined. And we hope you feel as encouraged as we do.

As people of different faith traditions, and with language, racial and cultural backgrounds equally diverse, our words and expressions have been carefully chosen and rechosen. We wholeheartedly give our names and our ongoing commitment to this process. For it is a voluntary process that cannot be organised by any of us, but which will bear fruit as we remain faithful to it.

John Bond, Jean Brown, John Mills, Erik Parsons and Rob Wood (Australia), Ernesto Veras (Brazil), Anne Hartnell (Canada), Tomislav Majeric (Croatia), Suresh Khatri (Fiji), Anja Snellman Orphelin (Finland/France), Sushobha Barve and Rajendra Gandhi (India), Kiyoshi Nagano (Japan), Jeong Yeon-Yuk (Korea), Chanthaniith Chittasy (Laos/Australia), Haridas Nair (Malaysia), Joan Holland (New Zealand), Robo Ukoko-Orogun (Nigeria), Astrid Eskeland (Norway), Fetu Paulo (Samoa), Pieter Horn (South Africa), Christine Karrer and Marianne Spreng (Switzerland), Jean-Marc Duckert (Switzerland/France), Liu Ren-Jou (Taiwan), Jacqui Daukes, Howard Grace, Edward Peters, Kumar Raval, Laura Trevelyan (United Kingdom), Catherine Ruffin and Randy Ruffin (United States), Duc Tran (Vietnam/Australia)