

Dear friends,
Peace and light to you. In this issue of FFF Newsletter we would like to tell you about a Visiting Course in Moldova and the sixth International Course in England. Mike Lowe reports about a trip to Moldova and two participants of the International Course share their impressions and experiences of this event, about how it affected their lives. You will find here about the Polish-Ukrainian seminar, the Year of Exploration and finance. Hope the FFF spirit comes through this letter.

Sincerely yours,
Lena Stepanova.

Fresh springs in Moldova



In 1994 Mircea Eladi and his wife Rodica, took part in the FFF International Course. Three years later, having returned to Moldova and started his own business, Mircea and Rodica organised an FFF weekend seminar in the Writers House near the capital, Chisinau, for 12 students who they had selected after advertising in all the main universities. Two of those students came to Britain for the FFF International Course in 1997, and I saw them again with another four of that group at the 3rd Regional Meeting in Birstonas, Lithuania. There we discussed the possibility of organising a Visiting Course, and finally in June/July this year it happened, with sponsorship from the Soros Foundation and the Chisinau City Administration. Howard Grace and Douglas Paine and I, Mike Lowe, went as faculty.

Again, a selection of students had been made. The six organisers had spent a whole day interviewing 40 applicants, finally selecting 24 very bright students with, on the whole, excellent English.

The VC took place at a sanatorium in a village some distance from the capital, set in beautiful countryside near a lake and a forrest in which were health-giving fresh-water springs and an Orthodox monastery. At 33 participants (including faculty) this was the largest VC so far. We managed it by dividing into four discussion groups for several activities and for quiet times so that everybody got a chance to express themselves. We soon got to know each other through Scottish Dancing, silly games and sitting round a camp-fire in the forrest. Halfway into the course we had an excursion to Orheiul Vechi where we saw an ancient monastery cut into the rocks. Meanwhile each day we were discussing serious topics: human

nature, how things change, the search for values and how to find your calling. We tried to relate some of the ideas to practice. So, for example, instead of a theoretical discussion on relationships, Howard deliberately treated someone badly (with their permission first!) to see how the rest of the group reacted. We invited some of the participants to lead one of the sessions, which they did well. Mid-way through the course we played the "Red/Blue game" which is all about cooperation and the processes of building trust. It led to a huge argument and many felt bruised. But as in the rest of life, it was the painful moments which led to the greatest learning. A time of evaluation at the end of the course confirmed what we had already felt: that for all the participants it had been a time of growth, and for some it was a transforming experience.

Quotes from participants

"I couldn't imagine that it could be a revolution for me. Now I realise how lucky I was to have participated in the seminar."

"The course made me review my life."

"My actions used to be motivated by "why not?" Now I'm thinking if it is right or wrong."

"I made a decision. I'm not a new person. Just me again with a new perspective."

"Before, music stimulated me. Now silence does too."

"I've been avoiding problems at home. Now I want to face them."

"There is lots of cynicism and confusion in the world."

From now on I have a starting point and a definite direction in life."



The Sixth International Course

Belgian chocolates, Moldovan dancing, Latvian Hymns, Welsh mountains, and lasting friendships with people from all over the world. These are only some of what I experienced during the 1998 Foundations For Freedom course at Tirley Garth. When a group of young people come together to learn about freedom, others, and themselves, lasting memories are created.

More than just memories, however, are gained at the FFF course. Part of what I took from the course was a deeper understanding of the lives of people from other cultures in comparison with my own life. As an American, I realised that I knew very little about Russia and Eastern Europe and the economic and social situations there. Since I now have friends from these areas, their situations have become real and important to me. In addition to this new awareness, I, along with other course participants, was able to learn about and explore questions surrounding inner freedom, democratic societies, business ethics, and how to be an effective person.

The FFF course encouraged personal growth by providing time to think, the peaceful surroundings of English countryside, and close-knit discussion groups which met twice daily. This made it possible for me to consider important questions about personal situations and God's will for my life. At the same time, the course offered a wide range of guest speakers and the chance for participants to learn from, and to teach each other during presentations about our countries.

During the "How Cities Work" section of the course, I



was able to travel to Oxford, and I can honestly say that I now know more about how Oxford operates than I do about my own hometown in America! This section of the course introduced me to people from all walks of life ranging from government officials to homeless youths.

The International Foundations For Freedom course, for me, did exactly what its title promises. It laid a foundation from which I could begin to understand my own inner freedom and what inner freedom means to others. It taught how I could play a part in laying the foundations for a positive and effective free society, and it achieved these aims within an international group. I now have a richer appreciation of the world around me, and many new friends who share that with me.

By Christine Kenny, USA

Quotes from the participants in the International Course 1998



"I understood that my abstract knowledge, my teaching experience have lost meaning for me. I have to start my life from the beginning, I have to get some practical profession, because abstract philosophy lost its attractiveness for young people. I am obsolete a little, I realised it here."

*"I got a strong impulse for self-development, that would help me in finding the practical methods of implementing MRA ideas in life. I will be strong in my faith, in my desire to follow the right way. Before coming here I found the door I was looking for and I was just staying in front of it and knocking. Now **I have the key** and it would be really silly not to open it by myself."*

"I feel the information which I got in the Course is just what a doctor prescribed for all the projects which I have been postponing due to the lack of information and enthusiasm."

"I feel a deeper conviction that the four moral standards are the right way of life."

"I was never tolerant of silence before. Now I value it. It has changed some of my ideas and thoughts about my place in the world. It has opened my eyes to how lucky and blessed I have been in my life."

New experience in Tirley Garth

Three weeks in a large country house in the North of England, sharing experience in freedom with twenty five young people from different countries, sounded exciting. Not for me. I did the international course last year and did not expect much from listening to the same lectures and discussing the same topics for the second time. But it was an absolutely different and exciting experience.

For the first time in my life I met people from South Africa and Belgium, these countries seemed so far away from Siberia. I was surprised how tolerant people from Latvia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine were to our common past. I dispelled my stereotype about the USA as being a “No problem” country and understood how diverse each country was. We learnt a lot from each other and the most stirring moments were to see great concern about me and my country in the eyes of another person as a reaction to my openness.

In the mornings we interacted with the speakers in the discussions about internal and external freedom, the importance of trust in society, relationships and how to build bridges between different communities. We discussed these questions in smaller groups and this was the most important time when you could see how the trust was being built and grown. Sharing thoughts and feelings with others was never an easy thing for me, but when I started seeing in a person not a representative of a country, but a real person that helped me a lot in my relationships with people.

Every evening was the time of country presentations. The participants chose sometimes to be serious and

sometimes not about their countries. They sang songs, showed folk dances, cooked national dishes and treated everybody with chocolates. I saw differences in cultures and traditions but not in people, and it was so strange that we have to be called Americans, Indians, Russians, but do not have a universal name. An exciting trip to the Welsh mountains where we climbed 500 meters to a mountain peak under heavy rain and very energetic Scottish dances on the next day was a good relaxation for our constantly working minds.

In the middle of the course we split into two groups and went to different cities to explore how our theories of freedom matched the ordinary life in Oxford and Manchester. The Manchester group were surprised by a combination of old and new, the absence of guns with the policemen, the concern of the local government about youth problems and the social environment in the city. The highlight of our visit to Oxford was a meeting with homeless people. Everybody was impressed by the net of social work that has been done in this sphere and the attitude in society to this problem. We also went to the Town Hall and got acquainted with the structure of local government and judicial system.

During the course a warm atmosphere was created by the people who hosted us and we always felt their care. It was a very special time for me, because one of the participant was my closest friend. I have known her for 8 years, but it was so much to discover about our friendship and myself in these three weeks.

by Lena Stepanova, Russia



“I have changed my concept of Latvian people and their attitude to Russians. I was surprised to see a Latvian girl who is fond of Russian culture and not defensive. The course gave me more confidence in my moral convictions.”

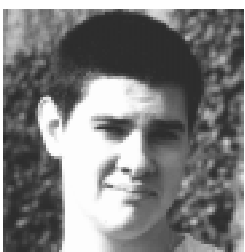


“I realised that it is not enough just to be a good person and lead your own life. Now I have more self-confidence and I know that being an effective person implies responsibilities. I have to overcome my fear of being a leader and I think this course helped me to do the first step towards it.”

“I understood that nothing is better than my own example.”

“I have to love myself more. I have to think not only about others, but my life and calling, otherwise I will not be able to create peace, confidence and love in the world around me.”

“The most important value of honesty, where I was compromising sometimes would not be done anymore. I have reinforced my faith and have prepared myself to face oddities in life, but keep honesty alive.”



“After a Visiting Course I decided to stop hurting others and myself. This course made this sense greater. I have globally changed myself but there are bad memories that are left. I am sure I have done a huge work inside me, I will never follow the way I used to live. My ambition now is to become an effective person and to work for people.”

Polish-Ukrainian Seminar

A small group of three Poles and five Ukrainians met with Mike Lowe in Caux, Switzerland, during the Agenda for Reconciliation session to plan for a FFF sponsored workshop on Polish-Ukrainian relations next year. They agreed to work on various projects during the coming year in connection with this: They will contact other non-government organisations which are involved in Polish-Ukrainian issues and publish a directory of these NGOs. They will also try to find ways to take care of Polish cemeteries in Ukraine and Ukrainian cemeteries in Poland as a sign of respect. We already have some funds raised for the seminar next year, and hope to find additional adequate sponsorship for it.

Year of exploration

FFF is five years old, and these have been exciting years. Over thirty courses and seminars have taken place, in nine countries, and the number of people who have taken part in our programmes has grown larger and larger. We could just carry on reaching more and more people but with so few of us running FFF it becomes more difficult to offer adequate follow-up support to those who have done courses. We think that we may need to enter a new phase when our main aim is to improve our co-operation with you and others who are in touch.

At present the core of the FFF Programme is as follows:-

a) Visiting Courses (b) the International Course in Britain each year (c) Regional Meetings (d) various "made to measure" seminars and courses in Britain or elsewhere. We have had such events for young politicians from Eastern Europe, for seminarians training for the priesthood, for young businessmen and students in various places.

The year starting September 1999 will be FFF's seventh year, and we would like to suggest that it should be a year with a difference. During this 'Year of Exploration', FFF would not offer any events to reach new people. Instead we want to build better teamwork with those who have already been in touch and search with friends from Central and Eastern Europe how the development of FFF/MRA programmes in that region can be more and more in the hands of local people.

We shall be discussing ideas for this year at our next committee meeting on the 29th of October, so any thoughts you would like

Introducing Lena



Hello, I am Lena Stepanova from Russia, Novosibirsk. I am 23 and will be working with FFF this year. I hope this year will help me to understand my inner world better and to discover the outside world as well. I graduated from the Academy of Public Administration in 1997 and have a degree in Management and Law. I met MRA in 1996 on Visiting Course and felt that those ideas touched my life. I had got many questions and now trying to find answers. I took part in the Regional Meetings in Prague and Lithuania, and I was inspired by people's openness and amiability. The International Course in England in 1997 showed me new perspectives what impact I can make in the lives of others. I want to learn with MRA and make my life useful for others.

to share with us by fax or Email would be very much appreciated by then. Particularly we would like to know your answers to the following:

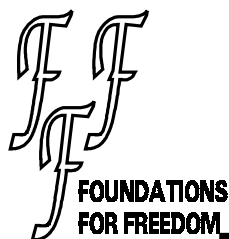
- 1) Are we right to include A, B, C & D above, or should we concentrate our effort and resources on one or two of them?
Please explain why.
- 2) Is the programme relevant for the needs of your society?
Please explain your answer.
- 3) Is the programme of real value to participants, or just of interest? Please explain your answer.
- 4) What do people most value about the programme?
- 5) What are the inadequacies of the programme?
- 6) Do you feel a lack of follow up and if so what would be ideal for you?
- 7) Our small team can only touch a few people. If nothing changes the total effect on the needs of the regions will be tiny. We would like to see responsibility for FFF being taken up locally, so that ideas spread in your own languages:-
 - a) Is it too soon for this to begin? If so, could you explain why.
 - b) What would be needed to encourage the localisation of the FFF programme?
 - c) How long do you think such a process might take?
- 8) Do you have any other thoughts or suggestions that would help develop the programme?

From the treasurer

Some generous grants have helped greatly with FFF finances over the summer. The Soros Foundation funded the internal costs of the visiting course in Moldova in early July, and a wonderful gift from the Hahnloser Foundation enabled us to sponsor a number of young people to visit Caux during the MRA conferences there - including the costs of a young Pole who took part in the Caux Scholars Program.

The total costs of the International Course - nearly £10,000 - have been met. We were particularly grateful for a grant of £1,500 from the Friends of Tirley Garth, and £400 raised by ladies in Wrexham to pay the costs of one participant. About £2,500 was raised from friends of the late Rex Dilly in Scotland, towards

the expected workshop in Caux on Ukraine/Polish relations. Due to the postponement of this workshop until next year, this sum is being held over for that purpose. We have a further £3,000 in hand, which will cover our known outgoings up to the end of 1998. However, we estimate that up to a further £5,000 will be needed to meet our commitments to the Regional Meeting in Moldova over new year (for which we will need to sponsor quite a number of people, due to the financial difficulties in Russia) and large printing bills around the turn of the year.



Diary



28 December - 3 January 1999 -
Regional Meeting in Chisinau,
Moldova.

10 - 21 April 1999 - Visiting Course
in Crimea.

May 1999 - possible Visiting Course
in Novosibirsk, Russia.

June 1999 - possible Visiting Course
in Krakow, Poland.