



International Secretariat Newsletter

June 2007

The SCI – IS Newsletter is prepared as an insight into both the work and personal experiences of the people working in the International Secretariat. Nearly every activist within SCI will come into contact with the IS workers in some form or another, though rarely face to face. This newsletter tells you a bit about the real lives of the real people behind all those emails.

Enjoy the Reading!

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Idealism all the way (?)....

by Johan Westra



I do not know many people in SCI who do not have a spare mattress for anybody passing by, or at least for anybody having done a work camp...

What makes SCI different from many other peace organisations? Certainly it has a lot to do with the quite unique mix of doing work for the benefit of others and for our personal interest. Connecting local experiences with global topics. Having an eye on what needs to be achieved and also on how everybody is doing personally.

At the moment I am reading “The Peaceable Kingdom (1978)”, written by Jan de Hartog. As roman it tells the breathtaking story of the early Quakers in Lancashire (UK) and Pennsylvania (now USA). Like many religious groups in the 17th century, they were looking beyond the practices of Catholicism – for the Quakers is was especially about respecting “that of god in everyone” and “looking for the inner light”.

As they felt that everybody could find a piece of the truth themselves, which could benefit to the well being of the community, they felt a lot of respect for every single person. Therefore, in that century, they were not willing to put their hat of for anybody of the nobility, or for judges or whosoever. This was one of the reasons why many Quakers were put in prison, during that time.

A general characteristic of SCI has also always been the idea that everybody can contribute to the benefit of all, and not to leave important decisions just to politicians or highly educated people. SCI is also a lot about group processes: I will learn better cooking while preparing with you some food, and you will learn more from my skills that I have put into practice. At least it will give more fun...

No use to be very formal to each other, as it is mainly creating distance, not understanding. (Quakers address each other as “Friends” and SCI people start to work and live together from the first moment they see each other.) That is why creating and maintaining friendships is a corner stone to get further, both for SCI and Quakers.

From the celebration of “70 Years of SCI”, in 1990, in Verdun, I remember very well Ralph Hegnauer explaining with enthusiasm how SCI “had ruined” his live (or at least his career) and that of many others in SCI. Not so easy after years of doing voluntary work to do a job again in the formal sector where mainly the “results” are counting, but not you or me...

Johan, Adina and Pedro during the

Weekend work camp at the IS...

It would be great to see prime ministers coming from different continents doing some gardening work together, somewhere, or cooking together a meal. It could help them to forget to think about how their countries can compete best to the other countries, be it economically, military or otherwise.

I do not know many people who would not appreciate friendship, or who would not be positively changed by it...

*... Kind Greetings,
Johan Westra*

Space for Peace?

by Morgana Jolin - Thomas

Johan, Boriana, Reeta and Nico were talking about painting the office at my first staff meeting, in June last year. At that time it felt like more hassle than it could be worth, as I was already overwhelmed dealing with so many new things. But now, after one year, we finally found the time to renovate both rooms of our attic office, and it feels great. Some people have said to me that it is sad to make everything new, just as I am about to leave. However, for me it is very apt, reminding me that all endings are actually new beginnings.

As I sit here looking at our new Kazakhstan / Tuscan / Terracotta / Salmon (in other words, pink) walls, I feel very happy and lucky to be ending my time here on such a positive note. There have of course been good and bad times, but in general it's been a really positive experience, and in fact, now I am really very sad and sorry to have to leave.

There have been a few highlights, things which I will not leave behind, even though I am leaving this office; especially the PVP seminar, and working on the Space for Peace website. The theme is clear, improving the peace education aspect of our work. At least, I hope that this is the outcome of these projects. I envisage the Space for Peace website as a central point for SCI activists, to exchange ideas for peace education sessions, games and thoughtful energisers, to read other project reports and find inspiration. And more than this, to encourage each others creativity, to encourage communication on topics that are

important to us, and big questions like '*how can we make our lives more peaceful?*', and '*what is the connection between the personal and political?*' However, I sometimes feel that we in the IS are quite detached from what is actually happening at the branch level. Is a tool like this really useful? Do the volunteers *want* peace education? Do the *activists* really want it, and are they really interested in these questions?

The Space for Peace website has been built, but it is, after all, only a tool. Like a telephone with no one talking, it is not useful unless it is used. And in this hyper-connected world, another website or mailing list can feel much more like a burden than a privilege. Of course, these things take time to grow and develop; habits take a long time to build. Everyone in SCI is extremely busy, just doing the everyday tasks. But we are a peace organisation, shouldn't peace education be our priority? Even at a branch level, shouldn't we constantly be asking '*how can we do this better, more creatively, how can we reach a wider audience?*'?

But maybe not. Maybe peace education in this sense is too formal, too far towards the words, rather than the deeds. And if so, what questions *are* activists at the branch level asking?

Is it really only once a year at the ICM that the IS and IEC have extensive communication with the branches? Is all the work we're doing on the strategic plan, peace education, PVP and volunteer management appreciated at the branch level? Are we on the right track?



Johan, Nico, Reeta, Adina and Pedro have all been amazing colleagues and I was constantly surprised by what a good team we made. I've learnt a lot from them and appreciate them all so much in their own, curious ways 😊

So thanks to them, and all of you, and bye.

Pedro, Adina and Morgana far from the city life...

MOVE Conference in Brussels...

by Adina Basarim



On 23rd – 24th May the MOVE Conference took place in Brussels, on the topic of "Mutual recognition of skills and competences learned through volunteering: Towards a

European debate". It was a very interesting event organised by The European Volunteer Center, CEV (Brussels) together with many other partners.

As a part of my work is focusing on volunteer management and the subject of the conference

was already very interesting, I decided to attend. More than this the event was to take place only 45 minute by train from Antwerp, so I had all the circumstances in my favor.

The subject of the conference is not new for the ones working in the volunteer sector. The event's objective was to bring together NGO representatives, University professors, lecturers and other stakeholders to create an environment for exchanging different approaches and information about the needs on this topic.

I personally did not know about this initiative, but as a volunteer I did consider it, even before knowing about it. I know from my personal experience how much I could use the skills gained through my voluntary work in other fields of work, but they were not really considered whilst applying for jobs. In a society that still appreciates very much the certificated

skills, an initiative like this could definitely have a positive outcome.

During the conference I learned that there are already countries where stakeholders do recognise these competencies and there are ministries and NGO's who are supporting this idea through different programs. Some short examples could be: Germany, where at the initiative of the Ministry of Intergenerational Affairs, Family, Women and Integration of the State of North Rhine – Westphalia, and many social and charitable institutions in the region, a certificate is issued that attests the competences and skills of the volunteers and also recognises and appreciates the commitment of their work. In Belgium there is already work being done at the University of Gent for the recognition through certification of the Prior Experiential Learning and at the same time local NGO's are creating projects in order to raise the awareness on the topic amongst the volunteers and to offer them support in order to learn how to better "sell" their competences gained through volunteering.

The program of the conference contained also 12 workshops, presenting the work of different stakeholders for identifying, assessing and validating the skills and knowledge gained through volunteering. At this point my only regret is that many of them were taking place at the same time and I could attend only three.

Nevertheless the whole conference gave me a lot to think about. I do know that any initiative of this type is much more successful if it has a

legal support and hopefully governments of the European countries will put effort into developing projects like these (some of them already do). At the same time NGO's should lobby for this idea to the governments in their countries.

Coming back to SCI, I think we should give some thought to recognising the contribution of our national and international volunteers and find a good way to certify the competencies they gain through their work within our organisation. Maybe we should consider also creating projects to support raising the awareness of the stakeholders and volunteers on this topic.

I would definitely be very interested in hearing more opinions on this topic from SCI activists and staff and, as well, examples of good practice about the recognition of volunteers input or any ideas might arise.

You are very much welcomed to use the *Discussion board – General discussion – Volunteer Management System (all, under Get involved)* on the international web site, and post your comment at the already started discussion about volunteer management. If you do not have a login ID yet, please feel welcomed to create one and join the discussion.

Only that which changes remains true...

by Pedro Chaltein Almeida Gontijo



*Pedro painted the office...
...Adina painted Pedro*

I read that sentence on the outside wall of a church, in Dublin, in June of 2003, weeks before I first heard about SCI. Then, as a hi-speed ray of light, four years of life happened. Now, it feels like only one day.

7 a.m. <getting in VSI Ireland office; meeting Timmo, the German placement officer; living in a Camphill Community; a workcamp in St. John of God's Menni Services; ideas for starting SCI in Brasil; meeting Ronan Moore; a deep-turning point workcamp in Germany; meeting Soeli, Matt, Sabine, Barbara and The Givers movement; Iceland!, renouncing normality, living without money, documents, electricity etc; another turning point, a quite mystical one; back to normality in every day life track in Brasil in 2004, slightly insane; the relationship, relationships, love, family, friends; back into sanity, recognised job in the parliament, recognised journalism studies, journalism? Why?; end of job; end of university; end of relationship; end of apartment rental; new

turning point: getting deeply into SCI, living in Antwerp, sleeping just two doors from the SCI IS office, Morgana, Adina, Reeta, Johan, Nico, TEM, Mihai, Yahu, people, placements, SCI people, more placements, Sooriya, coming in, Magd, staying, leaving, turning 25 years old, meeting again Soeli, Matt, Sabine and Barbara; walking concrete steps to make several dream projects a reality, planning, projects, more projects, getting overwhelmed with changes> 11 p.m.: the day is gone.

It was 4 years and felt like one day. Nico is leaving IS after 7 years of efficient dedication. Morgana is leaving after one year of intense energy donation. We have just painted the office. The theme of these last 2 months here in IS life is definitely changes. And what I can write about it is: yes, things, every small and big thing, young and old, changes. That's it, cheesy, but true.

A time of leaving...

by Nico Verzijden

The faithful reader of the IS newsletter might have seen it coming. Departing, saying goodbye and the past, it has been my theme in the last issues when I have been writing about the ceremony in commemoration of Idy Hegnauer and later my work in the Office Archives.

Morgana will probably use this issue to say goodbye to you as Office LTV. I am first saying goodbye to Nick Warren. I have just returned from his last Insurance Commission meeting.

He left the Commission after some 20 years of membership, discussing about the set-up of SCI Insurance, the volunteers we take care of, the financial back-up needed for it and all other related matters. In the eighties Ralph Hegnauer was still part of the Commission, it was him who managed to work out his idea and bring it into practice in the 1950s.

Last year we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of SCI Insurance.

Before being in the Insurance Commission Nick Warren has also been International Coordinator of SCI when the office was in Canterbury. Then he found a job at the Volunteer Centre in Sheffield and moved to the Peak District where we had the Insurance Commission meeting this weekend.

And as some or most of you know, it is also time for me to move on. I will stop working as Finance Officer for SCI at the end of August. Preparations for the transfer of my tasks to a new Finance Officer. have started but the selection process is still underway

So I might still appear in one more issue of this Newsletter but not in many more. My time here at the IS has been good. I think I can say I have brought a lot of myself into the job and into office life and it has been enough. It is difficult to leave my work in somebody else's hands but all in all our whole life is a preparation for departure so I should learn... I am not leaving SCI, though. For sure I will stay involved in my branch, VIA Netherlands, and who knows which nice task is waiting for me in some months or years' time.

It has been nice being with you all!



Nico being our guide during a bicycle trip in Rotterdam...

NEW!

SCI Exchange Guide

A New online guide to answer all your questions about exchanges...

Which procedure to use when?

Who do I contact regarding?

What on earth does mean?

The Exchange guide is constantly in a phase of development and will be updated regularly. So - keep checking for updates and make sure that if you have any comments, ideas, unanswered questions or concerns - let us know!

All comments and opinions are sincerely welcome at info@sciint.org

Also, if you have questions that are not answered by this guide - you can ask them to the SCI community in the Exchanges thread of the SCI discussion forum - <http://www.sciint.org/forum.phtml>

Calendar of Events

Event	Date	Place	Organiser
IEC Meeting	23rd – 26 th August	To be confirmed	IS and IEC
Summer University 3 – Strategic and Organisational Management Skills	15 th – 22 nd September	Romania	IS Host - SCI - RO
International Euridea Volunteer Festival	15 th – 22 nd September	Berlin - Germany	SCI - D
Peace Education Seminar			
North South Working Groups Meeting	October	To be confirmed	IS and hosting branch

The End...