

## **THE STONELEIGH GROUP YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAMME**

### **Origins**

The Young Leaders Programme is an initiative of Endeavour Training but has been developed in a consortium that includes a number of other organisations, namely Brahma Kumaris, Arthur Rank Centre, The Rank Foundation, Foundation for Outdoor Adventure, Mobex North-East and the Prince's Trust. The enthusiastic involvement of so many organisations is itself an indication of the timeliness and aptness of the scheme.

### **The aim**

The Young Leaders Programme is an imaginative and radically different approach to volunteer development. The aim is to seek out young people with distinct leadership potential and to develop their skills so as to prepare them as peer educators, role models and community leaders capable of working in support of other young people.

### **The participants**

Participants are chosen from among those who have already displayed interest, aptitude and commitment and who have existing basic skills in youth work and personal development training.

### **The programme**

The programme will eventually run over a two-year period and consist of experiential and reflective weeks/weekends, tutorials with mentors in local communities and a project to create a piece of dynamic and effective youth development work. The emphasis is on non-religious spirituality and self-discovery, to allow participants to clarify their capabilities, values, ambitions and direction.

### **To date...**

A residential week was held at Camas, on the island of Mull, in September 2000.

Participants were from:

Endeavour Training (2 elders + 3 young people)

Brahma Kumaris (1 elder + 1 young person)

Mobex North-East (1 elder + 3 young people)

The Prince's Trust (1 elder + 3 young people)

Stoneleigh (Arthur Rank College) (1 elder + 3 young people)

There was one facilitator.

It was an unstructured self-development course. Some of the participants, accustomed to structured courses and instruction, debriefings and feedback, found the lack of structure unsettling, even unnerving, at first, but by the end of the week all had 'got the message' and for many it was a turning point in their lives.

### **Defining moments**

There are some things we do that we just ... do – because we have to or because we're familiar with them or because we enjoy them. But sometimes we find ourselves doing something that is outside our previous experience.

One member of the course spent an evening baking bread, something he had never done before. Another went fishing for the first time in his life and caught two fish. Both chose these activities entirely of their own accord.

These apparently trivial incidents can in fact be extremely important in the lives of people, especially the young, because they may redefine the individual.

Someone who has previously thought of himself as a climbing instructor becomes redefined as a climbing instructor with domestic skills. Someone who has learnt to cope in an indoor, urban environment becomes redefined as a person with a range of indoor and outdoor skills. Such redefinition gives people confidence, independence, resilience and a more positive outlook. It may change the course of their lives.

'If I can bake bread, I can do anything!' Sounds absurd? Yes, but it's true, more or less.

Here's where we depart from standard practice. Participants choose and follow their own developmental path, with minimal prompting or direction and with only as much feedback and interaction as they want.

### **Development is the key**

Participating in a scheme such as this is not, must not be, merely a comfortable interlude, a retreat. It must not be a closed experience, which ends when the session ends.

Instead, what is expected is a learning experience that leads onwards. Participants will emerge from the scheme psychologically and socially enlarged and – vitally important – willing and able to use their new skills and understanding to help others grow and develop.

They will become role models – not on a pedestal, not remote, not 'celebrities' – but people who are just a little further along the path to a compassionate and wise maturity than their peers. They will teach in words and actions, but most of all by example.

'If he can bake bread, so can I!'

This is the kind of leadership that the scheme seeks to nurture.

### **... and a review**

A follow-up weekend was held for the Camas group in February 2001 at Brahma Kumaris Global Retreat Centre near Oxford. Representatives of UK Youth, the National Youth Agency and the Leadership Trust and others attended a session at the end of the weekend to meet the Camas participants and discuss the way forward.

### **Follow up**

The Young Leaders Programme is in its early stages. We need to monitor the first intake of young people who have experienced the programme and see what effects it has had on them. The programme should not deliver a short, sharp shock but be part of a long-term process. We must have high expectations of the participants, not only in terms of their own personal development but also in the example and the support they give to other young people. The programme must demonstrate its validity by actually producing proven young leaders.

### **The future**

This is what we wish:

- a rolling programme for several groups of young people, together with elders, each year
- training for the elders
- support for the programme in all its practical aspects, including the process of identifying suitable candidates
- a means of obtaining, as standard procedure, evidence of the impact of the programme in the subsequent lives of the young participants.