



What we learnt from the Adelheid Project

Carol Pirie

Carol Pirie is a member of the Adelheid Project Coordinating Committee

When we in Wales first invited the Adelheid Project to come to Brecon in August 2004 we little thought what effect it would have on us!

Women Walking Together is a group of about 25 members who meet on a regular basis throughout Wales to discuss spirituality issues. About 95 per cent of us are Christian but we also believe that we exist for women of all faiths and none - and it is in sharing our journey together that we learn. Three years ago we chose to affiliate to the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women - but the European experience is still relatively new to many of us, and some are still quite wary of what goes on across the water!

As an affiliated member of the Forum, we chose to invite the Adelheid Project to come to Wales in 2005 - the Adelheid Project has been part of the Forum's educational outreach programme for more than 10 years. The planning committee in Wales was small and the momentum grew slowly but surely. We knew that a teaching team would come with the visitors (in the end we had 11 students from northern and eastern Europe) and classes were planned in English, project finance and planning, and information technology. Amongst other things, we had to organise the accommodation and the visits the students would make to community project in South Wales to see the work going on here and to share ideas and experience. New friendships developed amongst us and the enthusiastic response of local people, both within and without the church, was heartwarming - many local people attended the open day discussing the trafficking of women and children and also the shared Bible studies and the pilgrimage in the Welsh countryside. In looking around for community projects to take our visitors to, we ourselves learnt about so much amazing work that is being done in South Wales with youth, HIV, drugs, community rebuilding, etc.

Fundraising was also part of our brief and we greatly appreciated the support of CEWERN in this respect. We had as much support from the public as we had from the churches and there were some amazing spin offs such as the first ever Women's Festival in Monmouth to celebrate World Book Day and International Women's Day which raised over £1,000 which Adelheid shared with the local Women's Aid hostel. We had many exciting women speakers - writers, politicians and activists - and all events were enthusiastically supported. On the last night we got all the local book groups together and held a fun evening at a local pub! None of this would have happened without Adelheid.

And what happened when the Project unfolded? Well, we learnt how much we shared in common with women of different faiths, ages and cultures. Each day began with a short meditation in the chapel, led by women from different countries. Many of them had never led worship before and it was a nervewracking, but liberating, experience for some of them. Shared Bible studies were also interesting.

We learnt much from our visitors - how their history has shaped their present, sometimes in different ways from ours; how much we take for granted in the UK and how much we waste; how we need to stand back occasionally and take the longer view rather than rushing at everything. It was so often in one to one conversations that we came closest to each other and friendships were made across invisible boundaries that will last a lifetime.

Such valuable lessons for us here. THANK YOU, Adelheid women, for giving us this opportunity!

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