

Mannheim, the 8th of January 2007

How it is for a young co-worker in Camphill

It is said that people can only cope with a difficult situation, if they see meaning in it. Meaning nowadays is in short supply. Thus it is an indescribable feeling for a co-worker to work in Camphill with the belief in doing something which is truly meaningful.

Having left the Camphill Community Thornbury, Sheiling School, and thinking back to that time, which lies just half a year behind me, there comes up a whole lot of emotions. To start from the beginning: Actually I decided to do my National Service in England basically in order to improve my English. By chance I came to this residential school with no expectations but pretty much curiosity. After only a short time to get used to the community's procedure the workload began to be high, as was the level of responsibility, but also very fulfilling. We young co-workers needed to learn to hold back our personal needs from time to time for the reason of a day and night job. In the course of the Foundation Year which contained subjects from Child Protection Issues, Syndromes and Polarities up to Biodynamic Farming, for an unknowing new co-worker a totally new world was gradually unfolding itself. As well as many educational and welfare matters, in which a co-worker is involved on a daily basis, you can also get to know an entirely different philosophical world view, something which strained the constructs of my education but which offered aspects of understanding from an entirely different point of view.

This year goes far beyond the often stated simple goals of a progress in English language skills and getting to know a different culture. In retrospect I can say that this helped my personal development tremendously. Self control, personal stress management, showing initiative, lots of patience are a short abstract of key skills developing in a place like that and preconditions in nowadays job market.

Looking back I couldn't imagine the possibility of starting my studies right away as it is proposed by lots of people in order to enter the global competition as soon as possible. I couldn't but see this year in Camphill as a great enlargement for a pre-student's horizon.

Due to living together with lots of others of your age, a nice and homogen group is created by itself in this community. This is the place and the year to build up very strong, perhaps even lifelong, friendships.

Talking to other camphill experienced young people you always feel a kind of connection and of course you can relate easily to them but there's something else, there's something special about all these people. It's all but easy to explain...

Needless to say that you can have in a group like that loads and loads of fun with your mates, but Camphill shows you that there's something else as well, which opens us, young persons, gradually the eyes and we see that the time comes when we have to stop this life in a bubble with a horizon barely reaching the two next obligations of debauched enjoyment.

A very important thing for me personally was this total freedom in respect to the philosophy underlying this whole concept. Just as Steiner did not intend to inspire belief, each co-worker was free to concern himself with the fundamental idea or just

leave it at all, for, thanks to the good instructions, each co-worker was capable to do a good job without any specific anthroposophical knowledge. Of course this whole thing depends pretty much on the quality of its staff, probably far more than in usual establishments. Thanks to my houseparents this was an extremely pleasant year and I learned beyond the daily routine a lot about life itself.

Back in Germany, starting university, trying to build up a new daily routine wasn't all that easy. I didn't expect it but having talked to the other young co-workers back home, at first most of us felt a bit uncomfortable and alienated. It was in that time when I remembered a line I read long time ago in a Camphill magazine: "When you make peace with the urban jungle you almost forget the vision of Camphill special school as an island of sanity in a maddening world" (Camphill Pages - A candle on the Hill).

Having learned in Camphill to appreciate and to be grateful for the small things in life I consider it as a big step to true happiness. Once in his life everybody should have experienced this unique capability of a Down-Syndrome child, or any other, to enthuse their fellow human beings, how the coolest young guy is moved by such a miraculously smile. At this point arises the question to what extent a corporate integration in today's society is possible to show the world how fabulous our friends really are. But in this case to my opinion Camphill is still setting rather integration limits because, neglecting the rare times they do show up in public, life in Camphill is like living "on an island of sanity".

All in all it's a healthy progress of giving and taking in Camphill. A giving from the idea of Camphill, a giving from the community's staff, but above all a giving from the residents themselves. It's up to you to seize these chances and to have this great feeling of giving back all these wonderful things by doing a good job with your student.

Hence and for the reasons I set out above this year is a unique chance for each young person considering a year abroad.

Sebastian Groh, student of economics at Mannheim University, Germany