



## Windows for Peace (UK)

### Edinburgh Summer School 2010

Conventional wisdom tells us that it is not the same second time round. After such a successful Edinburgh summer school in 2008, were we unwise to embark on another such venture in 2010?

The first key question was whether we could again raise the funds, by returning to the original donors and approaching others. The economy had taken a turn for the worse and, following the Gaza war, the climate in the middle-east was even more tense than two years before. Nevertheless, we decided to go ahead and try. After all, Windows for Peace was a very special organisation that brought together Jewish and Palestinian young people to promote dialogue and understanding:



“Windows is a joint organization of Jews and Palestinians from both sides of the Green Line. It was established in 1991 with the aim of promoting acquaintance, understanding and conciliation between people from both nations, through educational and cultural programmes, media and art. They believe that in order to reach a just and lasting peace, it is important to understand and to deepen mutual knowledge of the other”. ([www.windowsforpeace.org](http://www.windowsforpeace.org))

Thanks to several charitable foundations, generous individuals and supportive communities, we managed to raise the £33,000 needed for the trip to cover flights for 15 young people, 5 adult professional facilitators and translators, accommodation and activities in Edinburgh. The Edinburgh Summer School (ESS) 2010 was going ahead!

The 2010 young people formed a more diverse group than the 2008 group, comprising 4 Palestinians from the Jenin area in the Occupied Territories (the “1967 Palestinians”), 5 Jewish Israelis from Tel Aviv and 6 Palestinians living in Israel, in Tamra in the Galilee (the “1948 Palestinians”). They were all aged 15 to 16, excited but understandably anxious about their trip to the northern climes of Edinburgh. As the summer school took place in July, the group was able to stay in a boarding house in the beautiful, spacious grounds of Merchiston Castle School, where the green lawns offered a peaceful environment with space to play, talk and be private. The sunny weather of a British summer was described as invigorating, with its “cold fresh air”.

In the weeks leading up to the summer school, the group had communicated with each other, largely through e-mail and the occasional weekend together, talking about their own family stories, sharing personal experiences and journeys into the past. They spoke about grandparents who had fled Europe before the Second World War and about the horrors of the concentration camps; they spoke about grandparents who were uprooted from villages in Palestine, forced to leave their homes and become refugees; and about grandparents born in Israel when Christians, Jews and Muslims lived together in relative harmony. It was not always easy to hear these stories.

“We don’t come from different parts of the world, but come from different things inside us”, to quote one of the youngsters.



The teenagers spent nearly two weeks in Edinburgh, a luxury that is not possible in their homeland. This was not a holiday but an important opportunity to work together, “to understand and to deepen mutual knowledge of each other” and also to have some fun. Most of the time was dedicated to an intensive programme of activities so that the young people could talk in a safe environment and

study the impact that past history had on their lives today. The first few days were dedicated to building up trust through art, drama and outdoor activities, carefully planned by the facilitators. Building trust is the key but it is a difficult, sensitive and often painful process. How did the Palestinians feel when they watched the film “The Pianist”, the story of the Warsaw ghetto? How did the Jews feel when they watched the film “The Key” about Palestinian refugees longing to return home? “We carry the pain of our parents and grandparents”, said one of the group, “we carry the past in our hearts and our blood”.



The tensions within the group were often palpable; there was guilt, shame, anger and sadness; they saw each other as the oppressed and the oppressor; they talked, they argued and sometimes they cried well into the night. The facilitators, one Jewish Israeli, one Palestinian living in Israel and one Palestinian from the Occupied Territories, had to cope with the tensions, the doubts and a range of contradictory feelings themselves; they organised separate and joint sessions to work through the issues, relaxation time to overcome the tensions and games to build

on the growing friendships that the young people were forging.

Making the journey to Edinburgh; sharing new experiences; speaking different languages in a foreign country; living together in a boarding house; coping with daily tasks over a two week period, and enjoying the tourist attractions of a beautiful city helped to create strong bonds of friendship and of mutual respect.

Towards the end of their stay in Edinburgh, the young people organised a well-attended open day, when they spoke of their experience of living together in Edinburgh. They explained how they had learned about each other; they answered lots of questions and spoke about their plans to continue their Windows programme on their return to the middle-east. Their stories were moving, touching and courageous. Was it good to expose the youth to so many questions? The maturity gained from the summer school was evident and they did not shrink from the difficult issues of identity, religion, equality and hostility. They appreciated the opportunity to meet local young people from Edinburgh, Christians, Jews and Muslims. “Before the meeting, I was excited but also nervous because I knew there were hard stories to talk about – they are important subjects and I am excited to talk about them with these people”.



On the way home, the group visited Liverpool where they spoke movingly and answered questions about their Edinburgh experience to a diverse audience of around 100 people. Finally they spent a day in London visiting an East End mosque and spending time with RSY youth leaders (from the Movement for Reform Judaism). They acknowledged that they were returning home with on-going challenges and much still to process. Now,

months later, they are still working on the many questions that the amazing trip to Edinburgh raised; they are writing about their experiences in the Hebrew-Arabic magazine *Windows* and they are continuing to wrestle with the “tragic history of our peoples”.

Perhaps there will always be more questions than answers but hopefully the dialogue will continue. Hopefully it will be possible one day to overcome the travel and other restrictions that make it impossible for the three groups to be able to spend two weeks together in their homeland. Meantime, two year-groups have benefited in many evident and untold ways from the experience of ESS 2008 and 2010. Grateful thanks go to all those who supported the ventures.

Judith Sischy, April 2011

### 2010 Edinburgh Summer School - Income and Expenditure

#### Income

Excess Brought Fwd from 2008	£3,090
Fund-raising Concert	£3,120
Trusts	£14,527
Individual donations	£10,083
Gift Aid Tax recovered	£2,008
Shortfall subsidy from General Funds	£665
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£33,493</b>

#### Expenditure

Air Fares & visas	£12,090
UK Travel (train and coach)	£932
Accommodation & Meals - Merchistan School	£8,298
Accommodation & Meals in Liverpool	£903
Misc. UK expenses (extra meals and travel)	£2,310
Fleeces for participants	£215
Youth planning meetings in Israel/Palestine	£2,000
Salaries (Facilitators from Israel & Palestine)	£4,000
Windows (Tel Aviv) Overheads	£2,630
UK Office Expenses	£115
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£33,493</b>