

IASWECE COUNCIL IN THE UK

Janni Nicol

It was with great joy that we welcomed the IASWECE council members to the UK last October.

In England we have been experiencing many difficulties with a new inspection framework and general misunderstanding of the Steiner educational approach, particularly the later start to formal literacy and numeracy. In most English schools, formal learning starts at 3 in 'pre-school' and the focus is on 'getting children ready for school' by teaching formal reading, writing and mathematics. Many years ago, when the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum became statutory (written in law) for all children from birth to 5, the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship negotiated 'Established Principles' statutory exemptions so that we could continue to provide the Steiner Waldorf early childhood curriculum without compromise. It has been difficult for inspectors to understand our later start and how the foundation for these skills are laid in our early childhood settings - through everyday life activities, play, activities and our wonderfully enabling environment. Our early childhood staff are well qualified thanks to the excellent teacher training which has helped us build resilience, and of course, being with the children gives us inner reserves to call on, allowing our time with the children to be filled with joy!

The visit from the IASWECE council, and their appearance at our Waldorf 100 conference at Michael Hall, helped us feel supported, encouraged, uplifted and warmly held by our colleagues from around the world.

The council meeting took place at Emerson College, which used to be, and is becoming again, a centre for anthroposophical study. It is a very special environment to be in, peaceful, full of elementals, with nourishing biodynamic food and caring staff. We lived, worked, studied, ate and played on the premises, and also visited their little kindergarten in a Yurt.



The theme of our study activity was the significance of inner quiet, equanimity and trust in oneself and one's destiny for all those who work with young children. We were fortunate to have many council members contribute in many ways to our study, and also for their active support for other

IASWECE tasks such as fund raising for projects, which you can read about further on the IASWECE website. We also remembered our dear colleague Joan Almon who crossed the threshold this June.

We are also working on organisational development, thinking to the future needs of IASWECE, and possible new forms of the organisational structure. It is always healthy to revisit structures so that they stay fresh and in tune with the changing times and needs of our early childhood movement around the world. Sharing our experiences each time we meet and thinking about burning issues around the world also highlights what is happening today, with the children, their families and in our work.

A new colleague joined us from Holland, Marija de Vink, and we said goodbye to one of the German representatives Erika Henning, who has been with IASWECE for so many years, bringing her deep knowledge and wisdom to our study. We will miss Erika, her laughter, and the wonderful gifts she brought to sell to raise funds for the projects!

Once again, our grateful thanks for work of the IASWECE council, co-ordinating group, Board and of course our administrator and generally talented and wonderful Lara for holding everything together, and for your visit to our country. It is uplifting to feel unity with the world in a time of divisiveness in the UK.



Janni Nicol used to be a Waldorf teacher in South Africa. She now resides in the UK where she is an early childhood coordinator for the Steiner-Waldorf Association, and a member of the IASWECE Council and Board.