

# FOOTPRINTS – TOUCH OF HOPE      April 2024

Dear supporters,

Hello and welcome to our Spring newsletter!

**In February 2024 we had our final workshop for this group.** We met in the city centre of Osijek, and had our main meals on a restaurant-boat on the river Drava. Sadly Lufthansa had cancelled our outward flight at the last minute, meaning the loss of a full day out there; completing the training felt rushed as a result.

We concentrated on the theme of Non-Violent communication, looking at the story of Zacchaeus. We acted out the story of Zacchaeus, trying to get behind his character and to understand him - was he such an evil person? We looked at the different kinds of communication expressed in the story ( judging, criticising, self- righteousness) and compared that with how Jesus treated him. We asked the question, *“who and where is Zacchaeus in our own community?”* For all the members of the group, their life is hard as they struggle with PTSD and painful memories. They appreciate the love and acceptance they experience from one another, despite being ‘former enemies.’ Several in the group are interested in our Facilitation training.

Sadly, one of the participants called Đurđica (who had a heart-breaking story from Vukovar in 1991) has since died, aged 67, from the lung cancer for which she was being treated. Her illness meant missing some workshops but she was determined to be with us in February. She wrote : *“When they discovered the lung tumour in January, I didn't shed a tear. I am constantly in a positive attitude, and I haven't fallen for a moment. The workshops helped strengthen me even more, and to continue. All the workshop topics I attended were meaningful and interesting to me. I would recommend "Touch of Hope" workshops to everyone because they help. Clive, Judith, and Snježana were united in helping us, and they really did.”*

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**I would like to pay tribute to Rev John Johansen-Berg, the director of the ‘Community for Reconciliation’ (CfR) at Barnes Close, who has recently died.** I first met John in the 1980s at Barnes Close, when I was engaged with making church links with East Germany. When the work with ‘Bench we Share’ was in

its infancy, we sought to align our work with CfR and John welcomed us into their fold. He was closely involved with our work and very supportive. He was also Chair of the 'Fellowship of Reconciliation' from 2005-17.

John Johansen-Berg was a significant peacemaker, liturgist and theologian of the post-Second World War era. He was a respected voice for peace within his own Church, the URC, and co-founded the CfR as a way to enable and resource practical peace-making in the UK and around the world – with a particular interest in the Balkans, after the 1990s wars there. He also played a part in activating churches towards healing in Rwanda after the genocide. John dedicated his life to peace, and in particular, a peace that was rooted in prayer. We thank God for him.

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**Over last winter, Snježana met up with a number of former workshop participants, and recorded their perspectives.** Here are two of the stories she heard, which underline the workshops' ongoing value: **Zoran** (a Croatian Serb man) and **Verica** ( a Croat woman) suffered in very different ways because of the war, but both experienced some measure of healing and release during the workshops....

“My name is **Zoran**, I was born in 1963 and live in Tenja, a village next to Osijek. I've had a disabling visual impairment since the age of seven, however I worked as a waiter in one of Osijek's best restaurants from 1981, until the outbreak of war in 1991 ended all that. The war was the worst thing that ever happened to me, although as Serbs, we did not have to leave the village, living in an area under control of the Serb forces.

“It was only in 2000 that I found work again, and with it, a sense of worth. However, despite working on the Croatian coast, far away from home, somehow the Croat guests always discovered I was Serbian by nationality. They looked at me differently and said hurtful things. My boss always had to calm the situation and support me.

“These days I live an active life in my home village and relish the independence a state pension gives me. I came to the (Touch of Hope) workshops on the recommendation of Ana, leader of the local Volunteering Centre, who had

previously participated in the workshops herself. Since I trusted her, I attended a trial workshop, then wanted to continue....

“...in the workshops, I learned a lot about life and living; every topic was good and instructive in its own way. The topic of forgiveness was especially important and touching to me. When it was time to release a stone (as a sign of forgiving) only a few people were willing. Evidently we each had our own pain and sorrow, and weren't used to sharing feelings and needs with others. But we've learned since to express ourselves in the group and that was a liberating experience in itself. I learnt to both listen to others, whilst also becoming more assertive about expressing my own needs.

“Clive and Judith are wonderful people with a sense of leadership and working with others, along with our mentor, Snježana. We were all equal; no one stood out or was above the others; we were all together, and for each other.”

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“My name is **Verica**. I was born in Serbia, but moved to Vukovar in 1965, where I spent my formative years, then married, built a house, had a son. Then the war came, and destroyed all our dreams.

“Our house got war-damaged but even worse, the JNA forces took our entire family to their headquarters one time on a pretext. I, my mum and son were promptly released, and my dad three days later. But they kept my husband and transferred him to the notorious Velepromet camp nearby. They beat and mistreated him, but because he was a car mechanic, they kept him alive to repair their vehicles. Meanwhile back at home, we lived in fear every day, watching soldiers go about outside like they owned the place; I was abused by one of them. A few months later, they expelled us from our home, and all the other Croats from their homes. We were in exile on the island of Rab. My husband survived, but he left me for another woman.

“I returned with my parents and son to Vukovar after 10 years. Only the walls of our house remained, so we had to rebuild from scratch. I was always unhappy; empty; joyless. During three years of therapies for abused women, I realized that I needed to change; I used to think that everyone else was angry and quarrelsome, but in reality, I was the one attacking and provoking aggression. As soon as I started changing myself, I noticed a change in my surroundings, including re-establishing a good relationship with my son, with whom I was in conflict due to his lifestyle. I changed, but he also changed.

“Snježana told me about the "Touch of Hope" therapies. I liked the workshops so much. As participants, we were so diverse in nationality and character, and I would count the days until the next one. But most of all, it was hearing each other's human stories - we older women who have experienced abuse need to talk, but younger people don't have time for the elderly. If only we had a "Touch of Hope" association in Vukovar to bring us together. It's the only place where I can be natural, not have to think what to say or how to say it. I can be myself.”

*(Please don't reproduce either story without my written permission, thank you.)*

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**Financial matters....**Did you know that a weekend workshop for a group of 20 people costs around £4000-5000 inclusive of food, accommodation, travel and facilitator expenses; this works out at a **mere £250 per person per weekend**. Ideally, we like to run at least 5 workshops in our basic training cycle. Our facilitators' course runs over three weekends. Our pot is running dry.

**Could you help by organising a fund-raising event, or making a donation?** Cheques are payable to: **CFR Footprints**. If you are a taxpayer and can include Gift Aid, that would be a wonderful help. A Gift Aid form is attached with your covering email. Please send cheques/Gift Aid forms to: **Revd. Clive Fowle, 62 Copsewood Avenue, Nuneaton CV11 4TG**. Thank you!

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**War rages still in Ukraine.** We hear a lot about 'preparing for war' in the media but there is little about **preparing for peace**. Some of you might know of Ukrainians in your own community. I feel we need to be offering the Ukrainian community the chance to gain skills in conflict resolution, and the opportunity to experience healing from the hurts of war. **If you know of anyone who would be interested in our work from Ukraine or Russia, please get in touch.**

I am, as always, available to speak at your church or organisation – please contact me via [clivefowle1@gmail.com](mailto:clivefowle1@gmail.com) or 07817 057963.

In peace,

Revd. Clive Fowle

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