

REPORT OF THE SERVAS YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OFFICER March 2009

At the eGA in Latina in 2006 I set out the specific projects I would work on as part of the Servas Youth Team up to the next General Assembly.

Youth Travel Award 2007

Whilst still at Latina I set up a Servas Youth working group for the first Youth Travel Award. Dianne Peterson from Singapore, Vibeke Matorp from Denmark and Abhay Shay from India joined with me to consider the criteria for such an Award. We made an initial plan so that it could be offered in 2007 to enable a young person to take part in the Youth and Family Event in Britain in July 2007. Marina Pacheco from Brazil later joined the group.

Because of the number of strong candidates for the Award I made an application to the Development Fund Committee for additional funding. With the grant that was offered it was possible to select 5 young people to be funded to come to the event. One was unable to attend due to health reasons. Mary Boloweza from Malawi also applied for the Award but at 32 was outside the age group. However she was later funded from other sources including individual donations from Servas Britain hosts.

Excerpt from Youth Award report:

'The idea behind developing the Youth Travel Award was to provide new opportunities for young people to join in and contribute to international Servas activities. The intention was to focus on those young people who would otherwise not have sufficient resources to take part. Through organising past youth activities at Servas meetings it has been apparent to me that the majority of young people who attended were self funding or accompanying family members. Some funding was made available from the Development Fund to help young people attend the European Meeting in Britain in 2000 and at later General Assemblies in Thailand in 2001 and Barcelona in 2004. Servas Australia has part-funded young Australian travellers on a number of occasions. However youth involvement at international meetings has not reflected the diversity of young people who are members of Servas around the world.

For 2007 the specific aim of the Award was to enable a young person to attend the Youth and Family Event in Yorkshire and to enjoy exploring Britain as a Servas traveller. It was also hoped they would be able to extend their stay to include the possibility of developing language skills, gaining work or study experience or being a volunteer.

Although Servas has to adapt to a fast changing world and different ways of travelling it is evident that there remains a real interest from young people to explore other cultures in an in-depth and meaningful way.

The Award is one of the Servas Youth initiatives that reflect something of the spirit of Servas in the early days when it was seen as a peace organisation with an emphasis was on 'work, study, travel'. These initiatives are also aimed at demonstrating to young people that they can find 'added value' in Servas as an appealing, stimulating and safe alternative to the increasing number of internet-based hosting networks.

For more details see the full report on the Youth Award and reports of the young people.

Servas Youth and Family Event at the Dalesbridge Centre in Britain July 2007

Apart from the Youth Travel Award my main task as part of the Youth Team in the first year after Latina was to organise the Youth and Family Event at the Dalesbridge Centre in Yorkshire, in collaboration with Servas Britain. The aim was to have an international event that would be open not only to young people between 18 and 30 but also to Servas families with both children and teenagers. As usual members of all ages were welcome.

Interest for the event came from many countries but difficulties in getting visas meant those from Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, Kosovo and several African countries could not enter Britain. In the end 117 people attended from 26 countries.

The age profile was:

12 aged under 10

22 aged 10 to 18

28 aged 18 to 30

12 aged 30 to 45

26 aged 45 to 60

18 aged over 60

A mixed programme of activities was planned to include something that would appeal to each of the different age groups. We had a daily workshop in the mornings where we shared ideas about a diversity of world issues including health, poverty, fair-trade, responsible tourism and climate change. Later in the day there were local outings and walks followed by music and entertainment in the evenings. Families with younger children organised their own programme for some of the time but several times a day the whole group came together for meals or activities. Fortunately the weather was kind and it didn't rain. It was unusually cold at night but this didn't deter some late night gatherings in the campers' kitchen.

The group of young people funded through the Youth Award took a lead in the activities through the week and shared ideas and experiences from their home countries.

For more details see the report about the event and articles in 2008 SI News.

Other Activities

Both before and after the event at Dalesbridge the Servas Britain committee and hosts helped some of the young people to pursue their individual interests. In the longer term we supported Mary from Malawi through her extended stay when she took part in a volunteer work camp programme. After a visit to France which included a language experience with SYLE, Magi from Venezuela returned to be a volunteer with an asylum seekers project in Yorkshire with support from local Servas hosts.

Following Dalesbridge difficult family circumstances limited my own involvement in Servas Youth activities for some months. However I continued to act as mentor to Magi and we have been thinking about how to develop some of the other projects proposed at Latina.

Using the idea of 'practical peace' or 'peace in action' we have thought about the origins of Servas and how the wealth of opportunities that Servas hosts can offer might be used to further the aims of Servas as a peace organisation. We are aware that the Servas network can open up unique opportunities for young people. Potentially it can provide more in depth experiences for young travellers beyond the usual two nights of hospitality on which Servas host/traveller encounters are based.

Travellers are keen to explore cultures different to their own. With some advanced planning there is scope for interested hosts to extend what they offer young people to help them more fully understand and appreciate the communities they are visiting. This could include sharing a special skill or interest or making possible their involvement in a specific work or study experience. There might, as in Magi's case, be an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution as a volunteer over a longer period.

When I attended the Servas Youth meeting in Turkey in July 2008 we debated how Servas hosts and travellers can make practical contributions to peace. There was a rich mix of ideas about the possibilities Servas hosts could share with young travellers if linked up in advance of a visit. Among others, offers ranged from bird-ringing in a bio-diversity project in Turkey, to contributing to peace projects in Israel, to helping in an international House for Women in Rome.

For the future it is hoped to develop a scheme where hosts can make known in more detail what they have to offer and be linked with interested young people. Alongside this Servas Youth would benefit from having closer ties with other organisations and from promoting what is available for young people through the United Nations and other worldwide agencies.

Proposals for discussions and decision making at the General Assembly

The overall work of the Servas Youth team will need further discussion and evaluation at the General Assembly with a view to some decisions being made about future developments. The following are suggestions arising from my involvement as the Servas Youth Development Officer.

1. The future of the Youth Travel Award

Some of the issues to be considered include:

- A review of the first Youth Award in 2007, looking at how far the initial aims were achieved and the positives and negatives outcomes of the experiment.
- A review of the criteria for the selection of young people for the Award.
- Should an Award be further developed and offered on an annual basis?
- If so, how would it be managed? By Servas Youth within SI or possibly, in time, as a separate independent trust fund?

- Should the focus be on raising funds through donations and legacies from individual Servas members, donations from National Groups, grants from the Development Fund or from all these sources?
- Should the Award continue to be offered in connection with a particular event and with the emphasis on contributing to Servas or could it be offered to help a young person pursue a more individual travel plan?

2. Servas Youth Contact Scheme to link hosts with young people

A trial scheme is proposed focussed initially on the Servas Youth website and linked to the SI website. Issues to be considered include:

- What would be the practicalities of Servas Youth running a central scheme where hosts could indicate what they would like to share with young travellers? This could be in terms of their particular interests and skills or how they could open up possibilities for work/study experience or voluntary work in their own community.
- A possible model for the scheme might be:

The initial information publicised openly on the Servas Youth website and elsewhere would be a starting point for a young person to pursue a particular interest. It would include the host's country and region together with some idea of what they were able to offer. It would not include contact information about individual hosts as a safeguard against any inappropriate use.

The young person could request more information about a host from the scheme coordinator. Having checked from both sides that the expectations of host and traveller were realistic the coordinator would pass on the host's contact details with their permission. The arrangement would then proceed on the basis of agreement between host and traveller.

- Once a central scheme was established National Groups might want to include more detailed information about what hosts have to offer young people within their own host lists.

3. Developing links between Servas Youth and the UN and other agencies

How could Servas Youth make links with the Servas representatives at the UN? This would raise young people's awareness about the work of the UN and other organisations and about what opportunities are open to them to make a contribution.

4. International Forum for Servas Families on SI website

The Servas Youth website is now well-established. Could some similar space be set aside on the SI website for Servas families to have a forum where they could share ideas and experiences about being in Servas? It could help to promote Servas as a family friendly organisation and be a focal point for planning exchanges and future group events for families with both teenagers and children.

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 6th March 2009