

Inspiring Young People with the Dharma

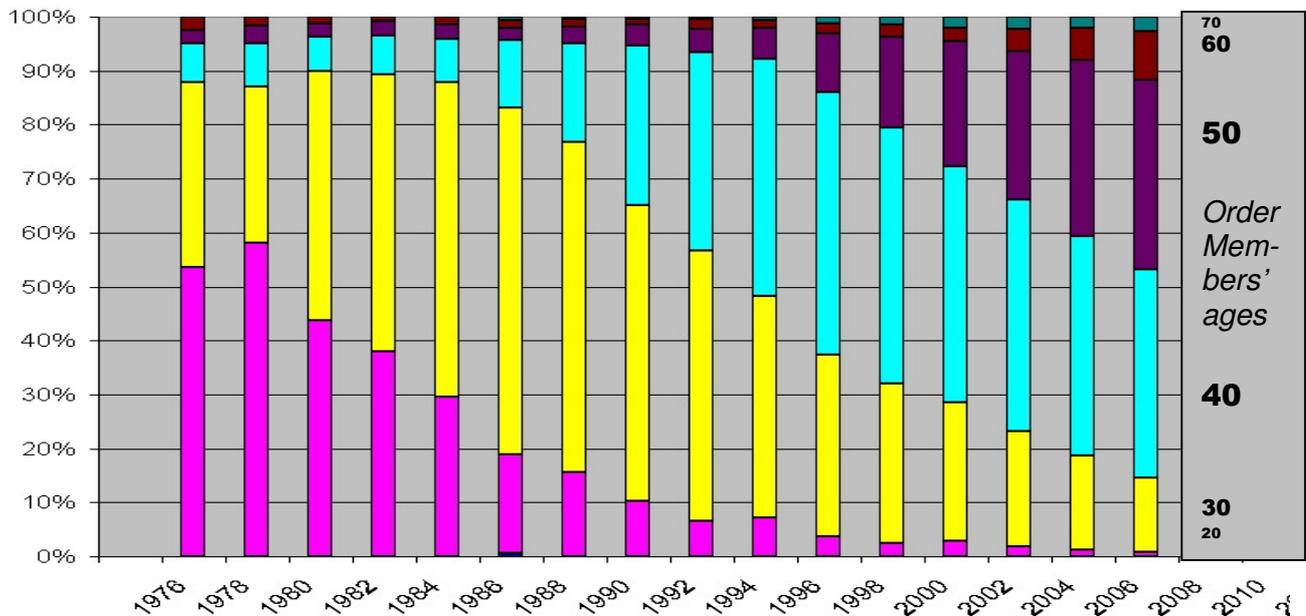
Enclosed in this "pack" are plenty of ideas and suggestions for attracting more young people to the Dharma and the FWBO Sangha. They mostly arose out of a weekend, held in November 08, that brought together young people in the FWBO in the UK, and have been drawn together by Lokabandhu and Vajragupta of the FWBO Development Team. We came away from the weekend with a strong sense of possibility and potential. We would very much welcome hearing from you – with examples of things that are going well at your Centres, of suggestions for what we could do (preferably already tried and tested!), and any comments on what follows.

With best wishes,

Vajragupta and Lokabandhu

What's the problem?

Over the forty years of the Order's existence its demographics have changed remarkably. This chart shows how its shifted between 1976 and 2006:



There are now very few 20- and 30-year-olds in the Order – they are represented by the pink and yellow blocks. Interestingly, despite Buddhism's positive reputation in the West, this seems to be a problem across the whole Buddhist world, not just with us.

Even if one argues that there will naturally be less 20-year-olds in the Order – because of the more demanding procedures for entering the Order – the fact remains that in many cases there are very few young people even coming to our Centres: thus the 'pool' of people from whom the next generation of the Order will be drawn is also aging.

Underlying this is very likely a dynamic whereby "like attracts like": a 40-year-old teacher attracts 40-year-old disciples, and so on. This, however, may literally be fatal to the Order, as it will take those disciples 10 years or so to fill the teachers' shoes – by which time they will be 50 years old... and so on... For the Order to survive and thrive, it seems necessary for us to find ways to attract and retain people many years younger than we are.

Five Ways for Your Centre to Encourage and Attract Young People:

Here is a summary of points that might help your Centre inspire more young people with the Dharma. It is very much based on the perceptions and ideas of young people on the November 2008 weekend. Please read it in conjunction with the Sheffield Buddhist Centre's "story" on the following pages.

1) Be aware of young people already in your sangha...

- * They may experience themselves as the only young person in the Sangha, or one of very few, with everyone else around at least 20 years older than them. Be aware of how this will impact on their experience – e.g. discussions of "lifestyle" where most people will have made their choices, but young people will still be facing theirs, or in discussions around "intoxicants" where young people may be in peer groups who take drugs, or may still be taking them themselves – and wondering if this means they "can't be a Buddhist".

2) Do what you can to welcome young people coming to your centre...

- * Have young people on class teams to be visible to newer young people coming to your centre.
- * Even have a young person who is a "contact point" or "convenor" for other young people, and maybe organising social events, university meditation classes etc.
- * Maybe have special classes for young people, run by someone who has a feeling for this, and at an appropriate venue – which may not be the Buddhist Centre (also see 4 below).
- * Have "rites of passage" for young people, as has been done in Essen.

3) Consider the vibe around your Centre...

- * Avoid classes that are STUFFY – nice, calm, polite, serious, and where the prevailing feeling is that everything in the centre has already been established. What impression does your publicity give? Do you come across like an adult education centre? That's unlikely to bring in young people! Don't try too hard to be trendy either!
- * Try and have at least some activities that are less formal and structured. Many young people simply won't book on a 6-week course. Heavily structured courses may remind them of College and exams.
- * Is there a class you can have that is more informal, spontaneous, and organic – picking up on the interests of those who attend? A drop-in class may

be best: be aware that young people may come and go... and come back again. You may also need to be more relaxed around single-sex.

- * Have a dana economy where it's really clear you don't have to pay if you can't afford it, and especially avoid giving young people the idea they have to pay a large chunk of money up front for several weeks at once.
- * Encourage a social scene for young people around your Centre. Sheffield do a pre-class Baked Potato Club and ping-pong! But beware assumptions. For example, not all young people are into Buddhafield, and there may be differences between men and women.

4) Encourage young people who want to spread the Dharma...

- * A lot of people on the weekend were very inspired to spread the Dharma – especially to other young people. But some, even those who are already running university Buddhist societies, weren't sure whether they had the support and "permission" of Order members at Centres.
- * Strongly encourage them, and get out their way! A university society is different to an FWBO Centre, where you may want to oversee things more. But even at your Centre, encourage young people to take initiative and be willing to experiment. This will inspire and involve young people. Maybe they can set up an outreach class. Maybe you can train them to run a meditation group or dharma discussion group.

5) And on a more FWBO-wide scale...

- * How about more weekends for young people, and dedicated retreats at our retreat centres?
- * What about a "young persons' convenor" working for the European Chairs Assembly, linking up and supporting young people at centres, organising events, and thinking through more deeply the "image" Buddhism has with young people?
- * Other ideas include pilgrimages for young people, or creating a new Right Livelihood 'Gap Year' project for interested young people...

Some Resources

We have a growing library of resources available to help communicate with young people.

Audio – on FreeBuddhistAudio, there are talks by and for young people at

www.freebuddhistaudio.com/community/local?c=FWBO-Community

Video – on Videosangha, there are clips of young Buddhists answering those tricky questions people love to ask at www.videosangha.net/search/?search=young+Buddhist.

ClearVision are producing a DVD by and for young Buddhists, to be released in 2009.

Photo – on FWBO Photos, there is a library of photos of young meditators at

www.flickr.com/photos/fwbo/sets/72157608868848566

Ideas – A full transcript of the ideas put forward over the weekend is on FWBO Centre Support at fwbo-centre-support.org/growth-and-development/young-people

Examples – the Sheffield Centre is full of young people, Lokabandhu is hoping to do a 'what's-your-secret' interview with Vajratara soon.

TBMSG have created the very successful NNBY, the National Network of Buddhist Youth – see

www.justgiving.com/indianbuddhistyouth or their website www.nnby.org.

Retreats – Buddhafield have significant numbers of young people coming, especially to the Festival (volunteers ALWAYS wanted! – see www.buddhafield.com/Helpers.html) and the Teens area of the Child-Friendly retreat. The Buddhafield Café is a great 'Right Livelihood' opportunity for young people.

Other Buddhist groups are also looking at ways to involve more young people.

Shambala have a special website www.youth.shambhala.info, an annual Buddhist Youth Festival (focussing on the three themes of Discussion, Art, and Socialising); plus a 'Vajra Dawn' study programme for youth.

Plum Village have a youth project called "Wake Up", subtitled "Young Buddhists and non-Buddhists for a Healthy and Compassionate Society" – see www.wkup.org.

Soka Gakkai are reported to have a thriving youth wing but we currently have no information on it.

In Germany there's a BuddhaTeens website (in German) www.buddhateens.de

In Australia there's a Tibetan initiative "Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth" (LKPY) at www.lkpy.org

The NBO (the UK umbrella for Buddhist groups) is devoting its next AGM in April 2009 to the theme of Youth and Buddhism; it has recognised lack of young people is a general problem among UK sanghas.

Books about/by/for Buddhist Youth have been published, especially 'Blue Jean Buddha' and 'Buddha's Apprentices'; there's also 'Dharma Punk'; and the 8-volume 'Buddha' manga cartoon series by Osamu Tezuka is a favourite of Lokabandhu's...

These notes by Lokabandhu and Vajragupta, November 2009

Young People at the Sheffield Buddhist Centre: a case history

Vajratara tells the story of how the FWBO's Sheffield Buddhist Centre became one that attracts and retains lots of young people...

The situation as it was (7 years ago)

Some young people did come to the Centre, but the serious ones tended to want to move elsewhere (Cambridge, Windhorse); others came but didn't stick around. The Centre as a whole was pretty small and low-key.

The situation now

There are definitely a lot more young people around these days (and more people generally: beginners courses often total 50-60 people). Overall there's more women than men, and more young women compared to young men.

What happened

In 2001 the Sangha moved to big new premises - the present Centre. Once they settled in it became clear most of the people coming to the beginners classes were older women. It was great they *were* coming – no disrespect intended - but Vajratara (then a mitra) and Vadanya started a series of meetings exploring how more young people could be attracted.

Looking back, with the benefit of hindsight, three crucial things were done, and several others were tried out but didn't seem so essential. The three crucial things were:

1. changing the booking system. Specifically, so that people deciding to come at the last minute were always welcome. This was necessary because it was noticed that the older women were really well-organised and quick to book; while young people and men tended to leave it till the last minute – and were therefore the most likely to be turned away. Having a huge new centre obviously made this easier as capacity was rarely an issue. They have however found that courses and classes can't really be larger than a certain natural limit (of around 50-60) and if they seem to be approaching this, they try and arrange more courses.

2. changing the centre's publicity. Basically this was radically changed, specifically by putting it in the hands of a young designer. He gave it a much less 'professional', much more 'home-made' look: all the glossiness disappeared; Centre flyers were simply photocopied on plain paper.

Underlying this, they looked at the whole 'vibe' the Centre was giving off, the subliminal message that was being communicated. They ruthlessly removed anything that made the centre look like an adult education institute or new-age centre; anything that implied the centre was a finished product that simply offered courses, anything that looked middle-class, middle-aged, or (worst of all!) like it was trying to be trendy. The key concepts they tried to put across in their publicity became *sangha*, *practice*, *co-creation*, *the Bodhisattva Ideal*, and *authenticity* – of course the actual flyers etc might or might not use those precise words. To some extent this was carried through into other media, eg the website and centre décor – but it was the printed publicity that mattered.

When people came to the centre, authenticity was again a key word – there was NO attempt to be trendy! Authenticity basically implied friendliness, interest in the other person, and confidence in the teaching. Friendliness cuts through any differences in age, lifestyle, whatever.

3. the dana economy. This was the third key change. Everything at the Centre runs on dana. Basically young people are often hard-up - hence unwilling to risk large amounts of money on 'trying something out'. The dana economy allowed them to feel safe in 'giving it a go'. But more than that – properly presented, it's radical, inspiring, even revolutionary; it says "this place is *different*; it's *serious* about creating community, it's a real alternative..."

These three steps can be seen as the Sanghravastus in action.



Other steps taken were –

classes exclusively for young people. These were held in town, under the name ‘buddha nights’. The team were young themselves, the evenings were great fun, but very few people made the transition to coming to the Buddhist centre. Looking back, the best thing about them was the opportunity it gave the centre’s existing young people to organise and really make something happen. What they learned is that outreach *is* important, but more for the existing sangha than for attracting new people!

young people teaching. Sheffield have a general policy about their teachers: they must be happy to teach Bhante’s Dharma (ie not their personal approach to it); they must be in harmony with Order Members round the centre; and they must undergo an apprenticeship first. If young people fulfil these criteria, Sheffield are quite happy for them to teach. Ordination is not a prerequisite.

Integration with the rest of the Sangha. This didn’t seem a problem, especially once there was a ‘critical mass’ of young people coming along.

keeping young people involved.

- Always be really clear what their next step might be – the regulars’ class, weekend retreats, supporting classes, asking to be a mitra or for ordination.
- Arrange social events, including outside the Centre.

Young people’s lives are pretty fluid, and their interests and priorities can change rapidly. Two things especially seemed to interrupt their involvement with the Sangha – demands of work, eg a new job; and their social life, especially relationships.

- So, make it easy for them to drop in to the Centre anytime, eg having drop-in classes (as opposed to always courses), and by avoiding any kind of guilt-tripping message ie “you should...”.
- Remind people the sangha and the centre is a constant process of co-creation, that the Dana Economy is a two-way flow....

ordination requests, and going to retreat centres

Going on retreats is definitely where people get ‘hooked’, where their practice really takes off. Best way to start people going is for an Order Member to announce “I’m off to XXX, who fancies coming?” – and gather a group around him/her and all go together.

Once young people ask for ordination they’ll probably start going to Tiratanaloka and Padmaloka more. This can be problematic though it doesn’t have to be.

Retreat Centre teams need to let the young people be young, ie to have loads of somewhat wild energy, to have enthusiasm for loud long mantras, to be a bit scatty... The Sheffield young men seem to love Padmaloka, the women’s reactions to Tiratanaloka and Taraloka are more mixed. Suggestion for Retreat centre teams - remember what you felt like when you were young!

Retreat centres can be expensive (see above remarks on the importance of a dana economy) – however young people can generally afford something if they set their minds to it.



finally...

The FWBO Files never seem to be a problem – it’s important to take the initiative in letting people know about them though.

When meeting people, be friendly, authentic, interested, and DON’T try to be trendy!

When teaching Dharma, emphasise the Bodhisattva Ideal, ethics, the contribution one can make to the world, the benefits of focussing one’s practice beyond one’s personal self; and puja and chanting...

And enjoy!

These notes compiled from an interview by Lokabandhu with Vajratara, Dec 2008

Inspiring Young People in the Dharma:

a talk by Lindsay Hannah to the FWBO's European Chairs Assembly
Taraloka, January 2009

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Introduction...

Hello, I'm Lindsay I live here at Taraloka and have done for 2 years now. I gave a short talk at the 'Inspiring young people in the Dharma' weekend in November and afterwards Vajragupta asked me if I'd be willing to talk to you today. This talk is a combination of the talk I gave that weekend along with ideas from lots of other different young people, feeding back ideas from the young people's weekend as well whole series of emails and conversations I've had since then. Vajragupta has asked me to talk about what it's like to come into the FWBO as a young person; discussing what is attractive and what is more difficult or off-putting; as well as giving some practical suggestions about what centres could do to attract more young people.



But firstly a bit about me: I'm 28 and my first contact with the FWBO was when I was 21 at the Norwich Buddhist centre and I've been consistently involved ever since, and have also had contact with the Birmingham, Llangollen and Cardiff Sanghas in that time.

What it's like to come into the FWBO as a young person?

One of the most notable experiences of being involved in the Dharma young is that I found myself in a Sangha where the vast majority of people were older than myself at least by 10 years if not more. I currently find myself in a community where the next youngest person is 20 years older than me. I get on well with people older than myself and I have found that my friendships in the Sangha have blossomed on the basis of a shared love of the Dharma and the meaning to life. But more recently I have been reflecting on the situation I find myself in, where with the exception of one other person who happens to be my twin sister, I lack any regular contact with anyone in the Sangha in their 20's. I'm starting to reflect on how I feel about that and doing these talks has certainly put me in touch with imagining what the potential benefits might be for me if I was in contact with more young people in the Sangha.

The Young person's event in November was a really inspiring weekend; it felt like a coming together of a group of people amongst whom were some younger people who were all deeply committed to the Dharma. Most of those young people echoed my experience of having spent most of their Sangha life around older people and I suspect with the exception of a few sanghas, like Sheffield, this is the general experience for young people in our Sangha today. In terms of the order statistics produced by Lokabandhu this is certainly the case.

What's off-putting to young people?

Lack of young people

So, firstly there is an issue about a lack of young people in the sangha – for some young people walking into a centre and seeing no-one near their own age will put them straight off. There is simply something unappealing to young people about being in a group where everyone is old enough to be your parents. To be honest these days I notice I am less likely to attend to local groups in Llangollen or Shrewsbury which have an older Sangha and I feel more drawn to venture to Birmingham where at least there are a few younger people my, even if that's further away.

In centres where there are few young people I think it would be helpful to consider having a young person facilitator – a named young person in the Sangha who was looking out for, meeting up with etc other young people in the Sangha. In this way new young people coming to the centres could be pointed in that direction or another young person. This facilitator could be particularly helpful at encouraging and supporting new young people who come to the centre who wouldn't yet have the support of a mitra convenor and the facilitator could be a person they could ask questions to and feel supported by.

Formality

When Sangarakshita set up the Young Men's Buddhist Association in Kalimpong one of the highlights in the activities for the men was playing ping pong in the recreation hut behind the Vihara! When young men enter our centres most often they will be met with a range of courses and classes, most of which will involve learning meditation, having discussions and chatting over a cup of tea! - a distinct lack of ping pong!! Young people may well find the type of communication in discussion groups or over a cup of tea with a complete stranger (probably much older than themselves) difficult. You may notice them hiding in the book corner hoping to look enthralled and busied by the books, when they are really just biding time until they can go into the class where they will hopefully be in silence and due to the fact they are meditating! One young person told me that after few awkward visits to his centre in that fashion he left and didn't go back for another 5 years!

Informal activities can be a way of getting to know other Buddhists, and thus about Buddhism, in a relaxed and informal way and may well be more attractive to some young people. Often there are informal activities going on in the sangha but these aren't advertising to people coming newish to the centre – they are far more likely to be invited to join a level one meditation course than a game of football or the cinema at the weekend. I propose this could be an area we could develop substantially and that this may well create more 'ways in' for young people for them to get involved and thus be inspired by the Dharma. Ideas for informal activities included: football, a sangha allotment, walks, camping weekends, films, arts etc

Some young people will be in or have recently finished years of academia and to be faced with more courses and levels and stages (ie level 1, level 2, becoming a mitra) at the Buddhist centre can be put young people off. Other young people won't associate themselves with being academic and the idea of formal courses and study may see intimidating to them and they may not feel confident enough to sign up for it. For this reason drop in classes may be more attractive to young people than courses, so bear this in mind when planning your programmes

Young people talked about how they could experience centres as being stuffy and stifling with an atmosphere that is serious, calm, polite. It seemed that they felt that this exacerbated a tendency for

them to be serious and grown up, as they didn't want people to notice they were younger, when actually they needed to let go and hang loose. There was a sense of relief for people on the young person's event from being with other young people – a sense of freedom to express themselves as young people to be playful and youthful. It would be really supportive for young people in the sangha for them to come together to form young persons kulas at there centres – a space for them to be with other young people.

How to be a Buddhist and have a young person's life

On the young person's weekend one of the most popular discussions was about how to be a Buddhist and have a life, or have fun? The people there were feeling the benefit of being amongst other young people and were discussing the sense of conflict they experienced between being a Buddhist and being a young person, and doing things other young people might do – sex, drugs and rock and roll – that sort of thing. An internal sense of "missing out" on something by not indulging in those things with other young people.

I explored for example the use of intoxicants: Generally speaking the use of intoxicants is rife amongst young people. As a Buddhist trying to adhere to the ethical precepts one would undertake to abstain from the use of intoxicants. Some young people who are interested in the Dharma may want to keep using intoxicants, and this may create a conflict within their 'spiritual life' so to speak. I've known young people to go away from thinking the Dharma isn't for them because they haven't given up the use of intoxicants. For these young people it is important for us to remember that they are young people and that giving up intoxicants is work in progress to them. One young person on the weekend rejoiced in the kindness and patience that people in the Sangha showed him as he recovering from being a drug Casualty, this is important.

Other young people interested in the Dharma might not use intoxicants, for so called 'spiritual' or other reasons, and this may create conflict when they are socialising with others who are using intoxicants (particularly other young people not involved in the Dharma). When I was younger I tended to fall into the second category and at times found it difficult and alienating being with non- Buddhist friends who were using intoxicants when I wasn't. This is another reason why I think it would be great if there were young person's Kulas at our centres – as they may help to create a social network of young Buddhists to socialise where the use of intoxicants was not an issue, or where it could be discussed with common understandings and I think we could work toward setting up such a kulas and or social networks.

Young people talked about finding them in a kind of bardo between their old life and the spiritual life. Being a young woman of 17 and finding it hard to relate to others at college and the pain of these old friends now experiencing them as weird. Or being a man in your early 20's who's finding himself making friends mainly with middle aged women. Yet another reason why it is essential that we establish kulas / social networks for the young people coming into our centres. Some centres are already starting to try to create this space, like the Baked Potato Club before sangha night in Sheffield, yet more could be done.

Making lifestyle choices without Buddhist peers

Looking at my friends not involved in the Dharma their 20's has involved a range of issues: setting up careers, buying houses, having sexual relationships, getting married, starting to have families.

Some people may argue that young people coming across the Dharma are less interested in these traditional issues as they are partly attracted to the Dharma life because it seems to be offering an alternative way of life, this definitely true for some young people who are attracted to our centres for this reason. However I also think it is fair to say that there are a substantial proportion of young people who

come across the Dharma to who all of these issues are relevant for, including myself. They have questions such as:

Do I continue to build up a professional career or do I give that up to work in a TBRL?

What does it mean to be a Buddhist and get married and have a family: how might that enrich or restrict my practice?

The Buddha lived a homeless life: what might that look like for me or do I want to have my own home?

Sangharakshita clearly taught that: the centrality of going for refuge is the central act of the Buddhist life where commitment to the three jewels is primary and lifestyle is secondary. So as such there is no right answer to those questions and issues, though let us remember that secondary does not mean unimportant, so we still need to decide what lifestyle is best for us in order to support our effective going for refuge, and there may well be pros and cons. Generally I end up discussing these issues with spiritual friends much older than myself who have often previously (or currently) owned their own house, been married and may have had children and have let's face it, have been there done that! I really wonder how it would feel like to be engaging with these issues and living them along with other young people who are also living the Dharma life. Another reason why I think it would be great if we could create a kula / network of young people practicing the Dharma in the FWBO and thereby create a forum whereby these issues can be discussed and debated.

In 1976 Sangharakshita gave a series of four talks called Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow and in the fourth one he described his vision of a blueprint for a new world. Highlighting what were to become two of the 6 emphases of the FWBO: single sex communities and the TBRL. Living at Taraloka I have got loads from the opportunity of both these things but I also wonder whether this blueprint talked of in 1976 is as relevant or appealing to young people coming across the Dharma in 2009. Do these traditional emphases of the FWBO attract young people or do they put them off? I wonder what impression(s) the FWBO gives young people who are trying to work with these issues and whether these are helpful, encouraging people to feel at home and engage in the Dharma, or whether they put young people off? I think this is some we need to think about.

Other young people

Young people are attracted by young people. So encourage young mitras to be on your centre teams for classes and think about having a named young person as a facilitator, a point of reference that new young people coming in to the centre can contact.

Role-models

But let's not forget young people are also attracted by older people, who can become inspiring role models for them. Young people are inspired by people in the centre, individuals who really have energy about them, a "presence" even, who "walk the talk" and exemplify and teach the Dharma in an inspiring way. Bhante would be our key example given that he was in his 42 when he established the FWBO, attracting many young people! So don't fear if you are older you can still be inspiring!

Search for meaning and community

Young people often come across the Dharma during a search for meaning and purpose to their lives, they have an intuitive sense that the right job or house isn't going to do it for them. So when they come across the Dharma they hear the truth and they find that sense of meaning and purpose in their lives

that they were searching for. For others, they are looking for freedom from suffering and hearing the Dharma gives them a path that leads from suffering. For others they meet people in the Sangha living in communities and working in TBRL and they are inspired by this way of life. So bear this search for meaning in mind when planning courses.

Friendships

Not surprising, friendship has had a key part to play in attracting young people to the FWBO. Many young people told personal stories where a key person at the centre has taken an interest in them, been a mentor, been the first person that has really "seen" them, or listened to them deeply, supported them, and been a person that can ask questions of. Personal invitations to events were helpful to some young people, encouraging them to come to events they might not otherwise have attended. Some young people can be unconfident and tended to think see a poster and think "oh that's not really for me" and personal invitations to events at the centre, or social events outside, made them feel welcome. So don't forget the powerful effect of friendship or underestimate the potential positive effects of taking an interest in young people at your centre and making an effort to invite them to things, it can make a real difference.

Energy

Young people are attracted to energy – energy in people, energy in ritual and energy in discussion of the Dharma. Some people felt that stimulating discussion of the Dharma was more inspiring and attractive than meditation, as it was addressing their longing for meaning and giving them opportunities to ask questions and search for the answers in their lives. Does your centre programme tend towards meditation and do you advertise a space for dharmic discussion? Ritual was seen as a great antidote for the stuffiness some young people were experiencing at their centres, a place for wholehearted emotional engagement that generated a sense of connection breaking down the "nice and polite" atmosphere.

Young Mitras running classes and initiatives

I realise this can be a sensitive area and understand that people want to feel confident that if GFR mitras are leading classes or initiatives that they have the appropriate level of knowledge and skills to be doing that. So whilst I think that does need to be taken in to account I think it can be incredibly enabling for young people to feel they have the permission and support to run something. These days young people generally come across centres that are already set up and established, so it can be harder for them to feel engaged as there is nothing like setting up a project to really feel a part of it. So give younger people the confidence, space and support they need to run initiatives, this might be at the centre or outreach classes at colleges and universities or in town. This was one of the positive outcomes of the young person's weekend, where the young people realised they had a voice and that people were interested and where encouraging them to take initiative – help that inspiration live on in your centres.

TBRL and Communities

Nagesvara told his story of coming to the Dharma, part of which involved moving from Sweden to work at Windhorse so that he could have contact with other younger people in the sangha. Are these opportunities available for young people coming across the FWBO today? Will they find thriving TBRL where they can live and work with other young people, alongside more experienced role models? It would be fantastic to see initiatives with young people and TBRL in mind. With this in mind that's become part our vision for Taraloka's future: as later this year we hope to begin a new project in which we are inviting the next generation of women to come and live and work here together, alongside others who are very experienced in the FWBO.

Retreats

Let's not forget the profound effect of retreats. Many of the young people talked about how it was because of being on retreat and going deeper which gave them a direct and real experience of the fruits of the Dharma: clear seeing of truth, an expansive calm mind, a heart full of loving kindness. For many it was those experiences that meant there was no turning back so to speak and gave them the momentum to commit. This was certainly my experience after a 10 day vipassana retreat in India. So let's make sure we encourage young people to come on retreats, be that sangha retreats or retreats at our retreat centres.

Dana economy and drop in systems

Which brings me to the very important subject of Dana. Young people often don't have lots of money and so it's really important that we encourage them to come and just give what they can. A dana economy really makes the difference to some young people it not only makes it possible for them to attend a class or day or retreat but it also makes them feel incredibly welcomed. Its one of the many things I love about Taraloka, that we run on a dana economy, and when people call me inquiring about coming on retreat that I can say 'just come', regardless of how much money you can give 'Just come', as the most important thing is that you 'just come' and experience being here, learn to meditate and come across the Dharma. We thrive, they thrive. Please consider running some events on a dana basis and not requiring people pay up front for a whole course as this can really enable young people to feel like they can afford to come and take the risk to try something new.

What can we do: practical suggestions from Lindsay

Make young people visible in your centres

As much as possible invite younger people to be on teams, to support classes etc.

Consider having a named young person's facilitator at your centre

Perhaps there's young Order member or an active young GFR mitra at your centre who would be able to take this on.

Give Young Mitras the confidence, space and support to run classes and initiatives

This might be classes at the centre or a Young Buddhist day, like Kev and I will run in Birmingham in March. Or it could be running classes at the university or college the young person is at.

Friendships

As I'm sure you will, continue to provide Kalyanamitratra, exemplify Dharma and remember the importance of personal invitations.

Formal activities

Keep young people in mind when planning your programmes and include events with energy – dharmic discussions, debates, puja and retreats. Consider alternatives to formal looking courses, and make sure there are some drop-in classes. As far as possible run these activities on dana.

Remember young people are young!

They may have issues around the use of intoxicants and they may be facing huge life choices for the first time. Encourage people to make the right lifestyle choice for them, avoid a 'been there done that' attitude and remember career, family and children may be important to them as well as single sex communities and TBRL.

Young person's Kulas, Social Scenes and Informal Activities

Create space for a Social scene and young person's kula at your centre and encourage the

young people there to take the initiative to set something up. This can be a forum for young people to be young people, to be playful, to make friends and have a place to discuss issues, such as lifestyle choices. From the shared interests of these people informal activities may arise, support and encourage this.

Create Communities and TBRL with young people in which are attractive to young people

Running events and advertising in non Buddhist environments eg. Universities

If young people won't come to you go to them – why not try running classes or giving talks in public places where young people might be – universities, colleges, arts centres, cafes even. Basically places outside of a "Buddhist centre" may be more attractive. Also target some advertising to places where young people meet and with young people in mind.

UK wide forum for young people practising in the FWBO

Some centres and groups are going to have too few young people amongst them to set up substantial enough young persons kulas and so I think it would be good to also have a more UK wide forum to create a social network for young people in the Dharma and a forum where young people can discuss their lives with other young people. With this mind I've set up a facebook group for young people in the FWBO which already has 47 members (though admittedly not all are young). But I also have a bigger vision of a coming together of Young Person's facilitators and kulas of young people from every centre in the UK (or worldwide) for events and retreats for young people to really inspire them in the Dharma and to bring the younger next generation of Dharma practitioners into the FWBO.