

How Can We Inspire more Young People with the Dharma?



Introduction

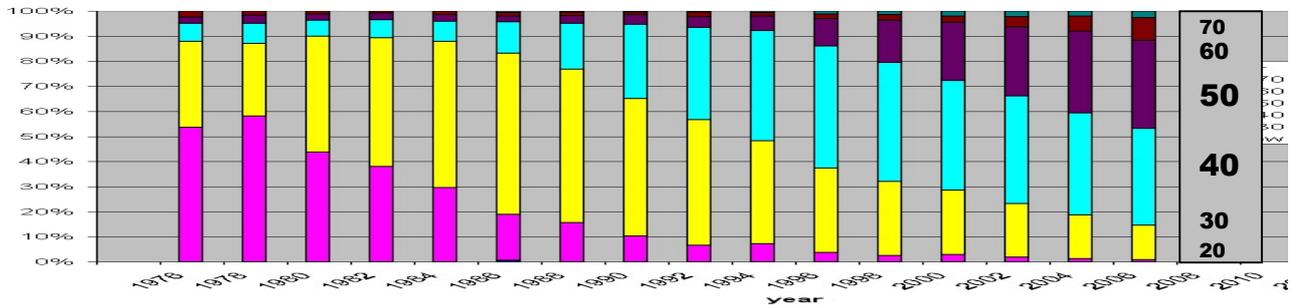
On the weekend of November 7-9th 2008 24 people (of all ages) from a range of FWBO Centres (in the UK and beyond) met to explore the topic "How can we Inspire more Young People with the Dharma?".

A rich collection of ideas and resources were generated using a process based on '[Open Space Technology](#)', this document summarises them, with a few more added from other sources.

Your comments and suggestions would be very welcome, please contact Lokabandhu on lokabandhu@fwbo.org or 07852 281750.

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. If we follow a trend of “like-attracts-like” it’s hard to see how we (as a Sangha) will do other than grow older and older. Interestingly, despite Buddhism’s positive reputation, this seems to be a problem across the whole Buddhist world, not just with us.

The ideas

These are the major ideas generated during the Young People’s weekend. All need more exploration and experimentation but all have mileage in them.

- ✚ **Figure out how to Have Fun; or, Be a Buddhist AND Have a Life...!** Linked topics – How do we bring more SPONTANEITY to organised activities at centres? How to make sure we create a social space in the centre. Try Sheffield’s Baked Potato Club?
- ✚ **Take the Dharma into Universities and Colleges.** Specifically, the two areas of Chaplaincies and Buddhist Societies. Train young people to teach – though maybe avoid the word ‘teacher’.
- ✚ **Encourage Young People to communicate the Dharma.** See above...
- ✚ **Start a Gap Year Right Livelihood Project.** Explore creating a new Right Livelihood providing Gap Year (and Career Break) opportunities for people.
- ✚ **Appoint Young Persons’ facilitators at Centres.** The post could be formal or informal depending on local centre size/situation; they could be a young person, or not. They’d act as a reference point for new young people coming to the centre, supporting them in the pre-mitra stage. If young themselves, they’d be linked to a local Order Member. UK facilitators could be linked into a network of young people’s facilitators.
- ✚ **Hold special Young People’s retreats.** Linked to this – provide channels where young people can hook up with one another eg events or groups on social networking sites like Facebook.
- ✚ **Develop ‘Rites of Passage’ for Young People** – as Essen have done.

More generally -

- ✚ **Explore** the image Buddhism has among young people/in society
- ✚ **Explore** issues facing 'Second Generation Buddhists'

The 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.

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

TBMSG have created the very successful NNBY, the National Network of Buddhist Youth – see www.justgiving.com/indianbuddhistyouth or their website www.nnby.org.

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 I have no information on it.

In Germany there's a BuddhaTeens website but I can't read it! www.buddhateens.de

In Australia there's a Tibetan initiative "Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth" (LKPYP) 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...

The plans

So far there are no firm plans for how to take this issue forwards, however this may change after discussion at the January 2009 ECA meeting. The Young People's weekend did not make any plans to reunite, although a follow-up weekend is an obvious possibility at some point.

In addition the International Urban Retreat and the Buddhafield Festival in 2009 are possible forums where we could bring young people together.

These notes by Lokabandhu, November 2009