

Soul Space Spiritual Directors Report: Greenbelt Arts Festival 2007, Cheltenham Race Course

Background

This year 25000 people attended the three and half days of the Greenbelt Festival which as usual brilliantly encompassed music, seminars and workshops from a wide range of spiritual traditions with an emphasis on reality, inclusion and social justice.

The 'Soul Space' initiative at Greenbelt has been developed over the last seven years. It is run by a team of spiritual directors who offer half-hour spiritual direction sessions throughout the festival and also create an area for prayer and quiet contemplation.

Soul Space has a stunning venue, high in the main grandstand of the Cheltenham Racecourse site, with wonderful views of the site and the surrounding hills. The venue is big enough for us to provide private individual spiritual direction in addition to the other related activities.

The aim of 'Soul Space' is to introduce people to a wide range of different ways into prayer, and to create an atmosphere in which people can pray easily and naturally. It also seeks to provide a non-threatening environment for individuals to engage with the activities offered at whatever level they feel comfortable.

2007 Operation: The Team View

We conducted 219 spiritual direction sessions during the festival and we estimated that approximately three thousand people visited the venue. The written feedback was overwhelmingly good and in addition many people thanked us personally on the last day. Typical comments were:

My children, aged 7 and 4, made us come here 2-3 times every day. They were quiet and reverent, and this place is lovely. The youngest says she wishes we could "take Level 5 with us."

Thank you for this space. In a busy buzzing festival this place is profound and profoundly beautiful. God touched and refreshed me here.

This place feels like the soul of Greenbelt. It has been very healing for me to spend time here and think and pray about my life. Very beautiful and very special. Some of the spiritual/prayer exercises such as the tree of life and 4 seasons would be wonderful exercises to take back to our churches and homegroups.

A lovely space. Very peaceful with lots of variety and ways to connect. Wonderful resource ideas.

Fantastic books! (Reference to the 'browsing table' we provide)

Thank you for creating this sacred space. Being listened to sensitively and compassionately was wonderful – thank you to the lovely Spiritual Director who listened to me.

The activities and the space represented an important point of contact for people who wanted to talk about their spiritual journey, wanted a space just pray or just 'be', and/or wanted to find out more about spiritual direction. We provide a space which includes activities for children and adults which we believe creates an 'all age' spiritually helpful environment.

Each year we compile a list of contacts for those who would like to consider having spiritual direction on a more permanent basis. This facility was again well used and makes an important contribution to raising the awareness and accessibility of this ministry. We also publish a leaflet on 'What is Spiritual Direction' and present a workshop on the same theme.

This year, for the first time, we provided a website (sponsored by Annunciation Trust) to support our work and this was well used. It is linked from the main Greenbelt website and includes a list of the resources used in Soul Space (with in many cases downloadable copies), a list of the books that were available in Soul Space on the 'browsing table', a biographical description of the spiritual directors, and information on spiritual direction. This we would expect to continue and expand for next year. (The web address is <http://www.annunciationtrust.org.uk/SoulSpace/>)

Finance

Our team of eight spiritual directors and a venue manager are expecting to return next year and in order to do this we need to maintain the same total level of funding from Greenbelt and outside sponsors. This funding allows us to provide off site 'B & B' accommodation and to cover 'out of pocket' expenses. The B & B accommodation is supports the team who all work very long hours in Soul Space and see many directees with a vast array of presenting stories.

Evaluation/Conclusions

The team provides an excellent arena for the planning and the creation of Soul Space, before the festival. It also provides both support and accountability for the spiritual direction during the festival. The space and the short spiritual direction sessions provide a unique facility for those attending and offer an introduction to a model of spiritual formation that they might not have experienced before.

Roy Gregory
(For the Soul Space Spiritual Directors Team)