

## **Feedback from NVN Annual Gathering 2019**

Thanks, everybody, for a great Annual Gathering. Thanks to everybody who made everything happen and thanks to everybody who participated so brilliantly.

Overall the feedback was very positive and there were many comments appreciating the efforts and organisation by the trustees.

### **Social and Wellbeing:**

There were many comments about the friendliness of the whole gathering. The buddy system seemed to work better this year with the allocation of buddies in advance. It is still a big gathering that can be overwhelming for new people in particular but the overall feeling from the feedback was that we are improving year on year. The focus on wellbeing was praised and Jo (and her team) were mentioned many times – not just in the written feedback but during the gathering as well. The message about taking time out as needed is coming through and there was much less feedback about being stressed. Similarly, the continued efforts on inclusivity were much appreciated and much praise heaped on the inclusivity team for their support. There was constructive criticism to be taken on board regarding word displays, making material available in advance to visually impaired people, always enforcing the use of the microphone in plenary sessions, always having warm-ups, not taking prior knowledge for granted (e.g. ‘as we all know...’). There was also a mention that the inclusivity team was all white and female and thus not very inclusive. To that we can only reply that there is always a call going out to participants asking for volunteers for different roles and only white, female members volunteered. The feedback raised (again) the wish for a quiet room but, unless we have an even larger venue, we can’t accommodate that wish – we are currently using all the rooms for workshops and home groups. This is also the reason why we can’t reduce the size of the home groups: they wouldn’t have a home!

The home groups were generally appreciated with many commenting on the ‘safe home’ away from the big gathering. There were some issues with understanding of the purpose of home groups and their facilitation and we are having a look at how we can improve the briefing of the facilitators.

The cabaret was widely enjoyed by all (perhaps a little long due to eager performers underestimating their time input!), and there was fabulous singing in the bar both Friday and Saturday evening. There were a few comments about inclusivity in newcomers not knowing the songs, but that is how we learn and share. A good comment about including the newly learned Big Sing songs.

### **Programme**

More time between sessions (and full hour sessions) was appreciated as was the ‘free time’ slot. Adding the continued message of JOMO (Joy of Missing Out), this year more seemed to have felt free to take time out for themselves, thus removing some of the previously reported feelings of stress. The feedback on the programme was positive: theme of the event; variation, content and quality of workshops; Big Sing songs and warm-ups (although more warm-ups called for). The keynote workshop received many positive comments about ‘legend’ Leon Rosselson’s history tour through protest singing, and his

contribution to the Saturday cabaret was warmly welcomed. There was also feedback that the session was too long, 'didn't do it for me', 'leftie', 'I didn't know who he was'. Frankie's comment when she heard that we had secured Leon for the keynote session was: 'How wonderful that we are going back to our roots!' It is good to have all this feedback - perhaps keynote presentations are there to shake ourselves up a little, learn something we didn't know about - but it also raises the issue of giving even more information about presenters and their presentation ahead of the event. We shall do our best to accommodate that as far as possible.

## **Venue**

The venue was overwhelmingly appreciated with comfortable rooms, 'lovely friendly and accommodating' staff, good workshop spaces, pool and spa facilities, everything under one roof. There were issues with harsh lighting and lack of fresh air, which are difficult to overcome, except for opening doors and windows and, as done in some instances, switching off the air-conditioning. There are some wishes for a less corporate, more 'earthy' and 'natural' venue more in keeping with NVN values, including kitchens with communal cooking. Also calls for moving the venue further north, e.g. Birmingham. All valid points. It has to be said that finding a venue that can hold the number of participants of our growing network is of course not impossible, but it is no easy task, and would involve a major effort. We are open to the idea but would need substantial help with that from the network membership to make it happen. It should also be noted that having a venue that we are now familiar with and which understands our needs is very valuable in terms of planning. As for self-catering (a nice suggestion was we could cook for ourselves in home groups) it looks to me a logistical nightmare – both in terms of organising the food and in terms of planning the gathering to take into account the time for food preparation. It is a huge task, currently taken care of by the hotel.

Which brings us to the issue of food.... While there were many comments about great food, there were many more about the need to improve the food, asking for more variation, particularly for vegetarians and vegans. We will feed this back to the hotel.

Looking forward to next year where we will celebrate 25 years of the Network!

Thanks again  
Lotte