

## HOPING FOR A CAMPHILL COMMUNITY IN KOREA

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*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference. – St. Francis*

I remember some of the last words in the book *Holistic Special Education* which I have kept in mind since translating the book into Korean in 2011.

‘What needs to be done is simple enough to express but it will take time, effort and a willingness to compromise.’(p. 274).

I must confess that the last six years at Yangpyoung Steiner School, the first Waldorf School for children with special needs in Korea, has been learning the right time to act and how to achieve a balance between doing one's best and having to compromise. Whilst the many Camphill communities around the world are beautiful and joyful places, it is necessary for us to realize that it will not be easy to build a Camphill Community in Korea, as Korea has its own unique culture. To build this kind of community is like transplanting a rare new plant: we have to wait until the plant becomes deeply rooted in this different soil.

Once the school had become more established, a group of teachers and I went to Europe during the three week Autumn vacation to visit a number of Camphill communities and to attend an International Curative Education and Social Therapy Conference in Switzerland. This was an important learning time for all of us. One returning to Korea, I had difficulty in adjusting. Possibly because of feeling tired, I was involved in a car accident. This presented a crisis for the school. But as we sometimes find in our lives, a crisis can present new opportunities. One of the teachers came forward and ran the school during this period. After three months of hospitalization during which I was unable to walk, I made a gradual recovery and returned to school. The school was taking a major step at this time for with the support of parents we had built a new school hall. While the students gradually started to adjust to new teachers, it was also a time for me to accept a new role. The co-workers with whom I had worked in Scotland came back to join us and I felt that this was the time to start some new work

providing opportunities to let more people in Korea know about Camphill communities. A representative of the Korean Welfare Facility Association for the Disabled expressed his interest in collaborating with us in the creation of a Camphill community. And we discussed what might be the best strategy for introducing such a community.

I started giving lectures about Camphill communities, relating my personal experiences of the Newton Dee Camphill community in Scotland and the qualities of Waldorf education for children with special needs. More and more people wanted to know about Camphill communities. The Korean edition of *Holistic Special Education* which had been published at the same time as my own book *The Letter from Camphill* proved very helpful for those people who wanted to learn more. It was proposed that people who actually worked in Camphill communities should be invited to tell their stories.

The Yangpyoung Steiner School and the Korean Welfare Facility Association for the Disabled took on this task and planned an international seminar on Camphill. In the Spring of 2012, we invited Stefan Siegel-Holz who is a writer on Camphill and who lives in Camphill Lehenhof in Germany, Astrid Radysh who is a housemother in the Newton Dee Camphill community in Scotland, a member from the Peaceful Bamboo Village in Vietnam, and Marc Blachere, chief gardener at Camphill Copake in America. We listened to their experiences of living in a Camphill Community. An overall total of one thousand people gathered for this seminar in Seoul and Daejeon - the two biggest cities in Korea. This introduction to Camphill proved a great sensation, as people in Korea were looking for new housing facilities for the disabled. A law had recently been passed that housing units for people with a disability should be set up each catering for no more than 30 people. For those parents who had children with special needs, this was seen as an ideal arrangement and many parents came to Yangpyoung Steiner School with the idea of starting a Camphill community by themselves.

Responding to the requests from the parents, my colleagues and I drew up a proposal to submit to the government. When our proposal was accepted, we decided to let the parents know more about Camphill. More than 500 parents with children with special needs received information about Camphill and through word of mouth the Camphill community concept rapidly became known throughout Korea. Those who wanted to experience Camphill community life at firsthand visited Camphill communities in England and Ireland.

But despite this level of interest it was still not easy to progress the idea of building a Camphill community. Many parents were asking when the first Camphill house was going to be built at Yangpyoung Steiner School, for they could see the benefits of their children learning independent life skills through the community life.

But it was not easy to commence work on the first Camphill house. One of the co-workers had to leave because of marriage and pregnancy. Some of the parents proved un-cooperative; simply waiting until a Camphill community was established and then taking advantage of the facility. There were also difficulties in creating housing facilities that were consistent with the Camphill ethos. Sadly too, Mr. Lim, the representative of Korean Welfare Facility Association for the Disabled, who had tried his best to assist us, suddenly died. However a financial benefactor emerged and promised to give us the financial support necessary to build the first Camphill house. So we were at last on our way.

The school had its fifth birthday on February 28th 2014. All of us prepared for the celebration. It is said that the Mojuk, a type of bamboo, takes five years before it becomes firmly rooted in the ground. If you plan on this basis then after five years, the plants shoot up from the ground and fill a whole forest. But perhaps our school had not yet become securely rooted, for there was one more challenge this year. One of the teachers who had for a long time played an important part in school management resigned from the school and a number of students left because of that. With these many challenges facing the school, I decided to come back and take on a class as a homeroom teacher and pour my enthusiasm into stabilizing the school. Up to that point I had been working mostly outside the school preparing for the establishment of the first Camphill house.

Parents of children at the Yangpyoung Steiner School were very supportive at this time. They continued to show their trust in the school and did what they could for the school. They demonstrated that they were part of our community. Although they might not understand Steiner's three fundamental social orders, they tried to fulfill all their responsibilities as members of the school. The teachers, too, did their best to engage with the children in the spiritual activities which flow from these social orders. Recently, we had a sports day where all the parents, students and teachers came together, laughing and crying, and recognizing the love and support they have for each other.

Establishing the Camphill Movement in Korea is not going to be easy. Recently, I had the opportunity to visit Camphill communities in New York and Pennsylvania. Here the communities were located in beautiful and rich environments and had the support of the states authorities and individuals. Whilst many places and schools for people with a disability in Korea get support from the government, the overall cost for that support is high. In seeking to start a Camphill community, we need to ensure that we are free in our decision making; however when you receive financial support from the government, this is not always easy. The Steiner School does get private support from different individuals for it is funded by a non-governmental organisation called 'Camphill Village' which provides each year 45,000,000 won (about \$45,000) from 350 individual sponsors. This is money which comes from people who have a profound wish to see a Camphill community in Korea.

Every year on the day of the winter solstice in December, 'Camphill Village' holds a special event. For this day of least light, we seek to share our warmth with each other. For five years, this event has been held. This year, I would like attach a special meaning to the event. It is everyone's wish to see the creation of a Camphill community deeply rooted in Korea!

## **References**

Robin Jackson (ed) (2006) *Holistic Special Education: Camphill Principles and Practice*, Edinburgh: Floris Books.

Kim Eunyong (2008) *Letter from Camphill*, Seoul: Ji Wasarang.