

## **Dedication and inspiration in abundance!**

*By Gitte Lassen, head of Parents Association at the 'Waldorf school in Lækjarbotn' in Iceland*

Last Saturday evening I wrote on my facebook: "The energy of a group of active change agents, as here, is always phenomenal and a privilege to be a part of."

'Here' is at the International Steiner Waldorf Parents Network (ISWPN) meeting and seminar in Oslo, Norway. Oslo is a beautiful city. It was a delight to look at the many beautiful, old buildings and walk among tall, majestic trees on my way to Rudolf Steinerhøyskolen where the meeting was held. You see, I come from Iceland, a country that has neither.

There were 15-25 people attending the meeting throughout the weekend of September 24.-26. And what a lovely group of caring and inspiring people from eight countries that was - Finland, France, England, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Sweden. Two of us hailed from Iceland, sort of coincidentally having received the information about this meeting; neither one of us had any idea that this sort of thing even existed!

The two of us from Iceland became so inspired by listening to what the other participants shared about their own school and country that we spend half an hour Saturday night on a street corner planning all the things we were going to make happen in Iceland. In fact, we ended up so inspired by the meeting that next years meeting will take place in Iceland.

Many good and excellent issues were brought to our attention throughout the meeting. Godi Keller, whom we all love and respect, asked a very important question that we worked on in groups to answer: 'What can we, as parents, legitimately demand from the teachers?' The answers were not unexpectedly focused around respect for the child, dialogue and information flow as well as teacher qualification and upholding academic standards.

There were sunshine stories to share: of success and growth and increased governmental support.

One such story was how the Norwegian Parents Association has been a major influence in affecting a change of educational law. As we listened to the story, we all came to understand that one of the main reasons for their success was due to the Teachers Association having cultivated an ongoing relationship with the politicians, enabling and cultivating a climate of trust, to such an extent that the teachers have been asked to consult on several issues.

I believe, this is something we all must take to heart if we wish to strengthen the Waldorf/Steiner presence in our respective countries. The laws are made by politicians and the more they know and understand Waldorf/Steiner pedagogy the more supportive they will be.

Another lesson the Norwegians shared was the fact that the politicians respect the parents' point of view more so than the teachers'. It makes sense when you think about it and points out again how important we parents are for the continuing successful existence and growth of the Waldorf/Steiner schools. If we, the parents, didn't want Waldorf/Steiner schools, would there be any at all?

Sadly, there were also stories from some countries of the financial crisis threatening the Waldorf/Steiner schools, non-supportive governments as well as lack of cooperation between schools.

Örjan Retsler, our representative from the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (ECSWE), suggested that parents could benefit by the creation of a formal European Waldorf Steiner Parents Association. In discussing this idea, we decided for now to remain an open forum for networking, but maybe take it up again at next years meeting. And perhaps, as one participant pointed out, when the need is really there, the parents of all countries will rise in strength together.

One of the most important things we learned from each other was that perhaps not the same model would be appropriate or even applicable in all situations. Differences between Waldorf /Steiner schools ignite a creative dynamic that none of us wish to see regulated out of existence. And so we come to one of the most beautiful aspects of Waldorf/Steiner: Individual differences, whether people, schools or countries, are to be treasured, honored and celebrated.

By the end of the meeting we, both as parents and members of society, were all inspired to become change agents and do our own personal best to strengthen the Waldorf/Steiner presence back home.