

## **ELSA Youth Meeting Giggleswicks 2009**

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July in the idyllic setting of Giggleswick School in North Yorkshire the 7<sup>th</sup> ELSA Youth Meeting took place with the theme for the week being the “Right to Speak”. ELSA stands for the European League of Stuttering associations and their main objectives are to a) Promote self-help in European countries b) representation of interests for stammerers in the European Parliament c) Exchange of Information and experiences between National Associations through Seminars, Newsletter etc, And it was with the last objective in mind that had 30 proactive young people aged 18-26 from 13 Countries within Europe were in this sleepy rural setting ready to do what they fear most speak to a group of 30+ strangers. The first night was all about introductions and settling in to what would be our home for the week this involved introductions from the Main leaders Edwin and Anita and what delights they had in store for us. Then it was the time we all dreaded, our introductions were we had to get up and say our names and point out from where in Europe we came from on a map and stating some small facts on our respective countries, you could feel the tension in the room as we all waited in the green mile for our time in the chair. It would be the last time I would feel that fear for the rest of the week.

The next day was the start of seminars for the week which would range from Human rights and Equality to Performing Arts, for these we were placed in four groups of 7/8., We started the day hearing about how other associations around Europe work and what role the young people had in their respective associations and how we can do more to raise awareness in our country. The experience in the room ranged from a 25 year chairperson to plain old members like myself but what the seminar did was give everyone the incentive to do more.

In the evening it was play time with Guddas Drama workshop which involved very little drama but a whole lot of childlike fun and it gave our group a great chance to bond. Our evenings were spent in the rec room of the school doing activities ranging from snooker to dancing and a few social drinks.

The next Day we started off with a visit to Bob in his performing Arts class in which we participated in activities ranging from learning to play the Didgeridoo to laying on a bed of nails and also expressing your feeling about your stammer using performing arts.

The afternoon was given up to a seminar by Edwin Farr in which we learnt the workings of ELSA in International and European Disability policy relating to stammering and the work that is been done on our behalf to protect our human rights.

Tuesday was our day off and as a group we visited local Caves and explored the nearby market town of Settle and that evening we had a few games of Football and for a change the UK and Ireland team seemed to have the upper hand on mainland Europe.

Wednesday was totally devoted to our project which entailed each group working out a business plan for an initiative to provide a worth while service for Stammerers throughout Europe. The groups then presented the plan to the leaders and other participants that evening and The fear that was so prevalent on the opening night had now dissipated as each group delivered a professional and passionate presentation. The Ideas

included a Radio Station, and a TV programme made for and presented by people who stammer, to a recruitment agency to help employers and employees to deal with stammering in the work place.

Thursday was another day for a project this time it was a drama with the theme being stammering and every group performing this at the leaving party which occurred on that our final night and was also attended by members of local stammering associations.

Friday was time to say our goodbyes and leave behind 30 new friends and return to the real world. I would like to thank ELSA and everybody taking part for making it an unforgettable week were I learned a lot about myself not only in relation to my stammer but about myself in general and the experience has taught me that my stammer is very small part of what makes up a person. Also thanks to The Irish Stammering Association for giving me the opportunity to represent them.

Chris Maguire