



Newsletter

TGS Newsletter no. 8-9, Sept./Dec. 2009 - UK Edition
TGS Eurogroup, via Marconi 22, 31021 Mogliano V.to TV, tel./fax +39.041.5904717

Season's Greetings from your TGS Leaders!

by Igino Zanandrea, President of TGS Eurogroup

A seasonal toast from all TGS Eurogroup leaders gathered for the traditional TGS Christmas lunch, just a couple of weeks before Christmas!

A much cherished event that heralds the official start of all TGS Eurogroup activities for the New Year: the Friendship Meeting, scheduled for Sunday, January 10th, 2010 at 10:00 am at TGS headquarters, "Astori" Salesian College in Mogliano Veneto. All leaders will be present and ready to welcome students, parents and friends - both old and new - of TGS.

For students and leaders who took part in our summer courses in Great Britain in the summer of 2009, the Friendship Meeting will be a special occasion to meet up again and maybe start thinking of a brand new TGS experience in Summer 2010. For parents, families, friends - and even for those new to TGS - it's the

best opportunity to learn something more about the Association, to review the program of TGS activities for 2010, and begin to plan summer holidays for their children accordingly.

What's new in 2010? First, the opening of a new center for the "middle school" age group: Coulsdon, which is now supporting Caterham, only a few miles away. Actually Coulsdon is not a real piece of news for TGS, as it used to be a TGS center until about 15 years ago: so this is rather like a welcome return! Secondly, the length of stay of TGS summer courses is now equal for all age groups. The school days are thus 15 for all centers, for a total of 45 actual hours of lessons.

But before thinking about TGS plans for 2010, as year 2009 is coming to an end let's take a break and think back of what we achieved so far.

This special edition of the TGS Newsletter is coming to you with a couple of articles about our 2009 Summer Courses in England and our Summer Camp in L'Aquila. Enjoy your reading!



TGS UK Summer 2009

by Bruna Rainaldi, Vice President of TGS Eurogroup

About 115 students, aged from 12 to 18, joined our English summers courses in the UK.

As usual this activity is a “planned adventure”, as much as possible, in every detail (technical and non-technical) and it normally becomes a bet for everyone: for our students of course, but for their leaders, young-adults-TGS-Leaders too.

While TGS courses were still on, a small group of “out-of-age” TGS volunteers which cannot be TGS leaders during the summer for family or work-related issues, visited our four centres, Caterham, Tonbridge, Dorking and Tunbridge Wells, to have a direct experience of what the groups were doing on the field.

We spent some days with our students and leaders, and together we shared some great moments: from the Holy Mass in Tunbridge Wells to the play “Romeo and Juliet” at London’s Globe Theatre, and even two “Get Together” events, the final party where all English families and Italian students & leaders mix.

It has been a great satisfaction to see that all our preparatory work, all the training sessions with the leaders in the previous months, the frequent e-mails with our English agents, the bookings and the inevitable last-minute problems... well, all this went to the background to leave room for the students’ desire to be together and the harmony between students and leaders.

For our older students it has been a real emotion to prepare the prayers of the faithful both in Italian and in English and then to sing an Italian song during the Holy Mass. We have been hosted by the Catholic Community, so similar in the structure but so peculiar in the way English people live it. It has been a moving moment when the priest justified the choice of the final hymn by saying that they needed to find a song “on which our Italian friends can sing along too”.

And what about the blonde English kids climbing on our host students to pull them onto the dance floor at the final party... and our students, apparently so detached, gave in with a nice smile to making them have fun and by having fun on their own first of all, under the looks of the English mums saying “it will be sad to see them go back to Italy tomorrow”.

And what can we say about the badly hidden emotion of our youngest students, very stylish (... that was a big moment for them!) to the certificate-giving ceremony from the teachers and the encouragement claps for their friends, perhaps less inclined to studying during the summer, but proud of having some A marks in their certificate.

And what about the students who laid the tables to have some spaghetti together alternating napkins, forks, glasses and jokes, out-of-tune songs and ending with a nice dish of pasta for our English friends, some raped Parmesan and nice cheers for the “cooking leaders”?

What we felt, as visitors, was a strong feeling of belonging to the group, a real desire to get to know other people, to create relationships which last for long, together with the genuine curiosity of the host families, for the places they visited and the experiences they had. Fun, energy and playfulness are of course the main ingredients for young people entertained by Salesian leaders.

When you see them come back at the airport, you somehow understand, from their crumpled faces, that something just isn’t right: there must be some kind of treasure you can’t grasp, you only perceive the reflection of all the things they have in their hearts in the weeks they spent together, and you would like them to explain what was so special about it.

And then, one day, in TGS main office we receive a letter by an Italian family; it says: “My daughter’s come home one week ago, and she keeps telling me that the leaders and the priest were real good and real fun, that she got to know so many friends, that she had so much fun, that she has visited some wonderful places. Not to talk about the host family: they were really the family my daughter left in Italy; they’ve always been helpful and nice, they always made sure she was OK, I couldn’t possibly ask for more. My daughter left a piece of her heart with them, and now, thanks to e-mails, she keeps in touch; she misses the kids, with which she shared games and little conversations. I would like to Thank you, Thank you from the very bottom of my heart and on behalf of my husband too”.

And so everything becomes clear: you understand that the “gift” that the kids brought home is the result of that seed of free love seeded by the leaders in their young hearts who are eager to live. This seed has found a fertile and welcoming earth. All this is in the sign of God’s love for us.





TGS Summer Camp in L'Aquila

by Igino Zanandrea, President of TGS Eurogroup.

From the 22nd to the 30th August 2009, four TGS Eurogroup leaders and two mother-tongue teachers, directly from the UK, organized an English Course offered as a gift to L'Aquila students.

TGS Eurogroup's Summer Camp was a part of the "Progetto Oratorio Salesiano: La giovane Aquila vola sempre Alto (The young eagle always flies high)" promoted by L'Aquila's Salesian House. TGS Eurogroup shares with L'Aquila's Salesian House "the need to carry forward the reconstruction of social and community bonds in order to revitalize the city's initiatives": TGS Summer Camp was therefore a drop in the huge sea of the "Estate Ragazzi" initiative organized by L'Aquila's Salesians. The project was part of a larger project but with a common objective: synergy and complementarity of the initiatives, activities and people involved.

For those who experienced it personally, TGS Summer Camp was definitely an intense experience, which really touched our hearts. A tiring adventure, but a rich adventure both in terms of emotions and contrasting feelings. Living so close to people so challenged by life cannot leave us indifferent. I am not exaggerating when I say that on this occasion, our voluntary service in TGS Eurogroup assumed an explanation and a commitment different from the past: nothing will ever be as it was before. This experience

widened our horizons and opened new paths for us.

It is hard to explain in words what this experience left inside us. Something, not that much actually, can be understood from the logbook we wrote during our week there, and which you can now read on TGS Eurogroup blog page, in TGS Whiteboard webpage.

It might be easier to say what L'Aquila Salesian Oratorio gave – and still gives – to the families of L'Aquila, which identified it as an unescapable point from where to start their reconstruction. I am not talking about the city's reconstruction, but rather about human and social relationships reconstruction, and this comes first, before any other proposition of urban requalification. This is perfectly expressed by the true words of one of the many mothers which every day take their children to the Oratorio:

"You, the Salesians, but most of all the youth workers who alternate on a weekly basis, you don't fully understand all the good you do. You gave back peace to our children. You gave them back their life. You gave them back what the earthquake had stolen. The earthquake stole their houses and a place where to stay with their friends and their schoolmates. In these months, being with us, they've been hearing a lot about the problems caused by the earthquake. But if on one side (not all of us, of course) some of us have been able, thanks to our job, to get back to some "normal" life, our children missed the most important thing: a place where to play and some friends to play with. You gave this back to them, and our children's faces lit up, the smile came back and the will to live too." (a mum from L'Aquila)

