

BRINGING CONVERSATION CAFÉ TO HOSTELLING: A Pilot Program



A Pilot Program to Bring Conversation Cafe to Hostelling International, Seattle, Washington, USA (and Hopefully to Hostels Nationwide and Beyond, Soon!)

Hostelling International (HI)-USA is nonprofit membership organization founded in 1934 to promote international understanding of the world and its people through hostelling. *Conversation Café* is partnering with *HI-Seattle* in a pilot to see how *Conversation Cafes* at the *Hostel* can help manifest their mission:

to bring about a world where intercultural dialogue and responsible travel are part of every individual's experience--to build a new generation of global citizens, unburdened by stereotypes, emboldened by open minds, appreciative of their own heritage and understanding of others, through the dialogue and education that comes through hostelling.

We believe the structure of *Conversation Cafe* is a perfect marriage. We are excited to explore the possibilities of partnership with *HI's* vast network of nearly 80 quality hostel accommodations throughout the United States, ranging from urban high-rise buildings to small more remote rural settings.

We have held three pilots since last summer, all with great success--thanks to volunteers: Susan Partnow, Paul Gleiberman, and *HI* staff, presently spearheaded by Rachel Payne and volunteers. The first, on a July evening, brought eight people together, including individuals from Japan, Scotland, Israel and India, as well as the United States, including Tennessee. The conversation was rich and connecting. We learned some key ways to build on the success (i.e. work hard to make the invitation welcoming and the joining safe--people were a bit uncertain at first--and frame some deepening questions to get beyond the banal enumeration of the day's activities and to draw out the richness of the international diversity).

The second pilot, in October, attracted 17 people! We speculate attendance was bolstered by the early fall of night, vs. the competing allure of a long summer night that makes additional sightseeing attractive. We broke the group into three; there were three topics to choose from: "*What have you learned about stereotypes in your travels?*", "*Why will you choose to stay at hostels in the future rather than hotels?*" and "*What are your dreams and how close are you to achieving them?*"

Participant comments were extremely positive, and although it was already after 9:00 PM, almost everyone wanted to continue the conversation. Breaking off into small groups and mingling amongst each other followed, and many of the participants even went out dancing together!

A third pilot was led by a volunteer and engaged a group of eight in juicy satisfying conversation. The *HI-Chicago* has expressed interest, as has *HI-San Francisco*. We look forward to embedding this deeper into the routine of the *Hostel's* typical week.