



# THE 'FESTIVAL OF SILENCE' FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

A positive message of courage, strength and awareness

**It's the end of June and the exams are nearly over. The festivals are beckoning. People who work are planning their holidays. During the last busy weekend of June, we had the pleasure of accompanying a group of young people on their journey to search for answers, found in silence. Two months after our Festival of Silence, they tell their story, talk about their experiences, pass on their message to others. Inspiring, for peers and parents.**

**“To me, the Festival of Silence was calm, peaceful and energising. At the end of the first evening, I was worried that the silence would make me restless. Soon enough, it turned out the opposite was true. I felt comfortable with the silence and that made me happy.”** **TINE**

## **Why did you take part in the Festival of Silence?**

**TOON** “The weekend came at just the right moment for me, after two hectic months of work and school. Silence is something that appeals to me; I think it can be the key to a more conscious way of living.”

**ANDREAS** “After my graduation, I felt a lot of pressure: I was looking for a job and had to make all sorts of life-changing decisions. This weekend helped me to take a step back.”

**GERMEN** “I haven't been happy with the work I'm doing for a while and I've been looking for a more satisfying job for the past two years. The search is very frustrating. I have talked to lots of people, had career management coaching, looked for vacancies, etcetera. All very well, but it only made it more complicated in the end.”

**STEFANIE** “I had been asking myself for a long time: ‘How can I find my inner self? What is it and what am I feeling? How do I get in touch with myself? What goes on inside me that can make me restless, impatient or insecure?’ That's why I took part in this weekend.”

**EMIL** “My parents had told me about this kind of weekend before, but I had never taken it further. I'm glad I did do something about it this time, it was very enlightening!”

## **How does this weekend relate to the issues most of your peers are wrestling with?**

## **Are you an exception?**

**JONI** “We are concerned with questions such as: ‘What do we want to be? What do we want to achieve? How can we look at certain situations from a different angle? Self knowledge, self insight and self development, but most of all, finding peace... those are important issues for my friends and peers.”

**TOON** “It is difficult to say what my peers are really looking for. Happiness and acknowledgement, I assume. At our age, making choices about our jobs or our girlfriends is often harder than we thought. At least, that has been my experience and others have told me the same.”

**JONI** “This kind of workshop can help everyone. I discovered that just having a good look at yourself with the help of silence was incredibly inspiring.”

**ANDREAS** “I think this workshop is a good choice for people who are ambitious, but don't know what they really want. People who, at a young age, have important but often undefined goals, and who have just finished studying really hard. People who don't want to follow the crowd, but want to make decisions early in life. This silence workshop is for people who have their heart in the right place.”

## **SILENCE seems rather an unusual means to an end. How did that work during the weekend?**

**TINE** “It worked very well. The topic of ‘silence’ was approached in a way that was not at all fuzzy or woolly. The exercises were well led, with examples and clear explanations and support where necessary.”

**CAROLINE** “The environment was such that I dared to be more vulnerable than I usually am.”

**TINE** “I liked the way it was done: on the one hand I was on my own, on the other hand I felt support from the coaches and through the exercises.”

**GERMEN** “The difference is that during those days, you are not

constantly fed new information, there are no new external stimuli. The space this created was used to systematically observe internal patterns of thinking and emotions. Through the exercises and the silence, you start to discover your own voice and you learn to think a'new'. It wasn't easy to completely let go of all external influences: the way you are raised, the opinion of your surroundings, your so-called certainties, your beliefs, your convictions... But in the end, they became totally unimportant."

**TINE** "I liked the way it was done: on the one hand I was on my own, on the other hand I felt support from the coaches and through the exercises."

## “Reading books all day make me sleepy and I lose focus.” **ANNELIES**

**ANNELIES** "It's been really useful. The rules of silence, even outside the sessions, were rules that really contributed something and I really wanted to follow them. The way they coached us was great, you felt how involved everybody in the group was. Very clever."

**EVELIEN** "I found it a very important weekend from a learning point of view. We were shown ways to be in silence. The explanation and guidance I was given showed me the way. We were all given tools to enter silence again and again. Alone, supported by the knowledge that what you were feeling was 'normal' and 'part of the process'. The exercises and experiences were placed within the right context. This made the weekend work, and it kept leading to surprisingly accurate and simple insights."

**GERMEN** "I feel that complete silence during the whole weekend would have been even more effective for most of us. Each of us would have come closer to his or her core. But I do understand that that would have been more difficult for many people."

**ANDREAS** "I like the fact that the coaches provided structure and gave us support without influencing the final result. From the first moment, I trusted both coaches and I was very calm. I felt safe."

### What, to you, was the most inspiring moment?

**CAROLINE** "Learning moments often occurred at the most unexpected times, through sudden experiences or insights... The freedom and peace that the constant silence provided were a breath of fresh air for me, and I hadn't expected that at all. Normally, when I go away for a weekend, I don't want to miss out on anything and I throw myself into it 120%. That is wonderful, but very tiring, and afterwards I need a few days to process all the impressions. Now, there was no reason to linger after a meal or not to go swimming when I felt like it... it was great to let go of everything! It also was great to be allowed to, and be able to, reflect in silence in between sessions of meditation, to allow thoughts to take shape without being distracted."

**ANNELIES** "One insight was key to me: that taking care of your body is important. To me, this self-care could also be extended to other areas. I now realise that the purely physical is the starting

point for reaching relaxation. According to me, it is also a way to make other concerns less onerous."

**GERMEN** The days in silence have influenced my development-process, especially in the sense that I feel different about the search. Instead of getting frustrated, I now see it as a journey full of adventures. I no longer see my search as a problem, I see it as 'This is me, and I'm searching'. This totally different way of looking at myself is such a relief! I am not a problem because I am searching. I see that it can also be a pleasant aspect of life."

**ANNELIES** "Insights occur suddenly and therefore achieve a deeper meaning. One thing one of the coaches said has had a great impact on me: 'What you can't give yourself (space and silence) you can't give to others.' It sticks with me because I recognise so much of myself in it."

**TINE** "To me, the greatest insight was about who I really am and how I really feel. I think about that a lot anyway for someone my age, but through embracing silence, I discovered new, clear facts. They helped me discover how I want to lead my life and what is really important for me to be happy."

**STEFANIE** "Being in touch with yourself brings peace, it allows you to 'stand still'. That allows you to exude peacefulness during meetings and in your contacts with others, and you make a bigger impact on people. It was very inspiring to realise that."



### How important was the group in spite of the silence?

**TINE** "The weekend gave me a warm, pleasant feeling, in spite of the quiet and sometimes 'lonely' moments. During the weekend I felt alone and yet part of a group, and that is pretty unique."

**CAROLINE** "I was impressed by the impact the experiences of other people had on

me. From a reassuring wonderment because so many of the questions and insecurities were the same as mine, or a smile when something rang a bell, to the desire to make contact with someone. Very enriching. I also clearly recognised how different we all are. An insight that leads to leniency and understanding, and puts things in perspective."

**EVELIEN** "After the first 24 hours of silence it was good to find out what stage people had reached in their journeys. It was good to hear what had been easy and what had been hard. It gave me the courage to continue. In that sense, we were alone, but also together. It was great to see how the group bonded. The silence itself helped make those bonds more authentic. For me, it was a great exercise in consciously staying in touch with others."

## “I am not a problem just because I'm searching” **GERMEN**

### What has the workshop done for you?

**JONI** "After this weekend I have started to see the potential energy of silence in so many elements, in spite of the fact that I have a very busy life. Also, during the creative workshops I discovered an unexpectedly calm artist in myself, and I certainly want to do

more painting in the future.”

**TINE** “The weekend has given me energy. I got that from other people, but also from within myself. The silence was very enlightening for me.”

**GERMEN** “The main benefit I got from the weekend is the awareness of how important it is to regularly go and find peace and quiet,



in order to see how things really are and to obtain healthy insights.”

**TINE** “I often think of the weekend and the way I found silence there. At times when I get upset, irritated or uncomfortable, I try to turn my attention to myself and to be ‘centered’, instead of getting carried away.”

**EMIL** “I try and find silence more often these days, when I have to make important decisions.

I want to find my own voice again and be able to filter out the opinions, judgements and expectations of other people.”

**ANDREAS** “The workshop gave me ready-to-use experiences that have helped me enjoy my work more. ‘What I’m doing is fine’, was something I became aware of. It showed me how important it is to listen to yourself, instead of to the endless amounts of advice you get after you graduate. It taught me to see things within a certain framework and to think more in the present, instead of years ahead.”

**STEFANIE** “I got in touch with my inner strength, which gave me inner peace.”

**ANNELIES** “I’m a person of stories, ideals and dreams. I left the weekend ready to spring into action. Reading books alone makes me sleepy and I lose focus. The weekend gave me plenty to think about.”

“The topic of ‘silence’ was approached in a way that was not at all woolly” **TINE**

### If you had to describe the workshop in one sentence, what would it be?

**TOON** “Learning to come home to yourself, in the warmest possible way.

**EMIL** “What I have learned will certainly come in handy. I am still so young!”

**TINE** “I found the weekend very inspiring. It gave me insights that I’d like all young people to have.”

#### THANKS TO:

- **CAROLINE** (organisational psychologist, 28)
- **TOON** (commercial engineer, hopefully to be employed soon, 24)
- **JONI** (Master of social policy and public management, 24)
- **GERMEN** (employed, 27)
- **ANNELIES** (organisational psychologist, 28)
- **EVELIEN** (remedial educationalist/family counsellor, 26)
- **ANDREAS** (engineer – looking for work, 25)
- **STEFANIE** (student of commercial engineering, 22)
- **EMIL** (student on a journey, 19)



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