Food for Thought....

.... Lodge of Light & Reflection

Bro Jake Lukas is Chief Executive of the Novalis Trust. He gave an interesting and thought-provoking talk about the work of the Trust’s Cotswold Chine School on Minchinhampton Common at the Avonmouth ‘daytime’ lodge.

Pictured here are (L-R) VW Bro Gordon Cole, Chairman of Novalis Trust Board; Bro Thomas Pentzek; W Bro Geoff Poyner, the WM of Light & Reflection and; Bro Jake Lukas.

The Trust has its administrative offices, support centre (providing a range of specialised therapies) and training facilities at Ebley House, near Stroud and also runs a residential home for adults with learning disabilities at Painswick.

Bro Rudolf Steiner

Cotswold Chine is an independent charitable school founded in 1954 for children with complex learning needs and associated social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The education and social care programmes are inspired by the German philosopher, scientist and Goethe scholar (and Freemason) Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925).

With residential places for 42 male and female students aged 7 to 19 and up to 18 places for day students, the school and children’s home uses a holistic approach in working with young people with challenging behaviour. Some students have complex needs, having experienced
such trauma that they don’t have the words to describe feelings. Many have experienced multiple previous placement breakdowns.

Jake explained, “To help them recover, we need to think about them as a whole person, often requiring specialised therapeutic work. It’s not about what’s wrong with them, it’s about what has happened to them. Children will not make progress in literacy and numeracy if they are constantly worried about their own safety – in a chronic state of flight or fight. They need to get past their state of fear before they can focus on learning.”

Feeling safe

“The staff focus is on helping young people to feel safe within the school,” said VW Bro Gordon, who is the Trust Chairman. “The physical environment is most important and Bro Thomas Pentzek, the Trust’s Resident Architect, is an expert in creating a low-arousal environment, using natural materials to create comfortable, safe living, working and recreational environments. Individual packages of support are devised for each young person including education, a personal activity timetable, a behavioural support plan and access to a wide range of therapies provided by the school’s team of clinical therapists.

“Students are placed by education and social care authorities from right across the country,” continued Gordon. “The Trust has earned national and international reputations for its success in working with traumatised young people and adults with learning disabilities. Currently, collaborative organisational development work with the Sanctuary Institute based in New York, is training staff in using a framework for treatment planning, community conversations and collaborative decision-making that enables them to focus on the most important aspects of helping people heal from trauma in a simple and accessible way. The results are not only rewarding for staff but inspirational, as some students have progressed to studying A-level sciences in the past two years.”

“Their journey was amazing”, said Jake “We are so proud of what we do and what our students can achieve”.

2014 marked the school’s 60th anniversary and the highlight of the celebrations was a royal visit by HRH The Duchess of Gloucester, (below). She performed the opening ceremonies for the new multi-use outdoor games court and the refurbishment of The Chine – a natural amphitheatre in the school grounds. “Both projects were designed and the work managed and completed for this very special visit by Bro Pentzek,” said Gordon.