

Time Banks UK National Seminar, 21-22 November 2003

I was asked to write this article as a fairly new time bank co-ordinator, to give my impressions of the first Time Banks UK event I had attended.

Arriving at Harborne Hall on Friday night in the mist and dark was quite spooky and it didn't feel like being in the middle of Birmingham at all. After we'd all settled in and had dinner, we had a welcome from Martin Simon and got to look at some of the newsletters, exhibitions and publicity that different projects had brought with them. We then all retired to the bar for a very sociable evening. This was a really good opportunity to meet people from all over the country, every one enthusiastic about time banking and every one with loads of ideas.

Saturday morning started with a choice of seminars. I took part in sessions on involving businesses in your time bank and long-term sustainability. For me, these involved a lot of listening, with my brain quietly ticking over, thinking "mmm, that's a good idea". The extent to which Kika and Julie from Gloucester had involved local businesses was really impressive and boosted my expectations of what I might be able to do in the future. Talking about long-term sustainability was very pertinent to all time banks, who seem to be on a constant quest for funding. Mike Frost, from the Government Office for the South West, gave us some useful tips for fund-raising bids and some clues on the kinds of things assessors look for.

Next up was our keynote speaker, Edgar Cahn. His celebrity status in time bank circles and skills at putting across the value of time banks, made this a real treat! Edgar's true life tales had the effect of illustrating how important an individual's involvement in a time bank can be, as well as the numerous benefits to communities.

The final part of the day involved short presentations by different time banks, giving an idea of the diverse nature of the projects and the innovative approaches they take. It was interesting to find out what's happening around the country and good to feel part of such a vibrant and active network.

For me, meeting so many other people was probably the highlight of the event and I felt really pleased to be part of such an interesting and fun group. Running a time bank can be something that it's difficult to explain to other people, so it was relaxing to be with people who understood the difficulties, excitement and intricacies of the work. Added to this, the workshops were extremely useful and the speakers interesting and stimulating. All in all, I had a great time and it looked like everyone else did too!