

Virtual Youth Conference 2020 Report

Virtual Youth Conference of 'Let's Make A Difference' held on 1 - 7 June, 2020



The 25 LMAD YC – 19 at Asia Plateau was a nearly full house, with the total number of people who visited and participated, were 389. The organizing team enjoyed the scale without compromising its deliverance and it gave a new insight as learning's for the future. At the closure of the 25 LMAD in 2019 the feeling was euphoric and big plans were rolling within our team to look at the future and the upcoming December gathering. Completion of 25 years of youth work under MRA – IofC - LMAD.

We did start planning and enrolling of participants for 2020 and close to 35 people had already registered by the end of January, as we progressed in time, the sad feeling had engulfed the entire team. Alas! No, YC 2020. The world witnessed a global pandemic i.e.; COVID-19, a breakout at the beginning of this year. The widespread of the virus led to a nation-wide lockdown.

Since the early time of lockdown, Chirag was pursuing that we must go virtual, many echoed similar thoughts. Dilpreet pushed the idea to at least start the morning quiet time, the soul of the conference, as many young people are feeling and facing anxious, frustrated, and fearful towards the future and being locked up within one's premises. This collective thought gave birth to the morning quiet time on the video call platform ZOOM. Since the mid of May, many of us gathered virtually for morning quiet time and that inspired the thought of having our first Virtual LMAD YC.

On 29 May, three days before the 2020 YC at AP, the youth team decide to have its first Virtual Youth Conference from 1-7 June on virtual video call platform ZOOM. The team got into a mode of spreading the message on social media and via phone calls. The very first day we had 39 registrations and they multiplied every day. On 1 June we had 153 registrations for the first-ever virtual LMAD-YC.

Every day we convened over the ZOOM call from 6:30 am to 8:30 am IST. To the surprise of the organizing team, we had participants from across the country and the world. People checking in from different time zones, a young lady checking into the ZOOM classroom from the UK at 2:00 am and attending the class till 4:30 am, one from Saudi Arabia with discipline checking in every day at 4:00 am, same was the case for those who joined from different time zones of North America. India participated with enthusiasm and we as a team felt continuity towards what we are doing successfully for the past 25 years.

The first day began with the introduction of IofC-LMAD and its beliefs. The course convener introduced himself and his association with this idea. He then moved onto the beliefs that IofC nurtures that are pillars of a person's life Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness, and Love. The course convener explained how when we are young we are taught these values but we don't understand and imbibe those ideas. He explained how our country got its freedom on these ideas and today we are at a point where it's difficult to find ethical people. He shared personal experiences with each standard for a better understanding of the participants. He emphasized that to follow these standards one doesn't have to be special. The conference for all the 7 days was focused on the soul of IofC-LMAD, Quiet time. The course convener guided everyone that quiet time is not where we think but we rather listen to the inner voice. The inner voice is what pinches us when we up to something wrong but it is beyond corrections, it's a guiding force and it is to that one must listen to while having quiet time. He then asked everyone to find a quiet corner and sit down to reflect on the four standards for 30 minutes.

After reconvening it was time for sharing and asking questions or doubts. A few of the participants who had attended the conference in-person shared their experience with a particular standard in PHUL. One of the participants shared of how she was in two minds, where she was happy about being safe and secure with family and enjoying her time and on the other hand some people are on the streets walking, trying to reach their home, some people are away from family and can't go back with bare minimum supplies at their disposal. The day ended with the course convener answering questions related to negativity creeping in during the lockdown period.

The second day started with the course convener sharing his experience of quiet time and how it took him time and guidance from his mentors to understand the concept of going within and listening to the inner voice during quiet time. PHUL is a yardstick to know where one has made those mistakes and need corrections. One isn't bad but sometimes the situation makes that person bad and PHUL keeps people from making those mistakes. People grow if this practice of quiet time is followed by discipline.

The course convener emphasized that writing is very important because thoughts from the inner voice appeal to one even after some time has passed by. Writing might be difficult initially but in due course, it'll be easier. It is also important to write because it's a reminder that this is a thought from quiet moments and it must be acted upon. The participants proceeded for how their quiet time has given an insight into what is stopping them from going within.

One of the participants shared how quiet time has helped her realize how important is her family and she is reunited with her sister. A participant who had previously attended other LMAD conferences shared how this platform gave her the confidence to stand up and speak for herself and how the four standards have become a part of her subconscious. Few of the participants shared that fear and self-doubt has become a hindrance whenever they want to start anything new. The day ended with a question being given to introspect on for the rest of the day.

On the third day, the course convener addressed the extreme times we are in one of the lockdowns and how it has made many people insecure, anxious, fearful and frustrated being with one's thoughts and in the confinement of one's home with family. He distinguished some of the terms and also sighted his experiences of going through some anxious moments. The course convener showed light on that people are a bundle of positivity and there are a few negative phases. A person might feel negative while having been in a negative phase but they shouldn't feel to be defined by those few negative phases. The course convener emphasized that life is simple but we tend to make it entangled. The participants proceeded to have their quiet time having to reflect on their positive selves.

One participant shared how failure in studies led him to self-harm. The positive peer group of LMAD made him realize that failure is common and must be embraced and learned from and should move ahead.

Another participant expressed how thinking negatively complicated life and this exercise has helped her to look at how blessed she is with happy moments.

One of the participants shared how even he was stressed out with his studies to clear an exam to go to the US. He shared how the failure for the first attempt gave him a setback but he kept a positive outlook while appearing for the second time and cleared it. Having been in the US and achieve what he wanted it's a happy moment every morning he added.

A participant expressed how his relationship with his sibling was terrible and how this platform got them together and that reconnect with his sibling is one of his cherished moments in life.

The day ended with an exercise being given to reflect on for the rest of the day.

On 1 June the participants were introduced to the 4 standards PHUL. On 2 June the concept of quiet time was introduced, 3 June was a reflection of a positive outlook towards oneself. Today it is a step further deep into the concept of quiet time. Our life is a collection of experiences; good and bad, which we collect as we grow up. We build a lot of relations through the course of our journey but while on the journey we somewhere forget to nurture them and that leads to weak relationships. The course convener, with the help of a PPT, explained the concept of Absolute of the four standards Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness, and Love. During the quiet time, the participants were to reflect on their life and evaluate it against the four absolute standards.

One of the participants shared how she gets angry at her family very easily and would try and hold back from now on.

Another participant shared that he did not speak to any of his extended family in these grim times and that made him realize how ignorant has he been towards his own family.

A few questions came along such as,

"What is the difference between self-respect and ego?"

"How does one deal with egoistic people?"

The day ended with the course convener answering these questions and leaving them with the same question to reflect on throughout the day which was given during the quiet time.

On the fifth day, the course convener gave prominence to the discipline aspect of quiet time and how practicing it every day will make one a better version of oneself. He then stated that we spend all our lives on our outer self for having materialistic things. Even if we have things we still want better versions of it. This need and greed never stop. This is when we need to look into ourselves, introspect and see, are we happy from the inside?

"We take a million steps outside but that one step inside is equivalent of those million steps outside."

He emphasized that if the quiet time is disciplined and regular then it'll guide a person to fulfill all his needs outward. The participants were given a 20-minute quiet time to reflect on.

The exercise on concentration followed after everyone reconvened from a quiet time. The course convener explained how we humans lack concentration and are easily distracted by one of the five senses. We may concentrate on new things but day to day things we are accustomed to doing we don't concentrate much and accidents happen. He elaborated that multi-tasking is doing things that don't acquire concentration. For better understanding he narrated a story over-concentration that revolves around that, one can become anything if one constantly with discipline is concentrated towards it. Then with the help of small exercise, he showed how fickle our mind is.

One of the participants shared how after she met with an accident realized that materialistic things don't matter much and should now be more observant gain experiences and utilize time to do something that matters.

Connecting to the inputs given, a participant shared her experience of not being concentrated while doing daily chores and how she cut her finger while chopping vegetables because she was thinking of work.

The day ended with the course convener asking the participants to continue the exercise whenever they are sitting ideal.

5 June is the World Environment Day the team had organized an informative session in the evening for about 45 minutes. Participants reconvened in the ZOOM classroom at 7:00 pm IST. The session was on how bad the state of the environment is currently and how a lot of us are directly or indirectly responsible for it. In the session the team members spoke on the topics of food, fast fashion, plastic, sustainable living and how can we make things better.

The 6th of June is very significant in LMAD; it's dedicated to family and hence family day. Family is something that is always behind each one's back. Family is the first teacher from where we learn how to face the world. The course convener shared his personal experiences and gave inputs on why family is important. He emphasized that a family thrives on love yet sometimes we become so ignorant by our ego that we don't respect unconditional relations. He asked participants to introspect on these questions; with how many people have I divided myself? How can I take charge and forgive someone who has hurt me?

A lot of people stepped forward to share. One of the participants shared how thankful she was to be with her entire family during this lockdown and how each one has been supportive and caring throughout.

Another participant shared his realization of being disrespectful towards his cousin and never even communicating with him for the past 2 years. He realized the adjustments and sacrifices his cousin made for him. He apologized and wanted to reconnect with his cousin.

Another one of the participants shared how she wanted to reconnect with her grandfather who was by her side during her significant years and got her anything she wanted unconditionally. Four years back she was there when they celebrated his 80th birthday but due to work commitments won't be able to see him soon.

A participant expressed his love for his family and how they have been through his thick and thin times. He shared how he wasn't a very healthy child growing up and suffered from kidney failure and it was his father who donated his kidney to him. He also shared how his parents and siblings supported him to pursue his higher education and have been by his side.

A participant who had migrated to our country shared how she regrets not being able to meet her brother or even talk to him. She added how he used to take good care of her and loved her and how today she feels bad that they cannot even speak to each other.

The course convener ended the day by advising the participants that we are at the luxury of our homes and family is around so we should show them the love we feel for them and connect with them.

On the final day of the conference, the quiet time was focused on mind, ego, and conscience or inner voice. The course convener emphasized how we are born pure and innocent but as we grow we let the feelings of pride, ego, and anger take over ourselves. Ego stands out in all of us and it slows our growth as a human being. But being a disciplined student of quiet time helps one connect to the conscience and let go of ego. The participants proceeded to have a quiet time.

Group picture was captured after everyone reconvened for sharing.

One of the participants shared how an atmosphere has been created in her house due to the virtual conference. She hopes that people at home will now be able to understand each other more.

A participant shared how these days have been enriching for her and how quiet time has helped her to understand herself and her problems. She added that the major take away from the conference was the quiet time and the four standards and she was looking forward to conducting herself along these lines in the professional front.

A participant shared her quiet time thought of living in the moment and not to wander in the past thoughts or worry about the future. She added how getting up in the morning to attend the conference has shown that there is ample time at her reach and that she shouldn't procrastinate her work.

A participant shared how before being introduced to this idea she would lash out at the people around her for everything. Now being a part of this idea and having learned to pen down thoughts she writes every day in the diary and has even imbibed the nature of letting go of negative feelings.

A participant shared how he was skeptical if he could get up in the morning and attend the conference but when he joined the first day he did end up getting up early every morning and joined in for the conference. He added how he found LMAD to be genuine and different from other organizations mentioning how at the end of any event or a conference any organization asks for donations but then there's LMAD who talks about refunding the fees if someone claims that they didn't learn from the conference. He was moved and did show his eagerness to help and be part of other LMAD conferences.

A participant expressed how he subdued his want to start a photography channel thinking in a negative mindset for nearly a year. He added that the thought had stayed with him throughout, attending the conference, and having quiet time gave him clarity on the professional front and he did start the channel on the world environment day.

A participant shared how after a lot of persistence from his partner led him to join the conference. He shared how these principles are a part of lost heritage and LMAD bringing it to the young people is great for the overall improvement of a person. He added that the time that we live now is cutthroat if a person is in gain he won't even think of the other person, this idea makes people more aware of themselves and also creates empathy towards others. He added that LMAD is a unique platform and should do more of these conferences covering more people and spread this idea.

One of the participants who were a parent of a team member shared how this was a new experience for him. The four standards are thought-provoking and he has been thinking about how one can apply them in daily life. He expressed witnessing a change in his son day by day and also wishes to be courageous enough to apologize to his sons for being strict.

The day ended with the course convener recognizing that how strangers come on 1 June with unknown baggage but on 7 June leave with a broad smile now being part of the larger LMAD family.

ANNEXURE – 1

Participants Feedback Summary

Being a part of the LMAD virtual conference was just like being able to get a glimpse of what the actual conference would be. The virtual conference was conducted with super sincerity and dedication and as a result, it has caused an impact on my life.

I have learned a lot from this platform. Looking up to being a part of further conferences.

I felt it was a safe space that was soothing and conducive for learning and self-discovery.

It was one of the best conferences that I have ever attended. 7 days of the conference have proven beneficial for me. Quiet has given me a deeper sense of myself and my relationship with people. It has developed hope within myself that yes I can achieve more and more in life.

A great opportunity to introspect, and realize that everyone faces the same issues somehow or the other. Heart touching experience.

I felt really lucky to be part of this conference. Value each individual added created self-confidence. Quite a Time I could realize that I was able to release what was holding me back and it was a great experience.

The morning sessions had a positive impact which was very much needed during these tough times.

It's a great opportunity and platform for all those like me who want to know about LMAD conferences, but due to other responsibilities, they are not able to make it to Asia Plateau.

It was an amazing experience while sitting at home we are enjoying such amazing sessions. Some sessions were really good virtually as I connected more and had more time to think about it and work on it.

ANNEXURE – 2

Summary of the feedback received from the refreshers regarding the Virtual Youth Conference.

A participant wrote his own experience of how whenever he had attended meetings online, members part of the meeting starts leaving at an exponential rate after the first twenty minutes. He highlighted how the Virtual Youth Conference had a negligible attrition rate which was an achievement in itself.

A participant wrote how she reconnected with her cousins who were a part of the conference from various parts of the country. She also emphasized how every day after the sessions they used to share their thoughts, views, and experiences.

A few participants wrote how this mode of the conference inspired them to bring their parents to sit through the entire conference pushing the age barrier. They expressed the reactions of their parents and also suggested to do a conference focused on parents.

Some of the participants suggested that the Virtual Youth Conference should run alongside the National Youth Conference hence reaching a wider audience across the country and the globe.

ANNEXURE – 3

Embrace the change, which is constantly changing. With these positive steps, the first Virtual YC was a learning experience and how LMAD can grow beyond imagination through this new platform. The saying, 'When one door closes, God opens many more doors of opportunity', is very true. This lockdown opened a new door for the work of IofC-LMAD.

The learning from the virtual platform encourages us to expand our thinking and embrace change where LMAD moves ahead with time and for future YC at AP. We will explore the virtual platform, where we will have a live conference going on in the auditorium of AP, and simultaneously we will encourage virtual participants from India and all over the globe to participate.

The 14 hours virtual conference, two hours each day clocked close to 20 hours at the end of 7 days. The other major take away out of this virtual learning was; at AP, age is a barrier, but on this virtual platform, age was no bar and to our surprise, many parents, elders and those above 30 years of age joined this for new learning and understanding of our work.

The virtual gathering has opened many new thoughts and ideas to get implemented in the future. Like a regular virtual conference for youth, specific issues or subject related workshop for 3 – 4 days, virtual conference for parents; whereby understanding the concept of quiet time and values one can bridge the generational divide within the family, session related to stress in married life; for young married couples. Many such thoughts and suggestions were shared.