

## Gardening Together: How Peace Education Grows In France



Photo by Bastian Linder: *Eiffel Tower in Sunrise at Seine*

Agnès Levitte is a volunteer with the [Peace Education Program](#) (PEP). She lives in Paris and helps

*oversee the PEP in France. Agnès is a facilitator of several PEP courses in the Paris area. She has lived in England, Cote d'Ivoire, Switzerland, and Australia, which has given her a broad view of diverse cultures and how they impact the way people express themselves and communicate.*

PEP volunteer Gaetan Trembley recently interviewed Agnès for TPRF. Here are some excerpts:

### **How did you get involved with the Peace Education Program?**

When I retired from my daily work, I felt that I wanted to give back in gratitude for all that I have received during my life. I didn't want to retire from life. I knew about PEP, and it was the first idea that came to mind. We formed a small team, including two people who had been through the PEP course. We promised ourselves that we would not be impatient or get discouraged, but get ready, move forward, and look for places, groups, and organizations that might be interested in the PEP. We thought it might take us years to host our first PEP. But it didn't.

We started meeting regularly. I had this idea to speak to the lady who oversees an association for artists connected to places such as hospices and hospitals. I know the artists because I sing with them. The manager was so enthusiastic about the idea of a PEP that she offered to help us organize it. A few months later, we started the first class in a hall the town let us use. It was such a success that we did a second one with the same organization.

On my street in Paris is a "Solidarity Garden"—a special garden open to everyone, including those who are homeless, have mental disabilities, or struggle with psychiatric illness. We all garden together. After a few months, I felt that the people there could really benefit from the Peace Education Program, so I began one at the Solidarity Garden.

This is how the PEP started in Paris.



I'm part of two teams: one in Paris, which is growing with new participants setting up ongoing PEP classes around Paris and the suburbs, and a second, larger team that translates PEP material into French.

As the PEP contact for France, I can see how lost people can be without translation, or when things are communicated in a way that is culturally foreign to them. We make sure that the terminology in the written material is consistent for each class. We have a special PEP dictionary for the French equivalent of words like "participant" and "workbook." We have professional talent record voiceovers for videos so that all the participants are able to understand Prem Rawat's message in French.



TPRF forms are translated so that people can register for the course with ease. Anyone around the world should be able to organize a PEP, even if organizers don't speak English.

### **Can you tell us what is happening in other French-speaking communities in Europe?**

Once the written material and videos were translated into French, making the PEP available developed more easily. We now have Peace Education Programs in 10 different cities in France and Belgium, at various social organizations. It's amazing that in each city the teams are growing because PEP participants want to help and become part of the team. Now they facilitate classes or assist with AV.

Some of the major cities, such as Paris, Marseille, and Toulouse, have had the PEP continuously.

But Peace Education Programs are also happening in smaller towns—Tarbes, Limoges, and Saint-Etienne—and in villages such as Menetou-Salon and Embrun. New projects keep happening because enthusiastic participants offer the PEP in places they work, and to their personal contacts.

### **How has the PEP impacted your own life?**

Volunteering as a PEP facilitator fills my heart and allows me to give back. I really enjoy being a witness to the power of Prem's message in people's lives.

One participant said, "I appreciate the moments in my daily life when Prem Rawat's words come back to me."

The PEPs that I've had the chance to organize were in associations and groups that I already knew. My daily life is full of many chances to offer the PEP. I don't have to look very far from myself.

