## We Are Not Alone

## by Linda Henry, CDSS Outreach Manager

CDSS Outreach has supported several regional leadership conferences: in the Northwest (Portland, OR, September 2006), the Southeast (Greensboro, NC area, October 2010), and the Northeast (White River Junction, VT, November 2011); this article is about the latter. The next conference will be in the Midwest in August; stay tuned.

Here's a picture that's worth thousands of words! This amazing group converged in White River Junction, Vermont on November 11, 2011 for Puttin' On the Dance, Northeast Dance Organizers Conference. As CDSS Outreach Manager and a dance organizer myself, I had the tremendous opportunity to help plan, lead and participate in this remarkable weekend. This experience has brought me several lifechanging revelations.

In the kickoff session on Friday night, my fellow conference organizers Chrissy Fowler, Delia Clark, Mary Wesley and I took turns speaking to a room full of eighty eager participants. As my turn approached, I mentally rehearsed the topics I had chosen to cover. All of a sudden I had a strong realization that there was

something more I needed to say: the beginning of this event would bring something significant to an end—the feeling that we are alone. This feeling that we so often encounter in our dedication to bringing music and dance to our communities would dispelled. soon be The connections and resources that would be generated during the next forty-eight hours will be available to us from now on!

As the weekend unfolded, an array of sessions and activities were offered to support

these organizers of contra, English country, square, gender-role free, community and family dances. The overall program was designed to address many aspects of creating and sustaining a successful dance series: clarifying our visions, building healthy dance organizations, marketing, making it happen (working with dancers, callers, musicians, sound), variety of visions, and long range vision. All twenty-four sessions were led by participants who shared

their expertise and facilitated discussions (see www. puttinonthedance.org for session content). It was impressive to realize that this newfound community of organizers could pool their skills and experiences to create an event that would be so beneficial for us all.

Another important ingredient of the weekend was rejuvenation. On the first night, we carpooled to a local middle school for an all-conference dance. The level of excitement in the room was palpable. We organizers who work so hard to bring joy to our communities got to be guests at a dance that was created especially for us. The next night we had a great time swelling the ranks at David Millstone's second Saturday contra dance in Norwich.

As the weekend came to a close, Delia led an

activity to encourage us to identify one specific step we would take back home to move our dances forward. We wrote our intentions paper, colored on including a "by when" date, our name and phone/email. Standing in large circle, followed Delia's instructions to fold our papers in a particular way, and it quickly became evident that we were each making our own paper airplanes. At the count of three. launched

commitments across the circle, then picked up one of a different color to read and discover who our "accountability buddy" would be. After finding our partner in the crowd, we talked briefly about being in touch after the conference—one more reminder that we are not alone.

Our next opportunity is to infuse all our dance communities with the wonderful energy and ideas we gained during the conference. On the homefront, I'm continued on page 17



The participants, including the four organizers (front row, l-r:): Mary Wesley, Chrissy Fowler, Linda Henry, Delia Clark; photo by Quintin Aspen.

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returning to my role as organizer for a community dance in Amherst, Massachusetts. I can see the potential for our series with fresh eyes, and am discovering new ways to help our dance thrive, noticing that my enthusiasm is contagious. As a result, our "crew" is stepping up their level of support and putting their ideas into action. With all eighty conference participants engaged in a similar mission, imagine the impact this is having in dance communities across the continent.

As I return to my work at the CDSS office, I'm realizing that my role as Outreach Manager is taking on a new meaning: Outreach = Reach Out. My conference experiences are providing many new avenues for doing just that. Here are ways dance organizers can reach out to each other and share resources:

- Join Shared Weight, an online discussion group that includes separate lists for callers, musicians, and organizers.
- Visit the conference website to access handouts and notes from all conference sessions.

I'm busy compiling planning materials from this event to create a template for future conference organizers, and Chris Weiler, Shared Weight's codesigner, will be working with CDSS to develop more online options to help organizers network and access resources.

The next conference will be August 10-12, 2012 in Cincinnati, Ohio; for information, contact Ryan Smith. And if you find yourself needing support with your efforts to foster traditional music and dance, remember that you are not alone. Feel free to give me a call at CDSS: 413-203-5467 x 105 or write.



Sending paper airplaces into the midst; photo by Quintin Aspin

## **Conference Testionials**

"It was fascinating to find that series are so different but yet share so many of the same needs and are facing so many of the same issues. I found learning how other groups have organized themselves and have attacked problems/opportunities to be hugely valuable; I plan to steal shamelessly. I also found after thinking myself "alone" for years is that I'm indeed a member of a supportive, larger, likeminded "organizer community."

Rob Lindauer

"I had high expectations of Puttin' on the dance which were all surpassed. From the ideas generated, community building, and creative synergism, to the great socializing, dancing and abundant fun, it was an energizing weekend that's certain to have a positive impact on the dance community!!

Suzanne Elliott

Related article: Max Newman's 11/23/11 blog posting.