

## SEEDS OF PEACE

### JOE SHERIDAN AND GOODNESS AND KINDNESS



*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22)*

The **Goodness and Kindness** project is a story of how one person's personal interest in finding out more about others can grow and grow. It began when **Joe Sheridan**, a Christian, followed up his interest and curiosity from his theological studies by telephoning his local rabbi to talk over a few things he was intrigued by. The Orthodox Levaticher rabbi he called, **Rabbi Zalman Kastel**, shared his enthusiasm not only to get to know one another better but also to share the value of their faiths together with local schoolchildren. Then they invited **Seyfi Seyit**, a Muslim, to join them in visiting one of their local schools. The experience was so positive on all sides, not least the children's and their teachers', that the initiative quickly snowballed. Indeed, so welcome was the initiative that it became too much for Joe on top of work demands – and **Ray Corbin**, a Roman Catholic and computer programmer, ably took over the Christian leadership and input. With the support of the Jewish education body **Chabad House** (and its Director Rabbi Nochum Schapiro) it then grew into a widespread campaign.

At the heart of the *Goodness and Kindness* project has been the understanding that the three great Abrahamic Faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) have an immense amount in common, despite widespread misconceptions in many quarters, and a history of political disputes. In particular, each has a common message about the way to nurture goodness and kindness, and how this can help to create ripples of peace and compassion in our world. As Seyfi Seyit says, *'the fact is all three faiths share the same values and have little to differ over'*. Indeed, as Joe Sheridan explained early on in the development of *Goodness and Kindness*, *'I've always thought there was vast common ground...if only we can stand on common ground instead of standing on the periphery and poking fingers at each other.'*

The aim of the *Goodness and Kindness* campaign was to educate students about differences and to involve them in acts of kindness. It also set out to excite children about their own ability to change their schools, community and, ultimately, the world and, to combat prejudice and promote harmony by demonstrating harmony in action.



As such a creative approach to teaching children about religious tolerance, *Goodness and Kindness* not only beat many high profile commercial projects to win the grand award of the run by the Community Relations Commission of NSW but also became an approved high school resource in New South Wales.

**Christian, Muslim and Jew together in harmony**

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The work of Goodness and Kindness offers a powerful model of different faiths overcoming violence together. In the words of the Chair of the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW, Stepan Kerkyasharian (at the 2004 National Multicultural Marketing Awards,):

*'This image of a Christian, Muslim and Jew comfortably together in front of a class room is a powerful one which breaks down stereotypes and demonstrates that we can all work together as Australians to accomplish a peaceful and progressive society.'*

Indeed the *Goodness and Kindness* organisers carefully targeted in their marketing strategy 10,000 children living in areas where there is less cultural diversity, such as Sydney's North Shore, the Northern Beaches, the Central Coast and Griffith. They understood well that after September 11 and Bali there would be unease in those areas and probably ill feelings amongst some towards Muslims.

### Harmony Day Quilt

Part of the project was to encourage children to decorate a square of cloth with their hopes and plans, to be sewn onto a massive patchwork quilt. On Harmony Day 2004, 1300 children from many different parts of the state then went to the New South Wales Parliament and presented a goodness and kindness quilt to the Premier. The giant work of art embedded with the pledges and the hopes of school children wanting to make their world a better place, was strung right across the face of the Parliament House in Sydney. (see unrolling picture right)



### Building Community

A further continuing example of this encouraging work has been the 'Building Community' workshops developed by Seyfi Seyit's *Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations* (FAIR) and the *Alternatives to Violence Program* (AVP), supported by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. These aim to bring together Jews, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and people of other faiths in a an atmosphere of friendship, trust and unity, building up stronger ties between individuals and extending these into communities.

#### Sources and more information:

NSW Government Press

an ABC Compass video is available: [www.abc.net.au/programsales/s1241533.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/programsales/s1241533.htm)

Living in Harmony [www.harmony.gov.au](http://www.harmony.gov.au)

FAIR [www.fair.org.au](http://www.fair.org.au) AVP [www.avp.org.au](http://www.avp.org.au)