

PACE E BENE AUSTRALIA

Nonviolent Leadership FOR Interfaith Peacebuilders

> MODULE 1 : REPORT

On the 29th January this year, 21 young adults from different faith/cultural backgrounds gathered for the first module of the National Nonviolent Leadership training program for Interfaith Peacebuilders. This inaugural program, run by Pace e Bene Australia invited participants to learn how to address violence and promote interfaith/intercultural understanding within their communities across Australia.

"I came here being a victim of violence all my life. My country and as part of a minority I have always been the target of violence. Coming here I've realized nonviolence is a sign of power not weakness. Power within and not lack of force when people do something to me. It has been part of my destiny to be here" (PARTICIPANT)

In a world with growing religious and violent extremism, Pace e Bene Australia believes it is more important than ever to educate significant young leaders for capacity in strong community leadership, interfaith dialogue and proficiency in nonviolence skills to lead their generation towards the goal of a world without injustice, violent extremism or intolerance.

"It transformed my idea of community. I now believe that those with differing faith backgrounds can get along and achieve peace if they have a commitment to nonviolence." (PARTICIPANT)

The program was designed as a national interfaith/intercultural youth development program seeking to skill future leaders to provide alternatives to violence in their communities. The project team delivering the program included Ann Morgan, George Trippe, Brendan McKeague, Ben Lohmeyer, Amy Fitzpatrick, Dale Hess and Simon Reeves. The 21 young leaders, aged between 18 and 32 years, came from various faith and cultural backgrounds including Muslim, Christian, Bahá'í, Buddhist and Brahma Kamaris.

"I will now feel responsible that I have to help those who have violent ideologies to attain a balance between the light and dark shadow." (PARTICIPANT)

The first residential retreat was absolutely brilliant. It exceeded all of our expectations and being with the young leaders was so exciting. The 21 participants spent the week talking, listening, growing, washing dishes, eating meals, swimming, playing music and even dancing together! One of the important learnings for the participants was around the 5 steps of nonviolent communication. Many participants commented on how absolutely life-changing this experience was.

"I am a totally different person from who I was 5 days ago" (PARTICIPANT)



www.nonviolentinterfaithleadership.org

Pace e Bene Australia... 'Promoting the Spirituality and Practice of Active Nonviolence'

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During this retreat the young people explored and gained skills in the areas of :

- Identity
- Faith traditions
- Community leadership
- Culture and context
- Alternatives to violence
- Interfaith dialogue
- Strategic Nonviolence
- Nonviolent Communication
- Conflict transformation

"As we learned: 'what we will not process within ourselves, we will project onto someone else'. I will start dealing with my complexities and shadow non-violently and am so ready to be open to criticism and will to keep learning more deeply about nonviolent living. Yes, I am so gonna keep the courage up to break away from the deep rooted thousands of years of old norms by spreading awareness, knowledge and light into Muslim communities and Western friends." (PARTICIPANT)

Guided by our facilitators and PeBA mentors, the participants are now designing and implementing projects to reduce harm in their own communities. Keep a look out on the program website for updates about some very exciting participant community projects in development: www.nonviolentinterfaithleadership.org

"Thinking about my personal project has helped me develop a clear picture of the next steps to take in regards to nonviolent leadership and promoting peace among my friends and networks." (PARTICIPANT)

The second residential retreat, will be held in April, where the participants will report on the progress they are making with their projects and consolidate their learning of the inner and outer journey of nonviolent leadership and build on their tool-kit for nonviolent leadership. We are inviting speakers from 3 faith traditions to come and share stories of peace, interfaith dialogue and nonviolence from their lived experiences and from their tradition.

EXTRA FEEDBACK AND WISDOM FROM PARTICIPANTS WE'D LOVE TO SHARE WITH YOU...

"I learnt about the qualities which define a good leader, and by explaining the actions of famous nonviolent peace building leaders such as Gandhi, I have discovered certain techniques and practices which show leadership" (PARTICIPANT)

"I feel more empowered to understand people from other faiths as well as excited to learn about nonviolence, love for self and others and love for God from their traditions. The greatest outcome has been the friendships developed with people from other faiths here." (PARTICIPANT)

"Any religion, when applied, is about peace making". (PARTICIPANT)

"It was freeing and liberating to find out that we are all pursuing the same thing...a peaceful world. And how it is even more powerful and special when we do it together" (PARTICIPANT)

"Helped me in having an open minded approach to not only other faiths and cultures but towards my life as well. In that being said I sense there is hope for change within our community." (PARTICIPANT)



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