

THE IMPACT OF PEACEJAM ON YOUNG PEOPLE

An RE teacher from one of the schools involved with PeaceJam in Hampshire wrote this account of the impact that PeaceJam, and attending the youth conference, had on the young people that she teaches. This account has been anonymised but we would be happy to put you directly in contact with this teacher so you can find out more about the positive impacts of PeaceJam on individual young people and on a school as a whole. We have similar qualitative evidence available from a number of schools and youth groups involved in PeaceJam.

“Several of our students who came to Peacejam over the years have now moved on to 6th form colleges. All did brilliantly in their GCSEs and two of them have chosen to study Politics at A Level as a direct result of the Conference, a subject both X and Y are enjoying tremendously. I believe Y has also set up her own feminist group, perhaps unsurprising given the strong female Peace Laureates we have heard from.

A and B sadly both experienced Islamophobia in their young lives. A’s mother was even physically attacked as a result of her religion. Peacejam gave them an opportunity to come out of a very white working class community where a small minority of people did not accept them, to a place where everyone loved them. A even got a standing ovation when she spoke on stage! A suffered from a brain tumour after the conference but managed to get through it and recover fully with tremendous bravery and good humour, as well as great support from the community.

Others have even gone on to University. C is at Cambridge University studying Computer Science. He was a very quiet boy in his younger years but I always remember his smile as the girls at the conference dragged him up on the stage to take part in the dancing and I think this really helped his confidence moving forwards.

I believe the conference and the way it taught them to build relationships with others and practise teamwork will have helped their confidence enormously in moving to their new schools. Some of them (and the older students) still come back from time to time to say hello and they all remember the conference fondly.

D is a quiet boy who has come to Peacejam twice. He has strong opinions and can get shouted down by larger groups of students as his views don't always match theirs. Peacejam gave him a forum to discuss his thoughts with people who would listen even if they did not agree with him, and for him in turn to listen to their ideas. This helped him with confidence and also in his academic work, as seeing things from different perspectives is a key skill in subjects like RE, History and English.

G is a cheerful, gregarious boy but one who is not naturally academic. As such he is often unfavourably compared to his two sisters (one of whom is his twin) who achieve well in school and college. Peacejam gave him the opportunity to be proud of himself for reasons other than his grades and this gave him the confidence to get a part time job where he is now a valued member of staff.

S has been to Peacejam twice (both times on her birthday!). She has since gone on to become House Captain and continues to be involved in the school Interact Club where she does lots of good work for her community.

The person I saw most change in though was K. Her father died in army service when she was in Year 8. She went through an incredibly difficult time after this and really retreated into herself and cut others out. She attended Peacejam in Year 10 and Year 11 and grew tremendously, opening up to me and others about her feelings, and joining in with activities with strangers who soon became friends. Her mother is moving to Scotland over the summer but K is confident enough to stay in Basingstoke to do her Health and Social Care course with the hope of eventually becoming a Social Worker in order to help others.

I was delighted for K this summer when she and her sister were invited to meet the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry at Buckingham Palace to be recognized for their bravery in dealing with losing their Dad.

All of the students have gained enormously from the experience. One of them even refused to get on the coach to come home on the Saturday evening this year because she was having such a great time with the new people she had met. I called her Dad who said he would be happy to come and pick her up later in the evening (luckily we're not that far away) because she sounded like she was having such a fabulous time. As she had experienced some bullying and peer issues, he was over the moon to hear his daughter sounding so happy and at peace with herself.

The experience of meeting and working with the Peace Laureates has been amazing for kids from an underfunded suburb of a small town, particularly the fact that they have all been really strong women, which has been inspirational to our girls. In fact, their no-nonsense approach to peace has been inspiring to many students who previously thought peace was a wishy-washy notion followed by hippies and do-gooders.

Peacejam has also had a wider impact on the school through students telling their peers about the experience and students in younger years really looking forward to taking part in the event (and other forms of active citizenship) in the future.

Finally, it has informed my teaching through the people I have met, the stories I have heard and the experiences I have had, some of which have been humbling, some empowering, some inspiring and some downright joyful.'

We would like to thank the Burns Price Foundation, and the Home Office for enabling schools and young people to take part in PeaceJam.



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