



# Reaching out to heal children's grief and trauma



*Ayman, Sameeha and little Tamim at a refugee candle vigil in Perth*

**As the refugee crisis mounted in Europe, an unusual dialogue in a Perth suburb during August went into healing grief and trauma for those suffering from war and relocation, and in particular, the effect on children.**

**The dialogue brought together a Palestinian academic, a family therapist, and a Uniting Church minister. It aimed to support Initiatives of Change in its mission of 'building trust across the world's divides'.**

Ayman Qwaider from Palestine knows trauma and grief first hand. He and his wife, Sameeha, managed to get out of Gaza just before the intense war with Israel a year ago so that Sameeha could begin research for her doctoral thesis at Murdoch University. Both are members of IofC Gaza Strip, a small dedicated team who, during last year's crisis, raised funds to provide milk powder and vital supplies for 290 families taking refuge in a school.

Ayman is particularly concerned about the 'enormous psychological toll' that the repeated wars have taken on children and families. Over 50 per cent of the 1.8 million people packed into the Gaza Strip are aged between 15-29. Most are from refugee backgrounds, with approximately 55 per cent living in eight crowded camps. At present 30 per cent of the population are displaced and living in temporary shelters.

'Children are not growing up interested in peace and wanting to make things better,' he said. 'They just grow up deeply traumatized and very angry.'

Studies show that children and adolescents in the Gaza Strip suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders, including anxiety, depression, conduct disorders, increased violence and loss of hope. Compounding the problem, many men feel powerless and helpless to support and protect their families, 'feelings which break the deep bond between fathers and children'.

Ayman quoted a number of children, including an 11 year-old girl: 'All years are alike, year after year; war attacks us. Every year we do not know if war is coming.'

Another 15 year-old said: 'We need to regain our respect and dignity, to be liberated and have freedom as others, not the same as we are now.'

In his view 'long-lasting peace for children' will not come until the conflict with Israel is brought to an end.

Meanwhile, large-scale trauma intervention programs are being carried out by many organizations in Gaza attempting to minimize the consequences of trauma on children, despite the difficult environment.

With this background Sameeha, his wife, is undertaking research for her doctoral thesis, analyzing women's experiences and their testimonies of life under occupation as shared through online narratives. Ayman completed his masters degree in Spain, looking at the role of education in conflict-affected situations, drawing on his personal and professional experience with children in Gaza.

Ayman was part of the team which formed the IofC group in Gaza, wanting to use IofC's approach to 'reconciliation and mediation to make change at our micro-level' within the context of the Palestinian situation. While in Australia, Ayman is managing the Arabic language social media outlets for IofC as an outreach not only to Palestinian communities but to other Arabic speaking countries. 'We strongly believe in the role that social media plays to realise social change and societal peace,' he says.

Speaking alongside Ayman at the Perth dialogue was Kate Barrett-Lennard. She has recently completed her masters in systemic family therapy after many years working on trauma and grief within families.

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Presenting the example of a family impacted by transgenerational trauma and grief, she invited the group to give their input as to possible interventions for healing and whole-making. The exercise provided an insight into the impact on family relationships down to the next generation when grief and trauma go unchecked – which is usually the case unless conscious healing has been embraced.

Kate suggested that the task of individual, family, social and cultural healing should be better understood before decisions are made to enter into a war – so that the costs of the war can be truly weighed up before the step is taken.

‘Only in ignorance can we bring so much harm to so many,’ she concluded.

## Discovering Ginn Fourie in WA



Kate Barrett-Lennard also sent this report of a gathering on the first Saturday in October, with ‘ten happy IofC folk’ to meet and hear from Ginn Fourie. One of the two South Africans whose story is featured in a powerful video *Beyond Forgiving\**, Ginn has recently immigrated with her husband to join their son in Western Australia:

Surrounded by a patio garden and platters of cakes and

sandwiches, we shared in the heartfelt story of Ginn Fourie and Letlapa Mphahlele.

Ginn related her experience in finding how to forgive Letlapa for his responsibility in the killing of her only daughter, 23 years ago in South Africa. For those who

do not know this story, it is a narrative of Ginn’s deep forgiveness and Letlapa’s personal transformation – after years as a political freedom fighter, feeling justified in killing so many. Their inspiring meeting formed a ‘peace partnership’— like a Phoenix rising story rising up with new life out of the tragedy of the South African Apartheid. Everyone at our morning tea was deeply touched. Ginn spoke about complexities in the life of the Lyndi Foundation and her new life beginning here at Margaret River with her son and family.

In short, I believe Ginn has found new friends here in Perth IofC... and we have found her! We are, I believe, far better off for Ginn making her way to us here in Australia.

\* *Beyond Forgiving*, 28 minute video is available for \$20 plus p&p from Grosvenor Books (address on page 4). See trailer on <http://au.iofc.org/dvds>

## Generations of service and care

Four women – from very different backgrounds, but each who have served the calling they found through IofC [formerly known as MRA, or Moral Re-Armament] – have died in recent weeks. We honour them and the contributions they made to their communities and country:

**Stephanie Ashton** was a fulltime worker with MRA from the post-World War II years onwards. She lived out her Christian faith, particularly through deep care for individuals and selfless service as a secretary in Japan (for two years), USA, Britain and India (where she joined the campaign, led by Rajmohan Gandhi in 1963, for a ‘Clean, strong, united India’). In the 1990s she returned to her home city of Brisbane where she continued her life-changing work. She died on 19 August in Brisbane, at 96.

**Betty Beazley**, wife of the late Dr Kim E Beazley, passed away on 13 September in Perth. Eulogies at

Christchurch in Claremont were given by her son, Kim Jr., (current Australian Ambassador to the USA) and her son-in-law Dr Robert Wasson. Kim spoke of his mother’s commitment to MRA and referred warmly to her generous hospitality. An Australian athletics record-holder for the half mile for 10 years, she also coached the Olympic champion Shirley Strickland. A family message remembered her as ‘always loving, always quick to help, slow to chide. Never judgemental. Always sunny. Joyful in her children’s enthusiasms. A rock in dealing with our disasters. Humble, despite great personal achievements. I can’t bear you not hearing your voice enjoining us to “wear life like a loose robe”.’

**Kathleen Richardson** was born in Cairns, Queensland. During World War 2, she met a young soldier, Spencer Richardson, who asked her father’s permission to marry her the day before he was demobilised and returned to the family farm

in WA. Along with raising three children on the farm, Kath became involved in community service, including the Country Women’s Association. From an Irish Catholic background, she retained a strong personal faith though became less interested in labels. In the 1950s, the family was introduced to the ideas of MRA, which shaped the way she interacted with people. She died on 12 September at the age of 89.

**Marjory Bates** slipped peacefully away on 3 October. She was 98. From Queensland, she trained as a secretary and served full time with MRA before serving for 20 years in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in Canberra, followed by a long and active retirement. Her faith and spirit of adventure were the engine that drove her life, right up to her last days. She was a true gentlewoman, evidenced by the affection in which she was held by all at the aged care facility where she lived.

## Afghan women taking action



*Shabnam and Hajer in New Delhi*

**Responding to an article in our August edition, Newsbriefs readers generously supported two women from Afghanistan to fly to New Delhi to participate in a Creators of Peace Circle and to receive facilitator training. Jean Brown from Adelaide, international coordinator for Creators of Peace, ran the program and gave this report:**

This was an initiative by Youdon Aukatsang, an elected member of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile and executive director for an NGO based in New Delhi for empowering Tibetan youth. Last February, Youdon had

joined a Creators of Peace workshop at a conference in Asia Plateau (the IofC centre in India). 'I was so inspired by the stories shared by the women peace practitioners from different parts of the world that, by the end of the conference, I was determined to be a part of a Peace Circle,' she commented later.

The Delhi CoP Circle and training in August brought together social activists, environmentalists, community workers, teachers and students. We were a group of 18: Afghans, exiled Tibetans and Indians

from Kashmir, Sikkim, Pune and Delhi. Five Kashmiris were flown free of charge from Srinagar to Delhi by two Indian airlines as their contribution to 'women's empowerment for peace'.

The two Afghan women, Shabnam and Hajer, have been close friends for a long time and had been supported by IofC friends in Australia in a previous IofC training. Shabnam is an Uzbek and a Sunni. Hajer is Hazara and a Shia. They demonstrate the trust that must be built across tribal and religious divides.

After the Creators of Peace Circle in Delhi, they arrived back in Kabul on a day of multiple bombings in the capital. They were determined to offer their experience of hope and friendship, inner transformation and peace to isolated women and widows.

They started two weeks ago with women in a refugee camp in Kabul. With thousands trying to leave the country every day, they live and work with a constant fear that 'we will end up like Syria'. Finding safe spaces for women to come together is a challenge, hence their decision to start in a refugee camp. Another plan is to run a Circle in a school after mothers have dropped their children for classes. The mothers can then meet in an empty classroom.

Shabnam writes about her regular quiet times of inner listening: 'I find it very useful... My life is changing.'

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## 'Inner peace and outer action' at CoP's annual celebration

**The word 'togetherness' rang out in 22 languages at the beginning of our 11th annual celebration for Creators of Peace in Sydney, 16 August. Joyce Fraser reports:**

Leah Briers, the Coordinator of the Auburn Community Centre, along with Bibi Ghoul Mossavi, a young woman from Afghanistan, were the MCs for a magnificent program which wove the local as well as the international achievements of the Creators of Peace movement.

Among the women who shared was one Sydney resident telling how she had invited a Muslim member of

Creators of Peace to answer questions on Islam at her Uniting Church.

The Creators of Peace film Give 10 was screened giving a kaleidoscope of international CoP participants as well as a report of remarkable trust-building among women of different tribes in Baringo County, Kenya. (See [www.cop.iofc.org](http://www.cop.iofc.org)).

Through the generosity of Auburn City Council, we were given their centre free and were able to use all the rooms for women dividing in to smaller circles to discuss 'inner peace and outer action'. Each person was encouraged to write a word or

phrase of decision/inspiration on a 'post-it' note, which were attractively arranged on a circle of cardboard for each group. The laminated circles will become a feature on the walls of the Youth Room in the Centre.

The celebration planning has been in process for several months and special thanks go to the Coordinating Action Team including Shoshana Faire, Trish Harrison and Tanya Fox for their work on the program, and Wendy de Meyrick for her work on publicity and printing.

## Bridges to Sri Lanka

In August Life Matters graduate Navin Gulavita from Melbourne travelled to Sri Lanka with Nigel Heywood, Rob and Cheryl Wood to support Jeremy Liyanage from Queensland (and like Navin originally from Sri Lanka) in his work for reconciliation and community development in the town of Mannar. Jeremy had arranged a two week 'moral and spiritual' campaign to support Bridging Lanka, the organisation he founded to assist this northern town that suffered greatly from the civil war.



Navin (right) and Nigel in the workshop

They were joined by two young Sri Lankans who have spent the last year in an 'IofC for Life' outreach program in different parts of India.

Rob Wood reported: 'On arrival Jeremy had a group of inter-faith leaders brief us on the challenges and opportunities of this town. What they said was underlined in conversations with 30 local youth. They spoke of alcoholism, unemployment, parental pressure

and suicide as four major issues confronting the community. Against this background the programs we brought - Discover the Other and Life Matters workshops - proved very relevant to the kind of answers they were seeking to their community and more personal concerns.

'Towards the end of the Life Matters workshop several spoke of decisions to implement to heal hurts and settle clashes in their families. When one of the two Sri Lankans (who had been in India) asked forgiveness for the way the Sinhala community had treated the Tamils, there was an immediate and heartfelt response.'

## Chai Community on the Gold Coast

Lesley Bryant reports:

'A few of us have been involved in another 'World Cafe' co-hosted by Anti-Discrimination Office and Chai Community bringing women of different backgrounds in our Gold Coast community together.

'This group is planning to prepare banners and participate in 'Welcome to Australia Walk' here on 31 October. Sadly I'll miss this walk because I will be in Suva Fiji with a team facilitating Creators of Peace Circles there.

'Then I'll travel to Levuka, Fiji, with documentary film maker, James Muller, to show the film he is preparing about last year's 150th anniversary commemorations and interviews with descendants of indentured labourers brought to Fiji from Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.' (See *Newsbriefs* December 2014.)

## Basketball scores in Blacktown



Jane Mills, living south of Sydney, was delighted to recognise a familiar figure on the ABC news - a tall South Sudanese refugee who came to a Life Matters Course in Sydney in 2009:

The NSW ABC Seven O'Clock News on 25 September carried an uplifting story of South Sudanese Australian, Mayor Makuei Chagai, and the

basketball team he founded, Savannah Pride.

The team is made up of young South Sudanese from Blacktown, Sydney, and has been a channel for promising players to teams at a national level. One young man has just been offered a basketball scholarship at a college in the USA. The Mayor and Andy Kenyi, the coaches,

were among the participants in the first Life Matters workshop in Sydney in 2009.

Subsequently the Mayor travelled to Melbourne to take part in an IofC basketball workshop, and in 2014 was a speaker at the Life Matters workshop for Blacktown youth in Gerringong. He has continued his community work as a bridge-builder, as well as gaining his degree in agricultural science.

A City of Blacktown website quotes Mayor Chagai: 'Life in Blacktown, it's not so bad and it's not very good... There's been issues among young people and I think that's due to different cultures, different languages and misunderstanding... I've been involved in, like, encouraging other young people to not feel intimidated by other cultures or... misunderstand other people because of the way they are, the way of their cultures, of their languages. That's part of my youth work.'

See also the Initiatives of Change Australia website: [www.au.iofc.org](http://www.au.iofc.org) Facebook page: [Initiatives of Change Australia](https://www.facebook.com/InitiativesofChangeAustralia)

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