

## **Can We Unite for Peace?** **Building Citizen Power for Change.**

My name is Sally Milne and I am one of the directors of PeaceJam UK, which is an affiliate of PeaceJam, an international peace education programme. Its unique feature is that it works with Nobel Peace Laureates who actually sit on its governing Board, contribute to the running of the programme, the curricula, and attend the youth conferences in person, working with the young people and their teachers and youth workers at a university over a week-end every year.

I became involved with PeaceJam through Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat, a medical and nuclear physicist who founded, with others, the Pugwash Conferences for Science and World Affairs. He, together with Pugwash, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995 for his efforts towards the abolition of nuclear weapons and world peace. He was the only scientist to leave the Manhattan Project on moral grounds when he discovered that the Nazis were not manufacturing an atom bomb. Joseph Rotblat became one of the laureates to work on the PeaceJam programme and was so impressed by his ability to interact with young people and pass on his knowledge and experience that he wanted to bring the programme to the UK, which was what, after his death, we did. There are currently 14 laureates working with PeaceJam from the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu to slightly lesser known laureates such as Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian civil rights lawyer, and Tawakkol Karman, a journalist and women's rights campaigner from The Yemen, and the programme runs all over the world – Africa, India, America, South America, East Timor, Europe. To put it simply, PeaceJam is: Nobel Peace Prize Winners mentoring Youth to change the World.

So what exactly do we do?

We work with a triangle: Education – Inspiration – Action.

Our Education is the curricular programmes for young people from 5 – 25 that build citizenship and teach 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. They are a wonderful resource, fulfilling Ofsted requirements which can be used by schools and groups in a number of ways to suit their requirements.

The Inspiration comes from 14 laureates whose wisdom and experience are used to develop young leaders inspired to create positive change in themselves in the first instance, and then their communities and ultimately, the world.

Action is engaging young people in service projects aimed at solving real community and global problems as part of PeaceJam's One Billion Acts of Peace Campaign – a worldwide global citizens' movement designed to tackle the most important problems facing our planet, designed on the belief that everyone matters, everyone can make a difference, and together, we are unstoppable.

When we began – 22 years ago – the Laureates had what they called a Global Call to Action. They identified 10 areas/issues which needed action, such as extreme poverty, access to clean water, rights for women and children, and so on. By 2014 we had just over a million logged projects carried out by our young social innovators. Then the founders of PeaceJam, Dawn Engle and Ivan SuvanjiEFF, spoke at a social innovation summit in California and described the programme

and the action component being a way in which young people could engage with their communities. Someone, called Meng, ran down from the audience when they came off the stage and offered to take them to somewhere where the food was better. He took them to the Google Headquarters where Google offered to help the programme become much bigger with the use of its technology. Over many months the One Billion Acts of Peace Campaign (1BAOP – billionacts.org) was devised and now – to date - we have just logged on the website over 39 million acts of peace worldwide – the power of citizens to change the world.

Let me tell you about a couple of them. In New Mexico the literacy rate was the second lowest in the USA and some children aged 12,13 and 14 years organised an intensive reading programme to teach 6,7 and 8 year olds to read at a summer camp. It was so powerful, the programme was replicated across the state. But they didn't stop there, they took books into prison for the younger children's classmates whose mothers or fathers were incarcerated, got the parents to read the stories, recorded them, and brought them home for the children to hold and listen to their parents reading to them at bedtime, thereby learning to read at the same time.

Another project was started here in the UK by a school in York working through PeaceJam with young people from a school in Greece, whom they had met at a youth conference we held in Winchester in 2016. The Greek students described how war had brought many refugee children to their country who needed the most basic things to help them in the camps where they lived. So they put together 'lifebags' which were backpacks filled with useful things like toothbrushes, soap, underwear.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o214HucvfCo>

Over time as the children stayed in the camps they needed supplies for their education and so the two schools started making 'learnbags' which were packed with everything refugee children would need for school such as pens and pencils, rulers, highlighter, notebooks. And gradually they have been persuading other schools and youth groups to help. If anyone here knows of a school or any young people, or anyone at all for that matter, who would like to get involved just contact our teachers Ellen Froustis at [efroustis@eimai.org](mailto:efroustis@eimai.org) or Helen Snelson at [hsnelson@mountschoolyork.co.uk](mailto:hsnelson@mountschoolyork.co.uk).

We are totally convinced that average, ordinary people can tackle the toughest issues facing humanity; that peace starts with me; that nothing is impossible; and that one person can make a difference.