

"This olive branch

Dr Elizabeth Kath



represents reconciliation"

Extraordinary things can happen when you bring people together from different communities in the spirit of reconciliation, says RMIT's Dr Elizabeth Kath.

"The olive branch is a symbol of willingness to extend a hand to others despite the circumstances, to make a commitment to keep talking and to stay at the table, for as long as it takes to reach a better understanding.

I was part of a fantastic reconciliation project recently called 'Changing the Score', where we brought a group of Australian Football League (AFL) players together with community members from favela communities in Rio de Janeiro. It was organised by RMIT University, Bluestone Edge and Global Reconciliation.

The favelas in Rio are very poor communities that largely operate outside of the formal state. They have an informal leadership system, often led by drug cartels. There are thousands of children in the favelas of Rio working in the drug trade, as soldiers guarding points of contact for traffickers and guarding the edges of the community and so on. It's a very dangerous existence and most of these kids don't live for very long.

The AFL players and young Indigenous players spent eight days with the communities in Rio, hosted by Brazilian NGO, IBISS (Brazilian Institute for Innovation and Social Health Care).

The core idea was to explore how everyday practices such as sport can become vehicles for reconciliation and social inclusion. But the project also created real change for the people who took part. When people from different communities come together and meet the human beings on the other side of stereotypes, the changes in perspective that result can be quite extraordinary.

Some of the young Indigenous men in our group performed a war cry dance before the community, which was incredibly special for the Australian group, but it was also very special for the Brazilian group. I've heard that they're still talking about it in Rio!

I interviewed the Australians after the exchange in Brazil and most of them said it had changed their lives. Many of them thought they were just playing sport in the public eye, but now a lot of these young guys realise that they can do something more. The staff at IBISS said the exchange with the Australians was also an inspiring and important experience for the Brazilians who participated

The trip was part of a series of reconciliation journeys run through Global Reconciliation that use sport and other everyday activities (such as health, education and the arts) to build community resilience.

Global Reconciliation seeks to build global support for local projects that use everyday practice as vehicles for reconciliation. It started off as a loose network of people around the world interested in reconciliation theory and practice, and has now become a more formal collaboration called Global Reconciliation. Philanthropy is very important in making possible the work we do.

Reconciliation has often been understood as a notion of peace or harmony. But we don't see reconciliation as that. We see reconciliation as building resources that help us as human beings to live with the tensions and difficulties of difference that are always going to be there.

I've always had a belief that, at the end of the day, we're human beings and if we try there's always some way that we can reach each other." ■

The power of reconciliation

"I have chosen to support Global Reconciliation for two reasons. Firstly, its core function is, as its name declares, reconciliation. The greater part of the world's turmoil is generated from fractured cultures and mutually antipathetic communities. Secondly, Global Reconciliation is a team of dedicated professionals with a long-term commitment to undertaking specific and measurable projects, and I see this as far more effective than other common approaches that pursue broad unmeasurable altruistic goals in an uncoordinated way or with a short-term focus. I would hope that my contribution assists in enabling Global Reconciliation and RMIT to achieve success in their selected reconciliation projects. I find it far more productive and cost-efficient to work through proven organisations rather than trying to reinvent the wheel."

Robert Costa, Director of Costa Group, board member and donor to Global Reconciliation

Image: Dr Elizabeth Kath, Vice-Chancellor's Research Fellow, Honorary Research Fellow with the UN Global Compact Cities and Co-Director of Global Reconciliation, pictured on City Campus.