

BREAKING the BARRIERS of FEAR, HATE and INTOLERANCE

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The Four Step Healing Process of “REUNITING THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM”

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2005 Vanguard Award from Women in Communications
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STEP ONE: Break bread. We invited Christian, Muslim and Jewish high school students to break bread (pizza) together. We broke the taboo about speaking to those we see as different, strangers, or enemies.

STEP TWO: Listen with compassion. Lines of communication were established when participants shared their stories of being victims of hate and prejudice. They told their stories uninterrupted, no one was allowed to comment, judge, or criticize. The teens felt they were being heard, some for the first time. Because they felt heard by the other, they perceived their thoughts and beliefs were recognized by the other. Because their sharing was not interrupted, they felt their thoughts and beliefs were respected.

STEP THREE: Be the *other*. The participants took turns role playing ... first the historical characters and then role playing the painful experiences of *others* today. By stepping into each *other's* shoes they experienced new levels of understanding. Their thoughts and beliefs were validated and they felt empathy for *others'* pain and circumstances. They saw each had different truths. They learned they did not have to change their personal truths or agree with the *others'* truth to validate the *others'* feelings and express empathy to the *other*. This is where the deep healing took place.

STEP FOUR: Create something new together. We created a new collective story and an interactive talk-back after the presentation to help foster discussion. The teens felt it was crucial to show how they learned to express empathy, and validate each others truths, without having to give up or change their own thoughts or beliefs. “You do not have to be wrong for me to be right.” “We have different truths but we can come together and create peace,” were just two of the critical life lessons the teens learned as they created the project.

The program gave us the unique opportunity to tell the story of Abraham's Children in a new light. We were able to symbolically heal the trans-generational wounds borne of the ancient sibling rivalry over a father's love and the demands for the fair share of their inheritance. We broke the barriers of fear, hate and intolerance. No matter how horrific the TV or newspaper stories, our hearts were opened to pursuing our dream. We felt we were making a difference. We were creating peace.