

Being at a celebration of hope

Neil Wright

Can you guess what is the WellSpring Centre's largest attended event each year? (This year well over two hundred people were there, in fact.)

It's the final 'Presentation Night' of our Building Bridges program, which this year was held on 12th October 2009 at Hawthorn Town Hall.

It was the time when students from the 23 schools in the program joined to celebrate what they'd discovered during the year.

Many families and school leaders were there too.

As you probably know, the Building Bridges program brings together students from Christian, Jewish and Muslim schools, based in small groups with a young adult facilitator.

There are times of sharing, 'workshopping', eating, singing and talking – talking about their faith, their life experiences as well as about their favourite TV shows and football teams....

So, on the Presentation Night we heard from a selection of those students.

They told us about what it is like as they first encounter Building Bridges and what actually 'happened to them' during the whole experience.

And what each student said was very individual, always interesting and often very insightful.

A common theme, naturally, was how they had come to appreciate what they have in common, both in life and in their faith.

One boy likened it to a stained glass window: "You see blues, reds and yellows, but it's from the same light coming through".

One boy picked up the theme that it is important to tolerate others' points of view, but challenged it:

"No, tolerance doesn't capture it. I do not 'tolerate' my group. I like them, respect them, and am proud to call them my friends.

It became clear that, although there had been input

from the leaders, in many ways the most significant learning was from each other.

"We were teaching one another", one student said.

And another made an insightful observation, "It's not just learning about others but also about yourself. It made me look inside".

Clearly some Kingdom-building work is going on here. It was fascinating to hear these stories of friendship and understanding and hope. In fact, the title of the evening was 'Hope for a New Future'.

There were other features of the evening, too.

We saw some DVDs: one was about students' experiences in the program, another about a practical fence-restoration project that some students undertook (yes, real fences, up at Kinglake), and one about the upcoming Parliament of World Religions in December.

We heard Tim McCowan, the initiator and Director of Building Bridges, talk about hopes and plans for further extension of the program.

The students sang a song they'd composed themselves.

And the guest artist was Jason Shulman, a Jewish hip-hop artist who performed and who spoke about his passion for understanding among different people groups.

But it was the students who with their stories and their passion stole the show.

It made you proud to be associated with the WellSpring Centre and very appreciative of all that Tim McCowan and his team have accomplished.

If you missed it, plan to be there next year, at the biggest WellSpring event of the year!

...what each student said was very individual, always interesting and often very insightful.

What was the biggest WellSpring event of the year, attended by more than 200 people?