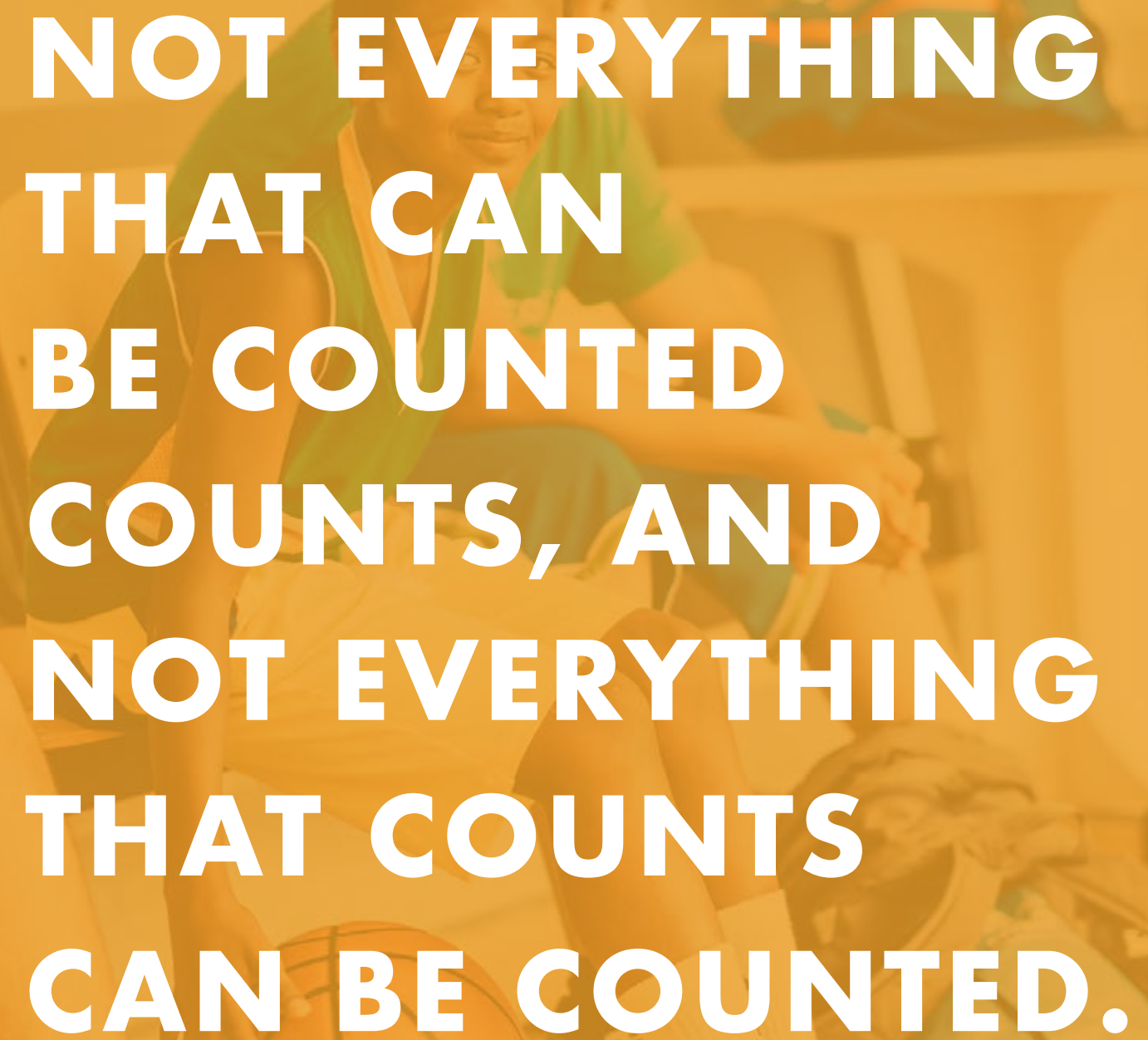


THE CHOICE OF PEACE

**PEACEPLAYERS INTERNATIONAL
MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES
DECEMBER 2017**



PEACEPLAYERS



**NOT EVERYTHING
THAT CAN
BE COUNTED
COUNTS, AND
NOT EVERYTHING
THAT COUNTS
CAN BE COUNTED.**

ALBERT EINSTEIN

PeacePlayers launched this story project in May 2015 to give a platform to participants, coaches and staff to share and understand each other's experiences. Throughout the report, you will hear stories from around the world that explore the connection between peacebuilding and sport, which we believe has a unique ability to change perceptions and inspire unity.

We invite you to hear from some of our PeacePlayers family about the personal transformations they have experienced, and to reflect on what enables all of us to step outside our comfort zone and change for the better. We hope that these powerful stories inspire you to join us in our mission to unite communities in conflict.

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE?

Most Significant Change is a monitoring and evaluation methodology that centers on the systematic collection and analysis of stories about change. It is participatory in nature, with program stakeholders determining which types of changes should be discussed and analyzed.

The standard process involves first the collection of stories from individuals who describe, in their own words, the most significant change they have personally experienced since joining a specific program. Once several stories have been gathered, these are circulated to others within the program, who are tasked with

selecting a small number of stories that demonstrate the “most significance.”*

The stories featured in this document were gathered and selected by children and youth participants, coaches, staff and board members from five PeacePlayers program sites and offices: Middle East, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Cyprus and Washington, D.C. The stories reflect a variety of themes—increased confidence, friendships, stereotype reduction, interpersonal skill development, hope for the future, etc.—illustrating the wide range of changes experienced by those who take part in PeacePlayers programming.



*For further information on Most Significant Change methodology, please see: The Most Significant Change Technique, <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf>



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT PEACEPLAYERS

Established in 2001, PeacePlayers uses the game of basketball to unite, educate and inspire young people living in divided communities. Based on the premise that “children who play together can learn to live together,” PeacePlayers has become a worldwide leader in the use of sport to build a more peaceful world, reaching more than 75,000 youth in 15 countries.

By offering equitable sport programming, peace education, leadership development and professional training, PeacePlayers

challenges the status quo of hatred and fear that grips societies in conflict – making cross-community cooperation desirable and giving young people practical skills to deal with conflict and grow into ambassadors for peace in their communities. The organization operates year-round programs in the Middle East, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Cyprus and the United States, with the Sports and Peace Innovation Network (SPIN) technical assistance program coordinated from Washington, DC.

INTRODUCTION

PROGRAMMATIC STANDARDS

Underlying PeacePlayers' work is a proven methodology that has developed from over a decade of experience in the organization's year-round international sites.

Though each site has adapted its own distinctive programming in accordance with the local context and needs, all rely on five core standards:

LOCAL OWNERSHIP

All PeacePlayers program sites are managed by **staff from the communities** in which they serve, which is critical to creating long-term programmatic and organizational sustainability. Local leaders are not just seen as credible stakeholders, but can also serve as relatable mentors to participants.

LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

Once participants reach high school they have the opportunity to join the **Leadership Development Program (LDP)**, in which they receive leadership training, take part in community service activities, and serve as assistant coaches for younger participants. LDP graduates are encouraged to continue as coaches and to apply for full-time staff positions.

BRIDGING DIVIDES

DEVELOPING LEADERS

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

SUSTAINED INTEGRATION

Teams continue to twin frequently; eventually, twinned teams begin to play competitively against outside opponents. PeacePlayers aims to enroll youth when they begin elementary school, and keep them engaged until they graduate from high school. **Frequent interactions over the long-term** allow for the development of meaningful relationships that extend beyond the basketball court.

PEACE EDUCATION

PeacePlayers recruits via community partners, commonly schools. Youth begin the program by engaging in "single identity" activities with children from their own ethno-social group, where they learn the basics of basketball and are introduced to PeacePlayers' **peace education curriculum**, developed in partnership with the Arbinger Institute. The curriculum is known to many participants as "Arbinger."

SPORT "PLUS"

After a period of single-identity work, teams meet for "**twinnings**"—integrated practices featuring basketball drills, games and teambuilding activities. Trained coaches link these activities to broader lessons about cooperation and respect.

PROGRAM CONTEXT



NORTHERN IRELAND

CYPRUS

MIDDLE EAST

SOUTH AFRICA

WASHINGTON, D.C.

PeacePlayers operates in diverse conflict and post-conflict settings across the globe. The unique history and context of these areas shape the personal experiences of program participants, and are thus critical to understanding the stories featured in this document.



MIDDLE EAST

In Israel and the West Bank, deep social divides continue to undermine generations of peacemaking efforts. Despite ongoing violence and political setbacks, PeacePlayers – Middle East has continued to grow, working with Arab and Jewish youth in Jerusalem, the center region and north of Israel.

Repercussions of the decades-long conflict are felt in the daily lives of PeacePlayers – Middle East participants and their families. In Jerusalem, Arab residents generally live on the eastern side of the city, while Jewish residents

reside in west Jerusalem. Moving between the two areas – which youth do regularly in order to engage in mixed activities – is not common, and can be difficult during periods of heightened violence. The PeacePlayers – Middle East Most Significant Change stories also reflect the fact that Jewish citizens of Israel age 18 and above are required to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces for two to three years. This transition can be challenging for participants, who begin military service having spent several years engaging in integrated peacebuilding activities.



NORTHERN IRELAND

Despite the existence of a 1998 peace agreement that formally ended decades of conflict known as “the Troubles,” less than 7% of Northern Ireland’s pupils attend integrated schools. Youth continue to grow up segregated – from the neighborhoods they live in to the sports they play.

PeacePlayers – Northern Ireland operates primarily in the city of Belfast, where Catholics and Protestants live in proximity to each other yet do not share the same public spaces. The areas where Protestant

and Catholic neighborhoods intersect are known as “interfaces;” during the height of the conflict large walls were constructed at some of these interfaces, many of which remain in place today. PeacePlayers – Northern Ireland focuses much of its programming on these interface areas, which are most affected by the legacy of the Troubles. This is reflected in some of the program’s Most Significant Change stories; for example, one story is told by a participant living in Ardoyne, Belfast, an area known for many past riots and incidents of violent conflict.



SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa is continuing to emerge from almost 50 years of apartheid, a system of institutionalized segregation favoring whites over other racial groups. Since the end of apartheid, economic and social disparities between groups have remained widespread.

PeacePlayers – South Africa operates in Durban, the largest city of the KwaZulu-Natal province. Many participating youth do not have the financial ability to take part in extracurricular activities, particularly those held outside of their neighborhoods;

thus, when program activities require travel to different areas of Durban, it is often the first time they are exposed to communities other than their own. Program participants, several of whom are immigrants to South Africa from other African countries, are also affected by ongoing anti-immigrant tensions in Durban. Most Significant Change story collection for PeacePlayers – South Africa took place in May 2015, months after a wave of violent attacks against African immigrants erupted across South Africa.



CYPRUS

A small island in the Mediterranean, Cyprus has been physically divided by a UN Buffer Zone since an inter-ethnic war in 1974 split the island into separate communities. To this day, Greek-Cypriots generally live in the south of Cyprus, and Turkish-Cypriots in the north. Travel between the two sides of the island is relatively rare, and requires passing through a checkpoint.

As the only year-round bi-communal sports organization on the island, PeacePlayers –

Cyprus brings together Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot youth to build positive relationships that overcome generations of mistrust and formidable physical barriers to interaction. Youth participants generally speak different languages – Greek and Turkish – and most cross the UN Buffer Zone for the first time to take part in program activities. Males in Cyprus are required to serve in the military for approximately 14 months once they turn 18 years old.



METHODOLOGY

PeacePlayers launched its Most Significant Change project in May 2015 with a formal introduction to staff and stakeholders in the international program sites and Washington, DC. This process included key decisions regarding the design of the project, specifically:

PeacePlayers did not adopt pre-defined domains of change as a framework for the initial collection of stories. As this project constitutes the first multi-site evaluative activity, it was decided that the process should remain as open as possible. In addition,

PeacePlayers wanted to ensure that unexpected changes, whether positive or negative, could emerge.

PeacePlayers decided to incorporate a wide range of program stakeholders (i.e. children and adolescent participants, coaches, staff and Board members) and arrange for stories from staff and Board members to be read and selected by younger participants. Thus, in addition to assessing change, a major aim of the project was to strengthen connections among those of different ages, positions and program sites.

ONE COLLECTION

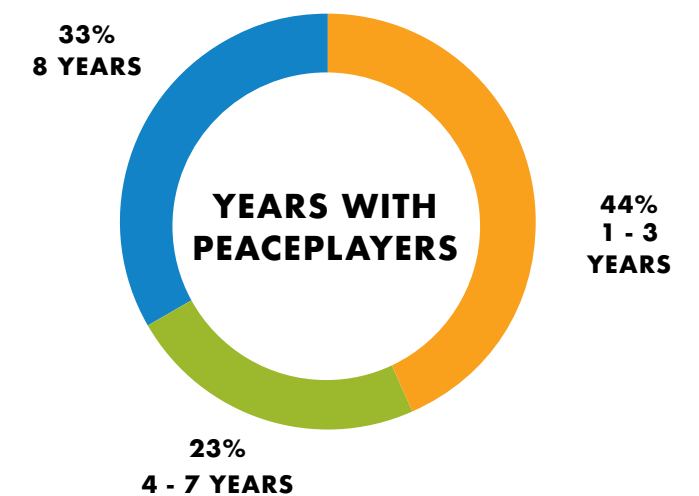
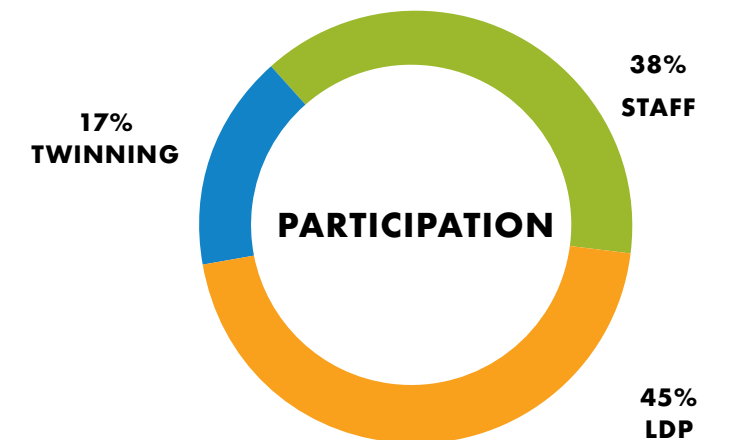
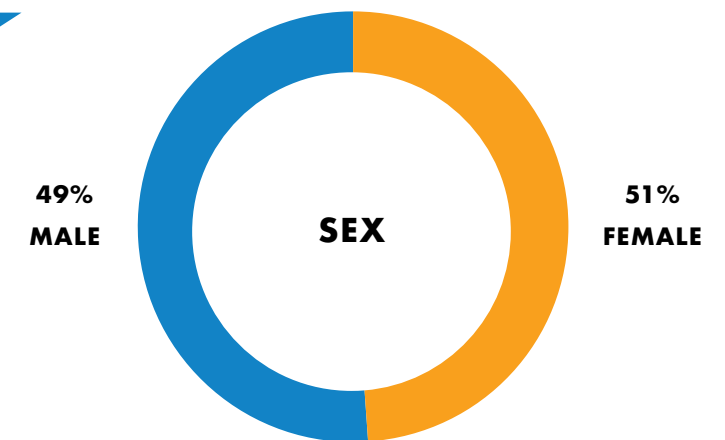
Stories were collected over the course of a year, from July 2015 - June 2016. Several methods were used to gather stories, including one-on-one interviews and group writing exercises. All one-on-one interviews were recorded and transcribed. In each case, two questions were asked of respondents:

- Can you provide an example or story of the most significant change, either positive or negative, that you have experienced since you first became involved with PeacePlayers?
- Why do you consider this change to be most significant for you?

The stories were collected by the PeacePlayers Director of Monitoring and Evaluation, the Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist and three program staff, who participated in training prior to engaging in story collection.

Fifteen to 20 stories per PeacePlayers site were collected, for a total of 73 stories. Following initial collection, all stories were entered into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo and coded by type of change.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS



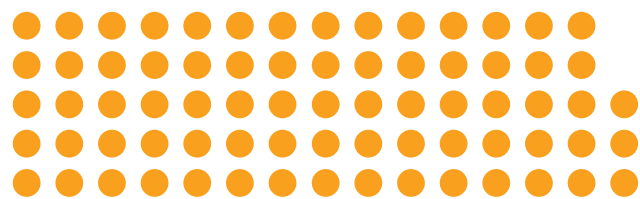
SELECTION

ROUND 1

PeacePlayers programs were paired together and staff members from each site were tasked with selecting five “most significant” stories from among the 15 - 20 per site originally collected. This round of story selection was conducted in July 2016 and carried out electronically, through a survey format.

Following the first round of story selection, 22 stories emerged as “most significant.”

SELECT EACH OTHER’S STORIES

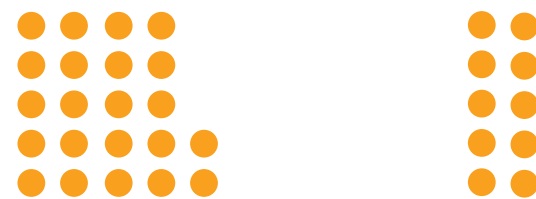


73 STORIES

ROUND 2

During PeacePlayers’ July 2016 leadership development camp in Cyprus, LDP participants took part in an in-person group exercise to select the top two “most significant” stories per site from among the five chosen during the first selection round. As in round 1, program sites were paired together for selection.

SELECT EACH OTHER’S STORIES



22 STORIES

ROUND 3

PeacePlayers staff in Washington, D.C. and Managing Directors at each program site selected one “most significant story of all” from among the 10 stories that emerged after the the second selection round. This final round of story selection was conducted in November 2016 and carried out electronically, through a survey format.



10 STORIES

VERIFICATION

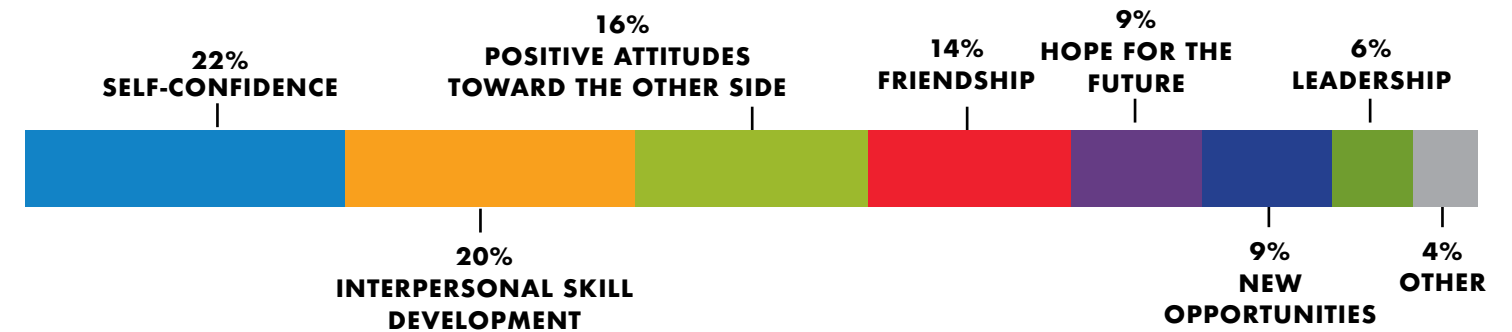
The stories featured in this report were verified through interviews conducted either in-person or through Skype by the Director of Monitoring and Evaluation, the Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist and additional trained program staff. Prior to publication of this document, each story was sent to back to its author for approval.

FINDINGS

The 73 stories gathered across PeacePlayers reflect nine major types of change: basketball skills; friendship; hope for the future; impact on family and friends; interpersonal skill development; leadership; new opportunities; positive attitudes toward the other side; and self-confidence.

SELF-CONFIDENCE, INTERPERSONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT, POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE OTHER SIDE, AND FRIENDSHIP WERE THE MOST FREQUENTLY EXPRESSED CHANGES.

MOST FREQUENTLY CITED CHANGES



MOST FREQUENTLY CITED CHANGE BY SEX



MOST FREQUENTLY CITED CHANGE BY PARTICIPATION



MOST FREQUENTLY CITED CHANGE BY YEARS IN PEACEPLAYERS



FINDINGS

SEVERAL CORE THEMES EMERGED FROM THE STORIES, SHEDDING LIGHT ON APPROACHES TO SPORT AND PEACEBUILDING PROGRAMMING THAT BEST SPARK CHANGE:



IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL RESOURCES TO PEACEBUILDING

69% of stories described the significance of psychosocial resources such as self-confidence and leadership. These are critical to both individual youth development, as well as to the peacebuilding process on a

broader societal level. Youth who are confident and have leadership skills are better equipped to speak out against stereotypes and discrimination, actively furthering peace in their communities. Thus, while many traditional people-to-people peacebuilding programs prioritize stereotype reduction as a building block for developing relationships across groups in conflict, the PeacePlayers stories demonstrate the need for an “inside-out” approach focused on interpersonal development first, which in turn leads to positive attitude and behavior change.

[BEFORE PEACEPLAYERS] I WASN'T CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO SPEAK OUT OR CHALLENGE OTHER PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS... [SINCE JOINING THE PROGRAM], I REALIZED THAT I HAVE TO 'UP MY GAME' AND SAY SOMETHING WHEN I HEAR NEGATIVE THINGS ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS. IT'S VERY EASY FOR PEOPLE TO GET SUCKED INTO THAT NEGATIVE WAY OF THINKING, AND IT'S ALSO VERY HARD TO CHALLENGE THEIR VIEWS ONCE THEY BELIEVE IN THAT. BUT I FEEL MUCH MORE BRAVE AND I'M GOING TO SPEAK OUT MORE. PEACEPLAYERS TOTALLY BOOSTED ME UP AND I DEFINITELY WOULD NOT BE AS CONFIDENT AS I AM WITHOUT THE PROGRAM. I HAVE LOADS OF PROTESTANT FRIENDS NOW, BOTH IN PEACEPLAYERS AND OUTSIDE OF IT – AND I'M NOT AFRAID TO SAY THAT.

GARY DUFFY, PEACEPLAYERS – NORTHERN IRELAND

FINDINGS

CREATING SPACE FOR FORMAL AND INFORMAL TIME

The stories highlighted two distinct features of PeacePlayers programming that create change: formal and informal time. Formal, structured activities such as basketball practice, peace education curriculum, public speaking courses or LDP volunteer

coaching help children and youth gain specific skills. Equally important is feeling supported by coaches and welcomed by other participants; in short, the atmosphere and “culture” developed around the program. Positive culture is certainly created through formalized activities, but it is also built during informal moments – the coach shooting the basketball with players during a water break, or players talking together while riding the bus to an activity. Successful sport and peacebuilding initiatives must be conscious of program culture, and build in both formal and informal time.

TWO YEARS AGO, I FOUND OUT THAT THERE'S A TEAM CALLED PEACEPLAYERS AND IT PROMOTES PEACE BETWEEN [TURKISH CYPRIOTS AND GREEK CYPRIOTS]. WHEN I LEARNED THIS I WAS SO EXCITED ABOUT IT. TWO WEEKS LATER I WENT TO THE COURT WHERE THE TRAINING WAS. IT WAS SO DIFFERENT AND AMAZING AT THE SAME TIME. ALL THE PLAYERS AND OUR COACH WERE FRIENDLY AND GENEROUS. EVERYONE WAS HELPING EACH OTHER AND THE BASKETBALL WAS SO FUN!

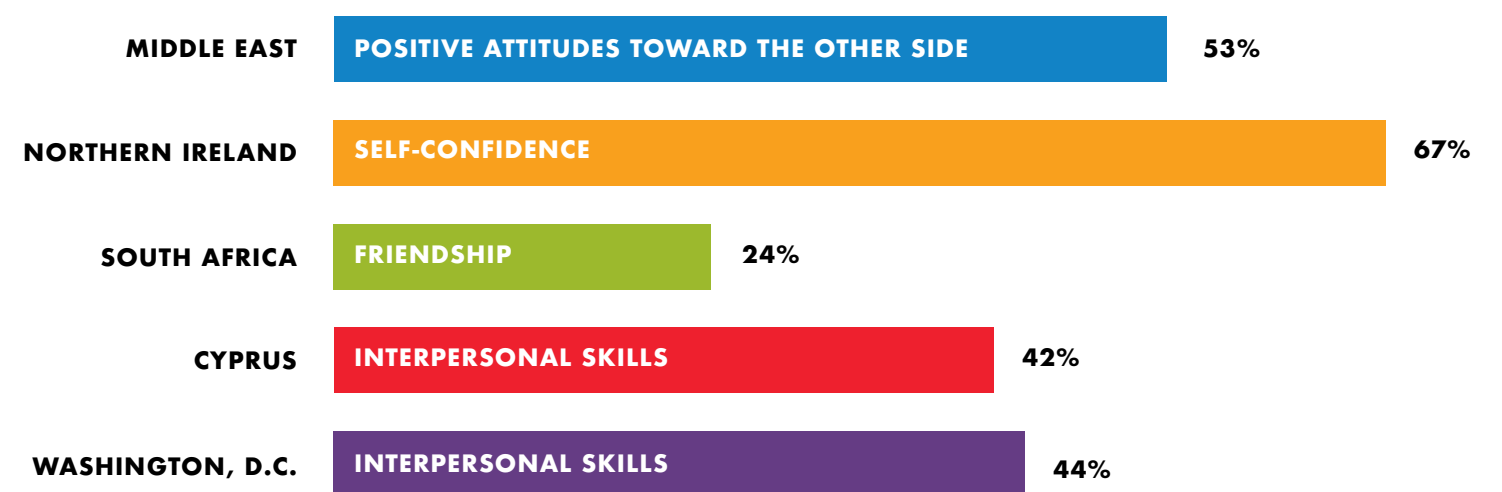
ANNA MARIA DIAKOU, PEACEPLAYERS – CYPRUS

PROGRAM CONTEXT AND CHANGE

PeacePlayers employs a similar model across all program sites, which centers on sport, peace education, sustained contact, a leadership pipeline and local ownership.

Nevertheless, in each site a different type of change emerged as most significant, demonstrating how context determines what is most important in peacebuilding programming. While friendship development or positive attitudes might be central to peacebuilding in one place, self-confidence or leadership could be more critical in others. This finding reinforces the importance of adaptable programming, driven by a strong program design process that is inclusive of local participants, staff and community members.

MOST FREQUENTLY CITED CHANGE BY SITE



STORIES



TOOT IMBAR

PEACEPLAYERS – MIDDLE EAST

Female, age 19

LIVES IN: Kiryat Yovel, West Jerusalem

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Twinning; Leadership Development Program

YEARS INVOLVED: 6

TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Friendship; Hope for the future

Following three rounds of discussion and voting by PeacePlayers participants and staff in all program sites, Toot Imbar’s story of change was selected as “most significant of all.” Her story, which focuses on a deep friendship developed with her teammate, embodies the vision of PeacePlayers that “children who play together can learn to live together.”

As a Jewish girl growing up in Jerusalem, all of my activities were with Jewish Israelis. I lived in a Jewish neighborhood, studied at a Jewish Israeli school, played for a Jewish Israeli basketball team, and met with my Jewish Israeli friends after school.

But in Jerusalem there were always these “other people,” the Palestinians. We didn’t study at the same school or play for the same teams, but I would see them at the grocery store, at the cinema or on the train. Despite that, I never had a chance to get to know any Palestinian personally. I had never talked to a Palestinian my age before. What I knew about them came from what I heard on TV, in the news, or what grownups were saying. Palestinians just weren’t included in my everyday life.

When I joined PeacePlayers, I understood the “playing together” part of its philosophy pretty quickly. Our team had such high-level basketball players; the Palestinian girls were very good and we were able to communicate. Slowly we became friends, and we performed really well as a team. We were one of the first mixed teams in Israel, and it was the best team that I have ever been a part of, both on and off the court.

My friend Aysha, who is Palestinian, was an assistant coach on that team. The whole team would come before practices to talk and hang out, and afterwards we would all go get something to eat. I saw Aysha, Duha, Malak and Raneen as my friends, but I also felt that we were in a bubble. You would always hear things in the news: reports of attacks and of the things that politicians say. It seemed as if we were farther than ever from the “living together”

part of PeacePlayers. I didn’t think that my friendships with Aysha, or with any of my other Palestinian teammates, had anything to do with the whole conflict; we were just a few kids playing basketball.

I finally understood the “living together” part during the summer of 2014. During that time there was fighting going on between Israel and Gaza. Many Palestinians couldn’t leave their villages, and many Israelis had to report to the military. Everyone was scared to leave their house and racism was at its worst. In the second week of fighting the first siren went off in Jerusalem.

Protocol states that you have to stay in the bomb shelter for ten minutes after a siren is heard. As I was waiting inside the shelter with my family, I got a text message from Aysha asking if my family and I were OK.

To any other person, that message would seem completely normal; Aysha and I text all the time. But it was this message that finally helped me understand what PeacePlayers is all about. Our team, and the relationships that we have formed, are more than just a bunch of kids playing basketball. Most people think that we exist in separate boxes: Aysha is a Palestinian, I am an Israeli, and that’s how it’s always going to be. But the moment I got the text message, I realized that while I’m in my shelter with my family, Aysha is also in a shelter with her family. We’re worried that everything is OK with our friends and family – and she’s included in my worry, and I’m included in hers. When I realized that, it broke a huge barrier for me. I realized that it doesn’t have to be something big, it doesn’t have to come from politicians. It can just be a text message between two friends.

EVEN THOUGH OUR COUNTRY IS VERY FAR FROM ACHIEVING A DIFFERENT REALITY, I BELIEVE THAT PEACEPLAYERS BRINGS US ONE STEP CLOSER. TOGETHER WE ARE CREATING ANOTHER SIDE, A DIFFERENT SIDE -- A SIDE WHERE ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS CAN COEXIST.

MIDDLE EAST



Female, age 21
LIVES IN: Jerusalem
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Twinning; Leadership Development Program; Staff
YEARS INVOLVED: 9
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Positive attitudes toward the other side

As a kid I've always been curious about everything – but not about Israelis. I've always lived in a community where everyone tells us that the other side are our enemies, they took our land, we don't make eye contact with them, we don't go to their places and they don't come to our places. We live in the same country but each side is trying to be in their own bubble. Where I live is actually two minutes away from an Israeli neighborhood but I had never gone there before because it wasn't allowed. It's the enemy's neighborhood.

Originally I joined PeacePlayers only to play sports. I started as a player and we had activities with Israeli girls. To be honest, at the beginning it was stressful and I was nervous. But after playing together for awhile it became exciting. Eventually I started playing in the league with my Israeli teammates, and we became good friends. Then I had the opportunity to be part of the Leadership Development Program, and through that program I was able to complete my coaching certificate. After being a leader and coach,

PeacePlayers hired me to be a Project Manager and now I coach four teams and I'm in charge of 11 Palestinian teams in Jerusalem.

While I liked my Israeli friends from PeacePlayers, I didn't always have the same good feelings about other Israeli people. But in PeacePlayers we also learn something called Arbing, which teaches you to see people as people and not treat them as objects. It showed us that if you want to do anything in your life, you should always start from yourself – you can't just go and ask people to change or to do something that you don't believe in yourself.

Understanding this was one of the great moments that changed me. I realized that it's easier to hate Israel, to be violent; it's easier to do the negative stuff. And at the same time, it's harder to feel peace, it's harder to forgive people, to try to move on and to make a better place. Being good is the harder way. So you have to choose it.

EVERYONE HAS THE CHOICE OF WHAT TO BE – GOOD OR BAD. THINK POSITIVE OR THINK NEGATIVE. WE LIVE IN THIS COMMUNITY WHERE CONFLICT HAS GONE ON FOR OVER 60 YEARS. PEOPLE ARE DYING AND WE'RE GETTING OLDER, BUT THE LAND IS STILL THE SAME, AND US, THE HUMANS, WILL BE GONE. SO YOU CAN CHOOSE TO LIVE HAPPY OR LIVE SAD, TO LIVE IN ANGER OR TO LIVE PEACEFULLY. I THINK THE CHOICE OF PEACE IS BETTER.



HENI BIZAWI, Female, age 25
LIVES IN: Holon
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Leadership Development Program; Staff
YEARS INVOLVED: 8
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Friendship; Impact on Family and Friends

I was about 15 years old when I first joined PeacePlayers. I started off helping to coach a team in Jaffa and I was invited to be part of the Leadership Development Program in Jerusalem, where I met Palestinians on the team. I had a really good time playing with them. I never, never had any interaction with Palestinians before, especially in Jerusalem – I had been to Jerusalem twice in my life before that. But with PeacePlayers it was just basketball, joking, high fives. I kept going to Jerusalem and I started to think, "Wow, I'm meeting Palestinians and everything is fine!"

My family had very strong opinions about the conflict. My older brothers were both soldiers in the Army, and I remember during a lot of Shabbat dinners we used to argue about PeacePlayers. They would tell me, "You know nothing about this, be quiet, come talk to me after the Army and see if you still think like that." When I got to the age

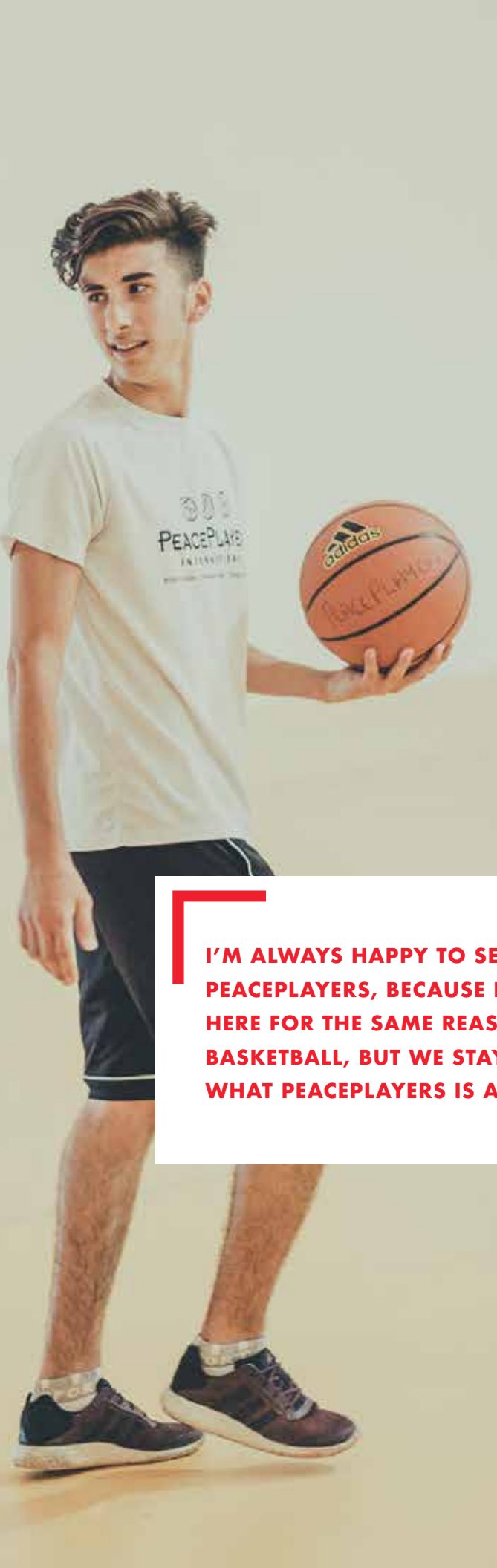
to go to the Army, I took a break from PeacePlayers. I was in the Army for three years, where I was the commander of basic training and commander in the corps.

After the Army, I went back to work at PeacePlayers. This is when I started to see the conflict differently. That was the biggest change for me; it made me understand personally how important PeacePlayers is. The moments where you see the kids playing together, it's very natural because they're kids and they're not thinking about the conflict – that's what gives me the motivation to continue and to really believe in what we are doing.

THE FRIENDSHIPS I HAVE THROUGH PEACEPLAYERS ARE SO DEEP AND SO STRONG. I'VE HAD VERY POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS WITH MY PALESTINIAN FRIENDS; THE HARDEST TOPICS EVER, THINGS THAT NO ONE CAN TALK ABOUT, WE TALK ABOUT IT AND WE DEAL WITH IT AS FRIENDS. WHEN YOU ARE GOOD ENOUGH FRIENDS WITH SOMEONE YOU CAN TALK ABOUT THE DIFFICULT THINGS. IF YOU'RE NOT TALKING AT ALL, YOU JUST CONTINUE TO HATE EACH OTHER.

I am still close with the Palestinian friends that I met when I first joined PeacePlayers. A few of them in particular, we eventually all became coaches and then staff members, so we spent a lot of time together and started talking more about the conflict. We definitely have a lot of different opinions. We've grown up in different places with different ways of thinking, but now we know how to put ourselves in each other's shoes. It's very emotional, it's very hard. It's a long, long process, and I think one of the big differences between PeacePlayers and other organizations is the time, that it's long-term – this is what makes it strong.

Now my family, seeing me continue for so long in PeacePlayers and really believe in it, they are also changing. My one older brother who is very right-wing, he told me, "I think what you are doing is important and one day maybe this is the way that something will change." He even agreed for his son to come to PeacePlayers activities. For my family to show understanding toward the other side, it's a huge change.



MUSA ABU-DALU, Male, age 18
LIVES IN: Beit Safafa, Jerusalem
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Twinning; Leadership Development Program
YEARS INVOLVED: 8
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Positive attitudes toward the other side

I joined PeacePlayers to play basketball, and when I first started I didn't know that it included Jews as well. I grew up in an Arab neighborhood, and I had seen Jews, but I had never actually spoken with one or even met one face-to-face. I didn't know anything about them except from what my friends told me, which was only negative. So, when I went to my first twinning and saw Jewish kids there, I didn't want to participate in the practice with them. When the coaches finally convinced me to go onto the court to play, I refused to pass the ball to the Jewish kids. I didn't even speak to them, because I really didn't want anything to do with them at all.

But as we started having twinings and other mixed activities more and more, we started talking a little bit. I remember that at one point we had to do a goal-setting exercise, and I realized that in order to achieve our goals we had to communicate better and get to know each other more. After that, with every practice we got closer and closer to each other, and I realized that my stereotypes, and everything I had heard from my friends, were wrong.

Eventually, I started to hang out with my Jewish friends from PeacePlayers a lot outside of the program. We would go out together, eat together at restaurants, and just chill. My friends from my neighborhood didn't understand. They would ask me what I was doing hanging around with these people, and tell me

that Israelis are all in the army, and that the army kills people. But I stood up for my friends and told them that not all people are like that. Not everyone chooses to do those things - they do it because they have to, not necessarily because they want to. There are people that can have a different attitude than what you think you know.

Without PeacePlayers, I'm sure that I wouldn't be the same as I am now. PeacePlayers has taught me so many things about different situations, different people, and how to accept people for who they are without judging them. Now, I feel like a leader in my community, and I have lots of Jewish friends that I trust and love.

I'M ALWAYS HAPPY TO SEE NEW FACES AT PEACEPLAYERS, BECAUSE I KNOW THAT THEY ARE HERE FOR THE SAME REASON I AM. WE JOIN TO PLAY BASKETBALL, BUT WE STAY BECAUSE WE BELIEVE IN WHAT PEACEPLAYERS IS ALL ABOUT.

NORTHERN IRELAND



GARY DUFFY, Male, age 15
LIVES IN: Ardoyne, North Belfast
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Leadership Development Program
YEARS INVOLVED: 8
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Self-confidence; Positive attitudes toward the other side

Before PeacePlayers, I used to think that Protestants and Catholics got along really badly. I never had any interaction with Protestants—I didn't try to stay away from them, because just looking at someone you can't really tell what religion they are, but if I interacted with any Protestants I didn't know about it. I didn't understand the background, and I had heard so many negative things about Protestants and the bad things they do.

I didn't totally believe these kinds of things, but I wasn't confident enough to speak out or challenge other people's thoughts. Back then, I didn't have any confidence, to the point where I never wanted to do anything to put myself out there. I was raised in Ardoyne, and there were riots occasionally—I only knew what I saw from the riots, and because of that I was afraid that something might happen to me if I spoke out and shared my views. So I just went with the flow.

Some of the things I heard in PeacePlayers totally changed me. I've had a change in attitude, and I've gotten used to different religions. I don't think we should be judging people because they're a different religion. I realized that I have to "up my game" and say something when I hear negative things about other religions. It's very easy for people to get sucked into that negative way of thinking, and it's also very hard to challenge their views once they believe in that. But I feel much more brave and I'm going to speak out more. PeacePlayers totally boosted me up and I definitely would not be as confident as I am without the program. I have loads of Protestant friends now, both in PeacePlayers and outside of it – and I'm not afraid to say that.

IN PEACEPLAYERS, YOU SEE THAT WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED ISN'T NECESSARILY TRUE. THERE REALLY THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US – AS LONG AS YOU TREAT OTHERS WITH RESPECT AND YOU'RE KIND, WE'RE ALL THE SAME, WE'RE ALL PEOPLE.



JOANNE FITZPATRICK, Female
LIVES IN: West Belfast
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Staff
YEARS INVOLVED: 8
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Friendship

I grew up in a predominantly Catholic area, but everyone was very tolerant of each other. Apart from having to go to separate primary schools, which is the norm, there really wasn't anything that stopped me and my friends from getting together. My neighbors were Protestants, their neighbors were Catholics, and it was just a mixed street entirely. But I wasn't really told anything about the Troubles – I was sheltered from the craziness that was going on around me.

However, I went to secondary school in Kilkeel, which is very divided. When you drive up the street, half of the curbs are painted red, white and blue and the other half are green, orange and white—you can feel the division. The Protestant Kilkeel High and the Catholic St. Louis Grammar in Kilkeel, where I went, hated each other. To get to school, I had to take two separate buses: the first brought me from my very mixed village to the next town, and the next bus went to the schools. So, I would wait for the bus with some of my Protestant friends in my town and

we would talk together at the bus stop. Then when we got on the bus they went to the back with the Kilkeel High students and I had to stay at the front of the bus. And that was it. Kilkeel High students just don't talk to St. Louis students.

After I had been working at PeacePlayers a few years Laura Agnew also joined the staff, and we became friends quite quickly. She went to Kilkeel High, and I went to St. Louis Grammar, so we knew a lot of the same people and had that common ground. Aside from her being a lovely person, coming from those schools and different religious backgrounds, and knowing what that means to other people, I think our friendship just meant a little more to us too.

BEFORE, WITH MY PROTESTANT FRIENDS, YOU JUST NEVER TALKED ABOUT RELIGION. YOU JUST KNEW THAT THEY WERE PROTESTANT, BUT YOU NEVER TALKED ABOUT IT. IN PEACEPLAYERS, YOU DO HAVE THOSE CONVERSATIONS AND YOU GO INTO IT A BIT MORE. BEING ABLE TO HAVE THAT, WITH COMPLETELY NO BARRIERS, HAS BEEN AN AMAZING THING FOR ME.

Being friends with Laura definitely changed my perception about the conflict. Having a friend like Laura, who does have a fair bit of history in the conflict with her family as well, it means a lot more when you can put a face to it. To actually have somebody, and know somebody's story, makes the whole reason I'm working at PeacePlayers a lot more personal. And you want to invest more so people don't have to go through what your friend had to go through. Hearing Laura's story and her past, thinking about mine, and comparing the two, and then realizing we're both here in Belfast working for PeacePlayers to bridge those divides, I think is what sets our friendship apart.



ANNA HINCHCLIFFE, Female, age 16
LIVES IN: West Belfast
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Leadership Development Program
YEARS INVOLVED: 4
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Self-confidence

I first joined PeacePlayers around the same time that I was diagnosed with generalized anxiety. Because of my anxiety, I was very shy and it was hard for me to do certain things or attend certain events, not just in PeacePlayers, but in my life. For example, one time there was a game that I was supposed to play in, but because I was so anxious, I didn't feel very confident at all. I hadn't played basketball for a while, and combined with the game being away, it wasn't an environment I was used to. I felt like I had to prove myself in front of everyone and show that I could actually play. The pressure eventually was too much, and I ended up leaving the hall and not playing in the game.

PEACEPLAYERS HAS HELPED ME DEAL WITH MY ANXIETY. WHENEVER I'M THERE, I KNOW THAT I CAN BE MYSELF, AND THAT EVERYONE IS BEHIND ME AND WANTS TO HELP ME. IT'S A REALLY POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT. I DO THINGS AT PEACEPLAYERS NOW THAT I STILL CAN'T DO IN SCHOOL.

When PeacePlayers organized a group trip to America, I applied. But when it came time for the trip my anxiety was at its peak. I remember sitting at the table with my mum just freaking out about getting on a plane and going to a whole different country. I realized that I really needed to sort out what was going on because I love basketball so much, and this anxiety was stopping me from doing things that I love. PeacePlayers was one of my favorite things, and I knew that I couldn't just leave it.

The format of LDP, when we had discussions and the room was quieter, was actually one of the environments where I would normally get very anxious. I'd think that I had no freedom and I couldn't breathe; I'd be afraid of doing things too loudly or making a scene. At the time I wasn't able to be in that kind of environment at school, and I'd actually get in a lot of trouble for it. But I was able to do it at PeacePlayers because of the people and the things we were learning. I just knew I wanted to stay because what we were learning was going to impact my life for the better and was going to strengthen my friendships.

The next year with PeacePlayers I went to Cyprus, I went to Israel, and I'm going to Norway in a few weeks. I always knew I could do it. I always had this thought in my head: I knew that if I stayed in this environment, if I stayed in the meeting for another 15 minutes, if I went to the next game, I would be OK. Now, I'm better at all sorts of things like presenting, giving advice, putting myself out there. If anyone ever needs a volunteer I'm always the first one with my arm up. I'm able to do stuff like that now. It gives me a real sense of pride. It was really amazing to show myself that I could do all that, and not have to worry about this big thing that had been dragging me down all these years. And I put a lot of that down to PeacePlayers.

SOUTH AFRICA



NASIPHI KHAFU, Female, age 28
LIVES IN: Durban
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Leadership Development Program; Staff; PeacePlayers - South Africa Executive Director
YEARS INVOLVED: 10
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Self-confidence; Friendship; Hope for the future



ELIEZER KABUYA, Male, age 15
LIVES IN: Durban
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Twinning; Leadership Development Program
YEARS INVOLVED: 7
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Friendship



I am from the DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo], and when I came to Durban I didn't have any friends. Life was hard when I first came to South Africa. I was stuck in the house, taking care of my sisters, and really only went out if I had to buy something.

I found out about PeacePlayers when I was in primary school. I played for the Addington primary school team. I have always loved basketball, and so PeacePlayers was a chance for me to play and meet people. In PeacePlayers,

there are so many people around you. It's such a fun thing, and it has taught me to be friendly with everyone, be a leader, and respect everyone. I know that the most important part in a basketball game is your teammates and your coach - without them, you will be by yourself.

I WAS ABLE TO MAKE FRIENDS BECAUSE I COULD PLAY GAMES WITH PEOPLE; WE LEARNED TO RESPECT EACH OTHER, AND TREAT EACH OTHER WELL AND FAIRLY. NOW, I CAN TALK TO MY FRIENDS AND FEEL LIKE I FIT IN.

Because of the basketball events, like practices and games, I have made lots of friends - both my own teammates and from other teams. And a lot of people are so friendly. I know that they can help me, even if my teammates are not there. With PeacePlayers, I have traveled to many parts of Durban, and now I know that if you go to new places to play, even if you don't know anyone there, you can play basketball - and it's no problem, you just play. You know you have people you can rely on. Everyone is one family.

PeacePlayers made me who I am today. Before, when I was at home, I didn't know what to do. I see other people who do not have sports doing drugs and being gangsters. But I know that doing that can only lead to bad things, like being in jail or making your life short. PeacePlayers has helped me stay away from that. Because of PeacePlayers, I don't have time to do that; I focus on my schoolwork, basketball, and helping my mother with chores. My life is so much better because I have lots of people around me now; it's in the stage I wanted it to be.

I was raised by my grandparents on the Eastern Cape of South Africa, but in 2003 I moved to Durban permanently. It was very difficult for me. I had grown up in a very rural area, and I had confidence issues about moving to the big city. I felt uncomfortable about the way I looked, and I really couldn't speak English that well.

I got involved with PeacePlayers when I was 18 years old, and because I had never played before I was initially

learning with kids who were much younger. At the time, I felt like it was taking me forever to learn the game. But my coach was always so patient, teaching me and wanting me to get better. And the atmosphere at PeacePlayers was great. We were playing games and meeting other people, so the experience became more than just a game. I started picking up basketball, got to meet other people I would not have met, and I made friends. Because I had always kept to myself in school, I didn't really have any friends before PeacePlayers. But with basketball, whenever you had a ball in your hand, even walking down the street, people would ask you to pass or do tricks. It was an interesting thing—you didn't have to be beautiful, or speak English properly (in my case), or be anything, in order to just play.

SPORT IS NOT JUST COMPETITION. YOU CAN CHANGE PEOPLE'S LIVES, EVEN YOUR OWN, THROUGH SPORT. PEACEPLAYERS HAS DONE THAT FOR ME; IT HAS GIVEN ME SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES. PEACEPLAYERS HAS MADE THINGS THAT SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE, POSSIBLE.

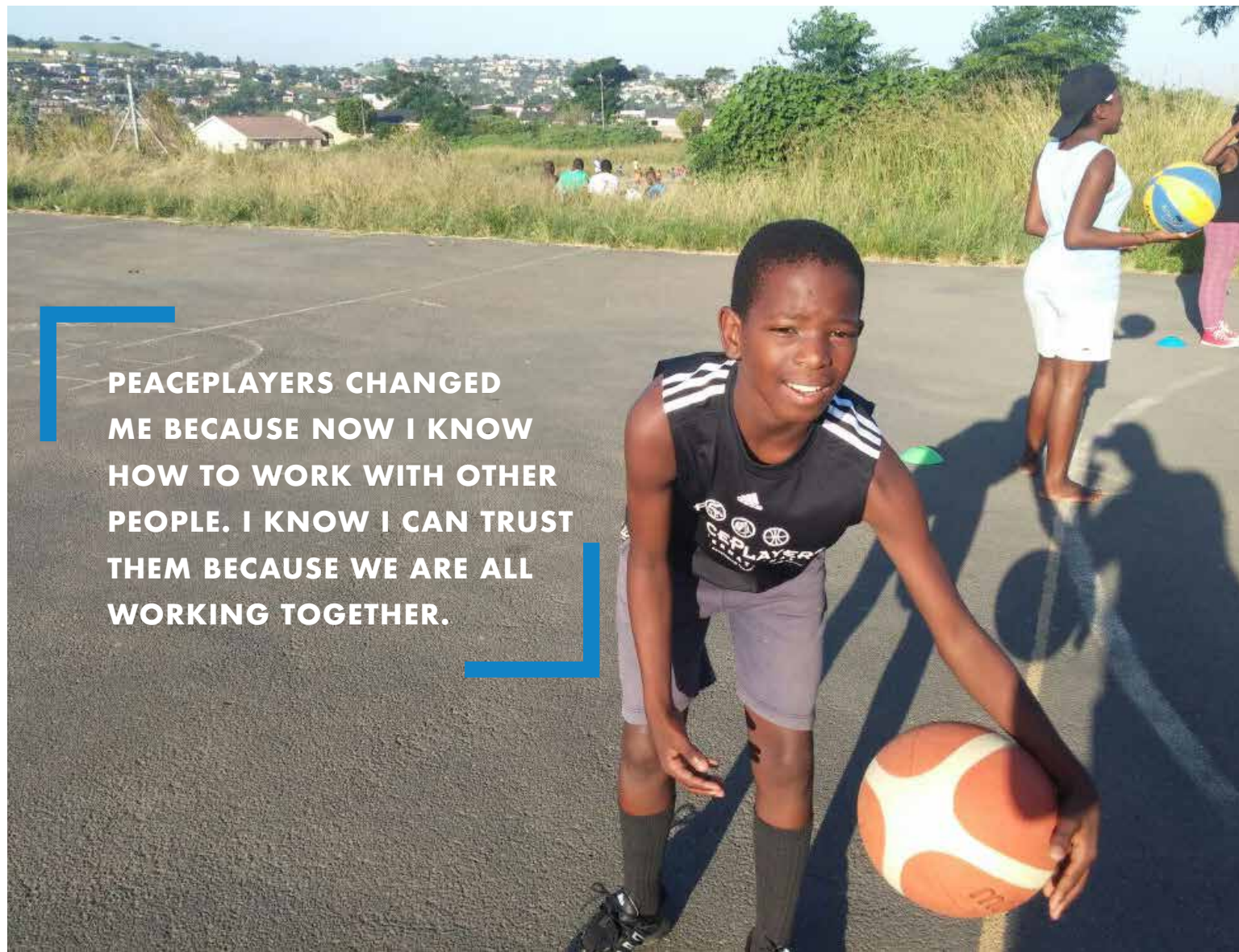
Everyone invited you based on the ball. And I really liked that. I started developing this confidence that I never had before.

I've had a lot of struggles at home; both my grandmother and mother passed away, and it's just me with my brother and sister. There have been times when we didn't have

money, food or clothes, and I've been tempted to make choices that would have led me down a bad path. But because of PeacePlayers, there was

always a basketball practice at three o'clock that I had to go to - that helped keep me away from bad decisions.

PeacePlayers changed my life a lot. I started seeing new opportunities and the possibilities of life. It makes you think: "If I'm disciplined, if I work hard, if I do what I have to do, I could get even another opportunity." I'm hopeful about the future now. I'm driven, and I just strive for greatness every day. I believe I can be anything I want to be. I believe I'm capable, I believe I'm deserving. And I have a career with PeacePlayers; I'm doing what I love. If it wasn't for PeacePlayers, I wouldn't even have known that was possible.



PEACEPLAYERS CHANGED ME BECAUSE NOW I KNOW HOW TO WORK WITH OTHER PEOPLE. I KNOW I CAN TRUST THEM BECAUSE WE ARE ALL WORKING TOGETHER.

APHELELE NGCOBO, Male, age 14
LIVES IN: Umlazi Township
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Twinning
YEARS INVOLVED: 2
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Interpersonal skills

Before I joined PeacePlayers, I wasn't good at trusting other people. While I trusted members of my family, trust had been an issue for us in the past, and because of some things that had happened in my life it was very hard for me to open myself up to others.

I had a few friends at school, and I joined PeacePlayers at

first because some of those friends were already playing there. Even though I had had some problems in my life before, because of my time at PeacePlayers, I learned to trust people. My coach was a big part of that; he helped me build my confidence up and always told us that we always had to work as a team. He treated everyone the same, as equals, and helped us all to feel as one.

At PeacePlayers, I learned to give positive feedback, so my teammates don't get angry at each other. When we play games and practice sessions, when somebody can't do something, I know that I need to motivate them, not criticize. If I don't trust others, it's clear conflict, and it separates the team. This trust is something that I never got anywhere else—but when I play basketball at PeacePlayers, I know that I can trust my teammates and my coach.

CYPRUS



PEACEPLAYERS TEACHES YOU HOW TO TRUST OTHERS BY PLAYING BASKETBALL TOGETHER. THE WAY YOU FIND YOUR GOOD FRIENDS IS THROUGH TRUST.

CETIN PIRLANTA, Male, age 21
LIVES IN: Iskele
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Twinning; Leadership Development Program
YEARS INVOLVED: 10
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Interpersonal skills; Friendship

I joined PeacePlayers when the organization first came to Cyprus about 10 years ago. When I was younger, I remember going to tournaments and camps and being shy because I had to share my room with boys from different sides of the island who I didn't know. We had different cultures, different languages and different religions. But these should not be obstacles to getting to know someone and sharing your room with that person. The activities we did together helped build bridges between us even though we came from different backgrounds. Through PeacePlayers I even met my best friend, Alexis; we played together for many years, and shared a lot of experiences. I can easily say that he has become like a real brother to me.

The biggest change for me started after we had our first lesson in Arbing. PeacePlayers taught us how we

should behave outside of the basketball court. Through the program, we not only learned to be role models for kids younger than we are, we also learned how to trust others and rely on each other through playing basketball together.

I plan on continuing to stay with PeacePlayers because I have met many people and have made good friends, especially in the last four years. I think having programs like PeacePlayers is so important to increase respect for each other and teach us that we must build trust with other people. Because of my time with PeacePlayers, I have hope that we can build bridges between the North and South and make peace.



SUREYYA CELMEN DEGER, Female
LIVES IN: Gonyeli, Nicosia
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Staff
YEARS INVOLVED: 1
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Positive attitudes toward the other side

Before PeacePlayers I had been involved in different bi-communal activities in Cyprus, and had crossed from the North to the South many times. However, crossing in my car always remained an issue for me; I could not get over the feeling of being afraid. I had heard stories on the news about Turkish Cypriots and their cars being attacked. Not every day, but occasionally they would. For me, it represented the mistrust and lack of confidence toward the other community in me. I was afraid that if I cross with my license plate declaring myself as a “Turkish Cypriot,” Greek Cypriots might attack me for no reason. Maybe it wasn’t rational, but still I had this fear, thinking it might happen.

Working at PeacePlayers helped me because I had to drive to the office in the South every day, so crossing in my car became a normal habit. The more I traveled through the roads in Nicosia, the more I met new Greek Cypriots to interact with—to talk, to share life together. In time, I realized that I needed to have trust towards others. Why would Greek Cypriots attack me just because of my Turkish Cypriot license plate? I don’t ever think about attacking cars when I see a license plate from the South, so why would it be any different for Greek Cypriots?

Interacting with Greek Cypriots is now part of my everyday life, and I’ve gotten to know them professionally. It is one thing to be able to cross to the other side and communicate with people, but it’s a step further when you are together every day and you feel you can go to them when there is a

PEACEPLAYERS IS THE FIRST TIME I’VE WORKED WITH GREEK CYPRIOTS IN AN OFFICE. THERE IS A DEEPER KIND OF RELATIONSHIP THAT DEVELOPS WHEN YOU SEE SOMEONE ON A REGULAR BASIS AND YOU TRUST THEM TO HELP SORT OUT YOUR EVERYDAY CHALLENGES.

problem. Also, being part of an organization that promotes relationships between the two sides is important – I want to model what we believe in as PeacePlayers. I’ve realized that you need to start changing things from your own life, and by doing that you show others that it’s okay to change as well. Now, I feel comfortable spending the night or a weekend in the South. When you have something in your daily routine, it becomes part of your reality.



ALEXIS GEORGIU, Male, age 21
LIVES IN: Latsia, Nicosia
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Twinning; Leadership Development Program
YEARS INVOLVED: 4
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Positive attitudes toward the other side; Impact on family and friends

I first heard about PeacePlayers at my local basketball club, where they used the court for practices. I was still new to basketball, but I would watch the team play from the sidelines. After the practices finished the coach would invite me to come onto the court and shoot the ball, and he would teach me basketball drills.

Eventually I decided to join. I knew it was a team with Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots together, and I was curious. In school you hear a lot of things about Turkish Cypriots, how they are the bad guys in this conflict. I wanted to see for myself if it was true.

PeacePlayers has games in both the North and South of the island. When I first joined, when my team crossed to the North I couldn’t go because my parents were so skeptical, and they thought it might not be safe to cross. However, I decided I wanted to go with my team, so I called my coach and asked him to talk to my parents. He told them that I would be safe and talked about all of their concerns, and eventually they agreed that I could go to the North.

I played on the team for several years and I even met my best friend through PeacePlayers, Cetin, who is from the North. When I was playing with Turkish Cypriots, I never felt like they are different from us. Even if we don’t speak the same language, we communicate through basketball. Eventually I started doing more activities with Turkish Cypriots, like going on an exchange trip to America. My mother also joined a coexistence group, and now my parents have crossed several times to the North of the island.

After high school I was in the Army, and I remember that people would say negative things about Turkish Cypriots. I was able to speak up and say that this is not true, because I know Turkish Cypriots and I have experiences with them. PeacePlayers gave me a chance to meet the other side so that I don’t have the wrong idea about them from school or the news.

PEACEPLAYERS TAUGHT ME TO GIVE PEOPLE A CHANCE AND SEE FOR MYSELF WHAT A PERSON IS LIKE, RATHER THAN JUST BELIEVING WHAT OTHERS TELL YOU.

WASHINGTON, D.C.



GUNNAR HAGSTROM, Male
LIVES IN: Washington, D.C.
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Staff
YEARS INVOLVED: 6
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: New opportunities

Before I joined PeacePlayers I was living in Boston, coaching basketball and working as a recruiter for a study abroad program. I started having an itch to do something else – I felt like in Boston I was doing the same type of work over and over again, staying inside my bubble. I had never really traveled before, and wanted to experience new things. For about two years, I kept thinking about doing something different but never followed through.

Then in 2009 my mom had a serious stroke, temporarily losing all motor function in her left side. I started making plans to leave Boston and move back home to Maine to help take care of her. As she was recovering, she wrote me a letter telling me not to move back, that what she wanted for me was to go out into the world and have an adventure. That’s when I joined PeacePlayers, becoming an International Fellow in Cyprus.

When you go live somewhere outside of where you grew up, you realize that there are different ways of doing things. One time, for example, I was supposed to work with one of our coaches to build a few basketball courts for a tournament. Before we started, I mapped out in my head exactly how we would go about doing it and brought all of the supplies I thought we needed – tape and a tape measure. When the Cypriot coach came and

I started telling him what we were going to do, he stopped me. He brought out some chalk and yarn, and had me grab a couple of sticks. Using the yarn and sticks he was able to perfectly measure out a basketball court in almost no time. His process made no sense to me at the time, and I still have no idea how he did it – but the result was ten times better than what I would have done. In that moment, I realized that I needed to start sitting back and listening to others more.

PEACEPLAYERS HAS HELPED ME SEE THINGS BEYOND MYSELF AND BEYOND THE PLACE WHERE I GREW UP; I’VE BECOME MORE PATIENT AND OPEN-MINDED.

The opportunity to get out of my bubble and be exposed to different ways of doing things has been the greatest thing that’s ever happened to me. If I had never joined PeacePlayers I would probably be doing the same type of work I was before in Boston – it would be fine, but it wouldn’t be fulfilling. For me, there’s a purpose now in what I do.



BRENDN TUOHEY, Male
LIVES IN: Washington, D.C.
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: PeacePlayers
Co-Founder and Executive Director
YEARS INVOLVED: 16
TYPE(S) OF CHANGE: Interpersonal Skills

FROM WHEN PEACEPLAYERS WAS FIRST FOUNDED UNTIL NOW, MY OVERALL MINDSET HAS CHANGED. I REALIZED HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO SUPPORT AND COLLABORATE. PEOPLE WORK MUCH BETTER WHEN THEY FEEL THAT YOU HAVE THEIR BEST INTERESTS AT HEART, THAT THEY CAN COME TO YOU AND YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT THEM.

When my brother, Sean, started PeacePlayers fifteen years ago, it was all about everyone having their own responsibilities. My job was to raise money and keep the organization afloat. My mentality was “just get it done.” Back then we had offices in Northern Ireland and South Africa, and being based in Washington, D.C., I saw issues in those sites as the responsibility of staff there. My job was to keep us running, and if programming wasn’t going well then it was their problem.

There were times when raising money was difficult, and it made me feel like a failure. Instead of being collaborative and bringing people in, I would just shut down. The stress level during those times created a lot of communication issues and hard feelings, and everyone kind of blamed each other for not getting the job done. It put stress on the organization, it put stress on me and everyone I was working with, both personally and physically. It just wasn’t the right way.

The change for me came through our partnership with Chad Ford and the Arbing Institute, which started the

development of our peace education curriculum. I went through trainings on the curriculum with the rest of our staff. It made me realize that there’s another way. I realized that you have to look at other people’s positions and rather than blaming, ask yourself what you are going to do to help the situation and to help that person. You have to try to understand the challenges that they face.

This is something that I’ve had to work at, but it has made a big difference. It’s changed the way I interact with our programs and the Managing Directors at each site. PeacePlayers has the confidence and the relationships with our program sites to be able to say “this is yours.” Rather than reporting to me, the Managing Directors now report into their local board chairs, and they have control over who they want to hire and what they want to change. My role has shifted to supporting them, asking what’s happening and figuring out how we in D.C. can help. I’m not always perfect at it, but I want everyone feel like we are one organization, the D.C. office has their back, and everything is transparent.



This collection of Most Significant Change stories is the result of much hard work and collaboration across the entire PeacePlayers family. Thank you for taking the time to learn about our programs and participants by reading this report. For more information, please visit our website at www.peaceplayers.org.

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