

GoNorth! Fennoscandia 2008

Module 2: Globalization & Tolerance - Chat #6

Tuesday, March 18, 2008

Welcome to the THIRD and FINAL chat on the topic of Globalization & Tolerance!

Background: When people use the term globalization, they could be using it to describe economic, political, environmental, or scientific issues, as well as describing the interchange of culture around the world. To globalize is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "to extend to other or all parts of the globe; make worldwide."

Language loss is currently happening in epidemic proportions around the world. Some of the loss can be attributed to the globalization of the English language. People around the world are learning and using English as it is emerging as the dominant language for many aspects of communication. E-mail, faxes, the Internet, air travel, cell phones, and camcorders are here to stay, keeping us connected with friends and family all around the world. Perhaps because it seems to be so simple and effortless, we rarely find the time to think about the magic that occurs as a result of increased communication.

Cultures, ways of life, and languages are being shared; thus, we are growing to understand and appreciate the cultural diversity of our world. The other side of the story is that because of our increased communication abilities, the world is becoming smaller. Cultures and languages are blending together or are simply disappearing. The challenge is how to live in a global community while attempting to strengthen and preserve the many cultures found in it.

As cultures rub elbows, another issue arises as well. What degree of welcome, respect, and tolerance do we have for other cultures with which we come into contact? Many of us experience this on a personal level when a new kid enters the classroom from another country or from a cultural group that is quite different from our own. For some people, the first inclination is to want to learn about that person. But sadly, for others, the first inclination is to make fun of that person, engage in ethnic or racial name calling, bully him or her, or even to participate in violence against the person's family or cultural group. All of these things violate basic human rights. What ingredients go into tolerance for others' differences? How can we learn to live within our own culture and yet be citizens of a diverse world?

Some questions to possibly open the chat with or discuss prior to the LIVE chat!

How do we show tolerance toward those who differ from ourselves? Are you tolerant of other people, their habits and customs?

What is the value of learning another language? What can you learn about another country by learning to speak its language?

Is it important to preserve Native cultures?

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About our Speaker: Neil Willenson

Neil Willenson is the Founder and CEO of Camp Heartland, a national non-profit organization that makes a year-round and life-long difference for children who experience HIV/AIDS, poverty, grief and other painful life challenges. In 1993, after befriending a five-year-old boy with the illness and witnessing the discrimination, pain and sadness that he experienced, Willenson, then 22 years old, sought to provide a safe haven for children infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Since the inception of Camp Heartland, thousands of children have participated in various camp sessions where they can have fun, make friends, feel accepted, and if desired, speak openly about living with the disease.

Willenson is also the co-creator and leader of the Journey of Hope AIDS Awareness Program. During these unique presentations, children affected by AIDS are given the opportunity to share their experiences with school groups, religious organizations and community audiences. Since 1994, the Journey of Hope has visited dozens of cities and has educated and inspired thousands of individuals. In addition, Willenson has served as a keynote speaker providing insight on youth leadership, activism and inspiration.

Willenson is the author of "A Journey of Hope – Inspiring Stories of Courage and Unconditional Love" which includes the photographs, stories and writings by and about the children of Camp Heartland. The book has won three national awards including being named Writer's Digest 2006 Most Inspirational Book for Youth.

In order to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS, Willenson and the Camp Heartland program have been featured by "Extreme Makeover Home Edition," "Dateline NBC," "The Oprah Winfrey Show," Time Magazine, The Wall Street Journal, Progressive Magazine, USA Today, and hundreds of other publications. Willenson and Camp Heartland were profiled in the CBS Movie of the Week, "Angelie's Secret," in the Disney Channel film "Friends for Life," on "Good Morning America," "CBS Morning News" and countless television talk shows, and in the film, "Born with HIV: Little Warriors."

Under his leadership, Camp Heartland has raised over \$30 million to support children with HIV/AIDS, has grown to become the largest organization of its kind, and now serves as a model for dozens of other camps throughout the world.

Willenson is also an actor who will appear in the upcoming feature film THE LEGEND TRIP opposite Mark Metcalf and has been in various television commercials.

Fundamental in every project Willenson leads is the belief that all people have value and that we should follow our heart and work toward a brighter tomorrow.

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GoNorth! Education Basecamp: Good Afternoon Everyone! We are so glad that you could join us today. This is our third and final chat on the topic of globalization and tolerance.

GoNorth! Education Basecamp: Neil is here and ready for your questions!

Mr Kroeger: 6th: MPS : Why do you think people are so afraid of others they don't understand (be it because of illness, where they are from, how they look, etc) ?

GoNorth! Expert: I work everyday with children who have HIV or AIDS. It is very challenging for them to live with a disease. But it is often even harder for them to deal with the discrimination that surrounds this disease. People can often be very mean. However, once people are educated we find that they become far more understanding and compassionate. People are afraid because they are scared. Once they learn the facts, most people are comfortable and far more compassionate.

GoNorth! Education Basecamp: We are going to adjust the display a bit so that it displays well for everyone..

Ms Curran: Prospect Park Elem: Mpls, MN: 5th Grade: You were so young when you set-out to help Nile. How did you know or learn where to begin?

GoNorth! Expert: I have been so lucky to have help from thousands of people across the U.S. When you believe strongly in something and work hard to achieve your goal - anything is possible. I attended camps as a child and was a camp counselor for many years. So I knew the basics about operating a summer camp. We had to recruit medical experts to help out as well as most of our campers take many medications each day. I have certainly made mistakes along the way - we all do - but I am never afraid to ask for help. People have been very kind and generous including thousands of young students across the U.S.

Ms Curran: Prospect Park Elem: Mpls, MN: 5th Grade: You are an inspiration and a role model for so many people... who are your role models and why?

GoNorth! Expert: That is so kind of you. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has always been an inspiration. He taught us that each of us as individuals can make a huge difference but if we join together with others we can make an even greater impact. I am also inspired everyday by the thousands of children that I work with. They are very courageous.

Helen Lourdes Hill College Australia: What inspires you to do what you do?

GoNorth! Expert: When Camp Heartland was created in 1993, my inspiration was the little boy Nile. Without medical progress, it appeared that he would not live a long life. So we worked hard everyday trying to give Nile and hundreds of children like him moments of fun, joy and acceptance. Thank goodness, many of our campers are doing very well including Nile who is now 22 years old. He is getting married and will soon start his studies to become a Minister. Yet, many young people with HIV/AIDS still suffer greatly. I am inspired to continue growing Camp Heartland because there are so many children in need. An estimated 2 million children have HIV/AIDS so we have a lot of work to do.

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Helen Lourdes Hill College Australia: Besides founding it, what is your role in the camp heartland program?

GoNorth! Expert: I serve as the CEO - Chief Executive Officer of Camp Heartland. It is my job to make sure that we are growing every year and remaining strong as an organization. As 80 percent of our campers are low income, we have to raise almost \$3million dollars each year. As CEO, it is my role to help raise these much-needed funds.

Narelle - Principal from Lourdes Hill College: Hello, I am the Principal of Lourdes Hill College in Brisbane. Last year I went with a school group of 40 students to South Africa. We took computers and spent six days in two remote rural schools teaching computer skills to young people. We knew that most of the children had been orphaned because of HIV/Aids but the heart proved greater than any fear, in fact fear was not an issue at any time. Friendship can remove the barrier of fear. Has this been your experience as well?

GoNorth! Expert: Great question....and thank you for your service! In 1993, during our first summer camp, my own mom was nervous about me working with children with HIV/AIDS as she didn't know all the facts. Thankfully, you cannot get this disease by being a friend to someone who has it. Even though my mom was a bit nervous, when she attended camp the first day she was filled with emotion - even tears. When she saw all the beautiful children and learned about their stories, she put all fear aside. It is very powerful to meet these kids. Once you do, you are changed forever.

Mr Kroeger: 6th: MPS : Do you think it is important to learn about other cultures and people?

GoNorth! Expert: Camp Heartland is my favorite place on Earth because it is so diverse. I do not think we should hide our differences; I think we should celebrate them. A visitor to Camp Heartland will see children from so many races, religions and backgrounds. It is so important and enjoyable to learn about other cultures and people. Life would be very boring if we were all the same!

Ms Curran: Prospect Park Elem: Mpls, MN: 5th Grade: Is it hard to work with people who are in sometimes a not-so-good situation? Do you ever get depressed by it?

GoNorth! Expert: Sadly, I have lost 70 children that I have cared about to HIV/AIDS. Words cannot describe how sad that has made me. Yet, through all the sadness I become even more motivated because I know the impact the kids have made on me personally. And I also know that for many of these kids, Camp Heartland was their favorite place. So there are certainly some sad moments when our campers get sick, but there are also moments of great hope. Many of the kids who were not expected to survive, are doing really well thanks to some new medications. There are hard days, but there are many more happy ones where I know we are making a huge impact.

Genna, Lourdes Hill College, Australia: Hello, If you wouldn't have had read about the boy suffering from HIV/AIDS, do you think you would still have the same reaction and want to help? Or would you have the same reaction as majority of the world

GoNorth! Expert: I am so glad I happened to read that article! Without reading the article, I never would have been cruel to anyone with AIDS, but I don't think I would have gone out of my way to give someone with AIDS a hug. Once I became educated about the disease, I became very comfortable hugging all those who are affected by it. Thankfully, more and more people throughout the world are becoming educated. As a result, some children with AIDS are

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having much happier lives. I hope all of you will step forward and become friends with any child you meet who is affected by this. They need your support.

Mr Kroeger: 6th: MPS : We saw you on the Extreme Makeover last Spring. Do you ever regret abandoning your studies for this life?

GoNorth! Expert: It was such a privilege working with Extreme Makeover Home Edition and Mandy Moore! When I was in college I wanted to be an actor and Hollywood movie producer. My entire life changed because of little Nile. But I have never regretted this. Just the opposite. I feel fortunate everyday that I have had the chance to meet thousands of inspiring children and volunteers.

Helen Lourdes Hill College Australia: Is there anything that we, as school students can do to help people living with HIV/AIDS?

GoNorth! Expert: Thanks for a great question. Most of the children affected by HIV/AIDS keep it a secret - even from their best friends, teachers and clergy. Sadly, there is still a lot of misunderstanding and people can be very cruel. The first thing I ask you to do is to be a friend. Many of our campers are very lonely at home because either they have a painful secret or they have shared their secret and have lost friends as a result. I ask each of you to remain friends with anyone that tells you they have HIV. It is a tough thing to talk about and they need your support. Another thing you can do is to get educated about HIV/AIDS. This is a disease that is preventable. Each of us can make great decisions to stay HIV free.

Ms Curran: Prospect Park Elem: Mpls, MN: 5th Grade: Do you think that you learn more from the children then they learn from you?

GoNorth! Expert 2: Absolutely! I have learned so much from the kids. They have taught me to be courageous when presented with obstacles. They have taught me so much about being kind to one another. The campers care very much about one another and this has taught me some very important lessons.

Genna, Lourdes Hill College, Australia: Do the campers come from many countries? And do you find it difficult to raise funds

GoNorth! Expert: Currently, our campers are all from the U.S. However, we have now launched our Global Heartland programs and will soon serve children in other countries. We are already sponsoring an orphanage called Living India and a program for children with AIDS in Honduras called Walking with Children.

Narelle - Principal from Lourdes Hill College: Has your religious experience influenced your choice to work in the field you do or is it that you simply felt your heart stirred?

GoNorth! Expert: I happen to be of the Jewish faith. My religion strongly emphasizes "tikkun olam" which means "to heal the world." Many Jewish people were active in the U.S. civil rights movement with Dr. King and this has inspired my work as well.

Mr Kroeger: 6th: MPS : We have been learning about bullies and are having a Stop Bullying Now T-shirt artwork contest... even today, are your kids bullied back at home? Don't people know any better these days?

GoNorth! Expert: Here in the U.S. there is more and more attention being paid to bullying. Bullying can be so vicious and harmful. I would estimate that the majority of our campers who

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have shared their HIV secret with their communities, have experienced some bullying. Although many of our campers are doing well at school and with their friends, we have even had some children kicked out of churches because of the fear of their HIV/AIDS. I wish all people in the U.S. were as caring as each of you.

Brigid,AUS: It must be terrible when someone passes away, how does it effect the other children with that same disease and you and your staff?

GoNorth! Expert: One of the hardest things to witness is when a camper passes away. The children living with the same disease must think about their own illness whenever this happens. But I will say that HIV affects everyone differently. We have a young man who is 27 and was born with the disease. Yet he is very healthy and will certainly live a very long time. He has been quite sad when his friends have died, but this does not mean he will die anytime soon. Many of our campers are very sad when their friends have passed away, but they are happy that they had a chance to know and love them.

GoNorth! Education Basecamp: These are fabulous questions! We have about 10 minutes left....enough time for a few more questions.

Student-Submitted Question: How should we work towards a brighter future? And what elements of life should we change to do this?

GoNorth! Expert: In my opinion, students are the key to a brighter future. Many adults are already set in their ways. Students are often willing to open their eyes, ears and hearts to those around them. I wish we could all break down the barriers between us. We all have disagreements about religion, politics and other issues. But that does not mean we have to fight. I wish we all could be accepting of one another. On a larger scale, we must make sure that we become concerned about the environmental damage to our beautiful planet. I have two young children ages 3 and 3 months. I want them to live in a beautiful world that is clean, safe and enjoyable. If all adults think about the world we are leaving for our children and grandchildren - it would be a much better place to live.

Ms Curran: Prospect Park Elem: Mpls, MN: 5th Grade: Is there one particular experience or lesson that stands-out as something you will carry with you always that you would share with us?

GoNorth! Expert: The first year of camp in 1993 a little boy, Ryan, attended. He came to us straight from the hospital as he had survived a very bad case of pneumonia. When he arrived at camp he was still pretty ill so he spent a lot of time in our infirmary, which we call "Club Meds." Ryan did enjoy some activities the first few days but missed most of the fun because he was resting. But by the third night of camp we had a little candlelight vigil. When the candle was given to Ryan he simply and quietly said, "This is the best week of my life." I was filled with joy but also sadness when I heard those words. Sadness because if this was his best week (one that he missed most of the fun) I could only imagine his worst week. But I was also filled with joy because I was so happy that a group of college students could provide him with his best week. The lesson learned is that all of us can make this world a better place if we have a dream and work hard toward it.

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Narelle - Principal from Lourdes Hill College: It must be great for you in this way to experience chatting to so many people of like mind, especially the young people. It is true isn't it that together we can make a difference?

GoNorth! Expert 2: Indeed! Dr. King said, "It is always the right time to do the right thing." On an individual level, I encourage all the students to be kind - help others in need, pick up litter, live a positive life. Together we can make a huge impact if all of us speak out when we see wrong, act when we see people being mean, getting involved with charities and other fine efforts. There is so much good in the world and students have made so much possible. The more we dream, the more we can achieve together. If we just shrug our shoulders every time we see something that bothers us, nothing we will change. But if we get involved when something bothers us, the world will improve.

Mr Kroeger: 6th: MPS : Kinda like you can't teach an old dog new tricks... do you think it is hard for adults to learn to be more tolerant and accepting of others?

GoNorth! Expert 2: I do think it is hard for adults to change. But think about all the positive changes that have occurred over the past 100 years. Women can now vote in the U.S. African Americans have more equality. In fact in the U.S. a woman and African American man are running for presidents. Decades ago, no one would have thought this possible. For adults to change, we need students to help teach us more about compassion, tolerance and acceptance.

GoNorth! Education Basecamp: While Neil is answering his last question, we want to thank you for joining us today. We had so much fun and we hope that you not only enjoyed yourself, but learned a lot too-

Helen Lourdes Hill College Australia: What is it that you most want us to take away from this chat today?

GoNorth! Expert 2: This is a great final question. I thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me today. I ask each of you to wake up everyday and pledge to do your best to be a kind, caring person. And at the end of the day, I ask each of you to look in the mirror and be proud of all the kindness you showed to all those around you.

Helen Lourdes Hill College Australia: Thank you for your wonderful insight and time, I learned a lot!

GoNorth! Expert: Thanks so much.

GoNorth! Education Basecamp: a big thank you to Neil for sharing his time with us!!

Genna, Lourdes Hill College, Australia: Thank-you, you have opened my eyes even further to understand. Genna Good luck for future camps

Jenny Clark, Lourdes Hill College, Australia: Thanks for being an inspiration to the truckloads of girls from Lourdes Hill College, Australia

Thanks!

From all of us at Team GoNorth!, Thank You for joining us today! Join us again next week on Wednesday, March 26th at 10 AM for the first chat on the topic of World Resources!