

My year as a Faiths Act Fellow

by: Pritpal Riat

Posted 2 November 2010



My name is Pritpal Kaur, and I am a Faiths Act Alumna. I was paired with Sean Rose, a Roman Catholic, at the Nishkam Centre, a Sikh ethos civic association in Birmingham, UK, for our work as Faiths Act Fellows.

Our goal was to create a multi-faith hub of young volunteers working towards alleviating global poverty, and in particular towards ending deaths due to malaria. The work was challenging but inspiring, and each pair of Fellows had unique experiences that they

personally defined by virtue of their own creativity and the nature of their host organisation.

By the end of our time as Fellows, Sean and I had met 7,600 people through presentations, workshops, events and information stalls; reached over one million people through online, print, radio and television media; and raised over £3,500 for Malaria No More UK—which was doubled by the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair. We held training sessions; participated in events during the UK's first-ever National Interfaith Week; represented the Faiths Act Fellows at the 5th Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne, Australia; collaborated with local artists on the UN World Day of Social Justice; engaged in creative service projects; launched a 'Congregations Act' appeal for local places of worship; raised awareness at an annual Vaisakhi Mela for World Malaria Day; hosted a national celebration for Faiths Act volunteers; and received a highly commended award in the 'Living in Faith' category for the Pride in Handsworth awards.

The Fellowship's biggest impact on my life, however, was the creation of meaningful relationships. The Sikh Dharam teaches that



Sean and Pritpal receive a highly commended award in the 'Living in Faith' category for the Pride in Handsworth

all human beings are but one large family – and throughout last year, the other 29 Fellows became my brothers and sisters. At the end of my time as a Fellow in Birmingham, I not only left behind a group of Faiths Act volunteers, mobilised to work across different faiths to end deaths due to malaria. Another important legacy of the programme was our friendships.

I was reminded last month, during the visit of Pope Benedict to Birmingham, of the many things I learnt from Sean about his faith as a Roman Catholic. The messages that His Holiness shared were of the importance of cooperation for international development, the need to build a civil society with a renewed sense of shared values and common purpose, and of the contribution that religions can offer to the development of a healthy, pluralistic society. They were messages I was certain resonated with Sean as a Roman Catholic, but that also resonated with me as a Sikh, and in the hearts of many people of faith and values.

The Fellowship gave us a chance to express our faith values positively, and it was a privilege to work in a capacity where our faith identities were encouraged as an asset. It was an invaluable opportunity to engage, in a humble way, towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals through the shared values of compassion and service.

If you are a young person of faith, who feels that it is a shared responsibility to make a difference in the world – then do not hesitate to apply to be one of next year's Faiths Act Fellows.

Pritpal Kaur Riat, Faiths Act Alumna