

A lesson in understanding

Broward mom develops curriculum to teach kids about cultural diversity

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Spurred by the lessons of September 11, Judith Keiser is attempting to change the tide of cultural hatred.

“I came out with the feeling that the rage and hatred generated against the United States were, in part, a reaction to our attitudes towards other peoples and countries,” said Keiser, a Broward County mother.

“Children are the ones suffering for it and they didn’t do anything.”

Hoping to channel the natural curiosity of children into a fun learning experience, Keiser developed curriculum for The Culture Company. The material, geared towards 6-10 year olds, incorporates games, dance, acting, food tasting, crafts and other hands-on activities to teach children about different cultures.

The idea, said Keiser, “is to attempt to present what’s different in a way that it becomes familiar, and therefore less threatening. The hope is to equip them with skills that will help them navigate the diverse and complicated world they will inherit.”

Keiser, a former practicing attorney, said new generations can be helped to better deal with diversity by “making what’s different seem familiar and to do away with the ‘us versus them’ attitude.”

Initially, Keiser developed the program to be taught over a two-week period in an intimate setting. But after a chance encounter with a member of the Urban League of Broward County, Keiser’s curriculum morphed into an eight-week summer program, attended by more than 100 children.

The camp, which started last week in Broward, was also inspired by Keiser’s seven-year-old son, William.

“William’s passion is geography. He is as comfortable listening to music from India as he is listening to American music,” said Keiser. “He already showed me how open and interested children can be.”

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Boca Raton is supporting a sister church in Broward in using the curriculum for summer religious education, said Keiser. In the future, the church is hoping to bring the program to Palm Beach County. And Keiser is already in the process of working with the Urban League of Palm Beach County to bring the program to local children.

The camp is more than just having fun and learning songs, she said. It's also geared to helping children grow through cooperative play, conflict resolution experiences and trust-building games.

"I think children are the answer because they'll grow up and their attitudes will dictate what goes on in the government," said Keiser. "Our goal is to give them the skills and understanding they need to create a peaceful future."

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