

Teens Affected by Terrorism Unite to Promote Peace

By Caitlin Gibson

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Jason Vadhan was 8 years old when his grandmother died on Sept. 11, 2001. Kristin White Gould, 65, was a passenger aboard United Airlines Flight 93 when it plummeted to the ground in Shanksville, Pa., after passengers and crew members fought back against al-Qaeda hijackers who had seized control of the aircraft and turned it toward Washington.

The loss of his grandmother in such a sudden and public act of violence is a painful story, but one that Vadhan, 18, said he feels safe sharing openly among the 76 other young people in [Project Common Bond](#), a camp for teenagers and young adults who have lost family members to an act of terrorism.

In its fourth year, the camp is being hosted by Foxcroft School in Middleburg. It began July 23 and ran through Saturday.

Vadhan said it is empowering to be surrounded by people who share the same experience and are united in their determination to promote peace.

“We’re not here as kids suffering from acts of terrorism,” Vadhan said. “We’re here to overcome it.”

The project was created by [Tuesday’s Children](#), a nonprofit organization that provides support

services to families affected by the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The project brought together young people ages 15 to 22 from nine countries for an eight-day program that focuses on therapeutic group work in addition to peace-building, mediation and conflict resolution skills.

Kathy Murphy, director of Project Common Bond, said the camp was conceived in 2007 when “a group of teenagers said to us, ‘We want to get involved globally.’ ”

Those teenagers were all from families served by Tuesday’s Children, said Terry Sears, executive director of the nonprofit group. In the years since their tragic losses, the teens had come to understand that there are victims of terrorism all over the world who might not have access to the support and resources that their families had, Sears said.

“They wanted to reach out to others who haven’t had the same kind of global attention,” she said.

In its first year, the camp was just that: a summer camp, gathering teens of different nationalities to spend time together, play sports, work on art projects “and maybe have some conversations about what had happened in their lives,” Sears said.

But the project evolved over the years, adding a curriculum designed by Harvard University Law School’s Negotiation and Mediation Clinical Program and delivered by a professional team, coordinated by family therapist Monica Meehan McNamara. The participants still play sports and work together on therapeutic art projects, but they are also engaged in conflict resolution exercises and team activities designed to foster trust, healing and cooperation.

The program is continuing to expand, Sears said. So far, 225 teens and young adults from 12 countries have participated in Project Common Bond, and the camp plans to include participants from additional countries, including Colombia and India, in the future.

At a focus group exercise Wednesday, 18 campers gathered around a table to share their thoughts on what the project has meant to them. Together, they represented nine countries: Argentina, Israel, Liberia, Northern Ireland, Palestine, Russia, Spain, Sri Lanka and the United

States.