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### Kindness Through Communication

When we are exposed to the idea of kindness, we think about our civic responsibilities and how we can convey proper etiquette: holding the door for the next person to walk out behind us, sparing change for someone in poverty, or even giving directions to the nearest bathroom or restaurant. What everyone needs to realize—no matter who you are—is that kindness goes beyond that; it is not only the simple directions you give someone, but rather the lasting impact you create on someone’s life. It’s how *you* change their way of thinking to help them become the most honest, true person they can be.

My father works for the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP) and as I continue to get older and more mature, he teaches me more about some aspects of his job and things his office does to protect the citizens of New Jersey. One program that stood out was the Interfaith Advisory Council (IAC). The title may seem very generic at first, but don’t let it deceive you; it is much more complex than one may assume.

Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Sikhism are few of the many religions that the program includes in their meetings. In fact, almost every major religion is represented; there are over four thousand members, and there are people from all twenty one counties in New Jersey. You may be wondering, “How does this program encourage kindness?” or “What lasting effect does this program have on the individuals involved?” Well, the IAC was designed to ensure safety in one of the most diverse states in the entire nation.

The group opens up a safe place for people with varied backgrounds and beliefs to discuss. This way, discriminatory problems can be addressed and individuals can become less

ignorant to other ideas that they may not support. Through kindness and understanding, the people in this group are able to collaborate and express themselves, which promotes positivity within different religious communities. To give a better visual understanding, picture a group of people of one religion showing hostility and animosity to another religion. This group could help prevent this negative interaction and instead, create a positive barrier between the groups so no one gets hurt physically, or emotionally.

Because the NJOHSP set up an area in which diversity is normalized and embraced, New Jersey is able to become such an understanding state. The IAC prevents possible predicaments or disputes that may cause harm to specific groups or individuals. Offering a kind, welcoming, and compassionate environment is something that shouldn't get undermined; it is more than just a group open for discussion. It is a group that is able to prevent violent hate crimes and threats against religions.

Not only do they provide support and protection, but they also offer grant opportunities for nonprofit organizations that may be under serious threat or danger. If a religious group is at high risk of a terrorist attack, they are able to receive a grant from the NJOHSP. This promotes safety and peacefulness within New Jersey groups and reduces the rate at which harm lies ahead of marginalized societies. The funding that the grants provide for nonprofit organizations may cover expenses for some of the following items: camera systems, extra fencing, and medical safety kits.

In the state of New Jersey, the IAC has positively shaped other societies that help to make our state such a safe, reliable community. For example, cities like Newark, Atlantic City, and Lakewood have created localized coalitions to engage in the prevention of terrorism and religious persecution. Not only is there the IAC, but there are also sub-groups to promote even

more kindness, and provide additional care to those who are marginalized. New Jersey cities are exceptionally showing care to its diverse groups, and are ensuring that we live in a safe, accepting state in America. Moreover, the Interfaith Advisory Council has also sponsored regional events to develop considerate societies within the state. For instance, the IAC supports events like “Chai With a Cop” or “Coffee With a Cop” to make sure religious individuals feel safe. In events like these, local law enforcement gets a cup of coffee with people of specific religious communities. This event occurs solely to build trust between religious communities and law enforcement. What may appear as a casual, simplistic idea is actually an act of kindness that can truly affect religious individuals. At first, communities may feel unsafe or targeted in the state of New Jersey, but when they are informed that law enforcement is on their side, they are able to feel a sense of comfort and support. They have people who they can rely on for safety against the horrible people who discriminate against religions or beliefs.

Obviously, religious hate and persecution is unfortunately never going to stop; there will always be people who are too naive to understand that people are able to have different beliefs. However, there are ways that we—as thousands of communities that make up our entire world—can reduce and prevent the amount of discrimination. One step towards this prevention is the Interfaith Advisory Council’s constant effort to provide safe and dependable communities in the state of New Jersey. “Small” things like a thirty minute conversation between a religious individual and a police officer, or a meeting to discuss problems with people from different backgrounds and experiences are more influential than it may initially appear. Communication is the greatest source of kindness that constantly gets disregarded. How can *you* make a difference like the Interfaith Advisory Council?