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Mindful Littles celebrate diversity with games, quilting workshop on June 2

By *Sophie Braccini*

The Lamorinda group Mindful Littles continues to organize fun activities and workshops for children and their parents to increase thoughtfulness and empathy. The children gain an opening to the world around them and beyond, while their parents can reflect on mindful parenting.

The group is now in the process of creating a quilt that will represent local diversity and how it makes our community more beautiful. A second workshop is available in the afternoon on June 2.

Tanuka Gordon has a way to connect with young children. She started her presentation on diversity with a pea masala sandwich. Can you picture a little child going to school in mainstream America with in her lunch box perfect triangular sandwiches filled with a bright green mush? It raised a few eyebrows, and the little girl, now an Orinda mom, got teased more than once. Her story was the perfect segue into the world of differences and diversity.

The five women who get together to organize the events proposed to the children a series of game activities that drew them gently into the concept of respecting differences by first connecting with what make us different, and also our similarities.

After a game of "Simon Says" where the kids tested their ability to recognize differences, each child sat with their families and reflected on the things that their family particularly loves and values. They then got together with another family and filled up a Venn diagram that showed what they had in common and what made them different.

After the exercise, children and parents were invited to share what they had learned. "We all have a heart," said a 5-year-old little girl, who obviously had grasped the crux of the matter. A parent noted that seeing what others value made her think of different things her family valued as well. Some noted they were surprised to see they had so much in common with people they had never met.

The afternoon continued with each family making its heart contribution to what will be a 35-piece large quilt. Ni-on Shesgreen, owner of the local business Vagabond Ruth, prepared the fabric kits for each family: a large heart set on a piece of fabric, each with different colors. In the center, the children and parents wrote what was special about their family and then attached to it a large safety pin where the children had strung a few colorful beads of their choice.

About 15 families had joined the playful Sunday afternoon session, and while some knew others in the group, some were coming for the first time.

Mark Kress, a local dad, says that he started coming to these sessions because he has the feeling that his kids live in a bubble. "The Haiti session got them some perspective about where we live," he said remembering a former activity. He added that his 6- and 9-year old are "sponges" and that they get it. Kress explained that he was introduced to the group by Sarah Bennett, who had started a mindfulness parenting group six years ago. There he reflected on aligning his spirituality with his everyday parenting. Linda Lathrop, who was there for the first time with her daughter, also said that one of her purposes is making mindfulness part of her parenting style. As a teacher she used some of the techniques to be calm in the present moment in the classroom and testifies that the children, who feed off the adults' energy, always react to it very positively.

Gordon started the Mindful Littles group with her like-minded friends Mary Patel, Molly Hanahan, Bennett and Maya Vasudevan. She explained during the workshop that after the next session in June, Shesgreen will assemble the quilt that will be on display at the Orinda Library. It will be carried by the group in the 4th of July parade in Orinda and then will be donated to the Orinda Community Church, "It will represent all our different hearts united as one," said Gordon.

More information about the group and registration for the June 2 diversity session is available at www.mindfullittles.org.

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