

Media Release: Puppetry Challenge To Fight Fear of ‘Them’ With Kindness

“Be kind to others who are different to you. Be kind to yourself if you are different from others. Share fun and food, not fear.”

SUNDAY APRIL 14, 2019: Out of concern for younger children's understanding of other cultures in times of graphic news, Larrikin Puppets seeks community support to adapt *Hijabi Girl* into a musical theatre performance featuring newly created puppets.

Hijabi Girl is a children's book for ages 7-9 co-authored by prolific Australian author Hazel Edwards OAM and children's librarian Ozge Alkan, and illustrated by Serena Geddes. Written five years ago, and much reprinted, it is a refreshing look at the diverse cultures within most Australian schools.

With themes around diversity, identity, anti-bullying and creative problem-solving that align with Australia's national school curriculum, *Hijabi Girl* is a celebration of acceptance and coping successfully with being different.

‘*Hijabi Girl*’ Melek wants to start a girls’ footy team and write a book with a character in a hijab for Book Week Parade dressups. She’s so ‘over’ being Little Red Riding Hood.

Larrikin Puppets’ Artistic Director Elissa Jenkins said creating a puppet show for a children’s audience based on a book full of cultural sensitivities required concerted research and development: new puppet builds, custom stage sets, converted scripts and original songs.

“While we are happy to invest our time into script development, songwriting and rehearsing, as we are neither puppet builders nor set designers, we need funding to support the creation of the puppets and the set, including materials,” she said.

Larrikin Puppets is calling on the generosity of the public to help fund the performance project via social cause crowdfunding platform Chuffed.

Supporters can choose a reward or donate to *Hijabi Girl* at www.chuffed.org/project/hijabi-girl-puppet-show

With age relevant puppets, music and songs for 7-9 year olds, Larrikin Puppets will transform the *Hijabi Girl* storybook into a visual extravaganza using 21 spectacular human puppets, fish puppets, pencil puppets, a rice paper roll puppet and a kebab puppet in the style of *The Muppets & Fraggle Rock*. It will also be the company’s first foray into black light (UV) puppetry.

Children’s librarian and co-author Ozge Alkan, a Muslim Australian who herself wears a hijab, said one of the reasons she wanted *Hijabi Girl* out there was because it tells the story of a girl who dresses differently to everyone else, and is totally fine with who she is.

“When the constant TV news message you hear is that different is bad and scary, it helps to have other messages that accept and celebrate being different,” Ozge said.

Best known for 'There's a Hippopotamus on our Roof eating Cake', Hazel Edwards said they wanted Muslim students to read the 'Hijabi Girl' book and be reassured that there were characters like them in books.

"All children deserve that reassurance," said Hazel.

"Also, once you have an understanding of another's customs, there is no need to fear the unknown," she said.

Hijabi Girl is now in its fourth reprint and is being read and enjoyed by students of all ages and backgrounds.

"The fan mail has been inspiring," said Hazel.

Larrikin Puppets hopes to raise \$8000 in 90 days to create the show and \$20,000 to tour it nationally.

Support is already coming in strongly, but the project is not without its naysayers.

"We thought most objections would come in from loud minorities who actively preach hate and intolerance, but we've also received a few objections from otherwise progressive individuals, specifically atheists and feminists, which has baffled me a bit," said Elissa, herself a feminist.

"However, as a first generation Australian – a child of migrants – and a long-time and public advocate of secular schooling and secular government, I am passionate about this project because I don't want any child in any Australian school, nor their families in local communities, who follow a particular religion to be discriminated against in schools or society at large," she said.

"At the moment the religion copping the brunt of hatred and vilification are Muslim Australians.

"Hijabi Girl the book and Hijabi Girl: The Musical Puppet Show is not evangelising a particular religion. It's not actually that profound and complex. It's a fun story showing acceptance and kindness to children and people of different faiths.

"It's not about changing the secular laws of our country nor the secular teachings in our schools. It's about saying no to hate and yes to kindness.

"Be kind to others who are different to you. Be kind to yourself if you are different from others. Share fun and food, not fear."

We can't wait to add puppets, colour and music to the mix," said Elissa.

Supporters can choose a reward or donate to Hijabi Girl at www.chuffed.org/project/hijabi-girl-puppet-show

Media Contacts: For more information, interview or photo opportunities contact Elissa Jenkins 0418 786 986 or Hazel Edwards 0409 022 702.

www.hazeledwards.com/hijabi-girl.html

www.larrikinpuppets.com.au