

By Peter Unsworth

It had gone on too long. Whatever caused the rift was hard to recall. All Edward Peters knew was something had brought about a split between himself and some old and valued friends. Because it wasn't sorted at the time, the molehill had become a whole range of mountains.

Sounds familiar? Perhaps, but in Edward's case he decided to do something about it even if a little late in the day.

He would approach his friends, apologise if necessary, accept theirs if offered and - wipe the slate clean.

The result was a friendship was re-kindled and the Clean Slate Campaign was conceived.

Its gestation period was fairly brief because Edward, who lives in Victoria Road, Oxford, is not one to sit around. You can't in his line of work as a voluntary worker with an international organisation.

He assembled a few like-minded friends, some from his church, St Andrew's in Linton Road, north Oxford, and Clean Slate was born.

Now a year and a half on, it has national recognition and a list of patrons (or should we say godparents?) that reads like an international Who's Who.

Currently all concerned are working towards the Oxford Clean Slate Week from November 29 to December 5.

Message

Two helpers, Richard and Dianne Bayfield, who live in Davenant Road, Oxford, this week saw the first of the 100,000 Clean Slate greetings card they devised, roll off the press at a Witney printers. It is hoped these will help spread the message worldwide in the weeks ahead. They are seen as a welcome alternative to the usual Christmas-New Year card. Schools are involved, with the Edward Feild Primary School at Kidlington devising a programme that has been sent to more than 400 schools throughout the country, promoting the movement.

To cap it all, Oxford's Lord Mayor Val Smith is sponsoring a competition with nine prizes of a cosy afternoon tea in the Mayor's Parlour for children who enter the best Clean Slate stories. Seventy schools in the county have been encouraged to take part. She also hosted a reception in the Town Hall which church and civic leaders as well as MPs attended. It must have something to pull in this kind of support.

But enough of the who. Just what is Clean Slate? What is its appeal that it can draw in people as diverse as the Bishop of London and Gary Lineker, the Duke of Montrose and the Chief Rabbi?

It is so simple it verges on the hard to explain. Put it this way, if, like Edward, you feel something in the past is holding you back, is a weight on your conscience or simply getting up your nose, then why put up with it?

CLEAR the chest (and nostrils) and start again. The detail, gory or otherwise, need not be shared. The privacy of it all borders on the selfish, but the amazing thing is that by taking this step, selfishness, probably the biggest basic ingredient in holding you back, disappears as if by magic.

Try it - it works.



ON PARADE: Edward Feild School pupils promote the Clean Slate campaign. Clockwise, from top, Shaney Butler and Thomas Bunce, both ten, Laura Murray, Laura Ferris, and Richard Weston, all 11, and Peter Ling, ten

Picture: Andy Cooper

Time for a fresh start



All of us have 'baggage'. Here's the chance to unload it. Courage might be needed - as in Edward's case; he could not foresee his friends' reaction - or it could be simplicity itself.

At the Edward Feild School, headteacher John Hawkins sees Clean Slate as a wonderful addition to their programme for living which is very much part of the school's teaching programme. It was put together by him and a number of teachers who also saw its value.

"It has helped give what we do any extra edge," says John. "We try to develop moral and spiritual values, showing how to co-operate and become part of the

community. The simple message of Clean Slate fits in well."

At the end of the four weeks, the children will be invited to write down minute details of the 'baggage' they wish to leave behind. The note, unseen by others unless the child wishes it, will be put in a bag and the lot will be burned on a small bonfire. Somehow a mighty conflagration seems unlikely from these youngsters!

What will happen to Clean Slate at the turn of the year?

"It will come to an end, but the theme is timeless," says Edward. "Clean Slate is all about being positive. It could become the habit of a lifetime."

And that sure as anything knocks the spots off those well-meaning, but short-lived New Year resolutions, doesn't it?

Further information can be obtained from Edward Peters on 01865 510734 or by e-mail on info@cleanslate.org