



### HEALING PAST WOUNDS

#### The Reconciliation Triangle– Dealing with the legacy of wounded history.

So many crises and conflicts in the world today can be traced back to unhealed wounds of history. They are evident in Africa, Kashmir, Kosovo, The Middle East, and countless others. Sometimes they spill over into our cities and communities here. Because of self-interest, unjust policies or discrimination in this country it sometimes undermines community relations here. It is evident also in these islands with regard to centuries of unhealed history in England's relations with Ireland, North and South. The fact is, so many of these wounds stem from a legacy of injustice and economic exploitation in which some of our ancestors were instigators or actors. Some of us find it difficult to acknowledge this legacy. Unhealed, it festers and causes further injustices. Such history cannot just be swept under the carpet, for the poison seeps out to infect us today.

One such wound is the legacy of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the consequences of which still affects lives and attitudes in this country, West Africa and the Americas. This underlines the significance of a recent event that took place in Liverpool.



Eric Lynch, Liverpool community historian (2<sup>nd</sup> from left) Luc Gnacadja, Benin Minister (3<sup>rd</sup> from right) Rev Tee Turner, representing the City of Richmond, VA (2<sup>nd</sup> from right) Stephen Broadbent, Liverpool sculptor (1<sup>st</sup> from left).

Liverpool, who had said, following the apology "*The only way to bring lasting reconciliation is to face the pain of history with courage, and then to change*". Councillor Storey went on, "*we have begun that process of change and this reconciliation triangle initiative is one more step on that journey*".

The Lord Mayor officially handed over to Benin and to Richmond the large Reconciliation Sculptures created by Stephen Broadbent, the Liverpool sculptor, which will be erected in all three corners of what is referred to as 'The Reconciliation Triangle'. On the side of the sculpture are powerful and creative reliefs representing the history and a vision for the future, designed by a local black artist together with young people from Liverpool schools. It includes the words 'Acknowledge and forgive the past. Embrace the Present. Shape a Future of Reconciliation and Justice.'

The next day the representatives of the three cities

met at Liverpool Hope University, hosted by the Rector, Professor Gerald Pillay. The purpose was to explore the possibility of a sustained programme of exchange and educational initiatives between Liverpool, The Republic of Benin and Richmond, engaging young people, with special focus on historical and cultural understanding,

reconciliation and sharing resources. This will also establish links between universities and schools between the three corners of the triangle over the next few years, which would include student visits, sharing resources and links with museums and other educational initiatives. These would aim to learn from each other, reconcile and repair.

**Gerald Henderson**

#### REGIONAL NEWS

##### London

The London group is currently working to increase its involvement with diverse community groups in the London boroughs. There has been a strong presence of new groups such as Eastern Europeans and refugees

On the dockside of Liverpool, which financed 40% of the slave ships that plied this trade and where many of these ships originated, people gathered representing the three corners of the Slavery Triangle. Among them were an official delegation from the Republic of Benin in West Africa, led by the Minister of Housing, Urbanism and Environment, Luc Gnacadja, the Rev Tee Turner of Hope in the Cities USA, representing the City of Richmond Virginia, the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, Councillor Frank Roderick, the leader of the City Council, Councillor Mike Storey, and citizens of Liverpool, black and white. The Benin Minister indicated that there were still deep wounds and divisions in his own country, Benin, stemming back to that era.

Speaking at the event, Councillor Storey spoke of Liverpool City Council's final act of the millennium, which was to apologise for its major role in the Slave Trade, and said that it had been linked to a commitment to policies that would end racism and exclusion in the city and society as a whole. It was a step on the road to reconciliation and justice. He quoted Nicholas Frayling, the former Rector of

**"Embrace the present.  
Shape a future of reconciliation and justice"**

and asylum seekers from countries in Africa and the Middle East; therefore we are finding ways of engaging with these groups and provide some support while they are assimilated into our society.

Some of our London team have been visiting groups in Tottenham and Harrow and others have been involved in mentoring projects that have become very popular with community groups and in particular amongst the minority ethnic children in our schools.

There is still a huge concern with gun crime, and more recently crimes committed through the use of knives. The police taskforce responsible for tackling crimes have had regular forums with community groups in a number of London boroughs where some of the group have attended. The general feeling from the communities is that there is a lack of consultation from the police service therefore creating little respect and regard for their work.

As a result, on the evening of November 29, 2004 the London group met with David Michael who was promoted to Detective Chief Inspector and served for 30 years with the Metropolitan Police. He was founder and Chair of the Black Police Association and served two terms of two and three years in this role. The evening was focused on the police service to minority groups and youth crime. He feels there is still a way to go in terms of combating racism and for the police to develop better understanding of diverse community groups as well as an urgent need for constitutional changes. Through his consultancy he is now busy advising other police services and organisations on good practices in community development. His contribution was much appreciated by everyone.

David can be contacted at: website:  
[www.causeconsultancy.co.uk](http://www.causeconsultancy.co.uk) for further details

**Rupert Hill**

## **Liverpool**

### **Public Event**

HiC in co-operation with Liverpool Hope University College and Liverpool Community Spirit, gave a public presentation in the Methodist Community Centre in Toxteth, 6<sup>th</sup> July, on the potential of HiC – "Honest Conversation" dialogues as a 'tool to community building'. People from various community organisations, residents associations, local government offices and the police attended this event. Responses from three people who had earlier participated in the Dialogue Facilitation Training were:

(1) It was empowering, it brought people together who do not normally come together, it built trust so now we can call upon each other (2) It changed our own ideas and prejudices, not just making rash judgements, *it was a chance to walk for a while in the others' moccasins*. By the end of the six days we were all friends ((3) I reconciled with a member of my family. A number of people have since signed up for training sessions in 2005.

## **Nottingham**

The 2004 Holding Hands around St Anns Day was the climax of Hope in the Cities honest conversation dialogues that took place in the Chase Neighbourhood Centre. The idea for the day emerged during the second dialogue when one of the workers in the area, Maxine, shared her dream of seeing different people from the area holding hands as an expression of unity.



Holding hands around St Anns



The realisation of that dream is fully shown in the illustrated colour report that was launched on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2004 in the presence of the Leader of Nottingham City Council, Jon Collins, who is a Councillor for the area.

The date had been delayed in respect for the family and friends of teenager Danielle Becan who was tragically shot not far from where the dialogues and meetings took place.

A large city centre memorial gathering had committed itself to '*stand together against guns and violence*'.

Further plans included:

- Formally establishing a St Anns Dialogue Partnership to provide a local base, which can be a specific focus for support, and fund raising.
- The development of Dialogue Facilitation training and expertise.
- Community cohesion depends on trust. The challenge for us all is to bridge the gap between our ideals and practice.
- Arranging weekend inter-cultural workshops for young people, which will extend to participation in a conference at the Initiatives of Change Swiss Conference Centre.
- Develop focused dialogues.
- Establish a Mothers self-support group, which will aim at diversionary activities for young people.

## **Lessons and Looking Ahead**

This report touches on different aspects of the HiC Local Project, much of which have been encouraging. At the same time we have been learning from our mistakes.

In Liverpool we had wrongly assumed that as a result of the training, those trained would have wanted to take the initiative themselves to create dialogue opportunities. This happened only once. This is partly because they are all very busy people and may also be because of a lack of confidence to step out into a risk situation without more experience.

Rev Tee Turner of HiC USA indicated that such initiatives seldom come directly from the facilitators, rather that facilitators usually respond to the invitation of others. This is no reason to be despondent, as all who have done the training have now received skills that are of immense value wherever they are engaged in their own field of work. Those who have taken part in the programme have decided to stick together as a team. It is however a challenge to our imagination to identify where the needs are in our communities and how to inspire others to take initiative, also how to adapt what we are doing to meet the needs of a particular community. Hopefully we can usefully address these challenges in the year ahead.

**Gerald Henderson**

## **Asylum Link**

### **Newcomers – a positive asset**

As a volunteer at Asylum Link Merseyside (ALM), I have the opportunity to befriend and get to know a wide range of people from across the world. ALM is a charitable organisation that started in a small way, in a church hall to befriend the influx of people fleeing conflict, ethnic cleansing, torture, and other impossible situations in their own countries, and who landed up in Liverpool.

The demand for its services grew and it moved to larger premises where there are facilities now for five days a week help to several hundred asylum seekers. There they can get classes in English, I.T. skills, advice on their legal and medical problems and help with finding schools for their children. They can also find a listening ear and can meet each other.

I got involved in the provision of clothes, furniture, bedding, etc, and most recently food for the destitute asylum seekers, many of these things donated by members of our local churches.

I have discovered so many who have genuine stories of tragedy and traumatic experience. Of course there are people who try to abuse the system, but I think it is both wrong and unjust the way some of the media, notably the tabloids, give such a negative bias about asylum seekers, and even the Home Office seem to propagate within their ranks and beyond a 'culture of disbelief' towards them. We have an opportunity to open our hearts to build bridges between nations. That will benefit us as much as it does them. An Iraqi refugee, who is a friend of ours, expressed his concern

recently that young Iraqi men, who fled from Saddam, who could have been potential friends and allies, are being turned against us by our attitudes.

'Asylum children are an asset' was the headline in our local paper last year. It was a report from Ofsted, the Government Education Inspectorate, reporting on a school in our city where a quarter of the children are from asylum seeking families. The head teacher said "*We make sure the pupils are aware of the reasons why people have to leave one country and come to another. It's good to see the tolerance and the way that the children get on with each other. We make sure that inclusion and equal opportunities are on the school's agenda. We see it as training for their future*".

One young Azerbaijani girl, who had to flee, said to me "I want to do something for the country while I am here, not just be on the receiving end". She contributed so much to the school, she was made deputy head girl, while still awaiting permission to stay. When the head teacher discovered that the mother was a geography teacher, she said that she would have valued her help. It was not possible, because the law does not permit asylum-seekers to work. Yet so many asylum seekers have skills that we badly need.

A headline in a local paper said "I think of Liverpool as home now". This, from a brilliant young Iraqi doctor who is able to take part in a scheme to train doctors, already qualified in their own countries, in order to be able to work in the National Health Service. It costs about £250,000 to train a doctor from scratch. It costs about £5,000 to help an immigrant doctor gain the same qualification: a gain for everyone.

One of the themes of the HiC National Conference taking place in Liverpool, February 26, is 'The Journey of Newcomers – their positive contribution'. Acknowledging the contributions that asylum seekers and refugees have made to this country over the centuries, we would start to realise the benefits. Yes, it is about being more compassionate, but it is also common sense.

**Judith Henderson**

## **DIARY DATES**

- Saturday 26 February – HiC National Conference, Liverpool
- International Conference – "A Heart and Soul for Europe" – Caux, Switzerland: Saturday 16 July to Sunday 24 July 2005

*HiC is a programme of Initiatives of Change, which is an international network of people of diverse faiths and backgrounds, working for reconciliation and justice, beginning with change in their own lives.*