

Runnymede Conference Speech 19 January 2005

Speaker: Elena Noel – Hate Crimes Project Manager, Southwark Mediation Centre

Speech for the Criminal Justice Policy Seminar

Hate Crime, and in particular race hate, fragments communities and is an issue for us all. We need to skill our communities that hate crime and in particular race hate is not acceptable, and to value diversity. As agencies and as practitioners we need to explore mechanisms and devolve strategies that enable this to be realised.

My work as a Mediator has taken me into schools, youth clubs and estates, and into the community with marginalized people.

In 2000 the Crime Reduction Team at the Home Office decided to tackle the rising levels of hate crime in Southwark, and PFACTS (Police, Partners And Community Together in Southwark) a two-year pilot was born. Its approach was novel; using eight existing voluntary sector and statutory organisations working in partnership to tackle hate crime. It had its sceptics. Partnership work between the voluntary sector and the Metropolitan Police, including mediation, had never occurred in this way before to address hate crime. Many said it would never work, and rendered the aims and objectives of the Targeted Police Initiative (TPI) unachievable.

It did work; the initiative was judged one of the most successful TPIS in the Southeast. It led to a culture change in the London Borough of Southwark, and the warm inter-agency relationship remains today long after the pilot has ended.

In 2002 the sole referrer to the Hate Crimes Project was the Police Community Safety Unit at Walworth Police station. Today the Hate Crimes Project has in excess of 27 separate sources of referral, including Southwark Anti Social Behaviour Unit, Community Wardens, Housing Department, PCSOs, self-referrals and community groups.

In 2002 PFACTS was given *Demonstration Status* by the Home Office, for Best Practice, a prestigious award, which allowed PFACTS partners like myself to share with a range of voluntary and statutory agencies, including other mediation services and those in strategic positions, information about the successful partnership work that had taken place. The PFACTS Model was formed and used in a number of new crime reduction initiatives in Southwark and else where in the country, such as Crime Hotspots, Victim Focus Desk, and others.

The message is clear: no single agency can tackle hate crime alone.

As a Mediator and Project Manager it has been an immense privilege to be part of an evolving process of change. In Southwark we now have a seven-year campaign against hate crime called '*Hate Hurts*' funded by SRB. It is the only borough to have this.

Many of you may ask '*what role does mediation have in hate crime?*' Why don't we lock the perpetrators up and throw away the key? Many of my clients use the process of mediation because they don't necessarily want those who cause hate crime to them and their families to be prosecuted. They do, however, want to know why they have been targeted '*Why me?*' They want those who harass them to realise the impact of

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their behaviour, and for their actions to stop so that they can feel safe. Mediation enables those who commit hate crime to be part of the solution. Court action does not always produce the desired reaction.

Mediation is a voluntary and confidential process where any agreements reached – written and/or verbal – are monitored. Those who are experiencing hate crime still have the backup of the law.

I work predominantly in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe where repeat revictimisation is commonplace, and where the community are hostile to ‘outsiders’. Those who call the Police and others for assistance are known as ‘grasses’, leaving many too afraid to report incidents for fear of reprisals. It is not too difficult to spot who has called the police because a uniformed officer will usually attend the callout. Incidents of revictimisation, often by unknown persons, will worsen, and lead eventually to the person experiencing the harassment not calling the police again nor reporting to any other agency.

I encounter families in very difficult situations. One such family had been subjected to egg-throwing for five years before encountering me and my co-mediator. The previous family to live in their home had been moved due to ongoing racial harassment. This family did not wish to move. It was home and they just wanted the incidents to stop.

Mediation enables those experiencing the crime to express their needs. It challenges the beliefs, value systems, assumptions and stereotypes held by who cause hate crime. In my work I explore the needs, similarities and differences of those I engage with in order to achieve long-term change. Mediation is about being future focussed in order to create stronger, safer, more empowered communities.

In some instances I can work on multi-party disputes with up to 20 families simultaneously – adults and young people.

Communities need to value difference and to let those who cause hate crime to know that it is unacceptable and unwanted.

Research into PPACTS showed that partnership work had :

- Reduced incidents of reported hate crime by 50% in 2002.
- Reduced incidents of repeat revictimisation from 1 in 12 to 1 in 4 with the use of mediation.
- Revealed that young people aged 11–18 years known to the Hate Crimes Project were known to the Police not for hate crime, but for other crimes and anti-social behaviour.

If you truly want to tackle hate crime you need to work with those who cause it, to work through their assumptions and stereotypes, and to challenge their belief systems so empathy can be developed.

You need to work with families and extended kin in an intercultural way.

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I want to see work in schools and youth clubs with young minds. In cases where young people have been involved in hate crime I have used trained and experienced Peer Mediators aged 17 years to great success. Young people learn best from their peers.

Four Peer Mediators recently received the Borough Commander Award for their outstanding work in the community. This is a special award and rare award normally given only to Police Officers.

I want to know that when my clients, your clients, choose to report an incident, clear policy and guidelines are in place and the frontline worker has had the appropriate required training, so incidents are responded to and dealt with swiftly and satisfactorily.

I wish to end on cautionary note. There is no room for complacency. Race hate is not simply a black –white issue. Tension between the ethnic groups exists. Here are some examples:

- A Kenyan Post Office worker refusing to serve a Somali woman and her family.
- African-Caribbean youths and white youths racially abusing and terrifying an Asian Family using the language of the far right, saying ‘Go back home’, etc.
- Two African-Caribbean women from different islands racially abusing and perpetrating physical violence upon each other for some years. When one of the parties initially reported this they were told hate crime cannot occur between persons of the same race. Yes it can.
- White parent with an African-Caribbean partner with some white children and some mixed-race children accused of racially abusing an African-Caribbean tenant. Her mixed-race children were being racially abused by other white children on the estate.
- A Muslim boy and a Sikh boy played together for many years as friends until 9/11, when the Sikh boy called his friend a ‘terrorist’. They fought each other, leading to the breakdown of their friendship and that of their respective families.

What we need is the will. If the will is there change is possible. Partnership work is the way forward. The launch of the race strategy is a positive step in the right direction, as it provides us with an opportunity to build more cohesive communities for the future.

Elena Noel