

Initiatives of Change International website

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Nottingham Printer Makes Community Impression

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Richard Hawthorne is an unassuming man. Arriving at Nottingham Station, I passed him by on the platform. He is as unassuming about the work he has done in the city for the past couple of decades. I was in Nottingham to hear about his involvement in Hope in the Cities (HiC), a programme of Initiative of Change which promotes honest conversation dialogues on 'race, reconciliation and responsibility'.



Richard is a former director of Hawthorne Printers, a 112-year-old company run by three generations of the family, where he was involved for sixty years. He has been long associated with Initiatives of Change and is a member of the local Rotary. He was awarded the MBE in 2002 for his outstanding community service in Nottingham.

At 76, Richard says, 'What is a restful life?... I don't know,' and that exemplifies his energy and calling in life: from shopping for food for a destitute refugees, to organising meetings for the local community in his home, to being a governor on the board of a local school, to coordinating HiC administrative work from

Richard Hawthorne

his study and being involved with the Church, Rotary, other city bodies such as the Racial Equality Council and the Nottingham Interfaith Council. As Raj Sharma, a member of the Nottingham City Council put it: 'Richard is a driving force in the community.'

Richard strives hard to mobilise key people in the St Ann's district to bring the fractured community together in the spirit of 'honest conversation', to dispel fear and build trust. St Ann's is one of three localities, in a city of 279,000 people, which are known for youth warfare and territorialism. Richard lives in a nearby neighbourhood and this has helped him forge deeper ties with St Ann's residents.

During the Industrial Revolution, Nottingham was internationally known as a centre for lace manufacture. However, rapid and poorly planned growth left Nottingham with the reputation of having the worst slums in the British Empire outside India. In recent years, the St Ann's area has been synonymous with violence, gun crime and a community in crisis. I was alarmed by the statistics that Nottingham was the gun capital of the United Kingdom and had the highest murder rate in England and Wales. The city had 13 shootings in 2006 compared with 11 a year earlier. And as we drove through the city, I couldn't tell if it was really that bad. It looked like any other provincial city in middle England. But then, what we see is not necessarily the reality.

As I dug deeper, I could see signs of good news; the figures were going down from 2003 when 51 shootings took place - an average of one a week compared to last year's average of one a month. There have been ten shootings so far in 2007.

We were on our way to meet 'The Hope in the Cities Dialogue Group', which had gathered to review past activities and develop future dialogues within the community. He has helped initiate



Holding Hands around St. Ann's

honest dialogue sessions over the years and their success propelled him to continue with them to get the community to come forward, hold hands, take pride in their neighbourhood and build a sense of ownership. One thing led to another and the annual Holding Hands Around St Ann's event came into existence in 2004 as a climax to a series of 'honest conversations'. In 2005, it saw 600 local people spend a day visiting various community facilities around the area. They came together to hold hands at a key neighbourhood centre—a symbolic gesture for the community to care for itself.



Today's meeting was held in Richard's home. A youth development manager and a centre development manager came from the nearby Chase

Meeting in Richard Hawthorne's home

Neighbourhood Centre. An official from the County Council, a primary care trust worker involved in inter-faith matters, and an HiC facilitator from Huddersfield also attended. Richard plays the role of being all-in-one – the administrator and the torch bearer, pushing the agenda, initiating and including people in conversations, creating a safe space for dialogue, and playing the role of the gracious host to perfection.

'Where do you get your energy and drive from?' I asked him. He said he had a profound change in thinking after he saw a play called *India Arise* by a theatre troupe of Initiatives of Change in 1967. One particular song, *Will we have rice tomorrow, Dad?*, made a deep impression on him. After the play, he went to the Embankment in London and reflected. 'I felt God telling me that I had to open my heart to different communities. I also asked myself if I was willing to take on what God asked me to do and not just what I thought would gain approval.' And there was no looking back since then.

Take, for instance, Maxine Cockett, an Afro-Caribbean community development worker in Nottingham, who couldn't face up to the police for the way she felt they treated the young people in her community. She's had a change of heart since she got involved in 'honest conversations'. 'I met Richard four years ago and by talking to me and listening to me, I was able to reconcile my anger toward the police,' she told me. 'He has played an important role in my life in the last four years.' At the meeting, Maria, from the Chase Neighbourhood Centre, shared her thoughts about how important it was to engage with 'young women, because they nurture the next generation'. Yesmean, a Muslim lady, who had been to IofC's centre in Caux, Switzerland earlier this year, said Peace Circles would be a great idea for the women in the area to come together. She promised Maria to share more of what she had learnt about the idea. As Maria said, 'They (young women) had their own issues with other women in the community. The first step was to create peace among themselves. The dialogue gets kick started.' Yesmean adds, 'Dialogue is about building trust'. Everyone concurs.

With gun crime and violence once rampant in the area, they are now working on ways to bring

into the fold those who feel disenfranchised. Denzil, the HiC worker from Huddersfield, said: 'War starts in the hearts of men, and it manifests itself on the battlefield. If you are at peace, you can bring peace.' Raj Sharma, a member of the County Council, added it was imperative for the group to identify themes that people wanted and continue to build on them. Richard kept the group on track by asking 'What will help the people most?' – especially when there was a bouquet of ideas. Richard looked around to gauge who would translate these ideas into action. The conversation moved on to discuss how the group could get the funding to take their work forward.

There have been moments when he felt they wouldn't pull it off. In 2005, Barrie Brazier, who had worked alongside Richard in the community, was found dead in his car near the river. The reason for his death remains unknown. He had a hands-on approach to building the community. He knew the kids on the streets, the folks who lived there and he had largely built a rapport and fan following. Suddenly he was gone. It was a tough period for Richard, not knowing how things would go forward after Barrie's death. But Richard was surprised that people came together and picked up from where Barrie left off. That was a sign of hope, that nobody is indispensable in achieving the bigger objective of bringing the community together.

Yes, nobody is indispensable, but people like Richard and Barrie are often those who can inspire action where it's most needed at the community level, especially in a city like Nottingham.

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