

Strengthening peace in the United Kingdom: A peaceworker's personal story

Sarah Hulme is working in central London at St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, which seeks to find new and creative ways of understanding faith as a resource for transforming conflict.



Although I was born in England, my family is from Northern Ireland so I grew up hearing stories about the Troubles, the work some of my family had done in the police and the contrast between the frustration of those communities which did live (happily) side by side and those which did not. Fast forward a few years and as a late teenager, I became a Christian. A whole world suddenly opened up to me of seeking (and finding) God, and he/she/it (!) finding me – so much so that I changed career direction and did my undergraduate degree in Applied Theology.

At the same time, I became heavily involved with a school in Kenya, eventually founding a charity to support it, even while I was undertaking a number of placements at university, working with homeless people and drug addicts, and visiting other countries in Africa. As I became more aware of the systems which affect people both here and in the emerging world, I found myself disturbed that some people seemingly never

had a chance – not because they weren't 'good' people, or didn't work hard, but because it seemed that the cards of life were stacked against them from day one.

Finishing university I became convinced that I was being led to do a Master's in Conflict, Governance and International Development. I discovered that this uncomfortable awareness I'd had of the odds being stacked against people had a name: 'structural violence'. I was already convinced that conflict had a great deal to do with 'stacking the cards' (hence my choice of course) but this was really brought home to me when violence broke out in Kenya at the start of 2008. Suddenly, it was my friends at the school who were fleeing their homes and I remember watching the news at every opportunity and plotting the path of the spreading violence, hot on the heels of the teachers and pupils. Having to restart the school from scratch after its destruction convinced me even more that conflict turns the system against

people, and I was more deeply committed to my path.

When I heard about the QPSW Peaceworker scheme I couldn't believe it – a chance to get some grassroots experience of conflict issues, so essential for anyone trying to break into this field. Furthermore, here was a marvellous chance to do it with an organisation which understood my deep faith-based motivation. At St Ethelburga's Centre I've been working with teenagers and children regarding the problems of London violence, and gun and knife crime. Funnily enough, I've been addressing some of my buried childhood memories due to the relationships formed when St Ethelburga's was built from the ashes of an IRA bomb. I've taken great pleasure in that sense of coming 'full circle' back to my childhood and marvelling at a God who sets things up so that I'm also working with young people in Northern Ireland...

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