

Breaking The Cycle? Learning from the past to improve the present

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The problem: what is 'hate crime'?

- No academic consensus.
- Crown Prosecution Service (2024) defines hate crime as any criminal offence *“which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice”*, noting that there is no *“legal definition of hostility so we use the everyday understanding of the word”*. Very subjective!

Our old 'Breaking The Cycle'

- Participant explained their own behaviour and examined their attitudes towards their behaviour and their victim.
- Contemporary myths surrounding a variety of groups (including Muslims, refugees, Roma and Jews).
- “The impact of hate on its victims, in this instance, through the example of Jewish people and how they were treated by the Nazis (also their collaborators, depending on the referral case)”. The programme used examples from 1933-1945, including the Nuremberg Laws, Nazi propaganda, Kristallnacht, ghettos and the six death camps.
- Similarities between their own behaviour and that seen in the historical examples, including a discussion of hate crime legislation contained in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Criminal Justice Act 2003.
- Meeting a Holocaust survivor in-person or online. The survivor gave a brief summary of their personal testimony and then discussed the impact of the participant's behaviour on their victim.

The participants

- Small-scale – around 20 participants took part each year.
- In the 2023-4 period, 75% of participants had committed a hate crime focused on the victim's racial or ethnic identity. Of these, 17% of the victims were Black; 17% were from Eastern Europe; 4% were Asian; 4% were Irish; 4% were Jewish; and the remainder did not have their ethnic origin recorded.
- Of the remaining offences, 21% were homophobic and 4% were disablist.
- Where a victim's identity is known, 38% of victims were neighbours of the offender; 38% were police officers; and 23% were family members of the offender.

The problem with this approach

- **‘But I said the wrong thing – I wouldn’t shoot someone into a pit’ – participants distinguishing their acts from Holocaust perpetrators’ actions.**
- **‘You hate gay people – so have a history lesson about Jews’ – the difficulties of using a historical event centred on race to influence contemporary non-racial hate crimes.**
- **‘You’ve done something wrong – so meet a victim’ – the need for historical perpetrator testimony when working with contemporary perpetrators.**
- **‘I feel like this is all left-wing propaganda’ – the dangers of appearing to moralise.**

A new approach

- Focused on SS-Hauptsturmführer Karl Niemann – told through the eyes of his grandson, Derek Niemann.
- Senior SS officer who was responsible for overseeing slave labour in Eastern Europe during the Holocaust.
- *“He slipped into a category of crimes that had he, perhaps, at the very beginning been shown where he would be going, he might have been a bit shocked.”*

'Onboarding'

1. **Lets look at what led up to the incident, where were you and what were you doing?**
2. **Was there something that triggered your behaviour, what were you thinking at the time?**
3. **Tell me about the incident itself?**
4. **How were you feeling after the incident happened?**

An ordinary man...



...who did extraordinary evil



What we have learned

- **Adopt aims which are realistic and specific – and do not over-promise.**
- **Be clear about why an historical approach is more effective than other approaches.**
- **Individualise the history that you draw upon.**
- **Emphasise and evaluate the actions of the historical perpetrator.**
- **Start with the participant's motives and attitudes.**
- **Listen to the victim – but only after the perpetrator.**
- **Be specific about your pedagogy – and teach, don't preach.**
- **Suggest solutions.**

A survivor's wisdom

Dr Martin Stern was born in 1938 and survived camps at Westerbork and Theresienstadt. He came to the UK in 1948 and went on to study medicine and work as an immunologist in the NHS. In 2024 he started volunteering as part of Breaking The Cycle and suggested the following approach before his first session.

- 1. Don't expect miracles. Be prepared for spectacular failures.**
- 2. Establish a personal relationship if possible.**
- 3. Adapt my experience of medical consultations: especially, get to understand the person to some extent and see their perspective.**
- 4. Try different things. Try to be creative and innovative. Try to learn what works and what doesn't.**
- 5. Have some way of measuring outcomes including assessment of the validity and value of the measurement. Do research.**
- 6. Seek expertise from every '-ologist' in sight and build on existing expertise but never stop learning and trying to contribute possible new expertise.**