



RELATIONSHIPS FOUNDATION

think relationally

Rebuilding community through public services

The body of Joyce Vincent was recently discovered in her flat, still surrounded by unopened Christmas presents, two years after her death. No-one had reported her missing. The sad truth was that this 40-year-old former advertising agency professional had no robust supportive relationships with anyone who might have noticed her passing.

Extreme cases like this act as stark reminders of the importance of our mission. In the long-term, Relationships Foundation wants to encourage the formation and maintenance of strong social networks



How can public services best help those who are alone?

by looking at issues such as working patterns and geographical mobility, and by challenging cultural values. But we also recognise the more immediate need to support those in public services who can prevent such cases of isolation and neglect from occurring.

Last year we conducted the last of a series of consultations looking at ways of relieving pressure on public services. One of the conclusions was the potential value of enabling existing services to go beyond their official remit to provide more support for family and community relationships. In the few instances where it's been

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done before it's proved highly successful – for example, training health workers to help new mothers not just with health issues but also with their relationships. Since then, we've been exploring how to do this with the Metropolitan Police and selected London Boroughs, particularly Enfield and Bromley.

The work ahead

Our current task is to identify who needs what kinds of support, and who has the opportunity to provide it. It's important that whoever sees the need, or has gained the trust of an individual or group is able to ensure appropriate support is provided whether or not this naturally falls within their normal professional or organisational responsibilities. In Enfield, for example, they are developing the role of education gateway workers, who can help families with children at the school access the services and support they need.

Some of the issues and ideas that are emerging may be taken forward by the boroughs in the context of new Local Area Agreements, and we've been invited to advise on aspects of their implementation, such as how targets on building social capital might best be met. We're now looking for additional funding from trusts and individual donors to take this work further, so that many more people might get the help that Joyce Vincent never had. ■

Feeling the blues

Posted by: John Ashcroft Posted on: 3 May 2006

A recent survey to support the BBC programme 'The Happiness Formula' suggests that in Britain we are becoming less happy with the proportion of people saying they are 'very happy' falling from 52% in 1957 to just 36% today. Not surprisingly almost half (48%) of people thought that relationships are the biggest factor in making them happy. Some people, however, have very limited social networks: 18% of single people had fewer than three close friends they spoke to at least once a week...

Read more blog posts on our website – www.relationshipsfoundation.org

Frontline view



Jim Wright

Jim Wright came across the book *The R Factor* 10 years ago, and has been interested in relational ideas ever since. Having tackled integration issues from two separate mergers of global pharmaceutical companies, he now runs his own consultancy business Soterio, working with a range of corporates

and charities to help with organisational and leadership development. Jim lives in St Albans in Hertfordshire with his wife Sheila and has been an Rnetwork member since the network was launched last year.

Why do you think relational issues matter?

If you take it to the core I think we're made to be relational beings, and that relational living is one of the core areas that needs to be addressed. Most of us aren't able to sit back and analyse 'what's wrong with my life is a, b, c', but what we feel is that things could be a bit better – and it often boils down to relationships. Both in family life and in organisations, I think that often we don't even get the basics right.

From your experience, how well equipped are most companies to look at relational issues?

As I go into companies and ask if they value relationships, of course they always say yes. But when I ask what they are doing to develop more effective relationships, they usually have very little to say except for the odd team-building exercise and an annual corporate employee satisfaction survey. Very few organisations are able to evaluate systematically the quality of working relationships to identify where they are good or poor, and to identify what they need to do to improve them. This is what I liked about Relationships Foundation – the relational framework and relational audit tools are great ways of looking into this.

What are some of the common problems for relationships in the workplace?

People are more and more pressured at work, and this leads to pressured relationships. They don't have time to talk, they are less inclined to think about other people's work. It's not that people don't cooperate, but they don't put the quality of time into thinking about interactions and cooperative working because of the pressures on time. You could layer onto that the busyness syndrome that we see so much. There seems to be a feeling that 'If I'm not busy, then I'm not important enough, my job isn't good enough'. It's almost a value to be busy and that's not true, it only gets in the way of building relationships and networking in organisations.

How can these issues be addressed?

I've had to deal with this both in my role as an internal HR manager and as an external consultant to business leaders, and even more importantly I've had to address it in my own life as a senior line manager – how did I work with my people when I was under pressure to increase efficiency and cut costs and I needed people working as hard as they could? I'm not suggesting that if we work relationally everything will suddenly be easier. Competitive pressures are intense, not just between organisations, but also within a company for resources.

Life is never going to be wonderful and comfortable in a competitive environment. So it's always a balance of how I as a manager or leader can shape the culture so that people don't feel fearful if they can't work way beyond the norm. The days where we worked 9 to 5 are long gone, so the way I addressed it was to keep talking about work pressure issues and to encourage people to discuss them. Once you get sucked into a culture of continually racking up the pressure, then it's not easy to stand back and see what's the issue. I suppose what I wanted was an accountability ethos. My supervisees are accountable to me, but I'm also accountable to them. If I talk about values and then don't live up to them, they should be able to come and talk to me about that.

Finally, why should people join the Rnetwork?

You are the focus for people who are interested in relational issues. I associated myself with Relationships Foundation to build my awareness of the issues, and to help me in my life and work to do what I can to help both society and organisations to be more relational. An ember on its own soon burns out. If you make time to talk to like-minded people, stuff happens. ■

Join the Rnetwork

Becoming an Rnetwork member gives you exclusive access to a range of resources, free or discounted entry to all our events, and the chance to network with other members. It's also a great way to give your regular support to all our projects.

Membership costs just £5 a month per individual or couple, but anyone on a low income can be a member at half price for just £2.50 a month.

So if you haven't joined yet, why not do it today online at www.relationshipsfoundation.org/rnetwork

RNETWORK 

Whose convenience?

Over the last few months we've been taking a closer look at weekend working. But what does that have to do with relationships?

For some time we've been looking at the impact of weekend working on family life through our initiative 'Keep time for children'. With children aged 5-16 at school from Monday to Friday, weekend working cuts directly into the time that parents can spend with their children. Research conducted for Keep time for children has shown

When working patterns become individualised rather than shared, everyone gets their time off at different times

that 40% of families with dependent children have at least one parent who regularly works at the weekend. This summer, new research will show just how much weekend working affects the amount of time families spend together and the kinds of activities they do.

But that's not the only dimension of social life that's affected by weekend working. When working patterns become individualised rather than shared, everyone gets their time off at different times. Friends and extended family find it hard to spend time with one another, and community activities such as sport or volunteering suffer.

Now it looks like weekend working hours for many people could be extended. Since the Sunday Trading Act in 1994, stores over 3000 square feet have been able to open for six hours on a Sunday. Under pressure from large retailers, the Government is currently reviewing whether those restrictions are still appropriate. It's considering either relaxing the regulations to allow a further three hours, or to do away with them all together to allow for round-the-clock, 24/7 shopping.



Some large shops are campaigning for longer Sunday trading hours

Consumer choice

The argument for deregulation is all about consumer choice. If people want to shop on a Sunday, why shouldn't they be allowed to? Does the Government have the right in this instance to tell

The report presents a strong warning that the social impacts of extending Sunday trading could be serious and should not be ignored

people what they can and can't do? Furthermore, why should a minority group of religious people decide what happens on Sunday when we live in a multi-cultural society?

It's certainly a compelling argument, but it entirely misses the effect on workers – and not just the retail staff, but cleaners, drivers, police, public transport staff and everyone else who has to work when shops are open.

Social impact

We were concerned that the review set up by the Department of Trade and Industry wasn't paying sufficient attention to the potential relational impacts of extending Sunday trading. So we decided to bring together a panel of Parliamentarians, chaired by Lord Anderson, to look at the social effects of weekend working and what any further extension of trading hours could mean for families and communities. On behalf of the panel, we wrote to a wide range of organisations, including those we knew to be on both sides of the argument, asking them to submit their views and evidence to the panel.

The resulting report, 'Whose convenience?' presented a strong warning to the DTI that the social impacts could be serious and should not be ignored. A copy of the report has been sent to every MP, and at the time of going to press, over 260 of them have signed a motion in the Commons saying that they are against any extension to the current trading hours.

Over the coming months we'll continue to work alongside other organisations such as Working Families, Keep Sunday Special, the Association of Convenience Stores, and the shop workers union Usdaw to keep on urging the Government to maintain the six hour trading limit that gives some small protection to family and community life.

It might seem like the issue is just about choice, but it has everything to do with relationships. We're not in any way against consumer choice – we're just passionately committed to healthy families and vibrant communities. ■

The report, 'Whose convenience? An enquiry into the social effects of extending weekend working and Sunday trading' can be viewed on our website at www.relationshipsfoundation.org, or printed copies are available for £2.50 +p&p.

News in brief

New design

We hope you like the new look to our newsletter! This is now just one part of an expanded range of ways for us to communicate with our supporters. The 'relational out-takes' section of the former R briefing has been incorporated into a weblog on our website where we provide comments on articles in the press and other current issues. We've also launched a monthly email service called 'Rethink' to provide thought-provoking relational perspectives, which you can sign up to on our website. And of course the site is also packed with a range of resources from talks to case studies, but you'll need to be an Rnetwork member to access all of them!



The Australia team

Australia

During his sabbatical earlier this year, our Executive Director Michael Schluter spent time in Australia talking with some long-standing supporters who are setting up an Australian version of Relationships Foundation! We've been giving them guidance with their first

project on the effect of long working hours on work and families, which is currently a hot issue in Australia with recent changes to labour laws. We'll continue to provide some input from our experience, but in time we also expect their own thinking and research to enrich our work here in the UK.



Proposed design for Cambridge Community Innovation Centre

Citylife

Citylife has recently moved closer to its birthplace. The organisation, which began as a Relationships Foundation project in 1995 to tackle issues of unemployment, has moved into a former youth centre in Cambridge, just down the road from us. The plan is to demolish the existing building to create the Cambridge Community Innovation Centre, a 'launch pad' and base for social enterprises run on a not-for-profit basis, and for start-ups by young or disadvantaged people. The low-rise, fully accessible 'green' building will also act as a centre for enterprise agencies, and will have a cafe, meeting rooms and rehearsal space for local people to enjoy. For more news, visit the Citylife website at www.citylifeld.org ■

Events and Resources

Annual conference

Together with this newsletter you'll find a flyer for our annual conference on 22-23 September 2006. This year we've opened it up to everyone and expanded it to two full days. With a selection of excellent speakers, we'll be looking at restoring broken relationships on day one, and working relationships on day two.

There's a discounted rate for Rnetwork members and a further concession for anyone on a low income, but book before 1 August and everyone can save £10! Take a look at the flyer now for more information or to book your place.

Recordings

If you can't make any of our events in person, you can always listen to the recording afterwards. You can buy a CD of any event for £5 directly from our website or by giving us a call. However, one of the benefits of being an Rnetwork member is that you can request a CD for free, or simply download the talk from our website. Available recordings include:

- **Jonathan Burnside:** The benefits of faith-based units in prison
- **Michael Schluter:** Relationships – the key to success

For information on all events, email us at events@relationshipsfoundation.org

Rethink

You drive me crazy! The latest email from our free monthly service, Rethink, taking a look at relationships on the road.

Wanted

It's finally time to replace some of our office furniture. If you can help with supplying some good quality desks or would like to make a contribution to our costs, please get in touch! ■

More resources are available online, check our website for the latest downloads – www.relationshipsfoundation.org

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