

News in brief

New staff



Peter Lynas, Louise Urquhart and David Wong

Since our last newsletter we have been pleased to welcome a number of new people to the Relationships Foundation team. The research team has been strengthened to include two new staff: David Wong has joined as our Senior Researcher and Peter Lynas is researcher and writer for our Finance and Well-being project. Most recently we were also pleased to welcome Louise Urquhart who is our new Development Officer.

Resources and events

Changing Australia

On the 3 July Relationships Foundation and the Royal Commonwealth Society jointly hosted The Hon Lindsay Tanner MP, Australian Minister of Finance and Deregulation who gave a talk entitled 'Changing Australia – new perspectives on the good life'.

A recording of Lindsay's talk is available on our website at www.relationshipsfoundation.org/LindsayTanner

Weblog

Keep an eye on our blog, 'First thoughts' for the latest news and comments on relational issues in the media. The blog also allows you to add your own thoughts and comments to ours.

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

Westminster Work

We have already seen a number of opportunities to bring relationship issues to parliament in 2008. In March we worked with a number of peers for a discussion on how the Government should help parents of school-age children, especially those on low incomes, to spend quality time with their children at weekends. Lord Adonis, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Children, Schools and Families, spoke on the Governments behalf, and was very much in agreement with the points and suggestions made. Since then we have also prepared briefing materials for parliamentarians on the impact of poverty and debt on families; the relational issues raised by the proposed 'titan prisons'; and most recently briefing a number of peers to speak against the Sunday Trading (Horticultural) Bill, which if passed would deprive many families of their shared family time.

Improving public service partnerships

Our Research Director John Ashcroft has recently been part of a team working with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) to produce a resource to help community partnerships improve their relationships.

The final publication, called "Growing trust and confidence, governance and partnership behaviour benchmark and health check" aims to assess and help to improve the effectiveness of relationships within and between community public service partnerships as well as in the communities they serve. Read it at www.relationshipsfoundation.org/idea ■

Rethink – our free monthly email

You may not have thought of the so-called credit crunch as a problem with relationships, but this is exactly what our guest contributor David McLlroy argues in his recent article for our Rethink email bulletin. In his piece David notes how a changes in the way that banks operate, particularly the growth of mortgage backed securities, has led to a deterioration of relational links between lenders and customers which has triggered the current banking crisis. The full article can be found on our website by typing 'Rocky Relationships' in to the 'search resources box'.

Ties that bind us

It is widely recognised that the last sixty years have seen a decline in the importance of the role of the extended family. This new report looks at a variety of practical strategies which might help to strengthen extended family relationships and suggests further avenues of enquiry. It is available free from our website at www.relationshipsfoundation.org/extendedfamily or in hard copy for £5. ■

Produced by JUNK 01242 702809



RELATIONSHIPS FOUNDATION

think relationally

Double dose to strengthen families

We have recently started two new projects which we hope will play a major part in strengthening the place of the family in our society.

The first is a research project looking into the links between working long and unsocial hours and family breakdown. "We are now seeing a major breakthrough in attitudes towards flexible working. Politicians on both sides are lining up behind this proposal to prove their family-friendly credentials. But although flexible working for parents would be a great first step, it's not the end" said Michael Clark who leads our Keep time for children initiative. "First, parents need protection, if possible legal protection that means they can't be required to work excessive unsocial hours or on both days at the weekend. Second, we need to maintain the momentum of culture change: employers that are family-friendly because they want to be, not because they have to be; parents who choose to prioritise family time."

To achieve this ongoing change we must continue to develop the evidence base to demonstrate the importance of shared family time. The project we have just begun is a comprehensive review of how working hours affect family relationships in the UK, something nobody has yet done. Our partners in Relationships Forum Australia did some related work last year using a range of international data and our new project builds on their work, taking the research to a deeper level and analysing data from the UK to get a picture of what's going on here. Work started in January and we hope to publish the findings in early 2009. The research was funded equally by the Headley Trust and donations from private individuals. Thank you to all who have contributed to make this project possible.



Secondly, we now have the funding in place to begin work on a report arguing for government investment in relationships education. Again this was funded in part with donations from two family trusts, but with more than half of the necessary funds given by individuals responding to our recent mailing about the project. Working with our project partners 2-into-1 we will be gathering evidence from around the world to ascertain the effectiveness of couple education in keeping families together, and to discern the best way to deliver such programs. The resulting report will then be used to encourage each of the main political parties to include a commitment to relationships education in their next manifesto.

Together these two projects will form the mainstay of our work to encourage and support positive family relationships, which we know is the key factor in the well-being of children, parents and grandparents. However, as you will read in the rest of this newsletter, our 'Finance and Well-being' project is also looking at ways in which the tax and benefit system and our personal financial arrangements can support the development of stronger family and community relationships. ■

Also inside:



Interview with Martyn Eden

Relationships Foundation's Director of Public Affairs tells us about his work with policy makers and how public policy can affect relationships



Through the looking glass

Can a focus on relationships help improve an organisation's performance?

Probing public policy

Martyn Eden has worked with Relationships Foundation for the last 4 years. As our Director of Public Affairs Martyn’s main role is to promote the work of Relationships Foundation to politicians and policy makers in Westminster, and to ensure that the projects we are engaged in are pertinent and relevant to the current political context.

What are some of the key ways in which public policy impacts on relationships?

There are few areas of public policy that have no impact on relationships because basic to all policy formulation are assumptions about human nature and behaviour and how we live together in families and communities. Thus, for example, public policy can support or undermine family life through the tax and benefit systems.

The hours they work influence the time parents can spend with their children, especially those at school. A change in public policy currently being considered would extend to all such parents the right to request flexible working hours, to be with their children when they are most needed. The relational quality of schools is influenced by the time their teachers spend interacting with them. An increase in administration related to Government targets reduces this time. The same applies in hospitals and police work.

The Government is to build three ‘titan’ prisons, each holding 2,500 prisoners. Such large prisons will hold many prisoners a long way from their homes, making family visits difficult and expensive. Prisoner’s families ideally play a key role in helping released offenders stay out of trouble, so titan prisons will do nothing to reduce re-offending. These are four examples of how public policy impacts on relationships.

Is it really possible to influence public policy and how do you go about it?

Yes it is possible to influence public policy, if one goes about it in the right way and recognises some legitimate limitations. There is little point in trying to change a major policy that was in the Government’s manifesto. There are also lots of other groups trying to change policy and campaigners must expect opposition from those who disagree with them.

In 1986 Keep Sunday Special (KSS) successfully campaigned against a Government Bill to deregulate Sunday trading, but such examples are rare today. The law was changed in 1994 to allow six hours trading but in 2006 we collaborated successfully with the trade union, USDAW, to prevent further deregulation. Relationships Foundation has also sought to persuade MPs and Ministers to adopt policies that would strengthen family and community life and increase individual and social well-being.

There are four key steps in trying to change public policy. The first is monitoring the work of Government and Parliament to know what they are planning to do and when. The second is to produce our own policy analysis to identify the relational implications of any proposed change. Thirdly, it is also essential to build relationships with the key people involved in the policy area under consideration. They are more likely to listen to our perspective if they know and respect our work. Fourthly, we have to make our case as persuasively as possible and show why it makes sense for all concerned. This is best done by briefing MPs and Ministers so that they can make our case for us.



How do politicians respond to Relationships Foundation’s ideas and thinking?

There are a number of politicians, from all of the parties, who respond positively to our thinking. We aim to build a relationship with each of them on the basis of politics’ three R’s. Firstly, respect the many demands on them, from their party, constituency, family, and other groups. We try to support them in their work as well to persuade them of the merits of our ideas. Secondly, we recognise that their loyalties to their party and constituency come before their relationship with us. Thirdly, we aim to be establish a reputation for reliability so that they can trust the material we give them.

If you were to bring about one policy change in the next few years what would it be and why?

It would be to persuade Government and society to recognise the need for one shared day off each week for everyone. It could not be the same day for everyone because some services, such as the emergency services, have to operate 24/7. However, one day off each week would be good for everyone’s health, reducing the health risks linked to stress. It would be good for relationships: parents spending quality time with their children, couples doing things together, and families seeing friends and relatives. It would give us time for recreation and community involvement and take us off the 24/7 treadmill. ■

Through the looking glass

At Relationships Foundation, we believe, that by putting relationships first, we can create a more humane, coherent and sustainable society. It’s a simple premise and, on a macro, philosophical level, it is easy for people to concur. There is a real danger, however, for it to be viewed as nothing more than an otherworldly ideal, with no relevance in the ‘real’ world. The challenge for us has always been in how we apply our thinking practically.

In a society defined by GDP, our leaders want hard facts and demonstrable results. The bottom-line is the bottom-line. This is especially true in the corporate world. But with the increasing influence of large organisations and corporate institutions over all of our lives, if we are to truly ‘influence the influencers’ and effect real change in our society, then we need to be at the forefront of thought leadership in this arena, too.

Progressive thinking, open minds

And this is why we are so excited about our latest project aimed at organisations. There is a growing realisation among progressive business leaders that the health and effectiveness of their organisations depend fundamentally on their internal and external relationships. As Arie de Geus, from the London Business School, has written: *“An important reason why some companies fail is that managers focus exclusively on producing goods and services and forget that the organisation is a community of human beings.”*

The business world is awash with management resources. However, few of them offer any real, authoritative analyses when it comes to relationships within and between organisations. With over 15 years of experience working relationally with organisations — from BP and BA to the NHS and the Prison Service — we are in a unique position to offer proven tools and help create organisational environments that foster positive and trusting relationships. We believe the time is now right to draw together all of our thinking in this area and create a definitive relational resource.



Through the Relational Lens

Building on our tried and tested model for analysing relationships, we are embarking on the production of a suite of materials that will help organisations build better relationships and work more effectively. Central to the project will be a new book (working title: *Through the Relational Lens*), demonstrating how relational thinking and its applications contribute to effective management and leadership. We will also be developing online tools for analysing relationships within organisations, as well as creating new training and management development programmes.

‘There is a growing realisation among progressive business leaders that the health and effectiveness of their organisations depend fundamentally on their internal and external relationships.’

For us, this is not just an opportunity to share what we have learned, it is also an opportunity to increase our knowledge base and expand our sphere of influence. We are privileged to be partnering with Team Focus (a leading supplier of psychometric tools) and Sandhams (a consultancy specialising in organisational relationships) in the delivery of this project. And it is testimony to the interest in our proposition that the likes of the John Lewis Partnership, OgilvyOne, Land Securities, and the International College of Management, Sydney have already agreed to sponsor us. ■

Join the Rnetwork

The Rnetwork is a group of people committed to building a more relational society. You can become a member by committing regular financial support of at least £5 per month (or £2.50 for those on low incomes) to Relationships Foundation. We also award honorary membership to people doing exceptional work to build relationships in innovative ways.



As well as opportunities to network with each other, members also receive a free introductory book and discounts on events and resources from Relationships Foundation. So if you haven’t yet joined, why not give us a call today or join online.

www.relationshipsfoundation.org/Rnetwork