

The Community Worker's Tale

Tracy Walters

In social terms, Milton Keynes is the biggest transplant out in Britain to date. It's a city of severed relationships. Consequently, there is a need to stimulate the growth of new ones to accelerate the natural processes of community development. But what a daunting task. And what difference can the work of one individual make?

Tracy is a very down-to-earth sort of person. He isn't put off by the enormity of the problem – nor by the realisation that what he does is just “a drop in the ocean”.

I came to Milton Keynes nearly six years ago specifically to work at Inter-Action. I'd been looking for work around people. I wasn't sure if it would be youth work, community work, theatre or whatever. I followed several lines of enquiry that led me to Inter-Action. I was given three months work on the summer project and doing a bit around the grounds and I've been here ever since. Let me explain. Inter-Action is a youth and community centre, an arts centre and a city farm – that's the definition. It's a place where, within certain limits, people can come and do the things they like to do. That can vary from gardening, looking after the horses, having a picnic, looking at animals or doing arts or radio projects. The idea is for people to fulfil themselves, to like themselves and hopefully to go out and make Milton Keynes a bit of a better place to live in. That's what we try to do anyway.

We're Just People

I'm the Project Manager but I don't want to appear like the oily rag that's become the engine driver. It's difficult to put a definition on what I do. I've been around for a long time, I've done a lot of work, therefore I'm aware of the problems in running the place and it's just up to me to work alongside everyone else and use the knowledge I've gained to help the place run smoothly. Roger is the director but he's Roger, I'm Tracy, and Lois is Lois. We're just people doing a job.

All manner of different people and groups use Inter-Action – Intermediate Treatment, schools, policemen, Vietnamese people, youth clubs, people who want to do workshops or just look at the animals. The main thing is, we give them a chance. We're not so interested in what they've done, as what their potential is. We try to show people their own worth but I realise that Inter-Action is just a drop in the ocean. People don't always like what we've got but there are plenty of other centres doing other things which might interest them more.

Most people don't even know where Inter-Action is but it would be greatly missed by all the people who have enjoyed the place. I've never been anywhere so long and it certainly wouldn't have held me if I hadn't thought it worthwhile. I've seen its ups and downs but through it all I still think it's a good joint.

I'm in a band called T-Bone-2 which used to be called the T-Bone Boogie Band which evolved from a jam band. All we're out for is a good time and to put on a good show. We work in pubs and do some charity work. We have also played at the Open University and the Stables but it's just really a knees-up – Jazz, Rock and Roll and Rythm and Blues – but just so people can dance and have a laugh. There is no need for anything more than that.

I live in Spencer Street but I came in there through the back door too – that's not to say I skulk around corners - but Spencer Street was already set up and going before I came to Milton Keynes. Through my work I met Tina who I've now lived with over five years and Tina lived in Spencer Street. We began our little affair which developed and that's how I moved in. I think Spencer Street works well. The fact is, it's survived six years and that's the proof. It's a group of people trying to be a community and I think that they are. It's not bound together by any philosophy, but its strength for me is its diversity which does mean that sometimes the ideals aren't reached and tasks can't be completed. We don't get up at eight o'clock and bow east or eat sandals and knit our own yoghurt, well, some people do but I'm more of a boots and beefburgers person! I don't think I'll live there forever but to ask if I'd live anywhere else in Milton Keynes is a hard question.

I'm a very content person these days. I'm content with myself. I'm not smug, but I like being me. I like my job and relationship and I like where I live. I'm not ambitious and I'm spoilt and I'm richer than most people in the world already. Many people don't eat and live in countries with heavy politics and I consider myself very fortunate. There are millions of things I want to do or develop but I'll do them in the fullness of time. But no, I'm not ambitious. Being realistic, I don't think human beings have got a lot going for them. That's not to talk about individuals. I like individuals, but I really think we're heading for destruction – not necessarily nuclear, it could be pollution or over-population or a million and one other things. But we just don't seem to get it worked out right. That's one point about Inter-Action: if people can come here and learn that they're special then they can lead a fuller life for themselves. You don't have to be famous to be special, most people are much more talented than me. I've just got a lot of bull and that's what gets me through.