

23rd January, 2020..



I am 72 and the situation on the streets with the youth today is appalling and to see this all happen in my life time is both disgraceful and upsetting.

I have employed people for well over 50 years. I have completed many Volunteer activities which have taken me to the streets but the increase in youth problems today has increased many fold over the past 10 years particularly. I am not going to bore you with the statistics, the truth be known you know them better than I.

About 2 years ago just before christmas I encountered a youth on the streets. He was walking up and down between 2 shop fronts. While doing this he was ranting, bashing the windows, kicking the front of the shops and shouting obscenities. I was parked some 15 metres away. I watched for a while and decided to intervene.

I managed to stop him and say "Hello" in turn he said "Hello" I asked why was he so upset? I had to repeat the question until he answered. It was a very genuine upset and indeed I would have been upset too! I then pointed out to him all the energy he was wasting on the problem instead of investing the same energy into solving the problem. I will never forget he stood still and maintained eye contact with me for what seemed a long time and said: "that is so obvious". There is more to the story but the point is "what sort of guidance did this young man have in his life? He was intelligent, caring and could be guided. This is just a very obvious and practical observation.

However, I bet if the intervention had occurred rather than a communication from someone who cared we would have had further upset and potentially some drug to calm him down. I have not a single doubt that this youth is capable and caring. Everyone is a unique individual but our systems seem incapable of distinguishing the differences in individuals and by necessity sometimes simple "pigeon hole" them. It all starts with communication and an ability to listen, understand and acknowledge. The emphasis in our box of solutions has to be communication skills. The single biggest failing in employment, calling suppliers and in fact dealing with anyone is their ability to listen and understand. I once had a customer totally change in front of my eyes when I listened and understood her.

Communication skills are needed desperately both in homes, institutions and schools. We have become a society that takes up the responsibility instead of insisting and helping the individual be responsible not by intimidation or threat of consequence or by drugging to subdue but by leading, inspiring, teaching and gently insisting that they can do what is

needed in any given circumstance. To do this the parents, friends, teachers, leaders etc have to know they can. Individual responsibility is something that is being lost in our society but without it we will continue to try and find ways like this commission to overcome what is a broad society problem where the solution is reduced to an assignment of responsibility to a select group of professionals appointed by the government. It is much bigger than that. I understand it has to be addressed but a real plan that addresses the various sectors of society (a big plan) is needed to change conditions.

Going back many years I managed to encourage 2 teenage girls from an institutional home to throw away gas lighter fluid that they were inhaling. I did not take it off them - I simply insisted for their own benefit to throw it away. Long story but one of the teenage girls who had been in an institution since 2 and was now 16 said "I think you are the first person I have ever met that really does care" As a society we have to care and I have no magic answer as to how you do that but it is a much bigger plan than just assigning the finding of a solution to a group of Mental Health professionals.