

**Joy Warmington**

**Ten years on, still heading in the right direction**

*Delivered at BRAP's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary event, Birmingham, 20 September 2008 (check against delivery)*

2008 is an important year for anniversaries in the equalities movement.

It's been 40 years since Enoch Powells' river of blood speech, made just down the road from here. 40 years ago Martin Luther King was assassinated after he inspired a generation of people. It's 60 years since the leaders of the world signed the universal declaration of human rights.

And of course, for of all of us here tonight – the birthday that everyone is talking about – BRAP's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

When BRAP was founded in 1998, the world was a different place. We were all a bit younger, Labour were the new popular party, the Spice Girls were in (the first time round) and petrol was 65 pence per litre.

Some things, however, don't change too much.

Back in 1998, black people were six times less likely to find work than white people.

The same is true today.

In 1998 the gender pay gap was 17% – today it's 13%.

And in 1998, the number of people living in 'severe' poverty was less than four and a half million. Today, it's over five million.

I'm not saying that we haven't made any progress on equalities issues, but if we carry on at the same rate:

- the gender pay gap won't close until 2085
- it will take another 100 years for EM to have the same job prospects as people from white ethnic groups
- and people with disabilities will probably never have the same job prospects

I used to hope that my daughter would grow up in a society without racism, sexism and discrimination. Perhaps this was naïve, but every parent hopes for better for their children.

But what these figures begin to demonstrate is that the equality I crave may not even be a reality for my grandchildren.

That's why it's important that we turn up the heat, that we step up the pace of change.

We're all (to a certain extent) privileged within this room tonight – we are the lucky ones. We are the ones who have been lifted up – some by social improvements, by educational opportunities our parents couldn't have dreamt of...an educational and social window of opportunity that we have seized while it has been open. We can afford to wait for equality.

But there are so many that can't:

Those we pass on the streets sleeping rough tonight.

The children that are excluded from schools.

The babies born to Pakistani mothers who are more likely to die before their first birthday.

The children and families that have been victims of knife and gun crime and racist attacks – in all the major cities, including our own – in those places where life is cheap and getting cheaper.

If you have worked with BRAP you will know that we will tell it like it is – we don't help you to tick boxes, or blur the truth. This agenda is too important not to tell the truth. And the truth is that we are now in a better place to help to reduce inequality than we have ever been – but only if we're prepared to acknowledge the lessons of the last ten years.

Firstly – making people richer is not enough. Look at our economy, look at the money spent on regeneration and unemployment. Yet despite this, social mobility is declining not increasing.

Despite our status as a country – we are unhappier, scared of our youth, and not able to keep our elderly warm.

Despite the revolution of ipods, mobile phones, blackberry's and the internet, we have forgotten how to communicate with each other.

Secondly, we need to address the cause of inequality – not just to tinker with the symptoms. BRAP was one of the first equality agencies in the UK to understand the importance of this, which is why you don't see us engaged in the latest fashionable projects. We know we still need to get the basics right.

And finally, a fairer, confident and more inclusive society cannot be built unless we all take responsibility for creating it. We can't sit at home, watch the news and ask 'why doesn't someone do something about it?' The challenges we will face in our not too distant future are far too similar to those of our not too distant past – recession, unemployment, higher prices, crime, tensions between communities and a growing sympathy for the far right. This will affect us all – rich or poor.

Finally, if you're not working with BRAP – this is your opportunity to do so. We need volunteers, we need willing partners and we need affiliates – not because we want to survive for another 10 years – but because we don't want to see discrimination of any kind gain any more ground. To meet this challenge it won't be enough for people to ignore the differences between them – we will have to explore what we all have in common.

If the two million people from ethnic minority communities stood together against discrimination – whether it was because of colour, class or religion – what a force for change that would be.

If the eight million people living in poverty stood up in support of each other – then someone might listen.

And if the 30 million women of this country fought for the growing women's prison population; for the 80,000+ working in prostitution and the sex industry; for migrant domestic workers who are in a new middle class slave trade; for the 60% of teenage mothers who have no educational qualifications at all; for the 1-in-4 of us who will



experience domestic violence; for those who are raped, but seeing convictions for rape falling – then we might see some changes.

And if the 60 million people in this country stood up because their fellow human beings faced unfair, unequal and discriminatory treatment – change would be unstoppable.

Until that day and with your continued support – BRAP will continue to stand.

Thank you.