

**Past and future challenges
15th anniversary conference - 7 April 2008**



Speech by Brigitte Chaudhry

Today it is 15 years to the day since RoadPeace held their public launch – on the anniversary day of the World Health Organisation, which in 1993 was dedicated to the prevention of death and injury through violence and negligence. This topic we considered very appropriate for the launch of the UK's first charity for road crash victims.

Within those 15 years, over 50,000 people have lost their lives on UK roads, and more than four and a half million were reported injured.

During all that time, RoadPeace supported the bereaved and injured and has been their voice. Throughout, we campaigned for an improved post crash response – a response fitting to the loss of life and quality of life and equal to society's responses to other wrongful acts or disasters.

It is almost impossible now to recall the deep level of neglect suffered by road victims at the time, or the shocking absence of any systematic procedures. The article Hidden Victims, included in the conference pack, is a reminder of the plight of road victims; this quote from it is from a bereaved mother:

...I felt that our right as parents and our son's right for justice were nowhere to be found. We were supposed to disappear in the background and not to question anything and not to expect to be given any answers. The grief, loss and hurt will never go away, but we were made to feel that to point this out is an imposition...

It was therefore astonishing that until RoadPeace came into existence, there was no charity for this huge group of traumatised and suffering people, almost 100 years from the first death by a car and millions of lives lost and blighted since then - in a country that has a charity for virtually every problem. There were some specific campaigns, but not a charity, and even Victim Support, who were government funded to assist victims, excluded road crash victims.

But on the other hand, looking back at the relentless struggle of the past 15/16 years – the hurdles, hard work, experiences of unfairness and frustration – by so many of us at RoadPeace and myself personally, it no longer appears so surprising that for such a long time no-one took up this onerous task.

Thus RoadPeace was very much a pioneering organisation, and the Mayor, about whose presence today we are very pleased, has known our charity from

the start – as my MP at the time I was setting it up, while I was simultaneously struggling through 3 Judicial Review proceedings, for which he gave supportive media interviews.

Several of RoadPeace's other valued patrons, each representing different areas relevant to the post crash stage – criminal and civil law, public health and trauma – began to work with RoadPeace early on and support us in our work. This included attending ministerial meetings with us, speaking at our conferences, lectures and seminars, and on occasion preparing joint responses to relevant Government consultations, of which there were countless over the years.

At first it was difficult to know where to start or which challenges to take on first. The conference pack includes examples of RoadPeace's pioneering work and I will touch on some of these:

- Most important was the helpline, which was the first helpline for victims, preceding by several years the Victim Supportline, and even by longer some of the others that followed.
- Then our surveys: RoadPeace conducted from the outset a continuous survey of victims' needs and their experiences with the agencies they encountered. This investigation was the only documentary evidence of its kind and was used by a Government working party (1992-1994) to draw up 80 recommendations for improved practices by all agencies, including to provide written information for victims.
- RoadPeace was first in producing this – our 'Guide through the aftermath of road death' in early 1995. We now have separate Guides for specific areas, including on road death investigation - the first such Guide for victims.

In Spring 1993, RoadPeace became a member of the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims, FEVR, and later took part in a unique Europe-wide study into the 'causes of the decline in quality of life and living standards suffered by road crash victims and families'. The most notable findings were the experience of injustice by almost 100% of the UK respondents, greater than anywhere else in Europe.

RoadPeace finds injustice towards road crash victims particularly abhorrent and would like to see the words of Martin Luther King serve as a warning, that ***'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere'***.

- We have campaigned for a law change almost from the very first day, backed up by a petition with fifty thousand signatures delivered to Parliament. The lack of recognition of the fact of death in charge and proceedings was and is especially hurtful and unacceptable to victim families.

In July 1998, RoadPeace launched a Campaign for Justice for Road Traffic Victims. The second 5-year term ends this summer, but many of our demands, spanning 6 key areas, will continue to need implementation or further improvements, and we will monitor this.

The presentations today will cover the recent development in four of the key areas; therefore I will only mention the last two:

■ **Medical care to national standards** – At present road injury is not a priority for the Health sector and this has a direct effect on the funding of care. The Accidental Injury Task Force is only considering prevention and not post crash care. Two reports by the Royal College of Surgeons have acknowledged that consistent trauma care for the severely injured is not available.

■ **Strategic approach by all relevant government departments**

There is still lack of joint working between all the departments responsible for our issues, and of a fair approach to post crash assistance or organisations working for road victims.

Part of our Justice Campaign, was an All Party Parliamentary Group for Justice for Road Traffic Victims, set up in 1998 and now supported by 150 MPs and Peers. Our next meeting on 7th May is on strict liability laws.

For six years every month, we also held a vigil outside the House of Commons - to highlight the monthly road death and injury toll.

RoadPeace introduced many more ways of drawing wider attention to this ongoing disaster and of remembering victims. I will only mention a few:

- Internet memorials on the RoadPeace website
- Remember Me roadside memorials – 3000 plaques are placed nationwide
- Planting trees at the RoadPeace Wood – within the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire
- Observing August as Road Victim Month, with many special ceremonies
- Publishing victim testimonies, and
- **World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims**

RoadPeace was instrumental in bringing this day into existence in 1993 and has observed and promoted it for over a decade with their European sister organisations. As the result, the United Nations adopted the Day in October 2005 as World Day of Remembrance – *‘an appropriate acknowledgement for victims of road traffic crashes and their families’*.

Following this, RoadPeace and FEVR in collaboration with the World Health Organisation produced a Handbook for observing World Day events, launched in Geneva in April 2007. I am now working on a worldday website.

One of RoadPeace’s three founding aims, next to support of victims and research, was the promotion of road danger reduction, which means that RoadPeace was also pioneering in this particular road safety approach, which seeks to address the source of road danger, not only the outcome.

- Speeding was targeted by RoadPeace in 1995 with an anti-speed campaign and later the production of 'Tough on Speed, tough on the causes of speed', the first anti-speeding publication at the time.
- And RoadPeace campaigned against the Government policy demanding multiple deaths and injuries before allowing a speed camera; against red light violation, which so far was never the subject of an official campaign, and the appalling offence of hit and run.
- Last April, to mark the first UN Global Road Safety Week, RoadPeace and the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims published 'Black boxes for safer and greener travel' – recommending the use of black boxes to reduce road death and injury, and carbon emissions.

'Crash not Accident' has been a long time, increasingly successful campaign by RoadPeace.

I will end the list here.

I know that we did not work in isolation; that many parties worked towards similar aims, and we look forward to hearing from key spokespeople in the course of today.

Together, we have ensured that the issues of road death, road injury and road victim treatment are firmly on the political agenda, from which - I feel sure - they can never again be removed.

RoadPeace undoubtedly played a key role in starting this process. The wrongful deaths and injuries of our loved ones and the way they have been treated have forced us into becoming experts in this area and campaigners for change, but today's anniversary hopefully marks the end of 15 years of struggle for recognition of road victims' rights.

So what work lies ahead in future?

In past years, once the way was paved, many new organisations and bodies for road crash victims have appeared and new ones are coming into existence. They do not all complement each other, and can even duplicate work or give different messages, which can be confusing or even unhelpful to victims.

And relevant Government departments and agencies have introduced provisions for victims and for post crash procedures, which have yet to be applied consistently nationwide, at satisfactory standards.

So a clear role is emerging for the RoadPeace of the next 15 years...

As the sole charity with the aim of representing the interests of road crash victims and campaigning for their rights and justice for them, it will fall to RoadPeace to check and monitor whether the promised provisions and procedures are applied nationwide and at minimum quality standards in all areas.

RoadPeace's past record and the research credentials of their Executive Director Amy Aeron-Thomas are excellent pre-requisites for such a role.

Which brings me to what I want to say last :-

I take today's event as the opportunity to announce my stepping down from the day to day involvement with RoadPeace. I am happy that I can leave a confident organisation in the hands of a competent director – Amy Aeron-Thomas, and chair - Cynthia Barlow, with a team of dedicated people behind them.

I would like to thank everyone who has worked with us and for road crash victims in the past 15 years.

I will of course stay in touch, but will now concentrate on my present role as president of the European Federation, with all the challenges and opportunities this brings, including participation in international initiatives and meetings. I attended the 8th UN/WHO Road Safety Collaboration meeting only last week at the United Nations in New York, where for a second time a historic resolution on the need to tackle road danger globally was passed. There I found another quote on justice, to end my speech – it is by John D Rockefeller Jnr.: “**...truth and justice are fundamental to an enduring social order**”.

I now have great pleasure in handing over to John Stewart, our one time chair, SafetyFirst editor, Advisor and much appreciated colleague and co-campaigner.