

Speech: “People are really good at heart”: speech to the Anne Frank Trust

“In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart.”

That idea, so simply and so beautifully expressed by a young girl more than 70 years ago, has been sorely tested of late.

In recent months and years, hatred, bigotry and sometimes violent intolerance of others has crept back into popular consciousness.

It springs from and targets all communities, and it manifests itself in a variety of ways.

We’ve seen vicious abuse doled out online, going way beyond the boundaries of legitimate debate.

We’ve seen a spike in hate crime on the streets of Britain, including a significant surge in reports of anti-Semitic abuse.

And of course we’ve seen the shocking, disgusting murder of a bright young Member of Parliament at the hands of a hate-fuelled extremist.

Brendan, I think I speak for everyone here when I say that your strength, courage and positivity in the face of such a tragedy has been an inspiration to us all.

Of course, hatred of people who are different is nothing new.

What’s different today is that we have no excuses for not tackling it.

We have all seen, too many times, where hatred leads if left unchecked.

We all know the harm that can be inflicted on people and the damage that can be done to communities if we allow bigotry to spread and divisions to grow.

In 2017, we can’t look the other way and pretend we didn’t know what was happening.

Each of us has a moral duty to tackle hatred and prejudice.

And the Anne Frank Trust is undoubtedly leading from the front in doing just that.

Every year the Trust reaches out to 30,000 schoolchildren, shaping and changing attitudes in the next generation.

It has delivered more than 100 projects in 70 prisons, bringing its vital message to people who are too often overlooked in the fight against bigotry.

And its touring exhibitions have taken the lessons of Anne's life and death into the heart of communities right across the UK.

Thanks to the Trust, countless men, women and children around the world have pledged to stand up for what is right, to defend those who cannot defend themselves, and to strive for a world in which our differences make no difference.

It's incredible work and I'm proud to support it.

I'm also proud to be part of a government that's serious about tackling hate crime.

We already have one of the strongest legislative frameworks in the world.

Last year we published our new [anti-hate crime strategy](#), which included £1 million for projects specifically targeted at young people.

Today I'm delighted to announce that [we're giving another £375,000](#) to five groups working with communities that face challenges in reporting hate crime.

These organisations work with a huge range of people.

Gypsies and travellers, religious and ethnic groups, even members of alternative sub-cultures such as goths.

The scope of these projects shows that hatred and bigotry is something that affects millions of lives across the country.

And I should know.

It's something I've experienced myself.

Growing up in the 70s and 80s, and looking like I do, it was kind of inevitable.

There's one incident that stands out, when I was at school and a fellow pupil called me a "Paki" to my face.

I should have taken the moral high road and challenged his behaviour.

Instead, I did what you probably wouldn't expect of a future Cabinet Minister.

I punched him.

In the face.

And then he hit me back...

And all that happened was that we both got in trouble with the head.

20 years later I was in a lift in a Bristol shopping centre, when the doors opened and this guy stepped in.

I recognised him instantly.

And he recognised me.

And then, out of nowhere, he said:

“Saj, I’m sorry for what I did. I’m so sorry.”

He’d changed.

He’d learned that the way he treated me back then was wrong.

He’d learned the damage that abusive language could do.

And he was raising his own kids to see that racism was unacceptable.

For me, it showed that, yes, “people are really good at heart”.

We are capable of changing.

We can see the error of our ways.

That’s why it’s so important that we educate young people about where hatred can lead.

They are the parents, the leaders, the opinion-formers of tomorrow.

The new national Holocaust Memorial will have a huge role to play in making this happen.

I’m proud to be leading the project, and very happy to say that concept designs will be unveiled later today.

I’m also very happy to have Robert on our educational advisory panel.

Few people know as much about using education to challenge bigotry.

That’s why I applaud the work of the Anne Frank Trust, and of anyone who devotes themselves to tackling prejudice in all its forms.

Because we all have a moral duty to stand up to hatred.

And we’ve all seen what can happen if we don’t.

Thank you.