

## Just say hello

**A simple greeting could go a long way to combating racism in Derry according to a Chinese woman who has lived in Northern Ireland for 20 years.**

Some 500 Chinese people are living and working in the city and yet the majority of these will rarely be seen outside of their family and community.

As a result Chinese people are misunderstood and become the targets of jokes and name-calling. If not addressed this can escalate into serious racist abuse.

According to Karen Scrivens, Community Relations Officer, Sai Pak Chinese Welfare Association, the solution to this is for more effort to be made in both the Chinese community and the local community to integrate and communicate beyond the Chinese takeaway counters. Karen explains: "What I think is the cause of racism is misunderstanding. Many Chinese people here are working in restaurants and many in the kitchen so they don't have to communicate much. They may have been here for 30 years but don't speak the language very well. I think it is for the local community to greet them a bit more but the last time I did a talk a lot of the people said the only time they see Chinese people is behind a counter and they don't really get to meet them.

"People will come and talk to me about an incident of racism and I will tell them to report it to the police. But to them it is only a minor thing. They don't realise that after a few times it can escalate. I always say to them if you don't want to report it at least tell me, it can be recorded and I can help you. The Chinese hate anything to do with paperwork but police want records.

"I did hear of one family whose Chinese takeaway was targeted and their car was damaged. This worries the whole family and therefore the whole community. But at the same time I don't know if the Chinese people did anything wrong to provoke this.

"I know that Chinese people do not report crime because of the time it takes to be investigated. For the Chinese community time is money. If you report a crime you have to be interviewed by a special detective and that takes time. In my experience it can take 2 – 5 years before a crime is solved so many do not report anything.

"The biggest problem is communication. Racism is a difficult topic to talk about and you will find that Chinese people won't want to talk about it. For most of them they won't have experienced it so they may be scared of offending you if they talk about it in general terms.

"It annoys me that people do not talk to me and ask me about myself. They talk 'about' me. I would like people to see me as Karen rather than Chinese because I don't see myself as Chinese unless I look in the mirror. I think both sides need to know more about each others cultures. The fact is that like any people you cannot put Chinese people into one category. The Chinese come from three different countries. Some may even be American even though their origin is Chinese.

"It's like Northern Ireland. They talk about Catholic and Protestants but there are all kinds of religions here. Some things are not catered for in the Chinese community or ethnic minority communities. It's our responsibility to give out information about our culture. It's up to the individual to make an effort. I find that many Chinese only talk among themselves. This needs to change."

## About this story

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