

## Personal Stories of Change

**Kathy Eales:** A perspective from an independent researcher and consultant

*“I’ve had to talk to and work closely with some people I previously felt quite antagonistic towards – and I’ve come to admire and respect the integrity of their thinking and its direct relevance and value to my own work and thinking.”*



**I’ve been involved in the South Africa dialogue process for four years. More and more I realise how profoundly the process has remoulded my thinking about what is needed to ensure good services, and what really matters. More importantly, I’ve been tipped out of my comfort zone. I’ve had to talk to and work closely with some people I previously felt quite antagonistic towards – and I’ve come to admire and respect the integrity of their thinking and its direct relevance and value to my own work and thinking.**

I can’t say there have been blinding, road-to-Damascus kind of revelations; rather, the four year process has provided the space for a steady drip-feed of new ideas and other viewpoints, and a steady assimilation of different ways of thinking, layer by layer, theme by theme. I’m more alert to the blind spots in my own convictions and more and more I find myself playing devil’s advocate in my own head, working to test the stress points in my own arguments and increasingly acknowledging the merits of other thinking. I’m fascinated by how dialectical the process has been – how confrontative dialogue has worked to locate and examine the points of difference and sharpen our, and my, insight into new ways of moving forward. Our recommendations for moving forward reflect the diverse strengths of our thinking, with the best of each reflected in the whole.

And now, as we work frantically to hone and edit our findings and recommendations, I’m amazed to see how far we’ve all come, in building a new language of constructive engagement, and practising greater respect for viewpoints that are different to our own. There’s been some remarkable convergence on what the core problems are and how best we can overcome them. To a degree that would have been inconceivable previously. An impressive, useful process!