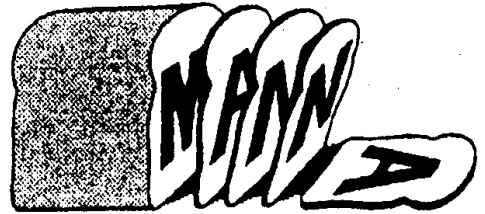


The Manna Society

Newsletter

Christmas 2008



Working with those in need



Merry Christmas

The work of Christmas

By

Margaret Shapland

Welfare & Advice Worker



"It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you...yes, it is Christmas every time you smile at your brother and offer him your hand."

Mother Teresa

At the time of writing this, it feels like the most inspiring of weeks – not just for the remarkable nature of the events themselves – the election of the first African American President - Barack Obama and the triumph of the youngest Formula One champion in the history of that sport – Lewis Hamilton but for everything they represent and the message it sends to all of us – that all of us have the power to write our own script in life.

But both of them acknowledged that this is not achieved alone – it needed people to believe in them, whether it was their families or others and so it is for all of us – we all at some time in our lives need someone to offer their hand in friendship or to give us aid, as Mother Teresa would exhort us to do whatever the season.

So let me speak about what that helping hand can mean.

"I am not alone at all, I thought. I was never alone at all. And that, of course, is the message of Christmas. We are never alone. Not when the night is darkest, the wind coldest, the world seemingly most indifferent – For this is the time that God chooses" - Taylor Caldwell (Writer)

One of the features of this year has been the impression that those who have recently arrived from abroad seeking refuge have had upon me. Someone who sticks in my mind was a young man – let's call him Abel - who had been a journalist in Eritrea and also a Pentecostal Christian, a religious persuasion that is not tolerated in Eritrea. He had served time in prison for his beliefs and had made the long journey by whatever means to seek refuge in the United Kingdom.

This he gained and set about re-building his life, found private rented accommodation and looking for work here. Whilst in this accommodation, he was assaulted by a fellow resident in a sexually predatory sense. He left –making himself homeless, rough sleeping and exacerbating the mental health issues he had. He approached another voluntary agency that could not help him as they did not have any referral rights into housing projects, so they asked us if we could help.

We were lucky enough to find him space in a supported housing project in Lewisham with a provider that has lots of other projects that support people into volunteering, training or employment (we organized the referral and the interview and the agency who introduced him to us accompanied him to the interview to support him). I hadn't seen him for about nine months but I bumped into him in the offices of the supported housing provider. He happened to be there as he was attending a briefing for a series of workshops he was due to run helping people with disabilities to use creative writing as a route to expressing themselves. He isn't in work yet but he is happy, he is in turn, lending a helping hand to others to discover themselves through the power of writing.

"The message of the Christmas tree is that life is "ever green" if one gives: not so much material things, but of oneself: in friendship and sincere affection, and fraternal help and forgiveness, in shared time and reciprocal listening" – Pope John Paul II (2004)

There is great emphasis currently on getting people who have been on incapacity benefits back to work. I am sure readers that you have seen all the publicity relating to this. About a month ago, we were visited by a centre user whom we had not seen for sometime – his name is Leon. He is a recovering alcoholic. We had known him for many years, many of which were spent "in drink", resulting in numerous brushes with the police, with other agencies being involved, sleeping on the street, even occasionally getting barred from the centre when his behaviour became unnecessarily disruptive.

To cut a long story short, Leon decided he wanted to follow a new path, did detox, went into rehab and was re-settled. Just recently, he was called for a DWP medical and judged fit for work. He came in to see us and having known him for some years and how vulnerable he still is from a mental health perspective, we all felt that if he was to go back to work just yet, then it was highly probable that he would return to the drink.

Leon seems very confident and very articulate on the surface but this hides a seething mass of insecurities, anxiety, depression, isolation and paranoia – he talks a good fight but he knows his recovery is fragile and he is still on his “journey” – he still has things to learn, to come to terms with. Obviously, we believe that anyone who is genuinely fit for work should do so but in this case, both Leon and ourselves felt that an appeal against the decision was justified.

So, we went through the paper-work connected with the decision, talked about areas that the person assessing him might have missed and wrote the support to the appeal and organized for a benefits worker to accompany him to the hearing. The appeal was accepted and Leon can continue for a while with maintaining his recovery but we also talked about how he might learn to value himself more and give something of himself – the upshot was a link back into a volunteering programme, where he can apply his many skills which have often gone unrecognized in his working life. We all know this is not the end solution and that one day he will return to work. In my humble opinion, he would be incredibly good at helping people who are going through similar experiences to himself.

“What is Christmas? It is tenderness for the past, courage for the present, hope for the future. It is a fervent wish that every cup may overflow with blessings rich and eternal, and that every path may lead to peace” - Agnes M Pharo (Writer)

I am struck by how many of our centre users leave us for a while and then return from their wanderings. They go off in all directions to the far-flung edges of the West Country or the outer rim of the Highlands – we don’t see them for months and then they come back and if they want our help to find them somewhere to rest

their head until the wander lust strikes again, then so be it, that is what we are here for.

I can only assume that they come back because they know that they will be welcome, that we won’t pressure them – we only hope that they let us and anywhere they are staying know that they plan to go on these little voyages of discovery – we just want to know they are safe.

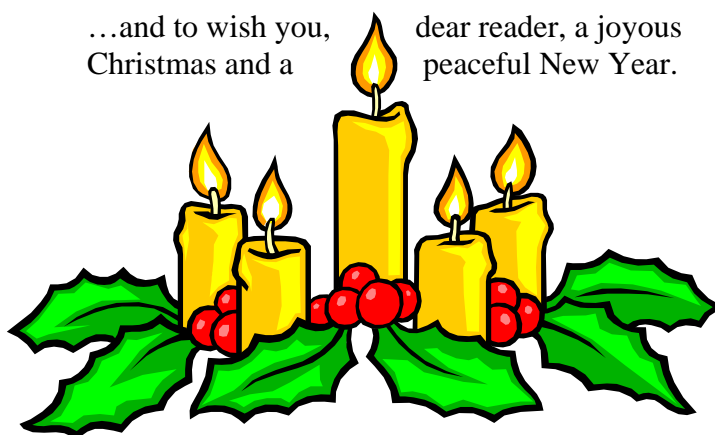
One has just returned to our fold and he is back to helping us out by volunteering while he decides what he wants to do and maybe, though I am only guessing, that these wanderings help people to find some inner peace. All I would say is that it is lovely to see them and great to have them back at any time but particularly as the Christmas season approaches so together we can celebrate the greatest event in the Christian calendar.

But the meaning of that event goes as we know far beyond the day itself and I would just like to leave you with a little poem that truly sums up the spirit of Christmas...

*"When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with the flocks,
then the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal those broken in spirit,
to feed the hungry,
to release the oppressed,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among all peoples,
to make a little music with the heart...*

*And to radiate the Light of Christ,
every day, in every way, in all that we do and in
all that we say.
Then the work of Christmas begins” – Howard
Thurman (1900-1981) minister, educator, civil
rights leader*

...and to wish you, dear reader, a joyous
Christmas and a peaceful New Year.



Manna Centre Update

By

Paddy Boyle

Manna Centre Director



In our Summer Newsletter and on our website we have been highlighting the fact that rough sleepers in the City of London are being woken in the middle of the night and being told to move so that their sleeping site can be washed down.

Broadway, the agency responsible for addressing the issue of rough sleeping in the City, argue that this is a small (and regrettable) part of an overall Corporation of London strategy, which has helped reduce the number of rough sleepers overall. Personally I would argue that this is harassment of an already marginalised and vulnerable group and that the ends do not justify the means.

Broadway are of the opinion that this controversial part of the strategy, the washing down, is now much reduced and is just being aimed at “hot spots”. Some of the rough sleepers themselves take issue with this and claim that “washing down” is still a regular occurrence. Regardless of the efficacy, “washing down” is a shameful tactic which should be stopped.

On a brighter note, once again this year we have had a marvellous response to our Harvest Festival appeal. Well over 100 churches and schools have passed on their Harvest goods to us. The food received will enable us to provide a breakfast and lunch to over 150 homeless and needy individuals every day for the next 12 months.

A former user of the centre Dean Johnson was our guest speaker at our Annual General meeting on the 17th September. He gave a moving account of his journey from his life on the streets, through his battle with alcohol addiction to independent living.

At the AGM also the Manna Society Committee for the previous year was duly re-elected. The only new Committee member is Canon Michael Cooley (better known as Fr Michael), whose church, Our Lady of La Salette & St Joseph is 50 yards further along Melior Street from us. Fr Michael has been closely associated with us and

has served both the spiritual and material needs of our clients since coming to La Salette in September 1983. Rachael Mallinson, a former mental health worker with the START Team, was also co-opted on to the Management Committee.

Our new A10 Worker, Milena Koczaska, started with us on the 27th September. She introduces herself on the page opposite. Milena will advise our A10 clients regarding employment and training. I would like to say a genuine thanks to Milena's predecessor Kasia for all she did for our A10 clients and to wish her all the best for the future.

Christmas Dinner Day will be on Friday 19th December. As usual we will have two sittings catering for 80-85 people per sitting. We will provide a full Christmas dinner, a choice of desserts – Christmas pudding or trifle, followed by mince pies and coffee. Everyone will also receive a Christmas present provided this year and last by Better Bankside (local businesses).

The centre will be closed for a week from Tuesday 23rd December, reopening Tuesday 30th. During this week our clients can access the services provided by Crisis at their Open Christmas.

Let me finish by thanking you for your support over the past year and to wish you a blessed Christmas and much joy in the year ahead.

Thank you for your great support

Despite it being a really wet day, I managed to finish my half marathon in 1 hour 47 minutes.

Thanks to all of those who sponsored me we managed to raise over £3,200 for the centre.



Time to Get Fair

By

Bandi Mbubi

Campaigns Worker



Views range from the most optimistic to the most pessimistic about the recovery of the current global economic downturn. We do not yet fully know what the long-term impact of the current financial crisis will be on our livelihoods. However, in the short-term, we have already seen a surge in unemployment, with the CBI forecasting that it will rise by almost half a million to 2.12 million by the end of 2009, and an ever increasing number of home repossessions as people fall behind their mortgage repayment.

As governments across the world put in motion economic rescue packages to help financial institutions, it is important not to forget those most in need. There is as much need to assist those affected by poverty as there is a need to bail out the banking sector.

The current crisis is compounded by the fact that 13 million people were already living below the poverty line before the present financial crisis began. And Crisis, a sister organisation, estimated that around 400,000 people are hidden homeless, that is that they are in accommodations that is not reasonable to continue to occupy, such as when people or households are staying with friends or family, when they are involuntarily squatting, when they are in a refuge, when they are at risk of eviction or living in severely overcrowded accommodation.

Recognising the urgency of the problem we face, the Manna Society has joined hands with over 50 other organisations calling on all political parties to commit to eradicating poverty in the UK by the year 2020. It can only be done if pressure is brought to bear on political actors of all persuasions to formulate and implement policies to achieve this aim. The road to a more prosperous society passes through 3 junctions:

1. An income that meets minimum living standards;
2. Affordable housing and decent neighbourhoods;

3. Fair access to services, without discrimination.

Just as there is a bailout package for financial institutions, those affected by poverty certainly need policies which boldly aim at eradicating poverty by 2020.

Most of us belong to Churches, groups and networks that may offer opportunities to promote this campaign to GET FAIR and should you need help in doing so, the Manna Society will be more than happy to assist. An ideal time to organise events or activities to promote this campaign is during the Poverty Week running from 31st January to 8th February 2009.

Two key-dates to remember:

1st February 2009: Homelessness Sunday

8th February 2009: Poverty Action Sunday

You can find more information in the enclosed leaflet and you can download resources and guidance notes on how to hold such events and activities on the Poverty Week website

www.actionweek.org.uk In addition, you can always e-mail me at bandi@mannasociety.org.uk or phone me on 020 7403 1931.

Let's join in the struggle to eradicate poverty by 2020, **GET FAIR!**

Hello!

My name is Milena Koczaska and since September I have been the new A10 Worker at the Manna Centre.



Before I came to London I lived in Warsaw for 10 years and dealt with social campaigns in advertising and public relation. Since coming to the UK I have always dreamt of working with those less fortunate than I, so I am delighted to be at the Manna Society now!

I am happy to have an opportunity to share my experience, skills and heart with homeless people.

Osteopathy on the frontline

By Emma Chippendale,
British School of Osteopathy
Tutor



If someone we are treating at the Manna Centre osteopathy clinic is not getting better, they say so. Or they don't come back. Patient feedback at the Manna clinic is as simple as that. This is “no frills” osteopathy – a service which we are pleased to provide, but which also offers an important learning curve for the teams of British School of Osteopathy (BSO) students who work there.

There has been an osteopathy clinic at the Manna Centre since 1998. It is one of a small portfolio of outreach clinics run by the BSO – itself a registered charity and Europe's oldest and largest osteopathy training school.

Our priority at the Manna clinic is to provide the best treatment we can for our patients, especially as some of them walk for miles to use the Centre and its services.

Osteopathy is a primary healthcare system, complementary to other medical practices. It is suitable for almost anyone and can contribute to alleviating an enormous range of conditions. Osteopaths primarily work through the neuro-musculo-skeletal system, mostly on muscles and joints.

That's the textbook definition. In practical terms, as I've seen first-hand during two years leading the British School of Osteopathy's (BSO) weekly drop-in clinic at the Manna Centre, lifestyles such as sleeping out take a heavy toll on the body. We also see people who may have basic accommodation, but who either can't look after themselves or who aren't receiving the care they need. Many of our patients have some form of psycho-social issues, whether diagnosed or not.

Along with fellow BSO tutor Jeff Grumball, each Wednesday morning I lead a small team of BSO osteopathy degree students. We see between four to nine patients on a first come, first served basis after they have put their names down on our register. Sadly, we don't always have time to treat everyone – especially if we

have seen someone earlier in the morning for the first time, because we need to take a medical history for a new patient before treatment. I'm currently looking into increasing the number of students working at the clinic, and whether we can bring a portable treatment table to enable us to see three patients at once.

New patients come to us mainly through word of mouth recommendations, but the team at the Manna Centre also help spread the word. On mornings when the clinic might be quiet, the serverly staff are great at going through the building, calling out “Anyone for the osteopath?” and generally encouraging people to come and see us.

For a lot of the people we see, we're “on the frontline” of their health care options. Without a permanent address, many of them are unable to register with a GP, so we are their first port of call for all sorts of health problems – we carry out relevant clinic testing and then refer them on, where necessary, to walk-in medical centres or even A+E.

Sometimes there are simple things that we can do to help. One man we saw recently had arm and hip pain from sleeping on the ground. As well as treating him, I talked to him about putting extra clothing or padding into his shirt and trousers before he slept. Some of our patients simply come for a chat. That's valid and worth our time; social contact can relieve the physical effects of stress and worry.

Because of the holistic way that osteopathy works, we do need to take a medical and lifestyle history. We're respectful and non-judgemental about what people tell us, and it is all strictly confidential. But knowing if someone takes drugs, or drinks heavily, is important in how we will look at what's happening with their body. Unlike most GPs and health centres, we don't need patients' full names or addresses; a note on their history about what they want us to call them is fine. And, unusually for osteopaths, we don't ask them to undress. We do need to touch, and work on, the part of them that hurts, but we've learned that many of our patients can be guarded or embarrassed about their bodies, and we need to do all we can to put them at their ease.

Working at the clinic is both challenging and rewarding. It offers us the opportunity to provide osteopathy to patients who may not otherwise be able to get it. It can also be really refreshing to treat people without some of the extra administration and paperwork that is often inherent in other clinics or private practice – processing payment, dealing with health insurance claims and so on. It is an opportunity to do what we are supposed to be doing.... treating patients. And it is great when we get to see a visible improvement in patients.



One man who came to us with major lumbar spine and leg problems is now, following regular osteopathy and yoga, only experiencing a bit of stiffness – we're pleased to be able to keep him "up and running" and mobile.

For BSO students, the clinic offers a glimpse of what life in general osteopathic practice can be like – needing to provide effective care to patients one after the other during a busy clinic,

and never knowing what sort of person, with what sort of health issues, will walk in next. Most importantly, it helps them shed any misconceptions they may have had about



homeless people as simply "mad, bad or dangerous to know".

Samantha Fennell spent several of her final months before graduating from the BSO this summer (2008) working at the Manna clinic, and has continued to work there whenever she can on a voluntary basis. I can't think of a better last word than what she told me when we were chatting recently:

"I hadn't thought much about homelessness beforehand. But all the patients at the Manna clinic have hearts and souls and stories to tell. It's been a privilege and an important learning

experience for me."

For more general information about the British School of Osteopathy and its work please visit www.bso.ac.uk or contact Deborah Hyde, BSO communications officer: d.hyde@bso.ac.uk or 07956 320 486

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Manna Centre – Christmas Appeal 2008

It costs **£30,000 a month** to run the Manna Centre. The work we do here is a compassionate Christian response to homelessness and poverty. We are dependent on the goodwill of our supporters for our continued existence.

Would you like to support the work of the Manna Centre by making a one-off donation



or

perhaps consider funding our work on a longer term basis by filling in a **Standing Order** form? If you are a taxpayer and would like to add another 28% to your donation, at no extra expense to yourself, you can do so by simply Gift-Aiding your donation.

Perhaps you would consider leaving us a **legacy** in your will?

However you choose to support our work we are indeed most grateful.

May God bless you in this holy season & throughout the coming year.

I would like to donate £_____ to the Manna Centre. (Cheques payable to “The Manna Society”)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

If you are a taxpayer and would like to Gift Aid your donation please tick here ☐ and sign below.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Standing Order Form

Name and Address of your Bank/Building Society;

To the Manager of _____ Bank/Building Society

Address: _____

Post Code: _____

Instruction to your Bank/Building Society Manager:

Please pay into the account of the Manna Society – Co-operative Bank plc account No. 50109537, Sort Code 08-92-99,

The sum of £_____ (amount in words: _____)

Commencing on (date) _____

And also the same amount in every succeeding MONTH / 3 MONTHS / YEAR (circle one as appropriate)

On _____ (date of month)

Until further notice, charging the same to my account:

Name _____ (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Signature _____

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Post Code _____

Bank/Building Society Details:

Account Name:.....

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*** Please return completed form to The Manna Society, 6 Melior Street, London SE1 3QP ***