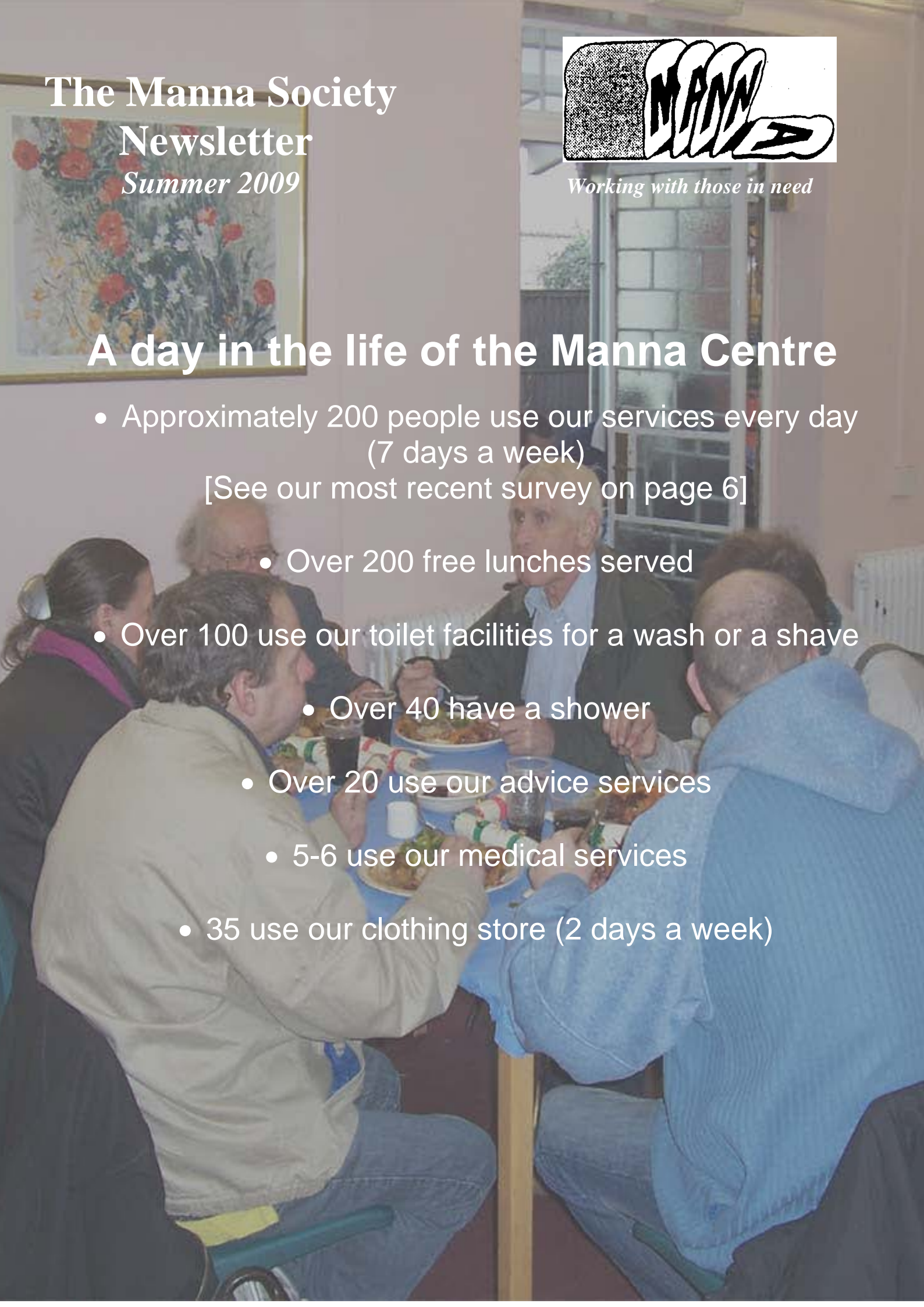


A day in the life of the Manna Centre

- Approximately 200 people use our services every day (7 days a week)
[See our most recent survey on page 6]
- Over 200 free lunches served
- Over 100 use our toilet facilities for a wash or a shave
 - Over 40 have a shower
 - Over 20 use our advice services
 - 5-6 use our medical services
- 35 use our clothing store (2 days a week)



Bad times, good times

By

Milena Koczaska

A10 Advice Worker



This article is about the recession, opportunities and the resulting sorrow and frustration these opportunities bring. The situations and ideas I want to write about are surely not fresh nor new, but are more prominent in times of crisis.

A newspaper article I read recently said that probably 6 millions Europeans will lose their jobs next year because of the present economic recession. It is hard to envisage a worse situation. Undoubtedly there are many countries much poorer than European countries but in my work here in London I see so many people who are lost, looking for a job for a long time, with no money, no hope and no home. Bad times cause people to lose their jobs and in spite of trying their best, their chances of finding employment again seem to become more and more distant and they become frustrated and desperate. But bad times also create the possibility of good times for others. A time for devious, cheeky and cruel ideas.

In the last few months I have tried to help those who have been taken advantage of, usually homeless Polish men. In many cases those who were exploiting the vulnerability of these men were fellow Poles, sometimes Polish Gypsies and at other times by other Polish nationals. Using the weakness of the most vulnerable is simply incredibly inhuman but seems to be true and occurs very often now.

Let's start from Poland. You live there but you know there is probably a better piece of world somewhere else. You've lost your job or maybe you work but your wages are so poor that it's very difficult to survive. When you spot an advert saying an agency will take you to the UK, it's a very attractive offer, one too good to miss out on. Yes, it is true that you will need to spend some money in order to get there but once you're there the rewards will be worth it. There is a good job and accommodation waiting for you in the UK. It is so easy, just take your last savings, borrow some money from friends, family and go to heaven (beware; you will experience your private hell!!!). Who cares at that moment if the recruitment agency is formally registered, that the agency

does not have a contact address and gives only a telephone number (and usually a mobile one at that). You don't worry overly about not receiving a receipt for the money you've given, you are so excited about the new opportunity, you are so proud that you will be able to send money to your family very soon.

Let's look at another scenario. When in Poland Michael was a "national" of the streets, likes a drink, probably too much, tried to settle down but has always had problems with finding or keeping a job and there was no partner willing to trust him. Michael is really a sensitive and good person but he cannot keep the rhythm of the world.

One day he meets people who tell him there is a different world somewhere else and it is not really far from Poland. Come on, go to the UK, we assure you will get a job there; we will provide accommodation and deal with the other formalities. Michael gets the wind in his wings, someone is trying to help him, someone believes in his abilities even though he has lost faith in himself some time ago. It is easy now to take the chance and to start a new, better life.

This is the moment you and Michael have just arrived to the UK. You both have feelings of loneliness and alienation, though these will probably go away very soon as you are about to start a new job. There are a few possible scenarios that will happen very quickly now. I will tell about three of them.

You will be met by the UK representative of the agency and asked to pay more money to secure your accommodation. Although you begin to get wary, having already covered this fee in Poland and without much money left, you are alone between strangers and still have some of your initial faith. Having paid this additional fee the agency representative leaves you alone on the street because he needs to fix a matter concerning your accommodation. No worries, he will be back in few minutes. Minutes pass one by one, you are getting more and more suspicious, and you are SCARED. No money, no friends, no faith anymore. Who could have known there was a back exit in that building?

Let's come back to Michael. He was taken to his accommodation and given a meal. An appointment with a bank has already been arranged and everything seems to be in progress.

Michael cannot speak English but they will help him, there is nothing to be worry about. A Bank account has already been opened and a bank card and PIN are on the way. Michael attends a job interview; he could not understand what it was about but still believes in his carers. Days pass and there is no job, his “friends” are not so nice anymore. When he discovers his documents have vanished he realises it is time to escape. Escape to the streets.

The third scenario can happen either to those who are new to the UK or those who have already spent sometime here but have been unable to get a job. Someone you meet, usually by accident, invites you to go outside of London and gives a promise there is a job and reasonable money waiting. Maybe this is a good chance to settle yourself and make some money at least?! Quick decision, they have a car and are offering a lift, a job and accommodation. No time to lose. Yes!

There is indeed a job waiting for you. Days of hard labour and low pay - waking up at 5am and working to 8 pm. Every day the same. Can this really be happening, can you really be treated in this way? One week has passed; your rate of pay appears to be 40-50 pounds per WEEK. You have lost all hope, you are isolated and far from any support. If you want to keep your sanity and to survive you MUST escape.

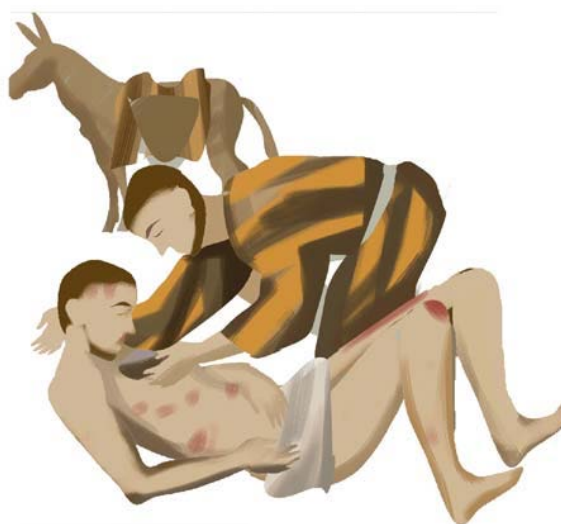
All the above scenarios result in: no home, no friends, no money, depression, no documents and no opportunity to improve your English. Also all bank cards, NINO cards and personal documents end up in the “carers” hands.

All the people who experienced such situations will get support from day centres such as our own. But it is very difficult to find them accommodation and employment. They have no access to UK benefits. Despite being offered tickets to return to Poland they prefer to stay, are afraid of families’ and friends’ reaction or there is nothing to return to. If they stay here, it is not unusual for alcohol to become their closest friend and for their homelessness to become more and more entrenched. Where are their real homes? What do their future hold?

It is a very common practice for the “carers” (already mentioned above) to start using the identity of the victims. Bank overdraft, child credit tax or other benefits fraud are common outcomes. Unfortunately it is very difficult to solve these problems. The Metropolitan Police are not really interested in investigating such cases as they feel there are just too many to pursue. The Inland Revenue also seem to be unable to prevent such frauds. A lot of public funds are being wasted e.g. Child tax credits are being paid to parents of non existing children.

However I still work on it. I believe my and my clients’ efforts and patience will be rewarded; telephone calls, bank, tax office and Jobcentre appointments must eventually produce results.

There is a saying “there must be a good balance in the world”. Does this justify and explain why bad times result in good times for those without any compunction?



Reasons for & responses to homelessness

By

Margaret Shapland

Welfare & Advice Worker



“The life expectancy of someone sleeping rough is estimated to be 42 years, half that of the average UK citizen and worse than Ethiopia or the Republic of Congo” (Still Dying for a Home – Crisis)

The above statistic is horrifying but from time to time, it acts as a worthy reminder of why organisations such as ours exist.

For this particular newsletter, instead of looking at case studies of people we have assisted, I thought we could look at the reasons why people do become homeless and some of the activities we are undertaking or projects we have linked with that can help us at The Manna Centre become more effective at providing help for people who find themselves in such a predicament.

“Imagine my surprise,” the former policewoman turned hostel manager said to me, “when I walked into the room to find my former police chief among the clients.” (Ending Homelessness – Vision to Action: Homeless Link)

The truth is that anyone of us could become homeless, but there is a greater likelihood of becoming homeless if:

You were in care or had a disturbed childhood

A report from Broadway, a large organisation involved with seeing homeless clients from all background conducted a survey called “Street to Home” which established that about 12% of all rough sleepers had a background where they had been in care – in our experience even though they may have been resettled into accommodation but lack of independent living skills or support whilst in the accommodation can offer lead to that accommodation being lost.

Suffer from mental health issues or are fighting an addiction

An investigation into health needs among rough sleepers by the Department of Communities and

Local Government established that 8% of all households who were accepted by local authorities on the basis that mental health needs made them more vulnerable. The same survey established that between 30-50% of rough sleepers had some form of mental health issue and that a significant number were fighting an addiction – either drugs or alcohol-based.

Have been in the armed forces

Around 6% of all rough sleepers have a background which includes a period in the armed forces. Some 20,000 individuals leave the armed forces each year and Veteran’s Aid (the Ex-services charity with whom the centre has the most contact) reported in their last annual report that the number of contacts made by veterans is increasing, the number of calls doubling over the last six months.

“You’re never more than two wage packets away from homelessness” – Ex-services veteran

Have spent time in prison

Broadway in their “Street to Home” survey established that 42 per cent of rough sleepers contacted in London have been in prison and Department of Communities and Local Government have cited Home Office research which indicates that re-offending rates are affected by housing. Recent Home Office research suggests that stable accommodation can reduce re-conviction rates by over 20%.

Changes to the legislation relating to priority in homelessness has helped those who have had a history of offending and more recently, within our own borough, a pilot scheme called “The Diamond Initiative” was put in place in a number of London Boroughs including Southwark. It remit is to help resettle offenders who perhaps have not had significant prison terms but repeat offend by bringing together resources from the police, probation, local authority housing to support and work with them to get them into accommodation and in other areas of their lives.

Are from a minority ethnic community

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) research states that ethnic minority households are around three times more

likely to become statutorily homeless than the majority white population. Black African and black Caribbean groups are particularly vulnerable to homelessness, being twice as likely to be accepted as homeless as people of Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin.

In May alone, the advice service saw the highest number of individuals with an ethnic background that was African – 40% of all our clients were of African ethnic origin and many were seeking housing assistance. This is a trend in the service.

Have migrated to this country from Eastern or central European or arrived as an asylum seeker

Research by Homeless Link found that 15 per cent of people accessing London's day centres, night shelters and outreach teams in March 2006 were A8 nationals and our centre continues to be used as a safe place and as a source of informed advice through the A10 service to this community. We have already done a significant amount of work in helping clients access private accommodation, supporting them to obtain access to local authority-run rent deposit schemes, helping them access night shelters in the general advice service as well as through the A10 service.

Broadway conducted research that showed in a one night count of London hostels 19 per cent of bed spaces were occupied by refugees and asylum seekers. The transition between being supported in NASS accommodation whilst awaiting outcome of any asylum case to being given leave to remain whereupon many are expected to resolve their benefit claim and find other forms of accommodation which is almost impossible as most hostels, private rented landlords require a letter showing that their benefits are in payment – a process which generally takes the Department of Work and Pensions 3 weeks to complete. We are lucky in that over the worst winter months we have access to the ROBES night shelter project which allows us to help people who find themselves in this situation.



Contributing structural factors

Alongside these more “personal” factors cited above, there are a number of other factors that contribute to the risk of becoming homeless, these being:

- Shortage of affordable accommodation
- Unemployment
- Low incomes
- Debt
- Navigation of the Welfare benefits system
- Trends in residential care and community care
- Migration – e.g. economic migrants from accession states, refugees.

Part of our job is to facilitate finding that affordable accommodation, help people access training opportunities that can help them better their chances of finding work, help them with any debt management issue by advocating for them or linking them with specialist advisors if there are complex requirements and help them understand and navigate the benefits system, the social services environment and sign post to the appropriate services for immigration support.

Over the last few months, we have been working to find more access to accommodation among housing projects to give us the best possible chance to assist people and lately, have started a research programme in the London Boroughs nearest to the Manna centre looking at housing provision in housing associations that can be accessed by means other than local authority nomination or through choice-based lettings schemes – that being the route for the majority of housing stock held by housing associations. This is a refresher piece of work to see how things have changed and to update us. It is yielding some interesting opportunities.

Another beneficial opportunity which has become more accessible to centres such as ourselves is access to rough sleeper provision through the Clearing House. The Clearing House has access to a substantial number of properties allocated to them specifically to house rough sleepers. Previously, most access was controlled through the hostel resettlement route or through outreach teams. This is changing to include centres such as ours and as long as we are convinced that the person fits the criteria, meets

the assessment and will be able to sustain a general needs tenancy, then we can put them forward. We can also link them into tenancy support through sustainment teams but can also provide some of that support ourselves – we do that already for a significant number of clients

In conclusion, though the opening quote brings the reality of rough sleeping into stark relief, it only heightens the desire among us who work among such a community to try and be as resourceful as we and to mine the resourcefulness that exists among our clients so we make sure that more rough sleepers have greater longevity, a home and the support they need to create the security they need and to build the future they want for themselves.

“It's not the troubles we run into, it's what we do about them which determines their net effect upon our lives ... by the very act of trying, our spirit is making progress” – Dr. Nick Baylis, Cambridge University

Manna Centre users survey results
Wednesday 20th May 2009

	Numbers	%
Male	183	91.5
Female	17	8.5
Sleeping Rough	96	48.0
Council/HA flat	54	27.0
Squat	28	14.0
Hostel	11	5.5
Friends	8	4.0
Other	3	1.5
Ethnic Origin		%
	Numbers	
A10	82	41.0
English	56	28.0
Black British	16	8.0
Black African	13	6.5
Irish	9	4.5
Scottish	7	3.5
European	5	2.5
Black Caribbean	4	2.0
Other	4	2.0
Asian	3	1.5
Welsh	1	0.5



Our Campaigns in a Nutshell

By

Bandi Mubi

Campaigns Worker



I remember when I first joined the Manna Society in 2001, we used to be open 5 days a week and we dealt with approximately 120 people. We thought then that, Britain being such an affluent country, we should not have that many people living on the streets or in poverty requiring a service such ours to alleviate their needs.

Much has changed, even more people need our assistance. Britain is still the 5th richest country on earth. If the claim that the number of people still living in poverty have continued to increase steadily in the past decade can be questioned, it is however indisputable that the number of people coming to the Manna Centre have increased to approx 200 during the same period. You would think that with an extra 2 days, opening now 7 days a week, the numbers would go down, but they have gone up over the last decade, a sign that people require more help to reduce and prevent homelessness.

This year, just like in previous years, we have not only dealt with people who have come through our gate, but also we have spread the word to you our supporters about this ill of our society. We have given over 25 talks and workshops, and spoken with people, in churches, schools, business, philanthropic and voluntary organisations to get people to work towards a homelessness-free society.

In addition, we have responded to local consultations about plans to deal with homelessness and prevent it. We have also participated in seminars with central government and homeless people's interest groups to influence policy-making in favour of our service users and all those in similar circumstances.

I was particularly encouraged and moved by the dedication, the hard work and the inspiration shown by Ursuline High School, particularly Year 8, in Wimbledon who competed and won for us a £3,000 prize sponsored by the Institute for Philanthropy. Our own in-put in the process was in the form of providing them with the necessary information and moral support which they used impressively well, making an excellent case for us. They have been and are an inspiration to us. They faced 11 other very good challengers, who could have equally deserved to win, but in the end the presentation they had prepared was not just any other; they gave it their all.

This past year too, Christian festivals have continued to offer the best opportunity for us not only to raise awareness on homelessness and



The winning team of Year 8 pupils from Ursuline High School with Bandi and Wimbledon's Mayor

poverty issues, but we have also used them to appeal for funds. We have been touched by the generosity of all those who have contributed in many ways to make it possible for our service users to continue to receive the help they receive at the Manna Day Centre.

At the national level, we have joined hands with over 70 other organisations to form a coalition to lobby the three major political parties to get them to commit in their manifestoes that they will work towards eradicating poverty altogether. We think that we should make every effort to impact on the political process to improve deep-rooted problems leading people into poverty. As part of this campaign, Get Fair, we have had to take part in meetings and give talks.

We hope to continue to raise our voice to make a difference for those who use our service and those in similar circumstances so that homelessness and poverty are a thing of the past. Thank you for ensuring that this voice is heard loud and clear through your many contributions: time, money, prayers and thoughts.

The Miracle

*The miracle is not forgiveness of sins,
The miracle is our believing love.*

*May we see wonders -
The wonder of ourselves
As we become aware of God's
Great love – God's light.*

*Throwing our sins to the bottom of the sea
Removing them as far as east from West
Redeeming our life from the grave.*

*We often think we are dying –
We are worth little...*

*God wants to throw all our sin
Into the depths of the sea
And raise us from the pits.*

*What holds us back is our
Disbelief in such love,
God's waiting, longing
Anticipating love
Expectant...*

*We must rise from the grave
By believing in God's crazy love.*

*Only God could love so passionately.
As long as we believe*

*We are less than
The beautiful and beloved children Of God,
There will be no miracles.*

Edwina Gateley



*Many thanks to everyone who
sponsored Marc in this year's
London Marathon. He raised a total
of £1,982 for the Manna Centre. The
above photo shows Marc about to
finish the Marathon in an excellent
time of 3 hours & 31 minutes.*



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