



The Manna Society Newsletter
Christmas 2012



Lenka & Joseph

By

Karolina Muszynska

Welfare & Advice Worker



The Christmas newsletter is a special one and one which requires a special story. I would like to share with you a story of Lenka and Josef as for me it is one of the highlights in this year's advice work. It shows also that recovering from homelessness is a slow process, even if you had a home for most of your life and lost it fairly recently, as a result of unpredictable life events.

Lenka is 34 years. She came to UK seven years ago from Slovakia. She speaks good English and is very articulate. She became homeless as a result of the unexpected death of her partner who supported her in the UK. He died in December 2010 and since then Lenka has had many difficulties in her life: alcohol, drugs and a difficult relationship has led to her losing her accommodation. She started to be a regular user of the Manna Day Centre in October 2011. At that time she was at the beginning of relationship with Mirko.

When I saw her for the first time she disclosed to me that she was pregnant. The father of the baby had been deported from the UK as an illegal immigrant and she had no contact with him. Mirko was aware of the pregnancy and wanted Lenka to keep the baby. Lenka was very worried as she had no home, no income and the child's father had disappeared. She was concerned that she and Mirko would be unable to provide for her child and that Mirko may not be able to cope with parental responsibilities. We made a claim for benefits and explained to her what her housing options were. She agreed to come back for housing assistance.

Mirko is a 39 year old Slovakian. He came to the UK with his wife and two children in 2005. He worked hard in the construction industry and provided for his family. Unfortunately, in January 2010 his relationship with his wife broke down and he had to leave the family house. Initially he stayed with friends but as his alcohol consumption continued to increase his friends decided that they could not help him any longer.

He started to use Manna Day Centre with Lenka. He came to see an Advice Worker as he wanted help to get back on his feet. We knew he was eligible for benefit but at that time he had no ID, as his passport has been stolen, so he could not make a claim. We applied for a grant to cover the cost of the passport fee for Mirko and finally in January 2011 he collected his new passport.

After due consideration Mirko and Lenka decided they would like to become a family and to bring up Lenka's baby together. In order to find accommodation they had to make a homelessness application. If you are homeless and wish to apply to a council for housing, you need to prove that you have local connection to that particular borough. The council will usually consider that you have a local connection if you have lived in the area for a total of six months out of the last 12 months, or three years out of the last five years. As

Lenka had stronger local connections to Brent than to Southwark, I suggested she should apply there for housing.

Lenka did not want to return to Brent as she strongly associated it with her dark period and the death of her partner. Therefore she decided to ask Southwark Council for help. They refused stating that she was economically inactive in the UK and therefore not eligible for assistance. Lenka and Mirko have chosen not to appeal against the council's decision as they were aware of their weak local connection to Southwark.

Lenka was referred to Southwark Social Services who agreed to house her temporarily but without Mirko. During the conversation Lenka had with Southwark Social Services she had told them that Mirko was not the father of her as yet unborn child. This being the case Southwark argued that they therefore had no responsibility for housing him. Initially Lenka refused Southwark's offer, telling me that as Mirko had given her so much support she felt she could not leave him now. We started to look at alternative options but all the options we generally offer our clients are for single people without children. The Manna Day Centre and the majority of other homeless organisations (day centres, hostels, shelters, etc) work mainly with single people. If we come across homeless parents we would refer



them to their local council. This is because homelessness legislation gives priority to people with children and if they meet the rest of the criteria they can be quickly housed by a local council. Lenka did not want to be separated from Mirko and we became stuck.

Lenka and Mirko were upset and disengaged from the advice service for some time. They still came to the centre for a shower, clothing and for food but they did not use the advice service. They had found a bike shed and were sleeping there. As it was winter time and Lenka pregnancy was becoming well advanced, all of the agencies involved in their case became concerned and finally they were both placed into emergency accommodation (until May 2011). Their baby girl was born in May 2011. As both Lenka and Mirko had a history of street drinking, the family court ordered that they should be placed into a family assessment centre where their suitability to bring up a child would be assessed. Social Services wanted to make sure that they would be able to cope with parental responsibilities.

After 3 months in the assessment centre their social worker felt they would indeed make good parents. With her assistance they made a fresh homelessness application and this time the council agreed to house them. At present the family is in a hostel, waiting for a 2 bedrooms flat to become available. I saw their baby girl recently and she gave me beautiful smile. What a highlight! :-)

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Joint working

By

Margaret Shapland

Welfare & Advice Worker



"It is in the shelter of each other that the people live." -- Irish proverb

I have been listening to a photographic and audio diary put together by Kayte Brimacombe, a photo-journalist on The Guardian website. She tells the story of Mario, a homeless Romanian man in words and pictures. It is a very touching story of a man whom she met in a park near to where she lived and struck up a friendship with him that allowed her over the fifteen months that she knew him to chart how his life evolved.

She comments that she was not aware of the level of support needed (through day centres, advice services and winter shelters) to assist a person from Romania find employment and accommodation. Despite having no other needs (other than unemployment and his subsequent homelessness) Mario was faced with limitations to his employment placed on people from Romania and Bulgaria by various European countries including the UK.

Though I know that this is a somewhat specific case, it gets me thinking about the level of energy that is needed and the importance of that helping hand across organisations. At this time of year it is of particular importance when the weather is changing, becoming harsher and making life much more difficult for those that are homeless.

I just wanted to point out how much I value my colleagues in the other services to which we are linked and to tell you a little about some of the occasions we have worked together.

So, in essence, this article will focus on some examples of that joint working.

Saviour – charting a pathway back from the brink

Saviour came to the UK from the Caribbean as an adopted child with his parents before 1962 when there was an “open-door” tradition of immigration for Commonwealth citizens. Since then there has been a significant level of immigration legislation which has meant that commonwealth citizens have had to comply with

the changes in legislation and a number of children of those parents have found themselves in difficult circumstances with respect to their status in the UK if their parents did not realise the implications of the legislation. Having worked for sometime in the UK, Saviour lost his job and his accommodation. He was placed in a hostel but after a while, as he had lost his original identity documents, the DWP were unable to accept the evidence he offered and his benefit claim for Housing Benefit was stopped.

Since then he has been homeless. We have been working with the outreach team in our area to help him get details that will either allow us to persuade the DWP that this is satisfactory evidence or provide the route to make an application to the Home Office, if all else fails. It is a long-winded process. We have applied and got his birth and adoption certificates from Jamaica, we have found evidence of a medical record in the UK and have made a Subject Access request for full details of his medical records which will hopefully give details of his presence in the UK over a considerable period. We have applied for his bank records but under the Data Protection Act, banks are only obliged to keep such records for 6 years. We have tried to obtain copies of school records but as he was in school during the tenure of the ILEA (how many of us remember that body!), the records have not been kept. We have written to The Passport Service in case we can identify if he held a British Passport at any time – we have received word back that they may be able to help us. The outreach team has made a Subject Access request to the Home Office for any documentation relating to him and through our partnership with ROBES, we have been able to place him in the shelter to give him some respite. The outreach team has agreed to fund the cost of an application to The Home Office which costs about £800, if we cannot provide enough satisfactory evidence from the work we are doing.

It is only through the partnership of agencies that we will be able to get resolution for Saviour – it is ongoing work but we are getting there. I am reminded of a quote from Mike Yankoski who wrote a book called “Under the Overpass” subtitled “A Journey of faith on the streets of America” – he spent five months as a homeless person and recounted the experiences he had. He says;

“Sometimes it's easy to walk by because we know we can't change someone's whole life in a single afternoon. But what we fail to realize is that simple kindness can go a long way toward encouraging someone who is stuck in a desolate place.”

Simon – getting a break through a private rented solution

The manager of the outreach team in Southwark phoned us a couple of weeks ago. They had a client who they thought might be suitable for private rented accommodation and he felt that we might be able to help. Another agency had been working with him and up to that point had offered him quite a restrictive hostel placement that really was not totally suitable or necessary to meet this gentleman's needs. Simon came to see us - we were lucky enough to come up with a 1 bedroom flat in South-east London on that day – he liked it and we asked him to return so we could approach the DWP with respect to a Crisis Loan for rent in advance. He duly came and we tried – unfortunately the DWP on that morning were not playing ball and he was refused initially. We spoke to the outreach team as on that morning we had a full book of clients and we could not make another application that day. The assistant manager at the outreach team agreed to try the DWP and after the usual one and a half hours of gut-wrenching anxiety for the client that is par for the course with these calls, the loan was duly agreed and the client is now happily placed in his property.

Bala – starting a new life in London

Bala has come from Uganda She was the victim of discrimination and violence there and sought refuge through the asylum system in the UK. She received her leave to remain and come to London as there is a very good support group in London which helps refugees who have been through experiences such as hers to share and get support from others who also endured similar experiences. She had been able to stay with a friend in Kent but could stay no longer without jeopardising her friend's tenancy. She had nowhere to go and her emotions are so near the surface, she is very easily moved to tears when she speaks about the reasons that brought her here and about the stresses she faces now through her homelessness. We have made a number of applications to housing providers and tomorrow, I am hoping to send her to view a flat but she would have been homeless tonight. The



THE MANNA CENTRE
Education and Training Service

The Manna Centre's vision is the creation of a just society that respects the dignity of every individual.

We aim to respect the dignity and worth of each person with whom we come into contact. Each and every one has an intrinsic value that deserves to be respected. No-one is dispensable.

We give practical support to enable impoverished and homeless people to restore their dignity - for example, by providing the basics of food and clothing.

We want to provide further support to our service-users through our Education and Training Service. This will enable them to move on from their current situation and to overcome the social exclusion caused by lack of IT skills and language difficulties.

Would you like to help by volunteering your time to assist people in learning English and improving their literacy, numeracy and IT Skills?

We are seeking volunteers for each of these 3 types of role:

- Teaching Coordinator
- Teacher
- Teaching Assistant

ROBES shelter in Southwark is full at the moment with a waiting list, so could not take her but I was lucky enough to find a place for her with the Camden & City Winter Shelter on the proviso that we were doing resettlement for her and to move her across to a local shelter when a space became available . I am so grateful to Jamie the project worker at Camden for helping us in this way.

It is time to draw a line under this little missive but writing this reminded me of a little song that my Dad used to sing to myself and my brother and sisters. It is a song by Woody Guthrie, the troubadour of the open road during the Great Depression in America. I can only remember the first verse and its chorus but it is all about working together. Here's how it goes

*My mommy told me an' the teacher told me, too,
There's all kinds of work that I can do:
Dry my dishes, sweep my floor,
But if we all work together it won't take very long.*

CHORUS:

*We all work together with a wiggle and a giggle,
We all work together with a giggle and a grin.
We all work together with a wiggle and a giggle,
We all work together with a giggle and a grin.*

We all found it highly amusing and very whimsical, particularly the chorus and the fact that my father did a bit of "dad-dancing" to it but it really sums up the benefit of being able to work together with like-minded people – in that by doing so, maybe the road will be a little shorter and the solution just that little bit nearer.

On that note, I leave you with my very best wishes for a peaceful and joyous Christmas and thanks for the help you have given to us over so many years.



Junior League of London (JLL)

By
Lisa Bajardi
JLL Member



Visitors to The Manna Society's London Bridge centre may have noticed that every so often a group of women in red shirts show up ready to work and to help out in various efforts around the centre. Who are they? They are volunteers from the Junior League of London (JLL), known in London as 'women building better communities.'

The JLL is an organisation of women committed to promoting voluntary service, the potential of women and improving communities through the effective action and leadership of volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable. The JLL's vision is of a London where each person has the opportunity and means to prosper. They provide volunteers and resources to support projects eliminating poverty and its effects in London. Over 400 members give over 20,000 volunteer hours to London each year, all with the goal of improving the lives of Londoners in need.

For the past three years, JLL volunteers have gathered on a quarterly basis to help assemble the mailings that go out to Manna's supporters (see above photo). Over two shifts spanning six hours, they spend their Saturdays folding, stuffing and labeling the newsletter. It's a convivial but determined atmosphere, with the volunteers keen to complete the task at hand. Paddy Boyle, the Centre's Administrator, provides volunteers not only with endless cups of tea but lots of welcome encouragement. One volunteer recently remarked, "I've had so much fun at Manna today. I got to see their facilities first hand, help them in their efforts and catch up with friends."

More recently JLL volunteers committed themselves to provide volunteers on the fifth

Sunday of each month to help out in the kitchen. Alongside volunteers from other organisations that support Manna, they clear up plates and cups, do the dish washing, lend a hand where needed and have a chat with some of the guests. They also provided an extra set of hands to assist in our quarterly centre clean-up in September, sweeping and scrubbing floors, dusting and generally help improve the physical state of the facility.

Volunteer Claire Thornley remarked, "Working with Manna has taught me so much about the needs of the homeless community in London, and I am always amazed by the energy and vigour of the volunteers and staff. In an increasingly expensive city, where life can often be harsh and difficult, Manna offers a real chance for people to receive comfort and care, and a chance to rebuild their lives. I love having the chance to work alongside the Manna team!"

In addition to the work that the JLL does with Manna, they have also painted rooms, planted gardens and played bingo with seniors through their Done In A Day programme (which provides one-off volunteer opportunities); provided over



900 personalised Holiday Hampers to London's most vulnerable populations during the holiday season; tutored disadvantaged children in arts, maths, and reading through their Learning Clubs at Colville Primary School, launched Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to help improve reading skills and foster an interest in learning in children from low-income families; and partnered with Centrepont, which aims to help young homeless people reintegrate into society. Volunteers are offered regular training opportunities to improve their skills as volunteers and civic leaders.

For more information, please go to www.jll.org.uk.

Making sense of homelessness with Adrian

**By
Bandi Mubi
Manna Centre Director**



Christmas is a special occasion to remind ourselves of the love we must have for one another, housed or homeless. That's the best way Jesus would want us to celebrate his birthday. It is love made flesh. I don't see how the Manna Society would have made it all these 30 years without such love. Our supporters from all denominations, people of goodwill, the R.C. Archdiocese of Southwark who generously provide the premises, have all shown unbounded love towards our service-users and the staff who work with them.

Recently, I shared a taxi with a total stranger. This was after my usual station was closed for the evening for railway repairs. All trains were diverted to Liverpool Street. I dreaded walking there from London Fenchurch Street. Not a long distance but I didn't feel particularly full of energy that evening. So when a fellow commuter, noticing my disappointment, offered me a lift on the taxi he had just hired, I was delighted.

We talked as if we had known each other for a long time. He told me that he is a builder. Naturally, he wanted to know about what I did for a living. I told him that I work with homeless people. His curiosity heightened. "Why should anyone have to sleep in the street? I simply don't get it", he said. So I had to share with him my understanding of homelessness. It may interest you to listen in.

I told him that in my opinion people don't generally choose to sleep rough. Sleeping rough is often the result of much deeper underlying causes. People would invariably have gone through very painful experiences, which often they feel unable to cope with. These could stem from problems with their family or relationships, such as a terrible breakup or abuse. We all know how messy things sometimes get with loved ones. When that happens, it can destroy any trust we ever had in ourselves, in others, and in all of humanity. To this, my new friend burst out laughing. He said that he had gone through a difficult marriage himself which ended in divorce. But it did not result in him sleeping rough. I applauded his resilience for being able to pull through. I explained that I was not suggesting that difficult family problems necessarily lead to homelessness. However, they often cause so much pain that some people are

unable to cope. As a coping strategy, they sometimes resort to lifestyles that they perceive to free them from the pain and stress they feel. In some cases, some resort to alcohol or drugs to numb their pain. The issues homeless people have to deal with can be very traumatic. For instance, many have been victims of mental, sexual or physical abuse.

Then came the question about the work of the Manna Centre and the way we work with homeless people. I told Adrian that we try to offer an oasis of peace and quiet. There is no television, nor music in our day centre. You're drawn to listen to people talking to you, with each other, or to your own private thoughts playing in your mind. We try to be friendly with everyone who shows up. We believe that some human problems take time to resolve. Time is often a healing factor. We show our acceptance of them by not asking them to fill out forms. We don't ask them intrusive questions, unless they want to tell us themselves their story. One thing though, we're always ready to help them move off the streets when they're ready, which inevitably happens. Before this takes place, we let them be, eat to their heart's content, have their shower, have as many change of clothing as they wish every week and play chess or scrabble. For over a year now, we have also been addressing people's educational needs by offering them computer and English classes.

This week I met a man who told me about his gambling problem. Though he's still working, he's lost everything he possessed. He's accrued massive debts. He's figuring out what to do next. A good number of people struggle with mild forms of mental health problems, often undetected or misdiagnosed. We work with the local mental health team, START, to address their needs.

My conversation with Adrian is a recurring theme in my life. I get asked questions about homelessness whenever I tell people what I do. I find people genuinely interested in homelessness and happy to help when they understand more about it. This Christmas, let's remember not only the glamour of Christmas with the visiting angels and wise men, but also its poverty; Jesus and his family as homeless. Merry Christmas!

*Merry
Christmas*

A graphic with the words 'Merry Christmas' in a red, cursive font. The word 'Merry' is on the top line and 'Christmas' is on the bottom line. There are green holly leaves and red berries interspersed with the text.

Manna Centre - Christmas Appeal 2012

It costs **£32,800 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 (either by cheque or online via our website)

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 25% 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 _____

Address _____

Post Code _____

Bank/Building Society Details:

Account Name:.....

Account Number:.....**Sort Code:**.....

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

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

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