



The Manna Society Newsletter *Spring 2014*

Working with those in need
Registered Charity 294691



Experiencing the peace of Easter at the Manna Centre

By

Bandi Mbubi

Manna Centre Director



For the Manna Centre service users, aside from a large painting of the Crucifixion of Jesus hung on a wall here at the centre, Christianity is communicated through actions not words. We do not proselytise. As a Christian organisation, our belief in every person being created in the image of God makes us treat them with respect. We believe in the intrinsic value of every human being. We aim to create an environment where they can restore their dignity and gain enough confidence to claim back their independence.

The services we provide at the Manna Centre are meant to satisfy the basic needs of our service-users. We offer hot meals, shower facilities, clothes, a comprehensive healthcare which includes nurse-practitioners, osteopaths and chiropodists, and furniture. We also give welfare advice and in the 12 months to January 2014 have found accommodation for just over 300 people. For the last 3 years, we have run an education service which gives our clients access to online services and enables those who do not speak English to learn it.

There is a debate to be had on whether organisations, like ours, offering services free of charge to people foster a dependency culture. The jury is still out. But from our point of view, we aim to remove anything that may prevent anyone from meeting their basic needs. We believe that it is only after people have had their basic needs met that they can meaningfully begin to engage in activities that increase their independence.

As people make use of our education service, we increasingly find that their educational attainment is diverse as well as their reasons for attending it. From using it for keeping in touch with friends on Facebook, listening to music on YouTube, watching films, to using it to write a CV, looking for a job, applying for benefits or updating relevant information online and learning English. Two proud students recently told me that they are

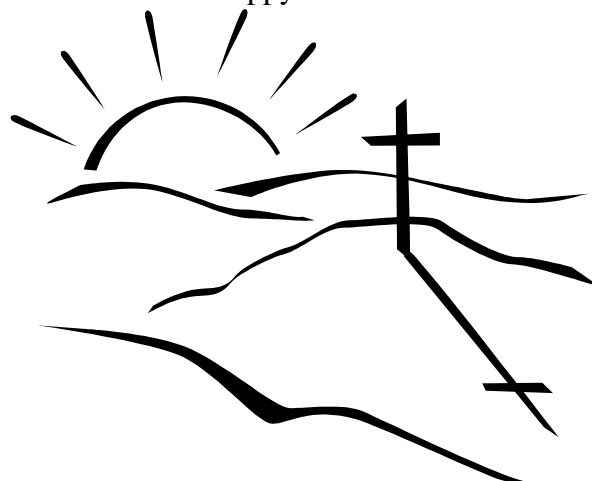
learning for the first time to use a computer. Such conversations help me understand why such a service is needed. As a society we are quick to tell people to help themselves, but slow to give them the means to help themselves. We are so pleased that we are able to offer a friendly environment that allow people to feel confident enough to learn, to acquire new skills.

As Easter approaches, some reflection on its meaning is permitted to reclaim it for our lives. There is a way in which it appears to be a uniquely Judeo-Christian festival unlike Christmas. The appeal of Christmas has reached beyond Christianity and it is common to witness people from other faiths and none join in its celebration. Perhaps because of its emphasis on joy on earth, it sometimes causes us all to think that that is all there is to it. We unfortunately end up portraying it as requiring nothing more than superficial acts of kindness expressed through exchanges of gifts.

Easter, on the other hand, has remained a sombre occasion. It has kept its appeal to our conscience. It leads us to question our behaviour, it interrupts our joy, it demands of us transformation before we are reconciled with our Creator. It is a time of forgiveness, of making peace with God, our neighbour and ourselves. But not without going through trials and tribulations, ritualised in fasting during Lent. We rediscover the spiritual meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus through these practices.

This Lent, if you have time to spare, during the week, between 9.30am and 1.30pm, please consider volunteering with us in the kitchen (washing dishes) or in our education service (teaching assistant).

Happy Easter!



The Manna and Other Services

By

Ellen Burns

Housing and Welfare Advice Worker



I have been an Advice Worker at the Manna for a year now. There is a lot to learn about how the Centre itself works, and the many services it offers to its homeless clients, from English and IT classes to free clothing and showers.

The bigger learning curve is how it fits into the matrix of other services for homeless people in London. The needs of a 'large minority' of our clients are very complex, and they are often supported by other services as well as us – be it mental health services, other day centres, services for people with drug or alcohol problems, outreach teams, nightshelters.

Recently I have been participating in the fortnightly Mental Health Training & Discussion Forum, chaired by the manager of the Islington Cold Weather Shelter called CARIS, and held at day centres working with homeless people across London. So far, I have attended one held at The Simon Community's Drop-In Centre in Camden, one at the Robes Project Wintershelter in Southwark, and one which we hosted here at the Manna.

The mental health forum and other such pan-London initiatives are great for giving you a real sense of what is out there, what we can learn from one another, and how we can work together to get the best outcomes for people. A good example of how it is important to know about other services, and work together, is a female client in her 30s. She uses the Manna daily for food and shower. We know from looking on Chain – the website maintained and updated by the London Outreach Teams – that she has been rough sleeping in central London on and off over a period of years. The Outreach teams were trying for a long time to persuade her to take up reconnection to her home country, as she was not succeeding in making a life for herself here.

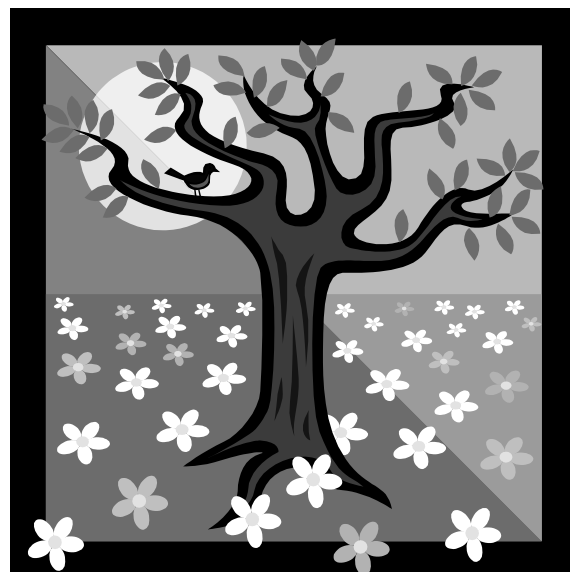
They eventually succeeded, but she returned. As winter set in, after negotiation with her local Outreach team, the Manna managed to get her referred into a church nightshelter. In this more contained environment, her mental health problems became apparent, and she seemed to go into an emotional crisis. She also confided in staff about exploitative and abusive experiences.

A referral was made to the local mental health team for homeless people – START (South London and Maudsley NHS Trust), and due to the good communication between the nightshelter and the Manna, a really full and clear picture of her behaviour in different environments, and the safeguarding issues, was able to be given to them.

We continue to discuss her case in the Mental Health Forum, which includes a Psychiatric expert, in order to make sure we all work together to secure the best possible housing and support outcome for her in the long term, and that we put firm pressure on the services that are there to help people like her, with a consistent message from all of us.

The Manna has a very good reputation within the homelessness services community. At the same time we have an independent feel, and practical, sensible approach without too much red tape or complex requirements for local connection. We will help anyone who walks through the door.

Wishing everyone connected with the Manna all the joys of Spring.



Faces behind the figures

By

Margaret Shapland

Housing and Welfare Advice Worker



“Homelessness has risen for three consecutive years. There is a housing ‘pressure cooker’, particularly in London and the South East” – The Homelessness Monitor: England -CRISIS

CRISIS, the homeless charity produces this research on an annual basis, so it provides a benchmark as to the success of our society in addressing this issue. It has recently published the most up-to-date monitor. Let’s give you some key facts....

- 9% of adults have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives
- 2.2% of the 9% say this has happened in the last 5 years
- 8% of under-25s say this happened in the last five years.
- Young adults, people of black or mixed ethnicities and those from deprived areas were more likely to have been homeless.
- Visible forms of homelessness are up, with rough sleeping rising this year by 6% in England and 13% in London, pushing the two year increase in the capital to over 60%
- There are sharply rising numbers being made homeless by the loss of private sector tenancies. This is now the single largest cause of statutory homelessness in London
- During CRISIS at Christmas 2013 in London, 4,090 people visited 10 centres over Christmas, a 20% increase on 2012.

- Since 2009, the ringfencing of the “Supporting People” funding ceased meaning that local authorities were free to spend this as they chose. This budget helped support through a variety of interventions from supplying supported housing to providing floating support workers to vulnerable tenants who had been homeless. One council took full advantage of the change and cut its budget to supported housing by 50%. What happened is increased homelessness, offending, self-harm, substance misuse and anti-social behaviour.

Over the past financial year we have increased the numbers of placements of people who have asked the advice service to assist in housing them – we have been lucky but we still struggle with the ever-increasing limitations that face people and services such as ours in helping homeless individuals in moving forward.

Here a just 2 stories to keep you abreast of what’s happening.

Ebeme – 69 and abandoned

Ebeme was sent to us by a sister organisation. She had come to the UK from Nigeria to join her sister here on a sponsored visa. Her sister was unable to continue to support her and she ended up sleeping in the police station in Edmonton. She is a very vulnerable lady with a number of health conditions and speaks limited English.

The first thing we did was to make sure that she got good advice on her position in the UK and we organised a session with a solicitor based at another homeless charity in London. We got in touch with a charity which will take a woman in her situation for 3 months at their hostel during which we hope that a clear pathway will be developed regarding her immigration issues.

There is a religious sister at the hostel who speaks Ebeme’s language which is Ebo. We don’t have an immediate solution for Ebeme but we can get the ball rolling, so she can make the best decision given her

circumstances. There are very limited housing opportunities for someone in Ebeme's situation.

Sami – running from domestic violence

Sami is a Muslim woman whose husband had visited domestic violence upon her. Despite an injunction, he continued to pursue her forcing her to leave the area in which she lived. She used all her savings since coming to London in staying at youth hostels but simply could not get established before her funds ran out and ended up rough sleeping.

Through the outreach service, we were able to help her secure a placement at a Muslim Women's project which again offers temporary accommodation up to 3 months. We looked at various options and alerted appropriate housing providers that we were looking for accommodation for Sami.

Eventually, we were able to send her to view a lovely studio flat owned by a housing association. She loved it and has just moved in. She is sleeping on the floor at the moment while she waits for furniture she has ordered to be delivered but she's happy. Statistically, 27% of women in domestic violence cases become homeless as a direct result of being a victim of DV. On an average day last year 230 women were turned away by Women's Aid, around 9% of those seeking refuge, because of a lack of space in a refuge.

It is an imperfect world in which we must continue to do our best to help in whatever way we can.

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Happy
Easter



Why do I like my work?

By

Karolina Muszynska
Housing & Welfare Advice
Worker



Friends, family members and occasionally people I do not know (e.g. recently a man who delivers bread to the Manna Day Centre) ask me from time to time if I enjoy my work. I have been at the Manna Centre for nearly four years and indeed, I still enjoy it. Why?

For many reasons:

- Because of the people I work with
- because of people I meet here
- because you never know what will happen and each day is different
- because it gives me satisfaction
- because it frustrate me and that is an opportunity to learn and grow.

The Manna Centre can be a challenging and stressful environment. We serve food to around 200 people every day. Most of them are men. They come from all walks of life and often are quite distressed. It may be because they had a bad night outside and they did not get enough sleep, they may have a hangover or just the common cold, they may suffer from mental health problems.

Some of our clients have an offending history, some were victims in the past (e.g. refugees escaping prosecution). Just imagine dealing with all these people – serving food, offering clothing and towels, cooking, washing dishes, cleaning, dealing with their enquiries and at the same making sure that it is a SAFE place – there is a lot of pressure on our serverly staff. It will never cease to amaze me how they can do all of these things and still keep a smile on their faces. I am most impressed and grateful to all our kitchen volunteers who do the very practical tasks such as dish washing for free because they want to help, to make a change.

The Advice Workers at the centre usually try to assist at least 6 people per day. We deal with various issues – we basically try to help with whatever our clients bring to us. This a part of our work's charm - it is rarely boring. Although most of the issues we help with will be housing or welfare benefits advice – there is often something that will surprise you and some

research will be needed in order to find a solution. Here are a few examples:

- my colleague had to search for a cat shelter for a client. The cat owner had lost her accommodation. She found one!
- We had to negotiate with the Lithuanian Embassy as to an appropriate payment method for a client's passport. They did not want to accept a cheque and we do not give cash to our clients. Finally they accepted payment over the phone but we had to synchronize it with our client's appointment.

Satisfaction and frustration. Two sides of the same coin. It is such a good feeling to help someone resolve a problem. To do a good job and to see your client happier makes you feel happier too. But very often helping is a long process, full of frustrations along the way.

Tomasz is a 55 year old, divorced, Eastern European. He has been working very hard through all his life. He has been working as a self - employed subcontractor in the UK, paid his taxes, rented his accommodation until two years ago when he had a very extensive heart attack and had to spend a few weeks in hospital.

The Doctor told him he would be unable to work any longer and advised him to claim Employment and Support Allowance. He never claimed any benefits before and did not know where to start. Someone suggested that he should go to the Manna Centre.

My colleague assisted him in making an initial claim but it was refused. We helped him to collect all the necessary evidence needed to appeal this decision. But appeals can take up to 12 months and in the meantime his landlord asked him to leave as he could not afford to pay the rent. He ended up on the street with his poor health and no income.

Fortunately he was picked up by an outreach team and referred to the Adult Social Services Team. They housed him and supported him with £30 per week for nearly a year. In that time he regularly accessed our centre for food. £30 was not enough to live on.

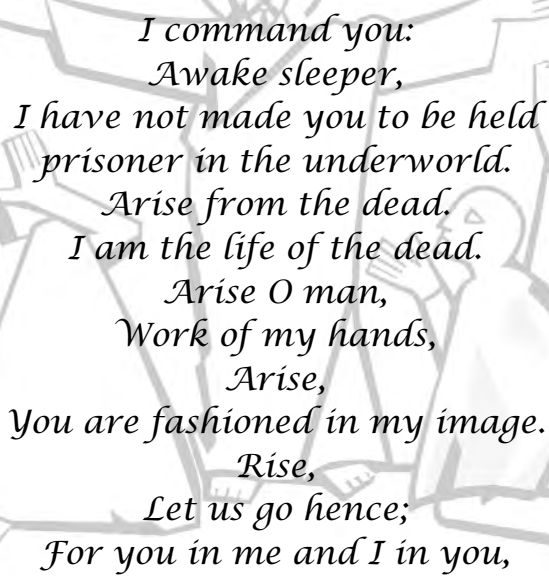
Finally, sometime in the spring of last year we received good news from the ESA Appeal Team – Tomasz had won his appeal. Social Services referred him to the Housing Options Team and

he was placed in temporary accommodation by the London Borough of Southwark whilst he waited for a permanent place.

In January 2014 he moved into permanent accommodation – his own flat. As it was unfurnished we assisted him in applying for a grant from the Emergency Support Scheme and in February they provided him with all the essentials he needed – a bed, fridge, cooker, table, chairs etc. He is so happy now.

We have made a long journey together.

An Ancient Homily For Holy Saturday



*I command you:
Awake sleeper,
I have not made you to be held
prisoner in the underworld.
Arise from the dead.
I am the life of the dead.
Arise O man,
Work of my hands,
Arise,
You are fashioned in my image.
Rise,
Let us go hence;
For you in me and I in you,
Together we are one undivided
person.*

A Bed for the Night

*I hear that in New York
At the corner of 26th Street and Broadway
A man stands every evening during the winter
months*

*And gets beds for the homeless there
By appealing to passers-by*

*It won't change the world
It won't improve relations among men
It will not shorten the age of exploitation
But a few men have a bed for the night
For a night the wind is kept from them
Then snow meant for them falls on the roadway*

Don't put down the book on reading this.

*A few people have a bed for the night
For a night the wind is kept from them
The snow meant for them falls on the roadway
But it won't change the world
It won't improve relations among men
It will not shorten the age of exploitation.*

Bertolt Brecht

Happy Easter & thanks for your support.

Can you help support our work further?

Thank you for supporting our work to date, it is very much appreciated. We have just produced a new promotional leaflet about our work.

Would any of your friends, family, colleagues or church members be interested to know more about what we do? If so I would be happy to send you as many leaflets as you would like.

It would help us in meeting our £30,000 (approx.) monthly running costs. Please contact me by phone or email (see page 5) and let me know how many leaflets you would like.

Many thanks.
Paddy Boyle
Manna Society Administrator





A day in the life of the Manna Centre

- Approximately 150-200 people use our services every day (7 days a week)
 - 150-200 free lunches served
- Over 100 people use our toilet facilities for a wash or a shave
 - Over 40 people have a shower
- Approx. 20 people use our advice services
- Approx. 20 people use our computer facilities
- IN THE 12 MONTHS TO JANUARY 2014 WE FOUND ACCOMMODATION FOR OVER 300 PEOPLE

We are only able to provide these and our other services thanks to those who support our work.

We are dependent on the goodwill of our supporters in order to meet our financial, clothing, food & furniture requirements.