

The Manna Society

Annual Report

2005 -2006



“Working with those in need”
Registered Charity 294691

“For when I was hungry you gave me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger you took me into your home, when naked you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help, when in prison you visited me.”

Matthew 25: 35-36

Patrons of the Manna Society

Most Rev Kevin McDonald, Archbishop of RC Archdiocese of Southwark
Very Revd Peter Price, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Bath & Wells

Contents

Manna Society Committee Members	3
The Ethos of the Manna Society	3
Director’s Report: <i>Paddy Boyle</i>	4
Housing Advice, Advocacy & Justice: <i>Bandi Mbubi</i>	6
Housing & Welfare Advice Statistics: <i>Margaret Shapland</i>	8
Manna Day Centre: Opening times & Services	11
There’s still a need: <i>Nannette Ffrench</i>	12
Treasurer’s Report: <i>Tony Charlton</i>	13



Committee Members

- Bill Dodwell..... Chairperson
- Tony Charlton Treasurer
- Pauline Emmerson, Nannette Ffrench, Alex Hobbs, Cha Power & Lynda Smith.

The Committee was elected at the Manna Society Annual General Meeting, held at the Manna Centre, 21 September 2005.

The *Manna Society* began in 1982 and formed under a constitution in 1988 (amended in August 1989). Our Charity Registration number: 294691.

The Society's objects and purpose:

'to relieve poor persons who are homeless and/or unemployed by the provision of food, shelter and other forms of Christian care with the object of promoting the physical, mental and spiritual welfare of such persons and of improving their conditions of life.'

(Constitution No 2a)

The Ethos of the Manna

Our vision is the creation of a just society that respects the dignity of every individual.

The Manna Day Centre is a place of unconditional acceptance. Our task, as we see it, is not to judge but to love.

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

Our task is to feed and care for homeless people and those in need who seek our help, but we cannot be content with this. We must also seek to challenge the structures of society that lead to homelessness and poverty.



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Director's Report

By
Paddy Boyle



Yet another busy year! We have been open **every** day for the last 12 months with the exception of Christmas Week (when Crisis runs their Christmas Shelter) and one day when we closed for a Spring clean. The number of people using the centre ranges from 120 on a quiet day to over 200 on a busy one. Our numbers have if anything increased slightly over the last twelve months. The housing status of our client group falls into four main categories: 35% are sleeping rough on the streets, 15% are living in squats, 15% are in hostels and the remaining 35% are in socially rented accommodation.

Quite a number of other day centres (both in our local borough and in other London boroughs) have as a result of Government funding moved away from drop-in services. They are deemed to be unfocused, not targeting the issues which lead to homelessness and therefore not value for money. The downside of this approach for those not ready or indeed capable of addressing such issues (and they can be many and complex) is that they are being literally left out in the cold.

The last 2-3 years have seen two seismic events which have had and continues to have a major impact on the homeless community. One is the large number of A8 nationals using services such as our own and the second is the impact of the Government's antisocial behaviour agenda. A8 nationals now make up about 20% of our client group and are by far the largest group living in squats. Traditionally the first step out of homelessness for most rough sleepers has been via a hostel. This is not a route open to A8 nationals. As they are not entitled to Social Security benefit they cannot get into hostel accommodation.

The Government's antisocial behaviour agenda has impacted on our clients in a number of ways. Many London boroughs are using the antisocial behaviour legislation to discourage begging by issuing Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) and Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). The vast majority of street beggars are drug dependent and living very chaotic lives. Some boroughs seem to have taken a laissez-faire attitude in the issuing of such orders, whilst others have in my opinion, taken a much more balanced approach. In the area of London where we are based about 12 ABCs have been issued and 4 ASBOs. Breaching an ASBO can have very serious repercussions – up to five years in jail.

Another repercussion of the antisocial behaviour agenda is that CCTV cameras have been put up outside our centre to monitor our users. Also a borough wide alcohol ban on those deemed to be acting anti-socially is due to come into place in November this year (2006).

Financially 05-06 has been a good year for us. We moved from having a £15,000 deficit in the previous year to a £13,000 surplus by March 06. This is a welcome change as there had been a deficit in the previous two years. One of the main reasons for the upturn is because Southwark Council gave us £43,000 to cover the cost of our Housing & Welfare Advice service. We are assured of this funding again for 06-07 providing we meet our agreed targets (we are very optimistic that we will do so). We may or may not receive this level of funding again in 07-08 when all interested parties will be asked to bid for it.

£5,000 of the above grant from Southwark went to setting up a computerised client database for our advice service. This means that in addition to providing Southwark with the necessary statistics, we are also able to provide a much more efficient service to our clients. Thanks to a one off Central Government grant of £20,000, we were able to refurbish the showers (for both men & women) and to replace and extend the verandah roof.

Whilst we are truly grateful for the financial support received from both central & local government, we have resolved not to become overly reliant on one funding source and will therefore not seek more than 15% of our total budget from them. Our major funder has always and continues to be the Christian community. Once again this community has been outstanding in its financial support – as can be seen in our accounts, in its practical support – as can be seen in our very successful Harvest Festival appeal and in its prayerful support – as can be seen in our continued existence. We see ourselves as one of the conduits through which the Christian community can show their concern for the poor- *“For whatsoever you do to the least, that you do unto me.”*



The Manna Centre
Basic statistics

Open 7 days a week, 51
weeks of the year

See on average 120-150
people each day. Approx.
50% homeless

Six services (all free):

food (breakfast & lunch),
showers,
clothing,
housing & welfare advice,
medical care
and
furniture

It costs £300,000 a year to
run.

Housing Advice, Advocacy & Justice

**By
Bandi Mbubi**



This year and previously, my working week has consisted of spending 3 days out of 5 giving advice on welfare and housing matters to homeless people who use the Manna Centre. The other 2 days I spend campaigning on the many issues our users face in their struggle to end their homelessness and live decently.

Housing and Welfare Advice

The role of an advice worker is a very challenging one and this year has not been any different. Many of our service users struggle with substance misuse problems. As a result some find it extremely difficult to find and to keep their accommodation. In order to achieve a successful placement (in short or longer term accommodation) their substance misuse issues need to be addressed first. However, effective suitable services addressing both substance misuse problems and offering housing are very limited indeed. One such service, Equinox, has had to stop offering their service at the Manna this year because of lack of funding.

The other main highlight for me this year has been the introduction of fair rent deposit schemes which do not discriminate against single homeless people. I have been most encouraged by our own small scale rent deposit scheme which is making it possible for our least vulnerable users to be placed into independent accommodation. Southwark Council have also been running a similarly generous rent deposit scheme, lifting many single people, who are not deemed to be in priority need, out of homelessness.

A comprehensive statistical breakdown of who has been using our housing and welfare advice during the year can be found elsewhere in this report.

Speaking Engagements

Churches, Christian and Philanthropic Groups remain our biggest supporters. This year, I have received over twenty invitations from the Christian Community to speak on homelessness related issues. As always, the message has been well received with positive feedback.

Schools have significantly increased their invitations for a speaker from the Manna. Throughout the year (even after the traditional harvest festival period when schools usually ask for a speaker) we have been invited to come and speak in many schools. It is a tremendous experience to contribute in raising awareness about poverty issues to the youngest in our society. I am encouraged by their keen interest in what we do here at the Manna. Some have even raised funds for us out of their pocket money, putting many of us to shame! Children care and it is a privilege to witness that. Altogether, including harvest speaking, I have spoken in over fifteen schools.

Networking with Sister-Organisations

We are also involved in an ongoing initiative to open a winter night shelter in our locality. It is due to run from November or December 2006 for a three to four month period, giving comfort and shelter to those sleeping rough during the coldest months of the year. It is called the ROBES Project, reflecting the areas where the churches taking part are based i.e. Rotherhithe, Bermondsey and the South Bank.

Unleash have merged with Housing Justice. They will be Housing Justice's London office, supporting the large network of church-based projects working with homeless and badly housed people. In terms of campaigning they continue to provide us with valuable resources and are a platform for like-minded individuals and organisations committed to tackling homelessness and poverty.

I have also taken part in the national poverty consultation conference in March this year held in High Leigh, convened by Church Action on Poverty. This was an important exercise as it framed a common plan for tackling poverty for the next ten years. In December this year, some of our users will be taking part in poverty hearings taking place in the House of Commons. An exciting opportunity for our policy and decision makers to hear first-hand about the lives of homeless and poor people.

After, much hard work, in November this year, along with Housing Justice and other organisations, we hope to launch a Starter Packs Scheme, modelled on a similar scheme run by the Scottish Churches Housing Action. The scheme consists of systematically helping homeless people to receive a starter pack each time they are found accommodation. The pack may include furniture, food, etc, and in some cases money to start them off on the road to permanent housing and independent living.

May God grant us the energy, the enthusiasm, the courage and the wisdom to face the coming year with fortitude!



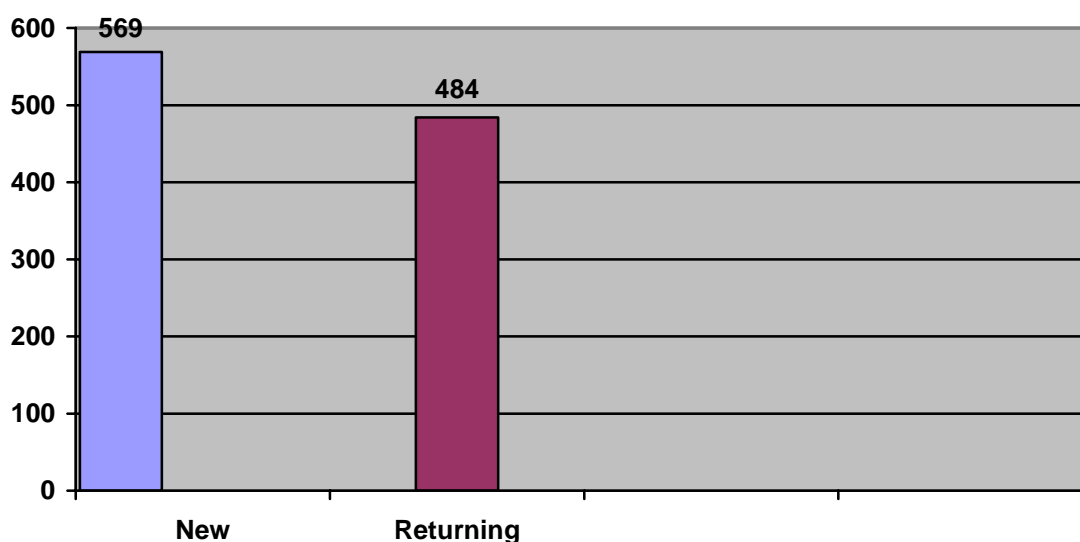
Housing and Welfare Advice Statistics

By
Margaret Shapland



All in all, over 2005/6, **1053** clients used our Advice and Welfare service: of these, 54% were people who were new to the Advice and Welfare service. Our clients come from many boroughs outside that in which the centre is based; 51% came from boroughs outside of Southwark; these days it is becoming increasingly difficult for people who need advice and support to get it locally as services tend to be very over-subscribed and many are cutting back due to funders re-appraising their priorities; so our service becomes even more essential as a lifeline

Table 1: Number of clients seen by the Advice and Welfare service – 2005/6



Many clients tell us that they just cannot get to see someone locally and, for them, one of the advantages of our service is that they can just put their name down to see an Advice worker and we try and see as many people in a session as we can. Overall, we provided a service for 329 days out of the 358 days that the centre is open (as most of you know, we close for 7 days when Crisis at Christmas is open to clients). This means that people were able to access the service for 92% of the available sessions; annual leave, sickness or days when we close the centre to spring-clean account for the remainder. Over this year, we have conducted 2139 individual consultations with clients – so, on average, we see between 6-7 clients in any one session. Each consultation may be dealing with more than one issue for the client.

As is the case with the centre, most of the clients using the service tend to be male and predominantly over 35 years of age (75%). As you would expect from a very ethnically diverse population, we see people from many different ethnic backgrounds; some 49% of our clients are White British, a further 13% come originally from Europe, 9% considered themselves to be from African origin and 8% from Eire.

What our clients are asking us to do for them

We ask all of our clients what their primary or most pressing need is. Fifty-two percent (52%) claim to be rough sleeping (in reality, a proportion are in insecure accommodation such as squatting or living with family or friends but have to move out as soon as possible). Not all of them want us to help them with housing; some already have relationships with street outreach teams and have a worker assigned to them who will take responsibility for their future housing.

Finding them a home

262 people asked us to help them find accommodation over this fiscal year. This accounted for 25% of all our clients using the Advice and Welfare service. Over the year, we have been able to place 72% of clients – this excludes those clients who we are not in a position to help because they have no recourse to UK benefits or their immigration status prevents them from accessing any form of hostel accommodation or having access to social housing.

Obviously, we always hope to place more but we are reliant in part with the amount of vacancies in hostels. In the current climate, we are faced with a number of restrictions which have made it more of an obstacle course to get people into more secure housing. - this may run from proving they have a local connection to the borough, some hostels only accept referrals from agencies in their local area, they may be hostels who deal only with people with specific support needs such as mental health, substance abuse or physical health needs. What this has meant that clients have to work with us consistently as the possibility of placing them in a hostel on the first occasion they meet with us can be limited due to the dearth of suitable places. This can be dispiriting for someone who is desperate.

One problem we have been aware of is that a significant number of clients to us who do not have support needs but have simply fallen on hard times – say; they have suffered a relationship breakdown or may just have had the bad luck to lose their job. Finding accommodation under those circumstances can be just as difficult as people are thrust into the private rented market, going to a hostel may not be appropriate as the cost of a hostel may impact on their being able to return to work as housing benefit reduces quite quickly against any earnings.

The introduction of a rent deposit scheme

To help us meet the needs of this particular group of people, we have introduced what is called a rent deposit scheme on a pilot basis with a budget of £5,000. We have linked in with another organisation that used to run a deposit scheme and had now stopped but still had links with landlords. We help with deposit and the 1st month's rent. The landlord repays the deposit to us at the end of the tenancy, though we encourage our rent deposit clients to pay us back the deposit as a loan; if they do so, we advise the landlord that the deposit should be returned directly to them. This means that we can keep recycling the rent deposit monies so we offer this service to as many people as possible. If a month's rent is required, this is usually refunded to us via housing benefit. This is working well and as we speak we have helped eight clients in this way. We hope to help many more in the forthcoming year.

Keeping them in a home

Some 111 clients asked us to help with sustaining their tenancy, i.e. keeping them in their home. Such help could range from ensuring they keep in contact with tenancy support workers assigned to them by their housing provider, a lot of the work is negotiating problems with arrears which may mean making sure that people are receiving the full amount of housing benefit they are entitled to or dealing with circumstances where they may have not understood a request from the council or from the benefits office which can mean that they are not receiving benefits consistently – many clients find it hard to navigate the complexities of the benefits system – many have literacy and communication issues which disadvantage them in dealing with such agencies.

In some cases, clients find themselves in a position where the housing provider is asking them to leave or they receive a notice indicating that unless they make good their arrears, they will lose their property or have got to the point where a date is set for eviction. At this point, we get legal services to help fight an eviction and help our clients remain in their homes. There is nothing to be gained for anyone in them becoming homeless and the hardship and anxiety which can follow is too disastrous to contemplate.

Working towards a better quality of life

The third strand of activity in the Advice and Welfare office is the provision of advocacy and advice on any number of issues. This work we do for 75% of our clients. By far, the most requested area for help is that of benefits, followed by help with identity issues such as getting birth certificates which are needed to redeem benefits. Many need help with debt management and for help with employment, especially those of our users who hail from the A8 (Accession countries who joined the EEA most recently).

If I was to take the example of one individual whom for this purpose, we will call Colin, we have helped this client obtain Attendance Allowance which has boosted his income by about £90 per week. By doing so, we have enabled him to take care of himself. We organise regular appointments with his GP and consultants for his physical health needs. We sort out his utilities payments and most recently have arranged for a Community care assessment as he was finding it hard to keep his home in order and he wants to continue to live independently. So, we have organised home help for him – there was a possibility of his home being at risk as it had got to the point where his housing providers maintenance department would not enter the property for health and safety reasons. We got the housing provider to undertake a “deep-clean” and went from there.

Computer whiz kids!

All in all, it has been a busy year; a new database for Advice and Welfare clients has been introduced which is helping us move to more of a “paperless” organisation with correspondence and important papers being scanned into the client record and making it easier to pick up cases for the two workers who job- share the Advice and Welfare post over the seven days. It was written as a bespoke system and is as helpful to clients as it is to the staff. We understand that it is one of the best in operation in day centres.

A final thought

We look forward to moving forward, to building on to what we have already and that we do our small part to helping our people realise their own potential and build their lives - all we can hope to do is help provide the assistance.

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

Ralph Waldo Emerson



There's



still a need

By

Nannette Ffrench

Committee Member

As we prepare our Annual Report we see that more than ever, there is a need for the services we offer at the Manna Centre. Poverty and homelessness has not gone away. While figures are available for the numbers sleeping on the streets of London, there are many more uncounted homeless sleeping in inadequate or overcrowded accommodation. This situation is a growing scandal in our capital city. The committed and ongoing support the Manna Society receives from such a wide variety of sources is a clear indication of the concern of so many. This support enables us to continue and expand our work with the poor and needy. It also encourages us to join our voices with others in speaking up for a just solution to a moral problem. Thank you for your material and spiritual support, without which we would be unable to continue.

We are familiar with the quotation - “act locally but think globally”. The world’s poor are trapped by the political and economic power structures. We will all agree that these structures must be challenged. To recognise and to befriend some of the victims of injustice can be a life changing experience, we begin to see the need for personal change – and this can be the most difficult!

“All pomp, all triumphs, all selfish capitalism, all false successes of life will pass with the world’s form.

All of that passes away.

What does not pass away is love.

When one has turned money, property, work in ones calling into service of others, then the joy of sharing and the feeling that all are one’s family does not pass away.

In the evening of life we will be judged on love.

Archbishop Oscar Romero



Treasurer's Report

By
Tony Charlton



This newsletter contains a summary of our financial position for the year ended 31st March 2006. The full management report and financial statement will be available at the Annual General Meeting.

These accounts show a surplus for the year of around £13,000. This surplus is very encouraging and it is very comforting to know that more money has come in than has gone out, particularly as there had been a deficit in the previous two years. The surplus means that we have been able to increase our reserves, so that we now have slightly over £150,000 in reserve. These reserves are particularly welcome and enable us to operate during periods like the month of August, during which this article is being written, when our income for the month will probably not be enough to cover one week's costs, let alone the costs for the whole month. The accounts show amounts received and spent not only in cash or some other monetary form but also they make provision for goods donated, and then distributed, in kind. If you exclude the amounts received in kind, the accounts show that it costs £300,000 a year to provide the services that we offer. Therefore our reserves of £150,000 are enough to run the Centre for six months, and this is the ratio recommended by the Charities Commission.

It costs more and more each year to run the Centre. This is not simply because of inflation but also because we are continually trying to improve and expand the services that we provide. Also, as you will see from our website, it seems that the number of people that we are seeing has increased. There are many reasons for this increase and this short report is perhaps not the place to discuss those reasons. However it is not enough just to provide direct help to "the poor" as we do, but we also need to look at the causes of poverty – as St Augustine said "You give bread to the hungry people, but it would be better to have no hungry people"

Finally, I would like to thank each and every donor who has contributed towards the healthy financial balance that we report upon in these accounts.



