

Small beginnings, a quarter of a century ago

By
Nannette Ffrench
Committee Member



A new venture nearly always comes into being alongside some one person as they journey on their way through life. I happened to be around at the time and so I was that someone when the Manna was born.

In 1981 I had come back to UK after working for many years as a nursing sister in Africa. Like so many others who at some time in their lives go through a dark patch, I was at this time in my life, experiencing quite a dark period. Up until then life for me had been quite straightforward, but now somehow I had lost my way. I found this a frightening experience! One morning a passage from Psalm 94 “O that to-day you would listen to my voice, harden not your heart...” seemed to become real for me. While at the same time I became aware of the many people sleeping in doorways and on the streets of London - one of the richest countries in the world. The passage from the Psalm persisted to ring in my ears and I was impelled to do something, after all, I always had somewhere to go, the people on the streets had nowhere to go.

I approached Bishop Charles Henderson RIP and asked him for a property. He questioned me as to what I would do with a property if I got one. I remember telling him that I truly did not know but would open the doors and see who God led in. This is exactly what happened! The Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark handed over the keys of the property at No 6 Melior Street. I never cease to acknowledge the fact that the Holy Spirit of God was surely operating. And so it is God who built this house, and as I stated at the beginning, I was just around at the time.

The story of the happenings when the doors opened of the little unused nursery school so kindly given to us, would fill a large size book. Around six months later in early 1983 I got a car number plate printed the ‘Manna Centre’ and had it put up on the wall claiming the building for the poor. The Manna was at the time the obvious name, people were calling and we did not have anything to give them. James O’Hara RIP one of the people calling in, introduced me to Pino who ran a Bakery in Bermondsey Street. When I explained our situation he said we could have bread for nothing. So the building was Manna for those calling in and it was Manna for me too ... Manna, bread from Heaven!

What followed is just a miracle. People calling to donate some of what we needed. This is the situation twenty five years later. For which we say a sincere thank you! Throughout the years it is by the dedication and hard work of all involved in the upkeep and running of the Manna Centre that tremendous gratitude is due. A special thanks to the Archdiocese of Southwark who gave us the building which now has become well known as The Manna Centre. Praise be to God!



Very early days in the centre

Chairperson's Report

By
Bill Dodwell



Five years ago, I received a letter. “Dear Bill, I would like to invite you to join the Manna Society committee.” It was from Nannette Ffrench, someone who’s name I knew – but whom I’d never met. Indeed, I didn’t know anyone at the Manna Society; my only connection was as a donor. I wrote back, saying that I didn’t feel I had any qualifications or experience but that I’d be happy to join the committee if Nannette wanted. I was co-opted onto the committee at the next committee meeting and I’ve been a member ever since.

The Manna Society committee meets every month, apart from August. Paddy Boyle, the Centre Director, Margaret Shapland, the Advice worker and Bandi Mbubi, the Campaigns worker all attend and we discuss the month’s activities and what’s coming up.

The changes at the Manna Society over the last five years have been tremendous. The biggest change has been seven-day opening. Five years ago, the Centre was open for 5 days a week. However, the generosity of our donors meant that the Manna could afford to take on the extra paid staff needed to keep the Centre open all week, for 51 weeks a year. We need to have a minimum of two day centre workers, together with our cook and volunteers in order to operate the Centre safely, for the benefit of all the Centre users.

The second big change has been the expansion of our Advice work. Some Centre users come in simply to see our Advice worker for help – mainly with housing and benefits. Margaret operates the advice service for four days a week and Bandi covers the other three days. In addition, Bandi sometimes acts as an advocate for people in especial need. You can read the monthly Advice report on the website – in general, the service sees 90 -100 clients every month.

Two years ago, the local authority, London Borough of Southwark, offered funds to the Manna Society to help finance our advice work. It’s probably fair to say that the committee had slightly mixed feelings. On the positive side, having additional funds to support the Centre’s work with the homeless is really helpful. However, one key aspect of the Manna philosophy is to offer help to all who need it, completely unconditionally. We do not want to see this approach put at risk, perhaps by being asked to follow government policies, in place of (simply) helping the poor. As a result, we all concluded that we should limit the funds from Southwark to about 15% of our total funds. This also helps manage risk, as we all know that government funds may not always be available.

In fact, despite what sounds like some rather negative comments, our involvement with Southwark has been very positive. Southwark financed our client database, which we needed to have, to provide the service reports that they need. The database also helps us manage all our contacts with the clients and we now have over 850 people on the database (in just under two years). The database has helped answer one question – was the Centre simply helping the same 150- 200 people every year? Clearly we now know that the Centre is helping a much larger group – and of course lots of Centre users don’t use the Advice service at all.

Talking about numbers brings me to my final point – there are more users than ever before. Our survey on 28 June counted 220 users. We know that more people come in on Thursdays, compared to, say, Mondays – but 220 people mean that the Centre is operating at full capacity. Maybe the next move – with your support – is to find a way of extending the centre.

The Manna Society celebrates its Silver Jubilee in October 2007. I hope that you will be able to come to our Annual General Meeting on 4 October, where we shall remember the Society’s work over the last 25 years.

Director's Report

By
Paddy Boyle



When writing a report about a busy centre such as our own, one can fall into the trap of overemphasizing statistics and miss out the impact the service has on the lives of its users. I will attempt to balance the two.

Tom and George are two of the 150-200 people who avail of our services every day, 7 days a week. Tom is in his early thirties and has been using the Manna Centre for 5-10 years. He has spent the last twelve months either sleeping rough or staying temporarily with his friend George. This was only a temporary arrangement for a number of reasons. One, George's Housing Benefit would be reduced if he had a "lodger", two, George felt that Tom was not "paying his way" and three, both men have mental health problems and George has an alcohol dependency problem.

Practically everyone who comes to the centre has a breakfast and/or a lunch here. It is by far our most popular service. For the two thirds of our users who are homeless (50% sleeping rough & 13% living in squats) and for many of the flat dwellers this is their main (and for some their only) meal of the day. Every week we serve over 900 meals and over 300 mugs of soup/stew. We are only able to do so because of the 40 – 50,000 tins of food we receive from churches and schools at Harvest Festival time and throughout the year. Thankfully from June 2007 we are now able to recycle all of these tins.

Again, it is solely due to the generosity of our supporters that we have been able to continue to provide the next two most popular services (in terms of numbers using them), clothing and showers/ washing facilities. Without donations of clothing and towels & toiletries both services would grind to a halt.

To return to George. He is in his early sixties and has had his Housing Association tenancy for fifteen years now. He has been homeless in the past. Due to his mental and physical health problems (he has slurred speech possibly as a result of a stroke) and alcohol dependency problem, George has had a number of tenancy problems. When he runs into difficulties he comes to us for help. In the last two years his problems have included utility arrears, maintenance problems and lost keys.

On the face of it resolving the latter problem should be a very straightforward one. However, because George had lost his keys on a number of occasions his landlord was reluctant to issue him with another set. They advised him to call out a Locksmith to have his locks changed. George could not afford to do so and was facing the choice of breaking his own lock and thus leaving his flat vulnerable to burglary or to return to the street. Thankfully thanks to the intervention of our advice worker he did not have to do either. Having been persuaded of George's vulnerability because of his numerous support needs, the Landlord agreed to give him another set of keys at no charge.

Tom is one of the 463 rough sleepers who used our advice services last year. In addition to being seen by the mental health team (the START Team) who provide a weekly surgery here, we also put Tom in contact with a Community Mental Health Team. We helped him also with some legal issues and provided him with identification by obtaining a birth certificate for him. Without identification and access to Social Security Benefit it is virtually impossible to find accommodation in a hostel.

This is one of the major problems faced by the growing number of A10 Nationals (the 10 countries who joined the EU in the last three years) who are now using our services – they have no access to Social Security Benefit and therefore no access to hostel accommodation. A10 Nationals now account for one in three of our users. About two thirds are sleeping rough and the remainder living in squats. The majority are hoping to find work but are often hampered by their lack of English.

Thanks to a one-off Government grant, we have been able to employ an Advice Worker specifically to work with this group and hopefully help them find employment. In three months and working a two day week she has seen 71 people and managed to place 14 into work. A fuller report from our A10 Worker, Ania Majcherek, can be found on page 11. The large number of A10 migrants has undoubtedly brought about the biggest change in the homeless population in London in the last twenty years.

As already mentioned, George lives in socially-rented accommodation, as do one in four of our users. Their only income is their Social Security benefit and they cannot afford to buy new furniture. Again, thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we are able to pass on good quality second-hand furniture to those who need it. The problem we have had over the years is finding a place to store the donated furniture. We have decided therefore to build a furniture store. We have been granted planning permission and would hope to start building later this year.

This year also we have been instrumental in helping to set up and part fund a new Churches' run winter shelter, the ROBES project. The ROBES project offered basic accommodation in local churches to rough sleepers from January to March. A more detailed description of the project can be found in Bandi Mbubi's report (page 12).

We have only been able to offer these much needed services to the poorest members of our society for the last 25 years thanks to the generosity of our supporters and to the generosity of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Southwark who lease us the building free of charge. On behalf of Tom and George and all who have benefited from your kindness please accept our thanks.

Manna Centre Survey results - Thurs 28th June 2007

	Numbers	%
Male	199	90
Female	21	10
Sleeping Rough	115	52
Council/HA flat	55	25
Squat	29	13
Hostel	8	4
Friends	8	4
Other	5	2
Ethnic Origin		
	Numbers	%
English	78	35
European	75	34
Black Brit.	18	8
Irish	18	8
Black A'can	10	5
Scottish	9	4
Asian	5	2
Welsh	3	1
Other	2	1

Europeans		
	Numbers	%
Poland	36	48
Lithuania	15	20
Czech Rep	8	11
Slovakia	5	7
Hungary	2	3
Latvia	2	3
Spain	2	3
Bulgaria	1	1
Germany	1	1
Greece	1	1
Portugal	1	1
Soviet Union	1	1

Polish Accommodation		
	Numbers	%
Sleeping Rough	23	64
Squat	11	30
Friends	1	3
Council/HA flat	1	3

Housing and Welfare Advice Statistics

By
Margaret Shapland



"All that is gold does not glitter; not all those who wander are lost."
John Ronald Reuel Tolkien

It seems an odd thing to start a review of our last fiscal years activity with a quote from JRR Tolkien but I think it summarises the spirit of our work; that seeing the "gold" in a person or situation may not always be obvious and that those that we work with, while they may be wandering have much to teach us – we just need to see clearly enough to learn. So let's see, what exactly has been happening

Over the last year, the Advice and Welfare office met with 1045 clients; of which just under half were entirely new clients to the service – an indication that need has not gone away but those needs may have changed – something we will come to later in this article.

1,045 clients seen
44% new clients to the service

The number of clients accessing the service is not the end of the story. Over the year, those clients may come back on a number of occasions, so the insert below gives you some idea of the level of activity undertaken.

2,175 consultations
On average 6.8 consultations per advice session & just over 2 consultations per client

In this article I really do not want to produce endless statistics but to comment on trends we have become aware of and that have had an effect on our service.



More female clients are using the service

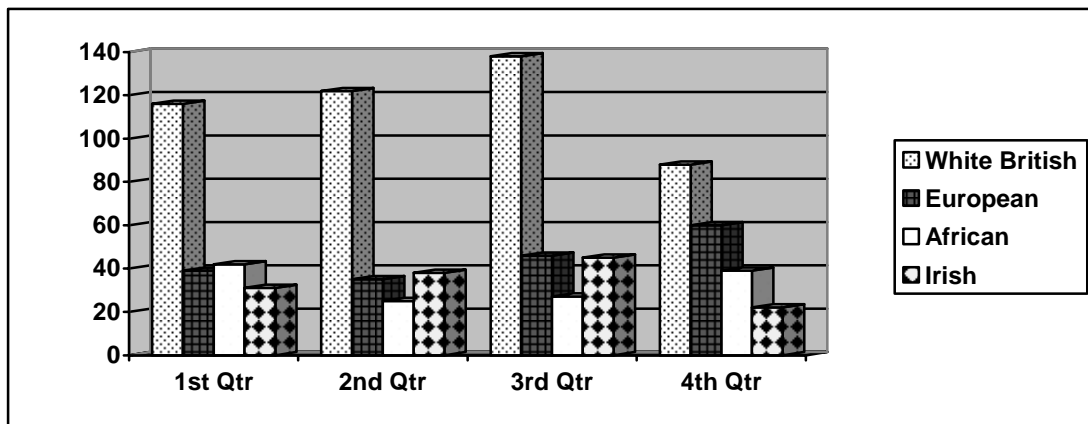
Traditionally the other services in the centre have had a ratio of 90:10 in favour of male clients. In the Advice and Welfare service however 12% of our clients have been female. This proportion has grown to 15% in the new fiscal year and this has been more marked in those clients coming from our immediate hinterland of Southwark. This is because we now get more referrals from LB Southwark's Homeless Person's Unit, referrals from faith groups and other voluntary organisations. It is also noticeably that female clients tend just to come to use the advice service rather than being committed centre users.



More diversity in the communities who use our service

Over this year we have seen changes in the communities who use our services. In 2005/6, our White British clients continued to be the largest group at 44% of our clientele; however by the last quarter of 2006/7, the number of White British clients we were seeing had reduced to 33%. More clients now comes from either established European communities or those who come from the A10 or Accession nations and they are now the second largest group of clients at 17% followed by our African and Irish client groups at 13% apiece.

The graph below attempts to illustrate the change over the year.



What clients ask us to do for them?

The two largest categories on which people seek advice, apart from re-settlement issues (which we will re-visit later in this contribution), are benefits (16%) and the all-encompassing category of “other” – also, 16%. Activities which fall into the category of “other” cover issues such as dealing with utility companies and dealing with maintenance issues for client’s properties, for example. More recently, we have been asked by clients from the Accession (A10) countries to look at tax matters on their behalf as many have opted for the self-employed route.

Clients also ask us to help them trace relatives with whom they have lost touch, if they are adopted; maybe they want to know something about their past and their identity: and this leads me rather nicely onto the third largest category which is associated with a person’s identity.

These days many organisations are very aware of identity theft so the ability to present appropriate identity documents is vital. Alongside this, many of our Eastern European clients are quite often scammed and exploited into handing over passports etc. So, we have been providing security by holding passports in our safe as a preventative measure, scanning them onto the client’s database record so that a copy is available if it is lost but also working with consulates and embassies to replace lost or stolen passports.

Around half of our clients are rough sleeping and a number of them are known to outreach teams (who work with people at their rough sleeping sites). We are a means of accessing the outreach teams. By doing so we improve the client’s resettlement prospects and help maintain contact between the teams and their clients and vice versa. This is the fourth largest category of non-housing interventions at 11%.



Hitting the housing bulls-eye – getting a roof over client’s heads

Overall, 33% of our Advice & Welfare clients ask us to help find them accommodation in some form – in this year, that number was 344. Of those, 56 (16%) had no recourse to housing benefit in the UK or did not have a passporting benefit such as Jobseeker’s Allowance or identity papers that would be acceptable to the Benefits Agency or local authorities. With those clients, we cannot help immediately but we start the process of sorting out these pre-requisites - then, we can help with housing. Overall, we put in referrals for 87% of clients we could help; of these, we placed 57% of the 288 who fell into this category.

Over this year, we introduced our rent deposit scheme working with an organisation called Hope Worldwide who have strong links with landlords. It works on the basis of a loan; we pay a modest deposit and clients pay us back hopefully through the medium of a standing order at around £21 per month up to the point where they have paid back the £200 or so that we usually lend. When they leave that tenancy, they get back the £200 which they can use to help secure another private tenancy. This has helped 19 people into accommodation during this fiscal year.

Many of our clients are what are considered to be low support – they have simply fallen on hard times and they are not a priority for the local authority to house, nor are they really going to flourish in a hostel environment. They are capable of working and making a life for themselves in the short-term without the enveloping support which many hostels provide for vulnerable clients; this support- for which there is no doubt a need - comes at a price and the cost of such a hostel if you were working could be prohibitive if you were responsible for the rent. That is why we developed an interest in a rent deposit scheme.

One of the aspects of trying to find housing is that in the current housing environment, clients sometimes have to wait for a little while. The housing market, if you can call it that, for people who are homeless is very restricted and bound by criteria such as proof of local connection, support needs, age group or referrals will only be taken from outreach teams or the local authority housing department etc and it can be frustrating to look at the available spaces knowing that you are unable to access many of them! One other reason why we are unable to assist clients is if they do not stick with us – they come in just the once and if something is not available that day, we don't see them again – sadly.



“All that is gold does not glitter...”

Back to the quotation from whence we started this little dissertation. Some while ago, I was working in my office at the back of the centre after the centre had closed to clients. The gates were locked but the doors were open to let air through the centre. A young lady in a smart trouser suit was hailing me to come to the door. She had found a gentleman who had arrived from Spain with no money, no job and nowhere to stay.

At first I did not recognise her until she said – “Margaret, do you remember when we first met” and the penny dropped. Some 9 months earlier, she had come to the centre. She was homeless, she was vulnerable as a young woman to exploitation, and she was on the edge in terms of nerves and anxiety. I remember I placed her in a Centrepont hostel in Berwick Street and from there she was re-settled. She looked fabulous, had gone to college for some short courses and was now working – how little time, how great a transformation.

She had found this person wandering around and brought him to us. And she was right to do so. We have managed to re-settle that gentleman too and he has had time to improve his English. A couple of days ago he came to see me to get advice on obtaining a CSCS card, which is a safety requirement for many construction sites, and so the circle goes on - so you could say that our young lady was beyond worth and although not glittering outwardly shone from within with her concern for a fellow human being and her desire to help.

All I can say is that I was proud of how well she had done for herself and that although she may have wandered to find her way awhile, she was never lost.



A10 Nationals

By
Ania Majcherek



In the last 11 weeks (working two days a week) I have seen 71 clients from ten accession countries from Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria and Romania. On average I see 6 people a day. The majority at the moment are Poles. The next largest groups are Romanian, Slovak and Czechs.

To date I have seen 57 Poles, 7 Romanians, 2 Slovaks, 2 Czechs, 1 Bulgarian, 1 Hungarian and 1 Lithuanian.

I have managed to find employment for at least 14 clients, mainly in the cleaning and construction fields. It has been particularly difficult to find work for those clients who do not speak English well. I have made appointments for 18 clients in order for them to obtain a National Insurance Number.

I have also directed 7 clients to The Upper Room 4 Jobs to register and practice for a CSCS card (a Health and Safety Card allowing them to work legally on construction sites). I have also made appointments for 4 Polish clients to receive new passports and have compiled and translated 4 CVs into English.

I would also like to mention that 4 clients have been registered with HM Revenue & Customs. This means that they are self-employed and responsible for paying their own tax and NI Contributions.

I came across 5 people who were interested in following an ESOL course (English Spoken as a Foreign Language) and I sent them to the Migrants Resource Centre at Churton Street, London SW1, where there are free courses are taking place. One woman has been registered with GP and one has been given accommodation in a hostel in Notting Hill, thanks to the cooperation of Dellow Centre.

In addition to the above I have also made many phone calls on a variety of issues. I have also written letters on behalf of the clients and helped with translations for various posts. I have also tried to give our A10 clients precise information about their rights and responsibilities whilst working in U.K. All in all it has been a busy three months.



Housing Advice, Advocacy & Justice

By
Bandi Mbubi



Biblical scholars, regardless of their stance with respect to the meaning of numbers in scripture, recognise the special symbolic use of the number 7. In fact, scripture is saturated with the number 7, from the seven days of creation to the seven seals of revelation. Before the next annual report is due out next year 2008, I would have been with the Manna Society for 7 very happy years. So this year has a special symbolic meaning for me.

During this past year, I have carried on working as a welfare and housing advice worker and as a campaign worker. On average I have worked 3 days as an adviser and 2 days as a campaigner. The major change has been working with the ROBES Project, a local cold weather night-shelter, as Manna's representative in the steering committee overseeing this work.

1. Campaigning

Speaking Engagements:

Campaigning each year always consists of speaking in churches, schools, philanthropic organisations and conferences on poverty and homelessness issues. This year I have spoken at 31 such events mostly during periods running up to Christian festivals. These were opportunities to report on our progress to our various stakeholders and to gain new support.

Local Authority

We have taken advantage of the various consultation meetings that Southwark Council have convened this past year in order to raise our concerns with them about issues of interest to us. We shall continue to influence our local policy and decision makers on homelessness issues this coming year.

CAP

Nationally, our campaigning has been mostly through my involvement with Church Action on Poverty, a campaigning organisation working for the improvement of the social and political climate conducive to better conditions for those affected by poverty, including homelessness.

The highlight this year has been helping to organise, as a facilitator, the first poverty hearing for just over 10 years in Westminster. It was held at Methodist Central Hall and was well-attended by both Cabinet Ministers and by politicians from the opposition parties. Religious leaders, business leaders, various organisations and interested individuals also attended.

ROBES Project

The ROBES Project takes its name from the areas where the churches are located: Rotherhithe, Bermondsey and the South Bank. Thanks to the support of 7 churches, we were able to open this year for 8 weeks, from 4 February to 31 March. Each night one church out of the 7 participating opened its door to offer 10 bed-spaces to homeless people. This coming winter we intend doubling the number of bed-spaces in any given night, so as to have 20 places with 14 participating churches for a period of 12 weeks. It has cost the project just a little below £20,000 to run and we estimate this coming year expenses not to exceed £30,000.

2. Housing and Welfare Advice

I share my advice duties with my colleague, Margaret Shapland, so as to have 7 days a week coverage. Elsewhere in this publication, she has given a full account of what our work has entailed this past year, with a full statistical breakdown of our advice work.

At a personal level, this year has been highlighted by an ever greater realisation of the fragility of existence and aging. I cannot stop thinking that the mortality rate for a homeless person is below many in third world countries, at 45 years of age. Four service users I have closely worked with in particular have led me to reflect on this issue. Invariably reluctant to engage with social services for fear of being moved into sheltered accommodation, in which - rightly or wrongly - they believe life is secluded, and they would therefore lose touch with friends who have become over the years their only family.

Furthermore, the increasing number of Eastern Europeans using the Manna Day Centre has taken me back to the very first years I came to the UK. My struggle with learning English, not understanding and not being understood, a sense of loss, unemployment, the fear of the unknown, losing hope then regaining it. Then adjusting to life in Britain and Britain becoming a home for oneself, or not as the case may be. I rejoice in the fact that the Manna has been able to employ, thanks to some external funding, a part-time worker, Ania, dedicated to working with them. You see one is never a stranger at the Manna, not even God himself.



Treasurer's Report

By
Tony Charlton



Overleaf is an abbreviated summary of our financial position for the year ended 31.03.07. The full management report and financial statement will be available at the annual general meeting.

These accounts show a deficit for the year of £754, and this is after making provision to spend £50,000 on building works here at the centre. Although no building work has yet begun, we have spent a considerable amount of time with our surveyor and our architect and we have now received planning permission to build in this conservation area. We are currently in the process of amending our lease with our landlords, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Southwark, and we hope to be able to start the construction work fairly soon.

It has become necessary to carry out this work because the demands on the centre are continually increasing. The number of visitors to the centre has increased from around 120 people a day when I first became involved nine years ago to the figure of 220 who were here on the date of our last census. This increase puts a considerable strain, not only on the staff and volunteers who work here, but also on the premises. For that reason, we are building a small extension.

The report and accounts highlights how generous people have been once again this year, and therefore this is a perfect opportunity to thank each and every donor who has contributed either financially or in kind over the past year.

The Manna Society
Statement of Financial Activities
For the year ended 31 March 2007

	Unrestricted Funds 2007 £	Total Funds 2006 £
Incoming resources		
Incoming resources from generated funds:		
Voluntary income	381,617	322,089
Investment income	15,040	20,275
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total incoming resources	396,657	342,364
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Resources expended		
Costs of generating funds:		
Costs of generating voluntary income	10,073	10,915
Charitable activities	334,623	315,450
Governance costs	2,715	2,575
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total resources expended	347,411	328,940
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Net incoming resources before revaluations	49,246	13,424
Provision for major works	(50,000)	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Net movement in funds for the year	(754)	13,424
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total funds at 1 April 2006	154,259	140,835
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total funds at 31 March 2007	153,505	154,259
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

All activities relate to continuing operations.

**The Manna Society
Balance Sheet
As at 31 March 2007**

	2007		2006	
	£	£	£	£
Fixed assets				
Tangible fixed assets		2,443		3,053
Current assets				
Debtors	3,014		265	
Cash at bank and in hand	231,150		177,453	
	<u>234,164</u>		<u>177,718</u>	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	<u>(83,102)</u>		<u>(26,512)</u>	
Net current assets		<u>151,062</u>		<u>151,206</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u><u>153,505</u></u>		<u><u>154,259</u></u>
Charity Funds				
Unrestricted funds		<u>153,505</u>		<u>154,259</u>
Total funds		<u><u>153,505</u></u>		<u><u>154,259</u></u>