



Working with those in need
Registered Charity 294691

The Manna Society Newsletter

Spring 2015

Manna Centre's new temporary address:
(6-12 months)

The Manna Centre's new temporary postal address is:
7-13 Melior Street
London SE1 3QP
Tele: 020 7357 9363

Our temporary entrance is:
The gateway between
60 & 62 Weston Street
London SE1 3QJ

(Directly opposite the Greenwood Theatre entrance)
Entrance



Our Rebirth

By

Bandi Mbubi

Manna Centre Director



Easter represents for Christians a time of reconciliation with God. It is a time of renewal and rebirth. This year, Easter is going to have a special meaning for us at the Manna Society because of all the changes we are going through.

After almost 33 years in the same premises we are moving to a new refurbished building on the same street. The Manna Centre is closing its doors for three days to allow the move, from 16 to 18 March. It is reopening on 19 March. The developers are helping us transport our belongings to the new location. From what I can tell, our biggest loss is the veranda which many clients used to enjoy, especially those with pets. It used to be an additional space to our dining hall. It provided an open safe environment. Summer would feel different without it. It also means that clients with dogs would not be able to enjoy their company in the centre.

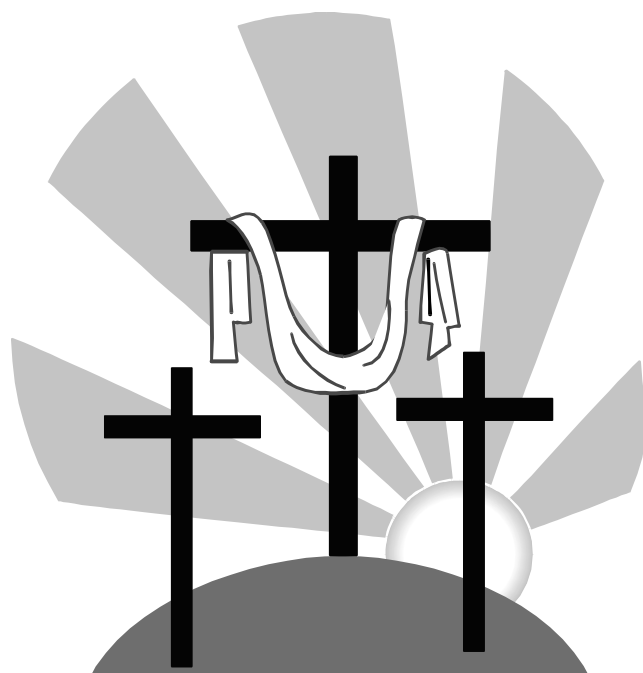
The reduced space poses some challenges to us. Would we be able to accommodate all the two hundred or so clients who turn to us for help? We have an open door policy and we let in everyone who comes to our gate. No one is turned away as we believe there is no such thing as the deserving or undeserving poor. Would we have for the first time to turn away some people for lack of space? What procedure should we adopt in order to remain fair to everyone? The unknown can be unsettling. The first few weeks will be important in determining whether all our clients can fit in.

In spite of the challenge posed by our reduced dining space, we are glad that the other services will remain almost the same at least in the first phase of our relocation. In the second phase which will begin any time from September this year, we will lose a room. This change would impact on our weekly osteopathic surgeries as the osteopaths would have one room at their disposal, not two as in the old building.

We strive to be an oasis of peace and love in our present-day desert. The breaking and sharing of bread freely in the Spirit of Love is fundamental to what we do. Food is at the core of everything we do. It is in the name of our Society; Manna, meaning food from heaven. We believe that it represents an important symbol in Christianity. When people affected by homelessness and poverty come to our centre, we partake in this great feast of love together.

After working with us for the past 2 years, Ellen Burns is moving on. We are grateful for her service and wish her well in the next phase of her journey. We are fortunate that we have been able to recruit another worker to replace her immediately, Jonathan Scott. In the coming months he is going to introduce himself to you through our newsletters.

Easter is bringing the rebirth of the Manna Centre. It does not mean we become a different organisation. Our essence and our values remain the same, but our operations may change and that is what we need to establish as we enter this new stage in our journey. This Easter, please pray for wisdom and God's providence to prevail.



Happy Easter

Home sweet home

By

Karolina Muszynska

Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



"Home is a notion that only nations of the homeless fully appreciate and only the uprooted comprehend."

Wallace Stegner, Angle of Repose

I had this conversation with my 9 year old son about my work and homelessness and he said 'Mum if I were homeless, I would just find my own secret and safe place to sleep and I would be fine. It is not a big problem after all'. So we started exploring together what having no home means and while we were talking I discovered more for myself too. Being homeless and having to sleep outside means that you are deprived of the essentials, most of us take for granted. Home is not a just a bed for the night. It is much more.

It is a safe space where we can hide, when we feel tired, low or unwell. It is a sink where we can wash the dishes and a cooker to prepare a meal. It is a wardrobe to keep our clothes clean and a washing machine to wash the dirty ones. It is a shower to wash ourselves. These all are the basics, most of us have, but try to imagine your life without them. Home is also an address, where you can receive letters. Without having a proof of address it is very difficult to apply for a job, benefits, register with a GP, get into a school or open a bank account.

There are also 'luxuries' like a hot, bubble bath when you feel cold and knackered; TV to watch, favourite music to listen to, books to read, games to enjoy with friends. A medicine kit that comes handy when we hurt ourselves or have a headache. A box where you can store memories from the past and pictures of you loved ones. A home these days often means access to a phone and the internet to keep in touch with family and friends.

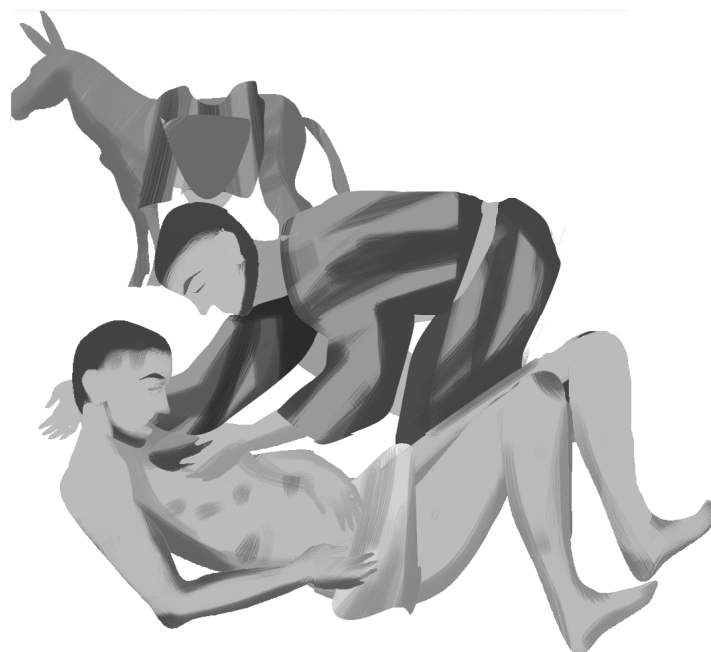
Imagine living without all of these, when your life is reduced to bare survival and all your belongings have to fit into a bag that is easy to carry around (half of the space in the bag will be taken up by your sleeping bag). It makes me appreciate what I

have.

Recently I have been deeply touched by a situation of a young girl (24 years old), from Germany who came to us for assistance. Let's call her Inga. Inga came to the UK to join her boyfriend a few months ago. She is a Somalian refugee, who was granted asylum in Germany few years ago. She left everything behind in Germany (house, friends) to join her boyfriend and he promised to take care of her, to help her to find a job etc.

Unfortunately the relationship did not work out, he became abusive to her before ending the relationship and putting her on the street. She found our details on the internet and came for help. We decided to use our special funding to place her for a few days into a backpacker hostel. Our funds are not huge and usually we would book the cheapest option like a bed in a 12 bed mixed dormitory. Taking into account her circumstances we decided to spend a bit more and booked her into a 6 beds female only dormitory so she could have a bit more privacy.

It still was not a perfect place to be when you are weak and upset. We have contacted a night shelter and hopefully they will be able to offer her a bed in couple of days. We gave her warm clothes and sanitary products. It was all very sad and upsetting. We often feel broken-hearted by our client's stories. Thank you very much for helping us to make a difference.

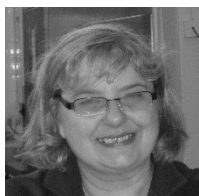


Rough sleeping on the increase

By

Margaret Shapland

Housing and Welfare Advice Worker



Yet again, the latest set of figures released by government show that rough sleeping in and around London continues to rise. The last count showed that the numbers of people sleeping on London's street has increased by over 36%. The CRISIS Chief Executive cited 3 reasons for this growth:

- a) Shortage of affordable housing
- b) Benefit reform particularly the squeeze on housing benefit and sanctions against claimants
- c) The erosion of support for those looking for help

Losing an essential lifeline

London now has more than a quarter of the country's rough sleepers. Among them, some 31% come from Central & Eastern Europe (the Accession countries). I have been working with one such person recently who comes from somewhere somewhat closer let's call him Jose. We met him some time ago – he migrated from Spain.

We placed him in a hostel that works well with clients who might need a housing benefit top-up while they improve their incomes. Just recently he had a decision from the local authority that he was failing to meet the minimum earnings threshold of £153 which would enable him to continue to receive a Housing Benefit top-up. Sure if you look at his earnings across the last financial year when he had been in the UK for a relatively short period. He earned about £126 a week. He has fallen into arrears and has had to leave the hostel and he cannot afford the rent which is not set unreasonably high when compared to rents for single rooms across the capital.

He came to the UK because of the straitened economic circumstances in Spain meant he found it hard to find any work. It is uncertain if he will be able to continue in his jobs as he now will be depending on the "kindness of strangers" certainly in the short term to have a roof over his head or

will be one of many travelling on the night buses just to keep out of the cold.

That said, more recently he has managed to get more hours doing three different cleaning jobs which would take him over the threshold. He has a zero hours contract which provide ultimate flexibility for employers but leave employees in a state of uncertainty, he earns the minimum wage. He is one of the unseen army of people that allow London to keep running. He is industrious both in his work and in seeking other opportunities. Surely, we need to give these people a little more grace to build up their income and to establish themselves. I am currently gathering all his income information (Jose does not have a complete record of his income) from all of his previous employers to see if he has indeed met the threshold and to see if his case can be argued. We have already obtained a commitment from The Aire Centre who look at the impact and the fairness of legislation relating to migrant workers to give us an opinion on cases such as that of Jose.

The erosion of support for those looking for help

Not so long ago, one of the major homeless agencies in London went on strike for seven days because of the terms and conditions for employment for new employees. Pay levels for these new starters were seeing a reduction of as much as 19% over those already employed. What employees of this organisation argue is that these actions may damage the ability to recruit quality dedicated staff. Now I know the salary levels across the housing and homeless sector – for many posts, the salaries would not reach the level of average earnings for a household in the UK. More recently, staff at Shelter voted on industrial action with respect to a £5000 equivalent reduction in salaries for new employees. Homeless Link published a SNAP survey (Survey of Needs and Provision) in the homeless sector and the key findings were:

- a) A shrinking sector - The capacity of the homelessness sector has continued to decline, with the number of accommodation projects at its lowest since SNAP 2009 (down 11%), and the number of bed spaces the lowest we have reported since SNAP started in 2008 at 39,638

- b) Less specialist support – The homelessness sector helps people with often multiple and complex needs, but services seem to be offering increasingly generic support.
- c) Restricting support - Projects are increasingly refusing access to people who are seen to pose a high risk to staff or other clients, rising from around half of projects in the previous SNAP survey to over three - quarters this year. Over half (55%) also refuse clients because their needs are deemed too high.
- d) Reducing funding - Half of projects reported a decrease in funding was a worrying trend and funding from non-housing sources such as social services and criminal justice has fallen again. We know that if there is a lack of support from those who have been through the criminal justice system there is a higher risk of repeat offending. For those who may be leaving the care system, unless there is some form of ongoing support, the potential for cyclical homelessness and development of complex needs is increased
- e) Greater gaps in provision – Move on housing continues to be by far the greatest gap, mentioned by 163 projects, including move - on for young people or those with specific needs. Access to mental health (85 projects) and access to substance misuse services (37 projects) were the next most reported gaps. Specific issues included long waiting lists for specialist services, high entry thresholds, limited out of hours access, and lack of dual diagnosis provision.

To illustrate the last point, I have worked recently with a client who we will call Celia. She had previously worked in media but had developed an alcohol problem (too much social drinking to relieve stress had spilled over into a serious alcohol abuse problem). She lost her job - she was living with her mother who had just had enough and she was asked to leave. We got her into a shelter while we dealt with her benefit issues. We found her a really nice bedsit in North London and helped her through grants to get the essential furnishings for her new home.

Those were important steps forward but she is still drinking though working with an agency who help people battling with substance abuse, she managed to reduce her drinking to a level that enables her to function and handle a tenancy before she took up this tenancy – which was important as the housing provider would not have accepted her as she would have been determined as too high need. As part of the tenancy agreement, with the client and the housing provider, we worked out an informal “contract” whereby we introduced her to an alcohol recovery project in her new area where she could continue the good work.

She is an enterprising girl and the most recent phone call I received from her she now was working as a volunteer in the centre to which we referred her helping other clients who are still a little further away than Celia in coping with their addiction. I could not be happier for her but we could not have achieved that outcome without being able to partner with other agencies that could provide this support for her.

In the Manna centre, we are lucky in that our ability to remain independent allows us to continue to provide a good and embracing service. Anyone can walk through our doors, the only restriction on the service we offer is the physical numbers of people we can deal with and the physical restrictions of space – there are no other barriers and it is thanks to the readers of our newsletter among others that we can continue to do this.



Goodbye Manna!

By

Ellen Burns

Housing and Welfare Advice Worker



This is my final article in the Manna Newsletter, as I have left my role as Advice Worker at the Manna Society, after two lovely, very busy years. I have handed over to my successor Jonathan Scott. He has previous experience in immigration advice, and helping homeless families - the two areas which I have found most challenging in my work - so he should be an excellent advisor for Manna Centre users.

I thought I would write about some memorable Manna episodes, which I know will stay with me.

The Sacrificing Father

It is easy to remember this man, as he comes in to see me every few months, to thank me and tell me he has still not forgotten what the Manna did for him. He is Spanish and came to the UK with his teenage son, as he could not find work in Spain, and was desperate. They had slept on the streets for the first time in their lives. The father was in tears.

We were able to find a winter shelter for them together. We got the father onto appropriate benefits, and into a tiny studio flat. The son was too young to go down the same route, but they were desperate not to be separated. We negotiated with the landlord, and the son was allowed to sleep on the floor in the father's tenancy for several months.

The father gave all his income to the son, and got him onto an English Language course, followed by a Sports Science course at University. We applied for, and got, funding to help the son move into University Halls of Residence. The son is now on a talent-spotting training scheme run by one of the big football clubs and, if all goes according to plan, will play football professionally. He is an intelligent and good natured young man and I really believe he will make a good life for himself in England.



The Hysterical Woman

I have worked with a lot of people in distress during my time at the Manna, but one woman in particular stands out in my memory. She was so devastated and depressed that every time she tried to speak she burst out crying. She was really sobbing and hysterical, and it made me feel very anxious. In a way, I wanted to run away, but only because I didn't know what to do. As the 'woman behind the desk', who she had come to for help, I felt I had to comfort and contain her emotionally, and also to fix her situation. I remember the sense of responsibility.

In the end I was able to tell her not much more than that she was depressed, that this was an issue to take seriously, and that she needed to see her doctor. We phoned and booked an appointment together. I wrote a letter of support for the GP describing her symptoms. She was prescribed medication by her GP. We were able to get her onto ESA, as the doctor agreed she was unfit for work. I wonder how she is now. I really hope she has got through that time in her life.

The Violent Woman

There was a mentally ill woman who used the Manna for a time. She was barred from several other day centres for violent behaviour. I remember the day Bandi told her, at my request that I was not going to be able to accompany her to the JobCentre due to her recent behaviour. Unfortunately, she knew I was doing advice work in the small office that morning! She burst in straight after her discussion with Bandi, shouting in my face. I really thought I was about to be hit, and tried my best to become invisible and unthreatening. In the end, when she had finished venting her anger, she left, and I jumped up and locked the door. I won't forget that day! We later heard from the mental health team that she had responded particularly well to psychiatric treatment. She was recovering very successfully, and moving back towards her previous, quite 'normal' life in Scandinavia.

The Manipulator

One of my first clients I found very, very difficult to handle. There was a concerted attempt at all times to push boundaries and make me feel uncomfortable, but the man was intelligent and

always kept his behaviour just on the right side of completely unacceptable. It was very hard to know how to react, and to assert your boundaries without being labelled as overreacting. The experience was a hard one. I will always remember it. It taught me a lot about my weaknesses, and about the wide variety of people and motivations that exist out there.

The Lost Man

One of our much-loved clients is a mentally ill man who came to the UK to find work, but has no insight into the fact that his mental illness, and the way his thought process therefore works, is what is standing in the way of him getting a job, and therefore accommodation. Over the year or so we have known him, his mental and physical health has deteriorated rapidly, and he is so angry at the world, because he seemingly can't understand why it is tripping him at every turn, and not targeting others in the same way.

I will remember the concerted and long-running attempts made by Manna advice workers and project workers to get him the help he needs. I will remember the difficulty and complexity of his case. I will remember his wonderful, at times hilarious, and utterly unique turn of phrase.

The Unusual Man

There is a long term Manna Centre user who is highly intelligent, and who seemingly chooses a homeless and nomadic lifestyle. He is very suspicious of authority, and rejects help from homelessness organisations. This has been interpreted by some organisations working with him as paranoia. There has been a long running, interesting query over whether his behaviour is/can be the rational choice of an intelligent man, or must be/is the result of lacking the full capacity for choice. He continues to refuse to fit into an easy categorisation for us.

So goodbye to the Manna Centre, with all its fascinating people. I will miss you. Over to Jonathan!



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[@MannaCentre](https://twitter.com/MannaCentre)

Registered Charity No: 294691

Who used the Manna Centre services on Sunday 15th February 2015?

	Numbers using centre	%
Male	182	95
Female	10	5
Sleeping Rough	99	52
Council/HA flat	36	19
Hostel	27	14
Friends	23	12
Squat	5	2
Other	2	1
Ethnic Origin		
A10 Countries	56	29
English	54	28
African	35	18
Western European	18	9
Asian	7	4
Other	7	4
Black British	5	2
Black Caribbean	3	2
Irish	3	2
Scottish	3	2
Welsh	1	0
In receipt of benefits		
	84	44
	No income	
	93	48
	Other income	
	15	8

*We wish all our supporters
A very Happy Easter*