

The Manna Society Newsletter

Christmas 2018

Working with homeless people & those in need



The Meaning of Christmas

By
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Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year." Charles Dickens.

Christmas is a strange time of the year. It can be happy or sad, depending upon your outlook. If you have a living family or friends to get together, all is well. But it can be also a very depressing period for those who are lonely. Those alienated from their family and friends through distance, lifestyle or personality and those who have no friends or family at all. It is also tough for those in financial difficulties, those who are grieving their loved ones, those who suffer from serious illnesses and many others, who are unhappy for various reasons.

In Poland, we have this lovely Christmas Eve tradition to leave an empty place set at the table in case a person down on their luck shows up and asks for shelter. As a child I used to spend Christmas time at my grandparents and I was always fascinated by that and hopeful that someone but I do wonder what came and asked my empty plate on the table will turn up. None ever did. It is a compassionate and stranger to your house and me this tradition reflect the which should be about fortunate then us. challenging act to invite a share a meal together. For true meaning of Christmas, sharing what we have with those who are less



As we are approaching Christmas I decided that this time I am not going to write about our everyday struggles in the advice service. I have feeling that I have complained about it a lot recently. I rather want to share something positive and heart-warming about my workplace to set our moods for Christmas. I have been with the Manna Day Centre for over 7 years and it is one of these workplaces that you do not want to leave. For me the beauty of work at the Manna Day Centre lies in continually witnessing numerous acts of kindness every working day. In fact projects like the Manna Day Centre would not exist if it were not for this continuous stream of kindness.

Let's start with our volunteers. We are a relatively small organization and without our volunteers we would not be able to offer all the services available now. The IT suite, where our service-users can access the internet, is entirely run by volunteers. So is our clothing project, where we give away donated second-hand clothing. Our kitchen feeds around 150 people a day and that amazing job is done by one paid worker and 2-3

volunteers. We also have volunteers helping us with administrative tasks. What an amazing bunch of people, who sacrifice their free time, to come and serve one of the most vulnerable groups in our society.

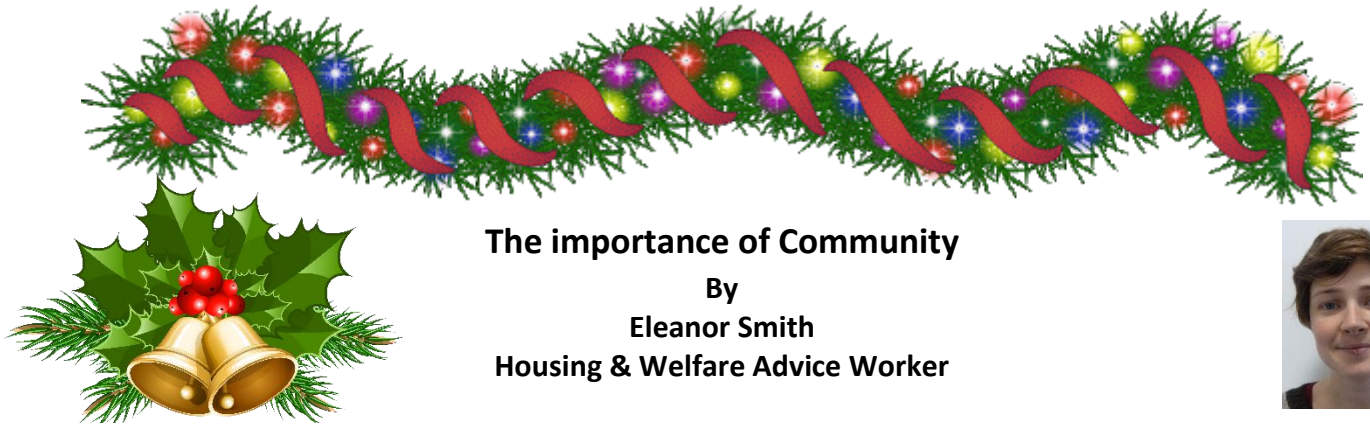
Next to mention are our donors. Local businesses and local people bringing us food and unwanted clothes on a daily basis. People who supports us financially. Churches, schools, companies and people who donate food to us during Harvest Festival. It requires a good intention and an effort to do it and all these donation are critical for us. Thanks to them we can continue feeding and clothing those in need.

Then all those people who ring us almost every day to seek advice, because they are concerned about a homeless person in their local area and they want to help. It is comforting to know that some of us are ready to help complete strangers without expecting anything in return.

Also our clients supporting and caring for each other, sharing their knowledge and experiences with newcomers. Our service-users who became our volunteers. Our service users who became our donors.

It is a great pleasure to work in the place where good things happen daily. It feels like Christmas here the whole year round.

This Christmas, bring joy to others with an act of kindness! Wishing you all a very Joyful Christmas!



"We have all known the long loneliness, and we have found that the answer is community" Dorothy Day

I have now been working at The Manna Centre for just over one year, and so have been reflecting on my time here. As the cold and dark draw in, and Christmas approaches again, I have been considering in particular the experience of becoming familiar with the community of day centre users, volunteers and staff. It has been very special to get to know regular users, both as individuals but also as part of a community – of differences and similarities, supportive relationships, teasing relationships, tensions, hardships, friendships, favours, chess games, shared tears, shared laughter, shared tobacco, shared hopes for the future.

Part of my motivation for working at The Manna Centre is my belief in the importance of community – a need every bit as important to humans as food and shelter. We are social animals, and we define ourselves through our connections with others. Lack of meaningful social connections can have severe consequences for people, especially people who are already vulnerable.

Loneliness increases the chances of experiencing both physical and mental health problems. In terms of physical health, it has been said that loneliness is as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day', and is linked to increasing the risk of early death by a third. Likewise, having health problems increases your chances of experiencing loneliness. It is a vicious circle. Professor Jane Cummings of NHS England has said about this alarming, although totally preventable, public health problem that "simple acts of companionship" could make all the difference. Carl Rogers, who pioneered person centred psychotherapy, would certainly recognise

the wisdom of this, placing great importance on the value of listening and empathy in soothing distress. He is quoted as saying "The gentle and sensitive companionship of an empathic stance... provides illumination and healing. In such situations deep understanding is, I believe, the most precious gift one can give to another."

And it is simple acts of companionship that make all the difference at the Manna Centre. From our long-time client who takes sandwiches round to home of another older client when she can't make it out of the house, to the familiar smiles and jokes of the project workers when people first arrive in out of the cold at 8.30am in the morning. In the advice office, even before we have managed to find any material solutions to a person's situation, the relief of speaking about it, and being heard, is palpable.

Soon, it will be Christmas and the day centre will close as Crisis at Christmas opens, and a small army of volunteers (11,000 kind souls across the UK last year!) will take over the care and support of our clients over the festive season. It goes without saying that Christmas can be a difficult time for our clients – of being in a bad situation at a time when everyone else seems to be celebrating. But Christmas can also be a difficult time for many other people – it can be a reminder of loss, or of being separated from family and friends, and can be a very lonely time of year. Volunteering over the Christmas period in this way can therefore be a source of solace - of meaningful connection with other people, as well as the natural joy of giving that lightens what would otherwise be a dark time. Volunteers and clients may therefore come together in the spirit of mutual aid, maybe from radically different lives, but with a very similar, very human problem that each has the answer to.

This is why I believe that Day centres such as the Manna Centre, as well as lunch clubs, social centres, libraries and other community resources held in common hold at least part of the solution to answering this basic human need, allowing people to share problems and feel heard and valued. These resources grow even more precious as they face the threat of closure, as have many libraries and community centres. We must defend these spaces, as they are vital to our collective social survival.

I wish everyone a happy festive season, may you all enjoy the incredible gift of your relationships, and value the power of your companionship and kindness.

Merry  *Christmas*



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“Why history will judge us for our treatment of the homeless”

By

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Housing and Welfare Advice Worker



This statement provided a title for the article Godfrey Holmes wrote for the Independent. He traced the history of vagrancy (as it was once called) and homelessness drawing comparisons from Philip O'Connor/s book “Britain in the Sixties: Vagrancy” to today. It is not a happy comparison. Not only are the circumstances that many of those who are homeless today face often through no fault of their own might justly bring us back in Mr Holmes view to a position where society’s approach to vagrancy/homelessness harks back to the days of the Black Death .

Sadly, if you read some of the articles about the mistreatment of some homeless people, you may well start to believe this. Just recently in Liverpool, it was reported that a homeless ex-army veteran suffered burns to his hand when a live firework was put in his pocket. A homeless man in Northampton suffering from dementia was set on fire by a group of teenagers; luckily as he was wearing a number of layers, he avoided being seriously burnt – a fate that two homeless men in Berlin fell prey to – both were doused with flammable liquid and suffered serious burns. When a man is spray painted just because he is homeless or a vulnerable teenager is “housed” in a tent albeit temporarily by a local authority or a video is put online of a man in the US seen kicking a homeless man, you wonder what if anything humankind has learnt or indeed whether it is worthy of the noun “humanity” – as one dictionary defines it – the quality of being kind, thoughtful and sympathetic to others.

Halved by 2022, at an end by 2027

So, let us look at the much heralded Government Rough Sleeping Strategy which might lead to an end to assaulting homeless individuals on the street. It starts with the statement that the government is committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. The basic tenets are;

- a) It will need all organisations to work together in new ways. So, there will be cross- government initiatives with new provision in the health services aimed at people who are rough sleeping to preventative work in prisons to prevent released prisoners from sleeping rough in the first place
- b) It is acknowledged that whilst rough sleeping is the most extreme form of homelessness, there is a commitment to look at prevention of all forms of homelessness – for example, greater protection in private rented tenancies
- c) It reflects on the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act which requires local authorities to support homeless individuals in their area and greater prevention responsibilities to a wider spectrum of people approaching them for assistance
- d) It acknowledges that we have, in the UK, a “broken housing market” and that there has to be secure and affordable housing citing that over a million homes have been created including 378,000 affordable homes and 273,000 homes for rent. That said, the government paper tells us that £9 billion will be invested in affordable housing – with greater levels of council housing building. This, it is hoped, will be delivered by allowing local authorities greater flexibility in funding so that councils can borrow more to build more
- e) It recognises the absolute value of quality supported housing; there having been a rocky period where the levels of Housing Benefit for supported housing came under threat. It was recently announced that the government will maintain housing benefit for all supported housing. There is also a commitment to get better outcomes from the housing providers in this sector
- f) That there is a need to better understand groups such as the LGBTQ sector (where there are high percentages of homeless particularly those who are younger) and those threatened by modern slavery
- g) It also recognises that rough sleeping may have different effects so, for example, what is called targeted provision for women

- h) A commitment to this longer term strategy – a nine year span where new approaches and initiatives will be tested so that an evidence-based decisions will be made on what is a good solution and to scale up and roll-out programmes that are clearly working whilst making sure that there is “meaningful” action **now**
- i) This will result in the development of new policies in this area once there is evidence that the interventions work

The approach is built on the three pillars of Prevent, Intervene and Recover. So what key measures fall under these key themes?

Prevent, intervene and Recover

There are great numbers of initiatives but let’s look at the highlights

Prevention

- a) Further development of what are called rapid re-housing responses – such as the further development of the Housing First project where people are housed and a wrap-around of support is then put in place, of No Second Night Out and more key workers or navigators who can help people access services both strands of which have proved successful.
- b) A review of legislation which affects the homeless community such as the Vagrancy Act to stop discrimination against people sleeping rough
- c) That policies will be embedded across government built on pilot schemes that enable people will enjoy stable and sustainable accommodation going forward
- d) Better understanding of key groups so that initiatives, approaches and outreach to those groups where this is needed – we have already mentioned LGBTQ and modern slavery
- e) Making sure there is better oversight and that any deaths or incidents of serious harm to homeless people are rigorously investigated
- f) Getting access and affordability in the private rented sector right so that there are a range of policy options available once
Allowance rates ends in

The latest Homelessness Monitor estimates that 340,000 homes per

the freeze on Local Housing
2020

Intervention

year need to be built every year up to

- a) £45 million will be of the Rough Sleeping year – it will bring 500 new homelessness workers and an additional 1,750 bed spaces
- b) Pilots of the “Somewhere Safe to Stay” will be developed in 15 areas with £17 million of government support
- c) Rough sleeping navigators who are a specialist breed of homeless workers targeted at helping rough sleepers access appropriate local services
- d) More support in improving services for those who are homeless and experiencing issues around their mental health and substance abuse - £2 million will be allocated but beyond that the government has asked NHS England to spend up to £30 on health services for people sleeping rough over the next 5 years
- e) New training for frontline staff so that they have the right skills to help people sleeping rough so that they understand how to work with people affected by the new psycho-active substances such as Spice, domestic violence, for example
- f) £5 million worth of funding helping to ease pressures on local services as a result of migration – dealing with rogue landlords who exploit such groups, improve integration by increasing support for English classes and to help new refugees into work, for example
- g) A rough sleeping support team which will help resolve the immigration status of non-UK nationals
- h) An improved Streetlink service – that is the reporting service for people sleeping rough so that outreach teams can get to them. The intention is to encourage the public, business and communities

to engage in a positive manner with rough sleepers and be able to let Streetlink know that there is a person who needs attention more easily

- i) The continuation of Housing Benefit costs for supported housing programmes – supported housing is more expensive than a general needs placement as it demands more intensive interventions

Recovery

- a) The government will take advantage of what is called the Dormant Account Funds (made up of monies in dormant accounts which no-one has claimed) which makes about £135 million available to help innovative financing for homes
- b) Move-on funding supported by a new fund of £50 million to deliver new homes outside of London. It is hoped learning from the projects will contribute to learning about capital funding for homes. £50 million has been provided to the Greater London Authority to help meet the needs of London's homeless
- c) Supported lettings schemes where flexible support can be proved for people who were previous rough sleepers who are now in their own accommodation. It is thought that this will help over 5,000 who were at risk of rough sleeping
- d) Helping develop local lettings agencies whose aim is to support vulnerable people into accommodation
- e) Housing First pilots will be expanded into Greater Manchester, West Midlands and Liverpool to build on the success of the initial pilots
- f) It is aimed to have homelessness experts in every Jobcentreplus who can deliver expert advice, signposting and support
- g) A programme entitled the Young Futures Fund whose aim is to support young people not in education, employment or training

There are many more initiatives going forward but let's remind ourselves of the scale of the problem and that although rough sleeping is homelessness in the extreme, homelessness is a pervasive problem affecting much greater numbers of ordinary people. The latest Homelessness Monitor estimates that 340,000 homes per year need to be built every year up to 2031 to meet anticipated demand – an estimate which is significantly higher than the Government estimates currently. The research suggest that 40% of those homes must be affordable homes (that is, homes where the rent is no more than 80% of the average rent in any given area). It is thought 70% of local authorities are struggling to find any stable housing for people in their areas and 89% reported real difficulties in finding private rented accommodation.

It's a big ask but surely humanity dictates that there should be room at the inn for all and we, as a society work together to be inclusive and to reject the idea of thinking that homeless people are a disposable element at the edge of society – quite frankly, the knife edge of survival that many of those I see every day endure tells me that there but for the grace of God go I. Thank you for your continuing support so that we can continue to give a safe and inclusive space of those in need which facilitates access to the services they need and to the homes they deserve. Let history judge us well.



***"The light of the Christmas star to you.
The warmth of home and hearth to you.
The cheer and goodwill of friends to you.
The hope of a child-like heart to you.
The joy of a thousand angels to you.
The love of the Son and God's peace to you."***

Sherryl Woods

Please take care of yourselves and those dear to you.

Merry Christmas





Recovering the meaning of Christmas

By

Bandi Mbubi

Manna Centre Director



During Christmas, the music and movies, the food, the glittering Christmas trees and lights in our streets, towns and cities, all contribute to making us feel good. And why not? Christmas is supposed to be joyful. Without the birth of Jesus Christianity wouldn't exist as a religion. For Christians, it's the starting point of Christianity and is therefore worth celebrating. But many of us have reservations about the way it's celebrated because of the rampant commercialism associated with it.

What's spiritual about reducing Christmas to a mere opportunity to buy and sell things which many of us can't even afford? Put that way, it doesn't seem spiritual at all and we can't help but see it as nothing more than a celebration of materialism. It appears to be an excuse to spend and spend and not think of tomorrow. Buy now, pay later!

A whole commercial industry is built around selling different types of products around Christmas, from entertainment products, like large screen televisions, and other household electrical appliances, like fridges and cookers, to clothing items and decoration materials. Lending companies and retailers are always keen to part shoppers with as much of their money as they can by using clever techniques, like "buy now pay later", and manipulating them into buying. Nevertheless, in the midst of this rampant commercialism, important traditions are practiced, in line with the spirit of the first Christmas. It'd therefore be a mistake to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Traditions associated with this historical event call for us to symbolically celebrate Christmas through manifestations of love, joy and peace. They're commonly expressed in our usual exchange of gifts, which the Magi shared with the Holy Family. We can be Magi and Jesus to each other, showering each other with good gifts, which honour Jesus, just like the Magi of old did, and vice versa. It's therefore clear that the buying and selling of gifts which people exchange during Christmas, in and of itself, isn't the problem. We often know when we receive a gift with love even when it isn't expensive. It's the rampant commercialism which is the problem. Jesus brings love and we show each other this love through our gestures and gifts of love, but in no way do they replace love, they're just manifestations of it.

But there is also another problem. Christmas celebrations can pull the wool over our eyes and prevent us from seeing our suffering neighbours and indeed we can forget our own personal problems, only to bite us later. The fun and excitement can at times be mixed with arguments even among close friends and families. Latent tensions can surface and emotions become raw and things can go downhill, if you're not careful. Oftentimes, excessive alcohol drinking heighten these tensions.

For some of us, including many of our service-users, we can feel sad during Christmas because we realise more than at other times that we have no one we can truly call family or close friend. If it's the first Christmas to be without a loved one, it can feel very lonely. Some memories of Christmas can also cause us to dread Christmas altogether. It's perhaps because of this that we should always be watchful of each other during this period of time to be truly in line with the real spirit of Christmas. To make some extra-effort to notice the troubles of those around us and indeed those we meet on the streets. In the midst of the euphoria of Christmas when we're all expected to be happy and get along, we may miss the pain of each other and not be there for each other.

At the Manna Centre, as usual, service-users, volunteers and staff will be celebrate Christmas by having our Christmas dinner, which, this year, will be on Friday, 19th December, a day before we close for Christmas

week. We have three sittings, with the third being reserved for staff and volunteers. It's a very popular celebration. Service-users are appreciative of the food and non-alcoholic drinks they're served for the occasion. They're offered the full traditional Christmas menu comprising of turkey with stuffing, roasted potatoes, and vegetables, such as turnip, parsnip, sprouts, and dessert at the end. Staff and volunteers wait on them and it's the only day when service-users don't have to come to the counter to ask for anything. We're at their beck and call, they wave their hand and we're there to give them their meal, top up their drink, prepare tea and coffee, and clear their plates. It's a great atmosphere! As they leave, they're given a present, thanks to the generosity of Better Bankside's Together at Christmas campaign.

Wishing you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

Manna Centre - Christmas Appeal 2018

It costs approx. **£37,500 a month** to run the Manna Centre. The work we do here is a compassionate response to homelessness and poverty. We are dependent on the goodwill of our supporters for our continued existence.



Would you like to support the work of the Manna Centre by making a one-off donation (either by cheque or online via our website)

Or

perhaps consider funding our work on a longer term basis by filling in a **Standing Order** form?

If you are a taxpayer and would like to add another 25% to your donation, at no extra expense to yourself, you can do so by simply Gift-Aiding your donation.

Perhaps you would consider leaving us a legacy in your will?

However you choose to support our work we are indeed most grateful.

May God bless you in this holy season & throughout the coming year.

I would like to donate £ _____ to the Manna Centre. (Please make cheques payable to "The Manna Society")

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Email address: _____

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

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____



A total of 3,103 rough sleepers were found in London between July and September 2018, the highest figure since records began.