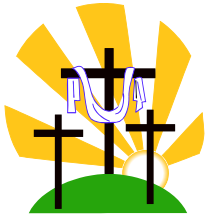


# The Manna Society Newsletter

## Spring 2019

*Working with homeless people & those in need*



### Giving Shelter

By

Eleanor Smith

Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



It's finally starting to feel like we can look forward to Spring: crocuses and snowdrops and daffodils are a cheering sight after what has been a very busy winter at The Manna Centre. Temperatures and conditions throughout the winter have posed a real danger to our clients, as well as being extremely unpleasant to be out in. Demand for the advice drop-in at cold times has a particularly urgent quality to it, and the drop-in has regularly been oversubscribed. 'I didn't feel it so much last year', commented one of my clients on being out in the bitter temperatures. 'This year I really feel it'.

During these times, we could not do the work that we do without the partnership of London's network of emergency winter night shelters, which get people indoors quickly, and give them a short term place to sleep, which is safe and warm. These shelters are by and large run by local church communities and are usually hosted in a different church or church hall every night of the week. They often receive little to no state funding and are run on donations, and the work of highly committed teams of volunteers. The homeless people who come to sleep in the shelters are generally referred to by shelter staff as 'guests', rather than clients or service users, creating a particular relationship between those that run the shelters and those that stay there; one that emphasises inherent worth, dignity and kindness, as well as the importance of the principle of hospitality.

#### Someone who had been

According to Housing Justice, coordinate and facilitate winter shelters across the

**reminded of his own humanity, through the humanity of others.**

an organisation which works to different winter shelters, there are 80 country which it supports, and there are

likely to be more outside of that network. In 2015-16 these shelters accommodated 1,920 people, 500 of which were able to find permanent accommodation, and 137 of which were able to find employment. Shelters generally employ a coordinator or advocacy worker who can offer dedicated support. Housing Justice also calculated from their most recent figures, that the number of people counted as sleeping rough would have been 40% higher if not for the provision of emergency winter night shelters.

It is an enormous relief when faced with someone in The Manna advice service who is scared, cold, alone and in crisis to be able to first and foremost make sure they are safe and comfortable at night by facilitating access to an emergency winter shelter. After this, we can begin to work together on a longer term solution. This is much easier when someone arrives rested and fed. A night's worth of sleep can transform a person, and means that they are more able to do the work required to re-settle on a long term basis.

Recently I met a young man in the advice service who was facing street homelessness for the first time. He had been beaten up and robbed on one of his first nights sleeping out in central London. He was dazed, physically shaking and feeling hopeless and barely able to think straight. I referred him to one of our regular partner night shelters in East London and advised them that he was in a fragile state. When at the night

shelter, the shelter coordinator discovered something I might never have found out until it was too late, not having any reason to ask the young man to remove his shoes: he was suffering badly from trench foot. Having a volunteer nurse at the shelter, they were able to clean and dress his feet, provide him with dry shoes and urge him to report to hospital the next day. After a few days of sleep, hot dinners and the company of patient and kind volunteers, it was like meeting a different person. Someone still anxious, but smiling, no longer trembling, and greatly calmed. Someone who had been reminded of his own humanity, through the humanity of others.

So as the days grow warmer, most shelters (though not all!) will be closing their doors and their staff and volunteers taking a well needed rest. They may spend their summer preparing for the next winter, including recruiting and training volunteers. If this is work you feel called to, please see [www.housingjustice.org.uk](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk) where you will be able to find your nearest winter night shelter. For those local to Southwark or Lambeth, see [www.robcs.org.uk](http://www.robcs.org.uk). And if you are already volunteering for a winter shelter, I wish strength and resilience for you and your guests in your final weeks and congratulations for making it through what has been a busy winter for us all.



*Would you like to sponsor one of our half marathon runners?*

Five Allianz employees are running the Hackney Half Marathon on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May on our behalf.

You can sponsor them via

<https://mydonate.bt.com/events/mannahalfmarathon/488026>

*Or*

*Would you like to do a 10k run through central London on our behalf?*

The British 10K London Run takes place on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2019.

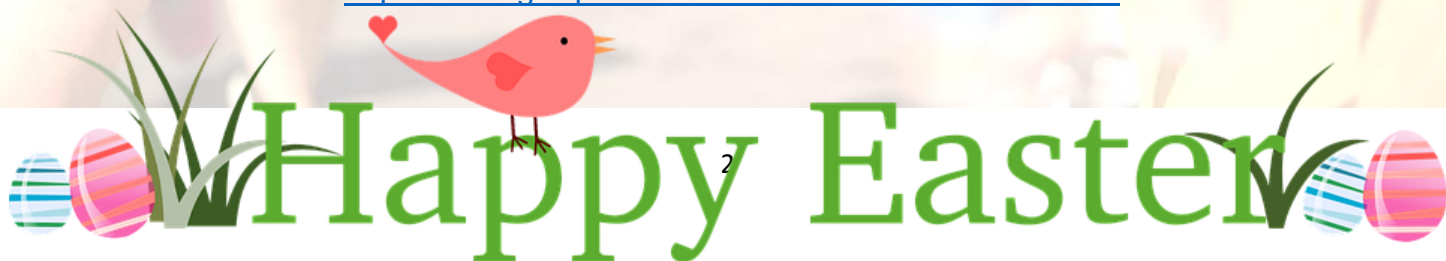
**We have 10 places for this 10K Run.**

If you feel up to the challenge and can raise a minimum of £200 we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please contact Paddy at [mail@mannasociety.org.uk](mailto:mail@mannasociety.org.uk)

More information about the run itself can be found at

<https://uk.virginsport.com/event/asics-london-10k-2019>





## A fair deal – does that exist for our most vulnerable?

By  
Margaret Shapland  
Housing and Welfare Advice Worker



Just before Parliament's Christmas break **four billion pounds** was put aside to deal with the consequences of leaving the European Union with "no deal" – just think how many new social rent homes could be built with those funds. You just can't get away from Brexit – I know that it is the most important decision the UK has made for more than a generation but you do get the feeling that just about everything else is treading water. On the day this funding was announced, a 43 year old gentleman was found dead by London Transport Police having choked on his own vomit – one of the homeless who had taken shelter in the entrances to the Underground in London.

There are some truly alarming statistics being reported:

- 12,000 people are sleeping in cars or tents. You can imagine how unsafe and how cold one might feel particularly in the recent cold spell
- On average, homeless people die at the age of forty-four, that's nearly half the life-span of someone living in stable housing
- Rough sleeping is, of course, the most visible form of homelessness (which has doubled in the last five years) but for every one rough sleeper recorded, there are twelve families or individuals experiencing other insecure forms of homelessness – sofa surfing or crammed into a room in a bed & breakfast
- The Office of National Statistics published figures before Xmas that nearly 600 homeless individuals in England & Wales died in 2017, a rise of 24% over five years
- Recently, there was some new data from Centrepont who work specifically with young people under twenty five. It shows 103,000 approached local authorities in 2017/18. Sadly, the main reason for their homelessness was that fact that parent or others were unwilling to accommodate them

### Getting a home

There has been some recent data published following a Freedom of Information request. The data focussed on "right to buy" and they make for very difficult reading. No-one begrudges someone owning a home but the surprising facts are;

- More than 40% are now rented out by private landlords
- Tens of millions of pounds are being paid by local authorities to rent former council homes to people who are homeless
- Some councils have bought back former council homes at more than six times the amount they were sold for
- Hundreds of landlords own five or more right to buy properties and there are some London boroughs where more than half the homes sold through this policy now are owned by private landlords
- In London borough of Ealing alone (the borough in which this scheme was launched back in 1980), the council has spent £107 million to buy back 516 former local authority homes.
- According to the Resolution Foundation think tank, for every two properties sold under the right to buy scheme, local authorities and housing associations have built one home, so basic replenishment is not at parity

Shelter have called for 3.1 million new social homes to address the current housing crisis, Polly Neate, the chief executive was quoted in a recent Guardian article saying, *“While right-to-buy has helped many families get on to the housing ladder, just three years after it was introduced in 1980, the supply of properties available for social rent had halved – pulling up the ladder for future generations”*. It does beg the question as to whether this is the right policy to continue to pursue at this time, when the housing crisis is so critical.

An article in The Independent last year stated that the numbers of homes available at a social rent had dropped by 11% in just one year. The biggest reduction was among private providers which fell by 30,000. More than 10,000 fewer homes were let by local authorities at a social rent. Social rents are typically 50% of the market rate. The current trend to build what are known as “affordable rent” homes – where rents are at 80% of the market rate. The Indeed.co.uk ( an employment website) website, cites the average hourly wage for a cleaner is £8.27 per hour – over a 40 hour week, earnings will be just over £330 a week, an average monthly salary of £1,430 before tax and national insurance – net salary approximation would be £1,249. That’s if, they can manage to work those hours.

An average private rent in our own borough of Southwark (from data published from the Valuation Office Agency) showed that the average monthly rent was £1,629 – (this is data from the third quarter of 2017). Of course, people who are earning a low salary may be given help with their housing costs but this is capped at what is called the Local Housing Allowance rate, so any contribution will be capped at £910 for a one bedroom flat, a size of property that most of the clients approaching us will aspire to. Doing an outline calculation, if our cleaner chose to rent a property at £1,629, they would still have to make a contribution of £828 towards their rent, and then pay council tax and their other expenses – clearly unaffordable. Finding a 1 bed property at £910 is a virtual impossibility in the borough in the private rented market.

On a lower salary, other costs are magnified. Travel in London is costly. Looking at the lowest cost of public transport, a monthly bus pass at £81.50 (over 6% of our cleaners budget – often they would not be able to travel by bus as their working hours are such that they need to be at work for early morning shifts that may start at 6 am if they are cleaning offices, alongside the other basic costs – council tax etc., they need to factor into their monthly budget We spend a lot of our time juggling budgets for our clients just so that they can make ends meet and remain in their properties.

### **Keeping your home – if you claim a sickness benefit**

Whilst getting a home is one thing, if you are a person with a long-term disability, the current policy for benefit recipients in this group can put this at risk. It is the usual practice for the Department of Work and Pensions to call people to attend a Disability Assessment on a 5 yearly basis. These are undertaken by private contractors.

For one of our clients, he attended an assessment in 2017 where he was found fit to work. Usually, if we can we like to attend assessments but this is not always possible – it was not possible to fit the original assessment into our timetables. - even when we can, we have turned up at an assessment to be told that the DWP have failed to send the relevant papers to the assessment centre to enable the assessment to take place on that day you can imagine how stressful that can be to an benefit recipient who may be already anxious about what is going to happen.

Essentially, our client who we will call Jude was found fit to work. This meant that he could apply for Jobseekers Allowance or the Universal Credit equivalent or not apply for any benefit and seek work immediately. If they make a decision to seek work and if they are in the disability support group they will

receive £73.10 per week. However, if they choose to contest the decision they will receive nothing up until the point where their case is accepted to go forward to a Tribunal hearing, when the rate of £73.10 will be paid up to the point of the hearing.

The client had long-standing physical health issues and was receiving treatment for liver cancer, alongside mental health issues. There are a lot of questions around the way these assessments are being conducted and a great many of them fall below acceptable standards.

Frank Field MP who chaired the Work & Pensions Select committee published a report in 2018 focussing on assessments. Overall, problems were identified with the assessment process - around trust, transparency and quality of the assessments – indeed; over 50% of assessments checked were found to be below standard.

### **Getting a fair deal**

In the case of our client, the assessor did not accept additional paperwork that the client had brought to an assessment – something about which specific instruction is given in the Work Capability Assessment handbook which all assessors have an aide. It specifically states that such additional information should be accepted by the assessor, reviewed, copied and sent on to the DWP decision-maker.

In addition, the assessor has a number of questions to get through and our client felt that he was not given time to add additional information to the assessor and that his voice was not heard. Again, the WCA handbook makes specific mention of the importance of “listening skills”.

One of the areas of contention was the client’s ability to walk a specific distance without considerable distress as he suffered physical problems and extreme fatigue. Alongside the medical evidence presented, we also looked at department of transport guidance when authorities are considering a person for a Freedom pass on the base of disability (the pass enables free travel on rail and other public transport within certain criteria) and were able to demonstrate how restricted our client’s ability to walk at any normal pace among other areas where he suffered physically and mentally.

We won the appeal and the judge commended us on the preparation and support we had provided to the client. That said, over the period when we were waiting for a tribunal hearing date, our client financial position was so poor that he was accessing food banks, applying to various grant providers to cover some of his living costs and basically going without basics so that he could make the contribution to his rent for service charges that were ineligible for support through housing benefits. His anxiety and stress were such that he started to drink alcohol again – as someone in the past who had issues with alcohol and given his liver cancer, this was really concerning. It took a year to get from the original decision to the tribunal hearing.

Then there is the cost of these appeals, which stood at £103.1 million in 2016-17. In 2017-18, 68% of appeals were won by the claimant.

A former DWP minister and Conservative peer, Ros Altmann, acknowledged the system needs an overhaul *“Disability benefits need an overhaul and, of course, we must not let people make bogus claims, but the extent of the appeals we are seeing clearly indicates that something is seriously wrong with the system,”* Overall, it does make you wonder if the community we try to help is getting a fair deal from government policies.





# Alcoholism

By  
Karolina Muszynska  
Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



Supporting people addicted to drugs and alcohol is an extremely draining and frustrating experience. It is like playing snakes and ladders and repeatedly sliding back to square one. It is particularly tough when you care about the person addicted and after multiple attempts to help, you have to decide to withdraw your support to protect your own sanity. It is now widely recognised that co-dependent family members need support as well, to help them set boundaries and to overcome guilt. Watching our loved ones ruin their lives is heart breaking. Coexisting with an addict is extremely difficult.

I come from Poland and we, Polish, are quite 'famous' for our drinking. Statistics shows that almost 12% of adults in Poland abuse alcohol and 2% of the adult population suffer from serious alcohol addiction. Every year 10 of thousands of people die in Poland from alcohol abuse. Most of my Polish friends have an alcoholic in their close family. I lost my grandfather and uncle to alcohol addiction. I have two uncles and one auntie severely addicted to alcohol. I have seen the destructible power of alcohol addiction in my close family. Destructiveness that affects current and future generations. It has been always puzzling to me how drink can become more important than anything else in the entire world.

Nowadays we see addiction as a disease and although this is a well-known fact, it is still very difficult for most of us not to make judgements. When all is said and done we feel that the person has chosen to drink rather than to abstain. Alcoholism cannot be treated without cooperation from the sufferer. It has an ugly face and we tend to perceive it as a life choice. Most often we think about alcoholics with contempt, disgust. We scornfully call them drunkards, winos, etc. We do not think of them as people who are sick. It is definitely not easy to empathize with addicts. It is a whole, new level of compassion. It is quite difficult to sympathize with addicts, particularly for those of us, who had never suffered from any addiction. Perhaps only someone who went through the same hell, an ex-addict, can truly understand another addict.

I believe that there are life experiences that we cannot fully understand if we have not gone through them personally. We can get close by listening to people, reading books, reflecting etc, but we will never be able to get a full picture of complex feelings and emotions related to the particular experience. You cannot fully understand how is it to be a refugee if you have never been one; similarly with parenting, bereavement, divorce, disability, trauma, alcoholism, homelessness, divorce, being discriminated against, being trans-gender to name just a few. This is something I keep reminding myself each time when I feel frustrated by alcoholism. Somehow admitting that I do not understand alcoholism helps me not to be judgmental.

Many of the Manna Day Centre users struggle with various addictions. Unfortunately for some it is a struggle they will not win and they will die from substance abuse. It is very sad. It is also frustrating to watch our clients deteriorating as a result of addiction. When you choose to work in a helping role you really want to see people moving on, turning their life around, and when it is not happening you feel powerless and annoyed that you cannot change it. You can support people in recovery but it has to be their decision to embark on that journey.

There is also that every day frustration in working with substance abusers. As they are chaotic they often fail to attend appointments, lose jobs, get their documents or phones stolen, and ignore letters. Often we end up doing the same thing over and over again. Sliding down the snake's back to square one and starting all over again. It does teach us patience.

Supporting people who abuse substances is a daunting task. It requires acceptance of our own powerlessness over other people's addictions. In this work it is very important to set our boundaries but equally important is to keep our door open.



## Can the UK Government end rough sleeping by 2027?

By  
**Bandi Mbubi**  
Manna Centre Director



In the past ten years, rough sleeping has risen by 169% and as a result Central Government has been under enormous pressure to take concrete action to significantly reduce rough sleeping. The government estimated in January last year that 4,751 people slept rough in England on one night in the autumn of 2017, up by 15% the previous year. But the homelessness charity Crisis estimates the number of people sleeping rough in England to be 9,100, almost twice as many. Crisis further claims that when you add figures from other categories of homelessness such as the number of people sleeping in hostels, in night shelters, in refuges for domestic abuse survivors, in unsuitable temporary accommodation like B&B, in cars, in tents, and public transport, the total is as many as 103,000 people in England. It is against this backdrop of increased homelessness and in particular rough sleeping that the government, in August 2018, published its rough sleeping strategy. One of its key-features is the government commitment to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and to ending it by 2027. It is an ambitious and commendable plan, but is it achievable?

The government's strategy revolves around three core action plans of intervention, recovery and prevention, with their own separate key-measures, including funding, to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home.

The policy calls homelessness services to intervene immediately and support people who are currently sleeping rough. Several key measures, with funding, are put in place to enable this urgent intervention, including up to £45 million, which in 2018 funded 500 new dedicated homelessness workers and additional 1,750 bed spaces; up to £17 million for work in approximately 15 areas to rapidly assess the needs of people at risk of rough sleeping; up to £2 million to enable access to health and support services, with an existing NHS plan to spend £30 million on health services for people who sleep rough over 5 years; new training for frontline staff in order to help them have the right skills to support people; £5 million new funding for non-UK nationals who sleep rough; etc.

In order to minimise the considerable harm caused by rough sleeping, the strategy argues that action must be taken beforehand to prevent rough sleeping from happening in the first place. Hence the creation of the 'rapid rehousing' response to rough sleeping to ensure that by 2027 no one will have to sleep rough again. This intervention plan targets categories of people who may fall between the cracks. These categories include people leaving prison and care homes and sets aside £3.2 million for it; people from the LGBT community, by improving understanding of the issues they may be facing; etc. Another important measure is to look at the affordability of the private rented sector, by working with stakeholders in order to develop policy options for 2020, in time for when the current Local Housing Allowance freeze ends.

Furthermore, the policy recognises the importance to have support in place before moving people into sustainable accommodation. It means that a stable home goes hand in hand with flexible support which is tailored to individual needs. The government reckons that up to £135 million can be generated from dormant accounts to support innovative financing for homes for people who sleep rough or are at risk. It makes available £50 million to deliver new supply of homes outside London for people who are ready to move on from hostels or refuges and might need additional support. Another £50 million package was previously allocated separately to the GLA for the same purpose. Under this recovery plan, perhaps the most exciting element is the creation of housing first pilot projects consisting of providing accommodation to people with multiple complex needs, with £28 million of funding to begin with. Similarly, £19 million of new funding has been made available for supported lettings, allowing flexible support in homes to help 5000 people at risk of rough sleeping.

Overall the strategy sets out meaningful action to help people stay off the streets and the different approaches needed to achieve the grand vision of ending rough sleeping by 2027. It not only lays out a plan of intervening immediately to move people who sleep rough off the streets, but also the way in which to prevent them from sleeping rough in the first place and help them keep their tenancies. It is commendable that it allocates considerable resources so that people can benefit from flexible and tailored support in their own homes and enable them to recover from setbacks.

The strategy offers very little detail about how the government intends to tackle the biggest barrier to relieving homelessness which Crisis identified in its extensive consultancies. Although the government acknowledges that we need to look beyond rough sleeping to ensure the entire system is working to prevent all forms of homelessness, it says very little about how it does that. The government claims to have built since 2010 more than 1 million homes, including 378,000 affordable homes and 273,000 homes for rent. But this claim can be misleading because the rent is set at 80% of market rents, which is still unaffordable to those on the lowest incomes.

Furthermore, according to the Chartered Institute of Housing, between 2012 and 2017, 150,000 social rent homes have been lost through conversions to affordable rent, right to buy and demolition. Crisis estimates that 4 million households in England are in need of social rent homes, and to address this backlog, we need a fifteen-year-housebuilding programme and build 383,000 homes per year, including 100,500 social rent homes. The government has since launched its own consultation through its Green Paper on Social Housing which offers the opportunity to assess Crisis's recommendations on the way forward.

It is impossible to achieve a utopian end of homelessness i.e. absolutely zero homelessness with everyone having housing and support, and no one being at risk of homelessness. But it is possible to achieve a functional end of homelessness, which means that long term homelessness and rough sleeping are addressed. In 2015, the Canadian City of Medicine Hat did just that, they ended long term homelessness and rough sleeping. The UK Government may indeed achieve such a functional end of homelessness, provided it addresses the current biggest barrier to homelessness i.e. social rent homes.



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