The Manna Society Newsletter Summer 2019

Working with homeless people & those in need

The Gift of Possibilities

By

Crystal Tan

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give" – Winston Churchill

It is raining and the cold bites through my jacket despite it being mid-May. I rubbed my hands together for warmth and quickened my pace. Today was my first shift at the clothing 'store'. Stepping in from the cold, I arrived at a modest room lined with crates and shelves of clothes, belts and socks. Light banter hung in the air, punctuated by bouts of laughter. Men were picking out thick sweaters by the counter and volunteers were bagging them. A woman brushes damp streaks of hair from her cheeks and shrugs off her fur-lined jacket, swapping it for a waterproof parka taken off the rack. "Goodbye, take care *Sheila," one of the volunteers replied as the woman, now bundled under the dry jacket, thanked them and left. As I will come to realize, it is in these ordinary practices and natural expressions that we find the extraordinary – or what is better known here as – *Manna*.

Like most of the centre's guests, I showed up in the morning to the place which would soon become familiar and integral to my day-to-day life. But unlike most of the guests, whose long journeys ended in rest on Manna's doorsteps, mine began upon arrival: I was on a quest to find out what dignity looked like, as part of my Masters' research dissertation in anthropology. I would continue to stay on for a month, volunteering and observing in different spaces of the day centre. This account is my witnessing of how care and dignity comes alive in the Manna, as I learn to practice it myself.

I was almost certain that there was something magical about the Manna Centre. There are no barriers and no signs on the wall telling one what makes for appropriate behavior. Anyone could enter the door, no questions asked. Yet it is precisely this trust that allows everyone – myself included – to feel safe and at home. On the rare occasion that someone loses his temper or affects those around him, he is told to cool down or leave. Intervention was never presumptive or punitive, but measured out of respect for one's self-mastery. The result was a safe haven made by the guests themselves, for if they wanted to stay, they had to make it safe for others too. Walking into the Manna Centre thus also meant leaving harsh conditions and hostile gazes at the door, into a place of solace where they know their weathered souls can be met with warmth and respect.

In the day-to-day of the centre, names and stories are not solicited but willingly exchanged. It is not so much order but rest and relief that permeates the entire place. I recall the way a man eased into a relaxed slumber in the computer suite, humming to Louis Armstrong's 1967 live performance of 'what a wonderful world' on YouTube. Mostly, people sit down in the servery for a game of chess and conversation while waiting for lunch. Every so often, staff at the servery greet people by their names and in joking banter. Others wait patiently for their turn to see the advice worker or nurse. Meanwhile, in the kitchen, bones are carefully picked out in the curry, sweat dotting the staff and volunteers' brows as they hasten to get ready for the lunch rush.

More formal assistance takes place in the advice rooms, where needs are met with an intent gaze, empathy and practical actions. Up till now, I cannot forget the hopeful expression and gratitude of a young man who had recently found a job. He was here to apply for temporary hostel assistance while he built his life back together. Before he left, he offered to volunteer and give back to the Manna. I believe anyone seated in my spot would realise the incredible possibilities that can come about through committed care, strength of resource, and one's willingness to believe in a person.

Indeed, there is a sense that volunteers and staff in the day centre are always *doing more*, taking that extra step to know, help and care. This atmosphere of ease and camaraderie sees the return of familiar faces and names known by heart. In fact, it surprised me to learn that some volunteers were currently homeless themselves – a phenomenon that speaks volumes about the mutual respect and bonds forged within the Manna Centre.

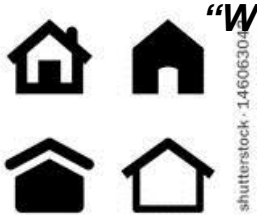
Having seen most of the spaces in the Manna Centre, I had come to gradually understand that its spirit lies not in a written and passed down ethos of dignity. Rather, it emerges from the consistent inflow of generous donors, the precious time of volunteers and the persistent commitment of the staff. It is the grit to ensure that "*we'll be here tomorrow",* because they see beyond where people came from, into what they can do and who they *could be*. And that is exactly what staff, volunteers and donors alike stand for when they give the gift of Manna, in its various forms: a life force to this possibility.

On my last day at the Manna, I found myself also inscribing upon the last page of my field notebook: *There is no magic in Manna, only striving and everyday care.* More than a provision of material shelter, food and finance, it is a commitment to acknowledge the other's dignity. It thrives not on an ideal, but on the backs of people who believe in it, who work, wash, run, serve, and give to it. Ultimately, behind these efforts is an everyday decision to recognize the potential of people, over the circumstances they find themselves in.

Manna – both the centre and its essence – is thus the creation of a world of possibilities for those who may have seen life as closed to them a long time ago. And so long as people continue to come in, every new slice of bread, pair of socks, dime and time offered and dished, will signify the promise of new and better beginnings.

Manna Society AGM invitation

Please come along to our Annual General Meeting
On
Thursday 26th September at 7.00pm
At
The Manna Centre, 12 Melior Street, London SE1 3QP



"Where, oh where have all the houses gone?"

*(*with apologies to Pete Seeger*)*

By
Margaret Shapland
Housing and Welfare Advice Worker

In newsletters of yore, we have talked about the private sector and the issues that people have found themselves homeless face in accessing that sector but on this occasion, I want to look at what has been a traditional source of reasonably priced housing – namely, housing associations.

A history lesson

Housing associations first appeared on the housing scene in the mid-nineteenth century in a drive towards philanthropic activity among the wealthy and middle classes. For example, the Guinness Trust was founded in 1890 by Edward Guinness, 1st Earl of Iveagh, to help the homeless of London and Dublin. He was the great grandson of the founder of the Guinness Brewery.

The intention was to help improve the lives of ordinary people, many of whom could not afford a decent home. Conditions in cities such as London were overcrowded, dirty and prone to the spread of disease; there were no safety regulations to protect the inhabitants.

To give you an idea of what it might have been like, the quote below illustrates the situation with great clarity

"*We do not say the condition of their homes, for how can those places be called homes, compared with which the lair of a wild beast would be a comfortable and healthy spot? . . . The buildings are in such miserable repair as to suggest the thought that if the wind could only reach them they would soon be toppling about the heads of their occupants. . . . Every room in these rotten and reeking tenements houses a family, often two."*
Reverend Andrew Mearns – The bitter cry of outcast London 1883

Among the first developments were in Brandon Street in the Walworth district of Southwark and Snowsfields just a stone's throw from our current offices with rents ranging from 2 shillings and 6 pence for one room to 5 shillings for 3 rooms and these types of buildings have been a feature of many of our cities since then.

But let's look at what is happening in that sector now.

Does that original vision and social mission survive?

In 2014 the English Housing Survey reported that the number of people in social housing had dropped by almost a third in 1980 to 16.8%. The latest English Housing survey covering 2017-18, reports that the proportion of households in social housing has not changed for over a decade, following a long downward trend.

Financial viability of the tenant counts more?

As is my wont, I was drawn to a recent article in The Guardian which stated that housing associations had come under fire for refusing to house homeless people who have been nominated for available housing association properties based on the premise that the welfare cuts have meant that the poorest prospective tenants pose too much of a financial risk preferring instead people who are working with a stronger credit profile.

Many of our clients, from my experience, just won't have the past credit history to match up to the requirements and the current knife edge existence of many in trying to cope with maintaining a steady income, the bureaucracy and paperwork demands made on clients when claiming any benefit and the poor decision- making and efficiency of communication that many experience with the DWP mean that it is hard for them to create that profile as their financial situation is precarious on a continuing basis.

Universal credit because of the assessment period principle can mean people have to wait up to 5 weeks before the housing cost is paid so they will fall into arrears automatically. Also we have noticed a drive in some housing associations where traditionally benefit claimants would be receiving housing costs 4 weeks in arrears coming under pressure to move towards reducing that arrears period so that the books show their rents moving to a nil balance with the aim that rents are being paid in advance and policies being implemented with quite substantial pressures – aggressive letters and phone calls with significant examination of means becoming more frequent.

So, are housing associations losing their focus and moving away from their original vision of housing the poorest and most vulnerable in society?

In the latest CRISIS homelessness monitor, it was reported that two-thirds of the councils reporting back to the monitor agreed with the statement "Affordability/financial capability checks are making it more difficult for homeless households to access social tenancies in my area."

Is there a change in the focus of housing associations?

Back in 2015, Genesis Housing Association announced it would no longer build properties for social rent. The now former chief executive – a stand-up gentleman by the name of Neil Haddon when questioned about a social responsibility to house the poor gave the robust response "That won't be my problem".

Government policy may have contributed to a change in focus – perhaps not as extreme as the Genesis example. Austerity measures introduced under the coalition government cut housing associations government grants by 60%.

Thus, some housing associations looked at commerciality as a necessity to survive making moves into private property development and re-classifying social rented stock under the umbrella of "affordable" rents or intermediate housing which allowed them to raise rents for those properties.

A House of Commons briefing paper "What is affordable housing" was published May 2019. Intermediate rents/affordable rents are normally about 80% of market rent. It mentions that in a consultation conducted by the then Housing Minister, Alok Sharma references were made to the feedback from tenants that "affordable rents were not really affordable"

The introduction of "affordable" rented property has coincided with a decline in the supply of new social rent properties. Ignoring new build affordable rent properties, between 2012-2018, 111,570 units were converted to "affordable rent" from other types of social housing tenure

Will they be going back to their roots?

There now appears to be widespread agreement that an increase in social housing supply is required to tackle the acknowledged crisis in housing affordability.

We now know that several of the government's more controversial policy proposals won't be implemented such as the proposed requirement on local authorities to sell 'higher value stock' in order to compensate housing associations for selling their housing assets at a discount under the extended Right to Buy or the voluntary extension of "right to buy" for housing association tenants

In terms of the position that housing associations, some have announced their intention such as Peabody Trust to reduce the rent on properties rented with an affordable rent once they become void. In an article published in Inside Housing, their CEO, Brendan Sarsfield said that affordable rents were typically £65-80 more expensive per week than social rent properties of an equivalent size in an equivalent area.

He went on to comment that there was a recognition that there was a potential to cause hardship, the increased cost added to the housing benefit bill stating that this was not only a burden for the tenant but also for the general population and the government.

Some like Peabody are moving to what has been termed the London Affordable Rent. The guidance given by the Mayor's office runs along the lines of " The Mayor does not consider 80 per cent of market rents to be genuinely affordable in most parts of London and he therefore expects most homes let for London Affordable Rent to be substantially below this level ".

A group of some eighty housing associations have come together to form the "Homes for Cathy" group (after the iconic homelessness drama of the 1960s – Cathy Come Home) on the fiftieth anniversary of the drama with the intent of recognising housing associations social obligations around metrics such as numbers of homeless people housed and reductions in numbers of evictions.

Their commitments are

- To contribute to the development and execution of local authority homelessness strategies.
- To operate flexible allocations and eligibility policies which allow individual applicants' unique set of circumstances and housing history to be considered.
- To offer constructive solutions to applicants who aren't deemed eligible for an offer of a home.
- **To not make any tenant seeking to prevent their homelessness, homeless (as defined by the Crisis plan definition).**
- To commit to meeting the needs of vulnerable tenant groups.
- To work in partnership to provide a range of affordable housing options which meet the needs of all homeless people in their local communities.
- To ensure that properties offered to homeless people should be ready to move into.
- To contribute to ending migrant homelessness in the areas Housing Associations operate.
- **To lobby, challenge and inspire others to support ending homelessness.**

Perhaps, all is not lost.

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The Conquest of Bread

By
Eleanor Smith
Housing & Welfare Advice Worker

'It is curious how seldom the all-importance of food is recognized. You see statues everywhere to politicians, poets, bishops, but not to cooks or bacon-curers or market-gardeners.'

George Orwell, The Road To Wigan Pier

One of the core activities of the day centre has always been the daily provision of food, to anybody who walks through the door. It was the daily donation of bread when the centre first opened, from a nearby bakery that volunteers distributed to hungry visitors which prompted the name The Manna Centre. Underpinning everything is the fact that we meet people's basic needs first. This basic need, which we all share, is currently a growing cause for alarm in the UK, as increasing numbers of people find themselves unable to feed themselves and their families.

The Trussel Trust, a national foodbank, recently reported that the year April 2018 to March 2019 was the busiest year for food banks in the Trussell Trust's network since the charity opened. During this past year, 1,583,668 three-day emergency food supplies were given to people in crisis in the UK; More than half a million of these (577,618) went to children. This represents an 18.8% increase on the previous year. Fareshare, the UK's largest food waste charity, reports that 8.4 million people in the UK struggle to afford to eat, 4.7 million of these living in 'severely food insecure' homes. 'Severely food insecure' means that their food intake is greatly reduced, and their children regularly experience physical sensations of hunger. These figures are taken from a 2016 UN report, and in light of the more recent Trussel Trust report, actual figures are likely to be higher. Oxfam, accounting for people who might be receiving aid from charities outside of the Trussel Trust estimates that more than 500,000 people are now reliant on food aid, in the form of food banks and parcels.

A report released in January by the government's environmental audit committee, as part of the UN's sustainable development agenda, confirmed that Food insecurity in the UK is significant and growing. The Manna Centre is open to all, but in practice has primarily served the most marginal and desperate members of the community. Now not only this group affected by daily hunger in the UK. Human Rights Watch have described this sharp and widespread national increase in food poverty as 'a new phenomenon' and 'a troubling development in the world's fifth largest economy'. The chair of the environmental audit committee stated 'The combination of high living costs, stagnating wages and often, the rollout of Universal Credit and the wider benefits system, means that levels of hunger in Britain are some of the highest across Europe. We found that nearly one in five children under 15 are living in a food insecure home – a scandal which cannot be allowed to continue'.

The Manna Centre and many other similar day centre projects in the UK operate what you might call a 'soup kitchen' type model consisting of a big hot daily meal cooked and shared among people, very many of whom are experiencing homelessness and other hardships. This type of provision to feed the hungry has existed since time immemorial, and has taken many different forms, varying over time and place. In 1834 soup kitchens, of which there were many at the time, were made illegal in the UK, along with any kind of aid outside of workhouses. They were later decriminalised due to the huge demand for food aid caused by the Irish Famine. In the US, the concept of the soup kitchen, and food

handouts for the needy increased and entered the national consciousness in a more mainstream way during the Great Depression. This is the kind of provision that many people think of when they think of the hungry in the UK – street homeless people, the very poorest, queuing for their daily meal. However, taking a broad overview of the landscape of free food provision in the UK clearly paints a much more diverse picture of food poverty in the country, including both working and non-working people, both the very young and very old, families and single people alike.
In fact it is also not only rough sleepers that use The Manna Centre. A survey in November 2018 showed that just 44% of surveyed clients were rough sleeping. Which meant that the majority were either housed or 'hidden homeless'. A quarter were in secure social tenancies. Housed clients come to us for a variety of different reasons – to be around people and not isolated at home, to get advice on managing their benefits or maintaining their accommodation, for clothes, but also for the necessity of food, which may not otherwise be met. One client living long term in private rented housing disclosed to me that if she did not come to the Manna Centre every day, she would not be able to afford to eat every day. Similarly, I was told a story by a volunteer in a different day centre that a visitor had told her 'none of my friends or family know that I need to come here to eat. They would be shocked'. The current situation in the UK means that services such as the Manna Centre are seeing a broader range of people who are struggling to feed themselves.

As well as the offer of a daily meal, in the advice office we are able to give food bank vouchers to clients, which they can take to a food bank and redeem for around 3 days' worth of shopping. Clients who visit the advice office for this reason often disclose the reason for their need as being benefits problems or delays. This is consistent with Trussel Trust data which cites the main reasons for people needing emergency food as being 'benefits consistently not covering the cost of living…and delays or changes to benefits being paid'.

We are finding that often when benefits are not covering the cost of living, the problem is debt – when people are struck by financial crisis they often take out loans in an attempt to help themselves. Or they find that they are unable to pay their major bills, and debts start to stack up. Creditors can later pursue these unpaid debts through the benefits system. Additionally, when people then first access universal credit, they must wait for a mandatory 6 weeks for the first payment. If they have no money to live, they are allowed an advance payment, but this is also in the form of a loan which must be paid back. I have a client who is paying back court fines after being caught stealing food from supermarkets, at a time when he also could not afford food, catching him in the very definition of a vicious cycle. All of these factors can mean that when the universal credit is eventually paid out the monthly amount can be very low, barely enough to live on, especially in an expensive city such as London. I have given foodbank vouchers to clients before living on £150 per month in benefits or less, after rent is paid. Our job then is to negotiate these repayments down, so that the person can meet their basic needs while they are repaying the money they owe.

The following passage is taken from food writer and campaigner Jack Munroe's blog, from an entry entitled 'Hunger Hurts'. It was written in 2012 at a time when she too was badly struggling, and illustrates heart breakingly what life is like in such circumstances: *'For reasons unbeknownst to me, this month my Housing Benefit was over £100 short. I didn't get a letter that I know of, but I can assume that it's still the fallout from the cockups made by the various benefit agencies when I briefly went back to work from March to May. Whatever the reason, it's easy to work out that £670 of rent can't be paid of £438 of Housing Benefit. So I'm a week in arrears, almost two, as by the time Thursday comes and the next £167.31 is due, there'll still be nothing coming in. The Income Support went on keeping me afloat, briefly, as did the Child Tax Credit. Now I'm not only in arrears, but last night when I opened my fridge to find some leftover tomato pasta, an onion, and a knob of stem ginger, I gave the pasta to my boy and went to bed hungry with a pot of homemade ginger tea to ease the stomach pains. This morning, my small boy had one of the last Weetabix, mashed with water, with a glass of tap water to wash it down with. 'Where's Mummy's breakfast?' he asks, big blue eyes and two year*

old concern. I tell him I'm not hungry, but the rumblings of my stomach call me a liar. But these are the things that we do.'

There are a multitude of social and economic factors threatening people's standard of living right now. Most recently the visiting UN rapporteur on extreme poverty, Philip Alston, decried the 'shocking' rise of rough sleeping and dependency of food banks in UK, problems we are only too familiar with at the Manna Centre. It is easy to feel overwhelmed, and difficult to know where to begin in trying to help. We think a shared meal is a good place to start.

Still Human, Still Here

By
Bandi Mbubi
Manna Centre Director

Street homelessness in general has been rising in the past ten years and lately supporters and visitors to the Manna Centre have been commenting to me that they have been seeing more and more people sleeping rough in their local areas more than before. You too perhaps have noticed the same thing, where you live, just as the staff and volunteers who work here have. Times are tough for people living in poverty and those experiencing or facing homelessness, but as I mentioned in my previous article, in our last newsletter, there is a glimmer of hope that Central Government may be increasing its resolve to tackle street homelessness and significantly reduce it. In this article, I focus on one category of homeless people, those with No Recourse to Public Funding (NRPF), failed asylum seekers in particular. To do this, I have borrowed the title of my article from the name of a campaign Church Action on Poverty used to run, about ten years ago, which highlighted the plight of failed asylum seekers who ended up living in destitution in the UK.

Unfortunately, failed asylum seekers still experience and face destitution to this very day. But increased awareness over the years has meant that a lot of people of goodwill have stepped in to help provide emergency accommodation to failed asylum seekers who would otherwise experience or face a life of destitution as a result of having state assistance withdrawn from them. Although this particular category of homeless people are usually unable to fend for themselves, the state has not tended to prioritise them in the

last 10 years or so. The last Rough Sleeping Strategy announced last year is a great illustration of this trend. Out of the £100 million put aside to tackle rough sleeping, only £5 million has been allocated to all the people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), including destitute failed asylum seekers. Although I pointed out in my last article, in our last newsletter, that the new strategy is welcome news, overall, the money for destitute failed asylum seekers is very little for the magnitude of the problem.

The term NRPF needs explaining. It is a condition imposed on a person due to their immigration status, under Section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, prohibiting them to receive certain welfare benefits, homelessness assistance from the council and allocation of social housing through the council's register. When the law was first introduced, the thinking was then that withholding such important state assistance would encourage refused asylum seekers and undesired immigrants to put themselves forward for voluntary repatriation rather than living in destitution. Whilst it is true that some immigrants, based on our experience, have sometimes chosen to voluntarily return to their home countries, especially those who originally come from EU countries, many refuse to voluntarily return home notwithstanding their destitution.

My own interest in this topic has recently been heightened by my close association with three of our clients with NRPF. They are refused asylum seekers from war-torn and unstable countries who did not contemplate returning home. They had been rough sleeping and living on the streets, with no prospect of finding anywhere to stay, when we first met them. My own role has been limited to providing moral support and my colleagues in the welfare and housing advice team have done much of the actual work, the heavy lifting. They managed to locate rapidly developing hosting schemes which ended up accommodating them. This is a great testimony to their great advocacy skills. It has not happened overnight but over several years and our open-access approach has enables us to accompany such individuals over several years and make their lives a bit bearable during this time. It also meant that they could use our shower facilities, have food for free, and for some of them to even engage in meaningful volunteering activities.

In these three cases, in which I have personally been involved, two of the three people ended up falling seriously ill. It is hard to say whether destitution played a significant role, but it certainly did not help. In fact, it made matters worse and caused undue distress. Given growing evidence that people who are fleeing war or famine would not volunteer to be repatriated even when they live in destitution, it is perhaps time to scrap this policy of NRPF for this category of immigrants and refused asylum seekers.

Brexit presents another challenge as EU Nationals who experience or face homelessness in the UK face living with NRPF and will continue to do so if they fail to apply for 'settled status'. Settled Status requires paperwork and proof of identity which many homeless people lack. Without this, many EU migrants risk staying in the country illegally without access to healthcare, welfare benefits and pension, as the latest report by WPI Economics pointed out. In general, homeless Europeans are more likely to be unaware of pending deadlines because they lack internet access and adequate information or simply fear interacting with authorities. However, if they fail to comply with the law, they may risk being detained or deported.

Complex needs clients

By
Karolina Muszynska
Housing & Welfare Advice Worker

Recently I took part in the social gathering of people, who I met through my work at The Manna Day Centre. Most of people there were the frontline workers from various homelessness organizations: outreach services (services that go out and engage with people on the street), drug and alcohol services, mental health team, night shelter workers and others. As you can imagine, in such company it is very difficult not to talk about homelessness and work as this is what has connected us in the first place.

It was very interesting to chat informally and learn about difficulties different teams encounter. The most recurring theme in all of these conversation was the frustration we are all experiencing, when we are unable to help our clients, even after we have invested a lot effort and resources and the client is ready to move on. Or when we see those, who we already helped into accommodation in the past, being back on the streets again. Or when we feel that we have failed our clients, when our well-intended intervention caused them to a lot of stress and made them feel less trustful and less willing to engage with services.

Why does it happen? Despite having all variety of specialist services for homeless people, despite government pledges to tackle the homelessness crisis in the UK, homelessness still continues to rise. There seem to be a missing element to the network of various statutory and non-statutory homelessness organizations. I used to think that the missing element was a lack of coordination and cooperation between various services. After speaking with my colleagues and reflecting on what I have heard, I am starting to think that another big obstacle is a lack of flexibility and a lack of understanding of the complexities of our client's needs. Our clients are often very chaotic individuals, who already are quite disappointed with services and who feel quite isolated from 'normal' functioning society. Some of them are so disappointed that they refuse to engage with services at all.

It's a complicated operation to help them move from the street into accommodation. It requires a level of engagement from them, prompt cooperation between various services and it has to be done as smoothly as possible but at the client's individual pace. This is because our clients are often very fragile and they have been broken by life so many times before. If something goes wrong, become too stressful or too hopeless, they may choose to disengage or never engage again. Sadly, we do see it happening quite often. It's like a wasted/lost window of opportunity with the client and the next chance may not come so quickly. It does take a lot of time and effort to build a good, trusting and engaging relationship with a person, who have been a long term rough sleeper.

We recognize that people with complex support needs, require extra assistance. Crisis, the national homeless charity, says on its website: "The *longer someone experiences rough sleeping for, the more likely it is they will develop additional mental and physical health needs, substance misuse issues and have contact with the criminal justice system (collectively known as complex needs). The more complex needs someone has, the more help they will need to move on from homelessness and rebuild their lives."*

Although we recognize that need for extra support we are failing to implement it at every stage of their journey. I do not blame any particular service here – I am just pointing out where I see that gap is that needs to be bridged. I will give you two examples:

We have had a number of cases of complex needs people, who were evicted from their temporary accommodation because of rent arrears. These evictions were totally preventable. The usual scenario is that the client was not given enough advice or support in order for them to get their housing benefit payments in order. The same council that accepted the client's vulnerability is now evicting them because of it. Surely there should be some support protocol to prevent this situation from happening?

We had instances of people, who were evicted from different supported accommodations projects because they did not engage with a particular service. They did not engage because they were mentally unwell at that time but this was not taken into consideration at all.

Often when we, homeless charity workers, discuss our interaction with statutory services, we tend to call it 'fighting'. For example we fight with the DWP (Department Of Work and Pension) or with HPU (Homeless Person Unit) to get our clients' issues resolved. I wish we could somehow change the nature of the interactions so that together we could work for the mutual benefit of our clients.

People with complex needs do not fit easily into a system of rules and conditions. We need to offer a more flexible and person-centered approach to them if we want to make a change. Also we need to make sure that at every stage of their recovery from homelessness they receive appropriate support. We need to remember that with complex needs clients we have only a certain number of chances - if we fail they may disengage with services forever.

And a BIG thank you to Helen Cahill, Doan Nguyen, Rebekah Murphy and Alistair Blundy (Allianz workers) who ran the Hackney Half Marathon for us and raised the fabulous sum of £1,811.