

# *The Manna Society Newsletter*

## *Christmas 2020*

*Working with homeless people & those in need*



*Merry*   
 *Christmas*







## A Christmas like no other

By

**Bandi Mbubi**

**Manna Centre Director**



Christmas is going to be different this year. Since July, because of COVID-19 restrictions, we have resorted to giving takeaway meals and clothing, outside the centre, along with a limited number of people allowed inside for welfare and housing advice, to see a nurse or have a shower. And for our Christmas dinner, although we would still do our best to make it special, the atmosphere would not be anywhere near what we usually have inside the centre. However, what we can count on is the food remaining delicious as usual. No doubt, this year too, Better Bankside will provide us with nicely wrapped Christmas gifts to give to our guests when they come.

Our usual Christmas dinner is very popular among our service-users. It is the only day of the year when staff and volunteers wait on our service-users, serving them food and drinks on demand, just like you would in a restaurant. As anyone who has ever eaten Irena's cooking knows, the food is delicious, but for our Christmas dinner, it is something else; it is heavenly. We serve our guests a typical Christmas dinner which includes food like turkey with stuffing, baked potatoes, gravy, cranberry sauce, and vegetables such as carrots, turnip and parsnips. And to wash it down, we have water, fizzy drinks, and several types of juice to cater for all tastes. For dessert, it is a choice between Christmas pudding and trifle. We tend to have Christmas music playing in the background – the only time we allow music – lots of banter and fun. For us all involved in the running of the Manna Centre and our service-users, it is the highlight of our year.

But COVID-19 has cast a cloud over Christmas celebrations with numbers of infection and death, as we have recently seen, rising again after a lull. It has also caused a bleak economic outlook. Many companies have lost business, some have had to close down completely, or significantly reduce their operations to survive. Although it is too early to fully assess the economic and social impact of the pandemic, what is clear at this stage is that unemployment is on the increase. As the [BBC](#) reported in mid-October, this is in part due to Government asking employers to begin to pay in November a bigger proportion of their employees' salaries, and employers deciding to let employees go. The latest figures saw a record rise in the number of redundancies to 227,000. That is the highest level since 2009, the last time we had a major economic downturn.

The situation for homeless people could have been far worse, with perhaps other wider implications for society at large. Thankfully, around March this year, the government took positive steps to provide emergency accommodation to homeless people, even to those who would not ordinarily qualify for such assistance. They issued a directive asking local authorities to offer emergency accommodation to people sleeping rough, and those sharing facilities, inadequate for infection control. As a result, 15,000 people nationally who were sleeping rough or at risk of homelessness were placed in emergency accommodation during the lockdown. They made up about 90% of all homeless people.

By September, the government said that more than 29,000 homeless people had been supported as a result of their scheme, with more than 10,000 people in emergency accommodation and nearly 19,000 in settled accommodation or move-on support. But, the biggest test will come when government's furlough scheme is rolled back and the eviction ban is ended as [Inside Housing](#) highlighted in a recent article.

In the midst of this COVID-19 crisis, with its devastating effect on people, and a bleak economic outlook, it is easy to lose all perspective. Like all major crises, the coronavirus pandemic has brought to the fore existing inequalities, between low and high earners, young and old workers and ethnic minorities. For instance, the

Institute of Fiscal Studies says that people on low wages are most at risk of losing income and their jobs during the pandemic. It also reports that the death rates between rich and poor neighbourhoods has widened. Whilst government effort to help homeless people during the pandemic has been highly commendable, as already highlighted above, I wonder whether current measures are sustainable in the long run. Those previously homeless may indeed continue to be catered for, by and large, but those who newly become homeless may not receive the same assistance as at the beginning of the pandemic, as some reports are beginning to indicate. After all, before COVID-19, major homelessness charities like Crisis warned government that unless they built enough genuinely affordable housing, homelessness will continue to rise.

Now is the time to introduce radical solutions to address longstanding systemic housing problems to eradicate homelessness for good, 'not patching', to paraphrase Sir William Beveridge. We can learn a lot from his generation who dared, in the middle of the Second World War, to lay the foundation for the modern Welfare State. Beveridge presented his report, which bears his name, to Parliament in November 1942, proposing to banish poverty and want. From the outset Beveridge insisted that war provided an opportunity to make good. The BBC quotes him as saying: "Now, when the war is abolishing landmarks of every kind, is the opportunity for using experience in a clear field. A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching." The Beveridge report provided the foundation of the modern Welfare State, establishing the NHS in 1948, and a national system of benefits, so that the population would be protected 'from the cradle to the grave'.

In the middle of this pandemic, we can settle for patching, or we can demand more transformative solutions from our elected officials for our generation and for generations to come. Beveridge generation dared to begin to lay the foundation of the modern state when the country was still at war and heavily in debt. Their political will and determination to end 'poverty and want' made the difference. That has always been the starting point of any real transformation in society; where there is a will, there is always a way. In so doing, the light and joy of Christmas will pierce through the dark cloud which is now covering us. Let the light and joy of Christmas shine through – we pray!



## *The* **GOLDSMITHS'** *Company Charity*

We are very grateful to The Goldsmiths' Company Charity for their latest £3,000 donation and to all our donors. Many thanks & Merry Christmas



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**Next Steps ...**  
**By**  
**Margaret Shapland**  
**Housing and Welfare Advice Worker**



**Looking back to earlier this year**

Back in March, we will remember the “Everyone In” programme which saw almost 15,000 people nationally who were sleeping rough or at risk of homelessness move into emergency accommodation during the first wave of the pandemic. As well as providing much needed roof over their heads, it had a demonstrable effect on reducing the potential impact of the virus on this part of our population.

Data published in The Lancet Respiratory Medicine Journal from work by University College London from a sizable study among 46,565 people experiencing homelessness, of whom 35,817 were living in more than 1,000 hostels, 3,616 people who were sleeping rough in 143 night shelters and 7,132 sleeping on the streets showed the health impacts of the programme.

Through modelling, it found that the COVID-19 preventative measures may have avoided 21,092 infections, 266 deaths, 1,164 hospital admissions and 338 intensive care (ICU) admissions of homeless people.

Assessments by some of the providers of accommodation during this phase reported on the improvement. Riverside who conducted a small study among 47 residents reporting that their “lives have been significantly transformed by this intervention.” The residents described better physical and mental health and no Covid-19 cases were confirmed among them.

**What happens now?**

In September, Robert Jenrick (Housing Secretary) announced the first tranche of funding designed to help the thousands of homeless and vulnerable people who were housed during the pandemic to stay in accommodation. A further tranche was announced last week to provide additional supported homes.

Christened the Next Steps Accommodation Programme it comes into being as we face a second wave and the intent is to prevent a return to the streets and build on the improvement in health of those who were lucky enough to find a place in the “Everyone In” programme

The programme has 3 key strands which are:

- a) Short-term/interim accommodation and immediate support. This part of the fund (£105m) is to be used for immediate support for local authorities. It can be used for a range of interventions including planned transition to more sustainable interim accommodation until longer-term move-on accommodation is put in place and supporting individuals to reconnect with friends or family. The funds need to be used before the end of March 2021
- b) Provision of long-term move on accommodation. This part of the programme is made up of £130m capital funding and £31m revenue funding and it needs to be used in this financial year with the aim to deliver 3,300 units of longer term, move on accommodation. This specifically aimed at rough sleepers in hotels.
- c) Funding for drug and alcohol treatment. MHCLG and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) have also announced funding for 2020/21, which can be used for drug and alcohol treatment services. Whilst linked, this does not form part of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme and will be administered separately by Public Health England. The aim is to ensure that the engagement people have had with drug and alcohol treatment whilst in emergency accommodation is maintained as they move into longer-term accommodation.

This, of course, is great news for many of those who were placed into temporary accommodation and who will be helped. That said, this is not going to cover everyone that needs help and support to find accommodation. Which is where organisations such as ours step in.

**Sorry – you just don’t quite fit the programme**

We are already experiencing approaches from clients whose relief from homelessness is not going to be met by the above. Let me give you some examples:

- a) A lady who is working but lost her stable accommodation some years ago. She has managed to survive by booking into backpacker style hostels but that has become untenable due to the fact that many impose an upper age limit that does not include her and that many dorm-style accommodations have been re-configured to become single-occupancy accommodation at a higher cost and with significant numbers being block purchased by local authorities. We have just found her alternative temporary accommodation while we help her look for suitable longer term accommodation
- b) A gentleman from the European Union who has lived in the UK for many years who has just applied for “settled status” to continue living in the UK. Currently he has no access to benefits as the Department of Work and Pensions are disputing his right to claim at this time. We have been asked to help in finding some accommodation while his application to settled status is considered and a challenge is mounted to prove his entitlement to government support through Universal Credit
- c) A young man laid off his work during the COVID lockdown and just told by his employer that they won’t be taking him back. As a result he lost the flat-share as he had to move to Universal Credit where the local housing allowance did not cover the rent payment due to his landlord.

### **Bridging the gap**

I could go on, so what do you do to secure accommodation if there is no immediate permanent accommodation that suits the client’s needs and traditionally that is how accommodations such as shelters play such a massive part in helping bridge that gap. Government guidance for night shelters states there should be a "balanced risk assessment" before re-opening night shelters, and they "should only be used as a last resort to protect against the risk to health and life of individuals remaining on the streets when other alternative options are unavailable".

Many shelters have created a new model for delivering their service moving away from a circuit of churches that was largely the traditional model. Some who have an existing site have moved to a single bedroom approach rather than a dormitory style accommodation. Others have leased buildings as a permanent site and during this period have converted the space to give private bedrooms and facilities. Many have said that that there will be a challenge in sourcing alternative accommodation for those who have moved off the street and being able to cope with the anticipated numbers who will become homeless following post-lockdown. Among the shelters with whom we work at the moment, reductions in number of bed spaces has become inevitable.

### **A safety net for those at the margins**

One of the groups that gives cause for much concern are those clients who have no recourse to public funds and have no housing. A study by the Mayor of London estimated that there were 674,000 undocumented migrants in the UK. Among these, there is a group of people who have the right to remain in the UK but do not have the right to recourse to public funds – mostly they are working but do not have the safety net of calling on public funds such as benefits like Universal Credit. One group of solicitors has said *“The Government has made some concessions and migrants with NPRF can utilise very limited forms of public funding, but it will likely fall to charities and non-public funding providers to fill the gap left behind by the state”*. We have always seen these groups approaching us for help but expect that there will be even more pressure on organisations such as ourselves to help this particular group to sustain while they seek help to regularise their situation.

I am writing this as the Government has just imposed a new lockdown period. In the previous lockdown, we continued to provide advice over the phone and seek to place people into safe accommodation as that was provision was available at that time. This time around, it is a different picture. We are at this time providing an appointment service in COVID-safe conditions – it does reduce our capacity in the Advice & Welfare service but we opened this service earlier than many other services and we sincerely hope we can continue this during the current lockdown – we are an essential service to those who need us. Our work helps provide shelter for those who have none and through our benefit work helps people to sustain the accommodation they have and to manage their budgets so they can survive - one is reminded of Mr Micawber reflection in Dickens’ David Copperfield *“Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery”* Let’s hope that as we approach a festive period which may look a little different than usual, that we can play a part for our brothers and sisters where the result is happiness. Wishing you all a peaceful and safe festive season.



## **Living with uncertainty**

**By**  
**Eleanor Smith**  
**Housing & Welfare Advice Worker**



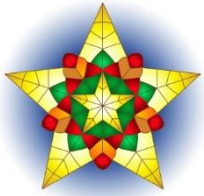
As the festive season comes around, many of the things we normally take for granted at this time of year are in question. Can I travel? How will we celebrate? Can I see my family? There may also be more worries this year about money, with many people losing their jobs, or not knowing how much longer they will be able to continue to work. Those of us who work with homeless people are also living in deep uncertainty for the fate of our clients this winter. The most crucial question of course, is where will homeless people sleep? The voluntary run church shelters that we normally rely on will be opening at heavily reduced capacity in order to run safely, if they are running at all. The government has promised £10 million to local authorities and £2 million to faith based and voluntary groups to help them to provide emergency accommodation. However, as has been pointed out, this is less than the £13 million cold weather fund given to homeless organisations and local authorities last year, and the challenges we face this year will clearly be greater. The huge amounts of funding given to local authorities to keep people off the streets at the height of the first wave this spring will not, we are told, be repeated. And the Chair of the Rough Sleeping Taskforce, Louise Casey, has now stepped down, and no replacement for her announced.

Thinking about uncertainty and fear for the future, I think of asylum seekers in the UK, and how much these are features of their daily experience. Many asylum seekers come to the Manna Centre for support with the basics of life – food and clothing, as well as for help accessing legal advice. Many do not know what the future will hold, and live in fear of the worst – being sent back to a dangerous life threatening situation in their home countries, or living in destitution in the UK, dependent on charities and friends to survive. For this group of people, uncertainty is a burden that has to be picked up and carried about every day. Research has shown that ‘the length and often seemingly arbitrary nature of the asylum process are major causes of stress and insecurity for asylum-seekers, with people living in fear that they could be detained and deported at any time’, and that this state of being can be highly detrimental to people’s mental health (Mind 2009). Stories about asylum seekers have been prominent in the news recently, as 2020 saw around 4,000 people making the perilous journey across the channel to seek safety in the UK. This has caused rising anxiety, even hostility for some people, that somehow too many people are coming, or that the UK is taking in a disproportionate amount of refugees. In fact, the UK is home to just 1% of the world’s 29.6 million refugees. The vast majority - 85% - of refugees globally live in the country bordering their own, countries which often have far fewer resources to support them.

In times of great stress, it is part of our psychological natures to lean towards black and white thinking, to lose tolerance for ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty, and to make scapegoats who can carry the blame for our problems. Psychotherapist Farhad Dalal makes the following point in relation to asylum seekers ‘As George Orwell showed in 1984, the invitation to worry about the enemy at the gate serves the function of distracting one’s mind from thinking about what is going on inside the gate.’

And yet, it is at these very moments of uncertainty and fear that we have the greatest capacity to empathise with others, who are also uncertain and afraid. Uncertainty, insecurity and fear for the future are common features of human existence that we can never escape. In ‘The Wisdom of Insecurity’, Alan Watts argues that the fact of this common insecurity should be recognised, even embraced, if we are to live our lives fully. He argues: ‘There is a contradiction in wanting to be perfectly secure in a universe whose very nature is momentariness and fluidity. But the contradiction lies a little deeper than the mere conflict between the *desire* for security and the *fact* of change. If I want to be secure, that is, protected from the flux of life, I am wanting to be separate from life.’ Living life in times of great uncertainty is difficult for everyone. How much harder it is to do with in isolation. At this time of year, let us remember how important it is for us to face uncertainty united by our common experiences, our common humanity.



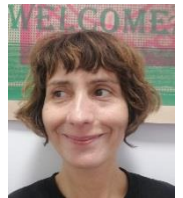


## Advice service in the time of coronavirus

By

Karolina Muszynska

Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



Like most others businesses, services and organizations, we have had to make many changes to the way we work with our clients. Our advice service was reinstated to its full pandemic capacity in June and at present, it is functioning quite efficiently all things considered. We have limited our face-to-face interactions to the bare minimum to protect our customers and our staff. We have developed ways to do more work remotely by using devices like video conferencing and conference calls. To avoid unnecessary travel we are now sending text messages to our customers to let them know that we have received their correspondence or that their clothing request is ready for collection. Other organisations with whom we work, for example accommodation providers, job centres, councils etc. have also switched to more contact-less methods of working. Most housing and benefits applications can be now done online and supporting documents can be uploaded; property owners offer virtual viewings; jobcentres offer telephone appointments. Information technology has massively facilitated communication and made contact-less support possible in these unprecedented times.

However, it is important to note that there is a downside to it too. It marginalizes even more those people without IT confidence, a smart-phone or access to a computer. It also makes it more difficult for those who cannot speak English well, those who suffer from mental health problems or addictions. I am glad we can still offer “on screen” appointments to some of our clients here at the centre. The way it works is that the client is in one room with a laptop and the advisor is in a different room with a laptop. They communicate via their laptops by means of a videoconferencing platform. Those appointments are the closest we can get to “face to face” in the current situation and are often the only way to help some.

For example, I have been supporting a couple in their sixties with the administration of their Universal Credit claim. Both are unable to speak English or to use the internet. The man has reached pension age and the woman had another 3 months to wait before she could claim her pension. They were applying for Universal Credit. It was somewhere in July this year when we helped them make a claim. At that time even something as straightforward as verifying one’s identity had to be done over the phone. Since they moved on to Universal Credit we have seen them regularly to help them manage it. We have helped them with providing information, uploading documents and making phone calls on their behalf. They are both very proud and independent and if there was a way to manage their benefits without having to touch a computer, they would find it. Recently the man told me that it took him half an hour before he felt able to dial our number and to ask for help. He felt so ashamed and frustrated with his inability to manage their benefits himself.

Lisa is a 65 years old, English woman diagnosed with learning disabilities. She does not use a phone, she cannot remember what benefit she is on and she cannot use the internet. When she needs help she would come and speak to us directly. Although we cannot offer her an appointment then and there we do set up an appointment with her for a later date. Normally we set up appointments via our telephone helpline but in Lisa’s case we make an exception as we understand her situation. We helped her to apply for a disabled person freedom pass. It is an online process that includes completing an online application, uploading documents and a passport sized photograph. Lisa would not be able to do it by herself even guided by an advisor over the phone. She needs a ‘face to face’ appointment.

If you ask me to describe our work these days in two words, I would most likely say something like “chaos navigators”. We are in a pandemic and everything keeps changing like in a kaleidoscope. We do not know when it will be back to normal and what the new normal will be. On top of that we are working within a welfare system which is in a state of flux. The full roll out of Universal Credit has been delayed again until September 2024 and that means that until then we will be operating in a confusing world of two different systems. Moreover, as a cherry on this chaotic pie we still have the uncertainty of Brexit and its potential impact on our clients and indeed on the welfare of all. It has been a quite a challenging year in the advice service and I really hope that 2021 will bring more clarity and positivity for us all. **Happy New Year 2021!**

# Manna Centre - Christmas Appeal 2020

It costs approx. **£40,800 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. (Cheques payable to "The Manna Society")

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

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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To the Manager of \_\_\_\_\_ Bank/Building Society

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Instruction to your Bank/Building Society Manager:

Please pay into the account of the Manna Society – Co-operative Bank plc Account No. 50109537,  
Sort Code 08-92-99,

The sum of £ \_\_\_\_\_ (amount in words: \_\_\_\_\_)

Commencing on (date) \_\_\_\_\_

And also the same amount in every succeeding MONTH / 3 MONTHS / YEAR (circle one as appropriate)

On \_\_\_\_\_ (date of month)

Until further notice, charging the same to my account:

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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Bank/Building Society Details:

Account Name:.....

Account Number:.....Sort Code:.....

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

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\* Please return completed form to The Manna Society, 12 Melior Street, London SE1 3QP \*\*