

# The Manna Society Newsletter

## Christmas 2021

Working with homeless people & those in need

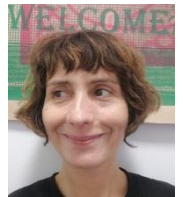


### Longer tables, not higher walls

By

Karolina Muszynska

Housing & Welfare Advice Worker

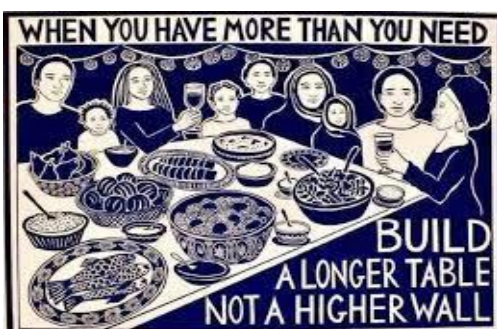


Another Christmas is approaching soon and although I am not really celebrating it always bring a lot of sweet memories from my childhood. I was very lucky to have the most amazing grandmother and we always spent Christmas at hers. Her name was Anna and she had a heart made of pure gold; she was so loving and compassionate. I loved to listen to her stories. There was one that has particularly stuck in my head, a story about sharing. Before the Second World War my grandmother was from a prosperous family and when she was a small child she used to secretly swap her rich and highly nutritious sandwiches at school with another girl from a very poor background. She was a young child of primary school age and the fact that she came up with this idea by herself, carried it out in secret and had a less nutritious breakfast at school says a lot about her. She understood that she would have plenty of good food when she came home while for the other girl the sandwich she received may have been the best thing she would eat during the day.

My grandmother was from a generation, whose youth was stolen by the Second World War. She was only in primary school when the WW2 broke out. Her whole family were abducted and taken to Germany where they were forced to work on German farms. They had to leave their house, their belonging in one day and only through the luck and random acts of kindness along their journey, they survived the WW2. Grandma experienced hunger, cold, cruelty of war, fear and these experiences had never left her. Moreover, the older she got, the more vivid they became. When WW2 finished, the whole family came back to their hometown and had to rebuild their entire lives from the scratch. There was no money for her to continue her education despite the fact that she was extremely bright. War took everything but not her good heart. She always taught me that sharing with those less fortunate is important and that we should never take what we have now for granted.

I am bringing this story here as I feel very upset by what is happening on the border of my country, Poland, and Belarus. Some of you may not be aware so here is link to Guardian article about it if you want to find out more: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/31/poland-belarus-border-migrants-deaths>

In short refugees from various countries are being illegally pushed back by border guards on both sides and are not allowed to claim international protection. They are stuck with children, older people in a dense cold forest between Poland and Belarus without food, medicine and shelter. We do not know how many of them have died already, as independent journalists are not allowed into the area. It is pure horror in a time of peace and reasonable prosperity. I feel ashamed of Polish politicians who are playing a political game with Belarus and using these very vulnerable people as pawns in a game. Both countries are pushing the responsibility for this humanitarian crisis back to the other and meanwhile people are dying on their borders. We have enough to share and our ancestors have been through this not long ago. How could we forget? What would my grandma feel if she would still be alive?



So please build longer tables this Christmas and share with those less fortunate.

Merry  
Christmas



**A glimmer of hope**  
**By**  
**Bandi Mbubi**  
**Manna Centre Director**



After a lull, the recent resurgence of daily infections and hospitalizations numbering in the thousands and the daily death toll being consistently well over 100 people, we have had to tread carefully at the Manna Centre. The Covid-19 Pandemic has remained a dominant issue still affecting our lives despite the vast majority of the UK adult population being fully vaccinated. But there is a glimmer of hope that covid-19 cases could significantly fall in November or December without the need to reintroduce restrictions according to a model produced by some experts who have been advising government on its strategy on the pandemic.

As we still need to protect staff and service-users from Covid-19, we have sought to strike a balance between the need to reduce the risk of infection, by employing strict infection control measures, and the need to offer a viable service to our service-users. You can read all about the different various ways we have adapted our service during the pandemic in our recently published Annual Report and more widely on our website.

Following the government lifting most restrictions over the summer, we carried out an extensive risk assessment after which we decided to allow an even greater number of people inside our building than we have so far done throughout the pandemic. We can do so because most of our staff and volunteers are fully vaccinated, which means that we can work with people face-to-face more safely now than we did previously. So since 18 October, we have introduced two sittings reserved for people who are fully vaccinated, or those with a negative covid test result valid for 48 hours.

Alongside sit-down meals, people can access our shower facilities, clothing store, nurse clinic and our housing and welfare advice service. Please see below a table detailing our current operations. Overall numbers remain relatively the same, averaging 130 takeaway meals per day. Since we introduced the sit-in service, less than a month ago, an average of 10 people have come inside the building during both sittings, but only less than 5 people have chosen to have sit-down meals. An overwhelming number still prefer to have takeaway meals, as opposed to sit-down meals, regardless of whether they are fully vaccinated or not.

Services	Main activities
<b>Sit-in Service</b>  (Requires proof of (1) vaccination or (2) LFT)	Monday to Sunday – <b>30 people max. at each sitting</b> <u>Toilet facilities &amp; limited showers during both sittings</u> <b>1st Sitting: 8:30am to 11am</b> Tea or coffee & breakfast <u>30 minutes break to clean and disinfect</u> <b>2nd Sitting: 11:30 to 1:30pm</b> Tea or coffee & lunch
<b>Takeaway Meals for All</b>	A hot meal and a sandwich Monday to Sunday: 11:30 am to 1:30pm
<b>Mail for clients</b>	Mail for registered clients can be collected Monday to Sunday during drop-in or takeaway meals times
<b>Clothing</b>	Clients fill clothing request slip and are contacted when clothing is ready

<b>Housing and Welfare</b>	Telephone advice: 020 7403 1931 (option 1) - Monday to Friday: 10am to 1pm Clients with appointments seen via laptops at the centre, on Zoom, Monday to Friday: 10am to 1pm
<b>Nurse Clinic</b>	Wednesdays only from 8:30am to 1:30pm

This is not necessarily desirable as there is value in the social dimension of our work. Creating safe spaces for our service-users enable them to interact with each other. Meeting other human beings helps to break the sense of isolation a person feels when they are homeless. It is through social interactions that staff establish the kind of rapport which enables us to accompany our service-users through life's difficult and complex challenges which often impede independent living.

Our usually open access service also allows colleagues from other statutory and voluntary organisations to come into the centre to offer services and treatments that we ourselves are unable to provide with our own internal resources. For instance, local mental health workers from the START Team regularly come to our drop-in to support people who struggle with mental health problems. Similarly, outreach workers from St Mungo's, who go out onto the streets to reach out to people whilst they sleep rough, usually encourage people they meet to come to the centre for warmth, a cup of tea, and a friendly atmosphere. It is usually their first step back into mainstream living after a person has turned their back on society. But during the pandemic, we have been unable to offer this welcoming environment because of all the limitations that the disease has imposed on us.

Because of Covid-19 restrictions, exceptionally last year, Crisis at Christmas could not run the day services they normally offer homeless people during Christmas Week. Traditionally they offer emergency accommodation and day services to homeless people during Christmas Week to allow organisations who work with homeless people to take a much-deserved break. But last year they could only offer emergency accommodation to people who needed it, without day services. So we decided to keep the Manna Centre open during Christmas Week to ensure that homeless people could still access day services during Christmas Week.

Thankfully, unlike last year, Crisis at Christmas is going to run day services this year, which means that we are going to close the centre from 24 to 28 December, which coincides with the day services run by Crisis at Christmas. And the Manna Centre will reopen on 29 December.

Subject to Covid-19 numbers significantly falling in December, as some scientists are predicting, we intend to organise a sit-down Christmas dinner on 23 December. We could not do so last year because of Covid restrictions. Instead, we gave people takeaway meals and presents on Christmas Day itself. We are already in conversation with Better Bankside who every year donate presents to our clients who come to our Christmas dinner. They make it possible for each of our 'guests' to receive an individually wrapped present to celebrate Christmas. It is the highlight of the year for all of us who work at the Manna.

May the Light of Christmas shine through this difficult period and lift our spirits!





## ***“At Christmas, all roads lead home”***

By

**Margaret Shapland**

**Housing and Welfare Advice Worker**



What Marjorie Holmes meant by the title of this article was that whatever your beliefs – the idea of coming home or being at home and the holidays are made for each other – almost as though that shelter is necessary for those holiday rituals to survive. Following the restrictions that were in place last year, the gift of independence will be in reach for some but for many it is under threat.

What I want to explore in this article is the thinking in the reports – one by CRISIS called *“Everybody in – How to end Homelessness in Great Britain”*, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s report – *“Private renters face a policy black hole”*, published in October this year and *“Denied- the right to a safe home”* from Shelter.

Let’s start first with what might be considered as a definition of what a home is;

*“It is a place that provides security, happiness, contentment, acceptance, forgiveness, and overall growth of an individual”*. For many, that is exactly what a home represents but for those who are struggling, the picture is not so rosy. Of course, we know that rough sleeping is the most extreme representation of homelessness but even those who do have a home may feel under siege. Shelter estimated that there is roughly a 1 in 200 chance of becoming homeless but also point out that 17.5 million are denied a real home because they live in conditions that are overcrowded, dangerous, and unstable or in unaffordable accommodation. This is at the heart of what has been labelled *“the housing emergency”*. Let’s examine what’s happening.

### **Lack of affordability:**

Shelter sampled 13,000 households for their report. What they found was 14% of people say they regularly have to cut spending on household essentials like food or heating to pay their rent (or mortgage payments).



The high cost of housing means the private-rented sector has doubled in size over the last 20 years.

There are now more than 11 million private renters in the UK, including more than one million families with children. Between 2000 and 2019, the number of households renting privately more than doubled from 2 million to 4.4 million – or 1 in 5 of us. Over the last 50 years, the average share of their income young families spend on housing has trebled. Private renting has become increasingly unaffordable, with rents rising significantly more than earnings. The average private rent has increased by 29% in the decade since 2009/10, compared to only 18% in average earnings. 19% stated that the experiences of finding and keeping a home makes them worry about the likelihood they will find a suitable home in the future.



### **Instability:**

Six in ten have no savings at all, so their ability to manage sudden losses of income or rent increases is extremely limited putting them at greater risk of arrears, eviction, and homelessness. The legal framework for eviction has not changed significantly since 1988 and though the notice period and ban on evictions during Covid has assisted, the situation whereby a Section 21 or “no fault” eviction can be served has reverted back to 2 months’ notice. At the time when the eviction ban was lifted, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimated that c. 400,000 renters had been served with eviction notices or had been told to expect them.

### **A decline into poverty:**



Housing costs have proven to be a major driver in plunging people into long-term poverty. Can it be right that the high cost of private renting is leaving almost one million households paying rents they

cannot afford? This is leaving nine in ten of these families in poverty, with some family budgets more than £100 a week below the poverty line as a result. JRF's research findings stated renters are more than three times as likely to be behind with rent or bills (6% vs 19%) compared to homeowners, they were also twice as likely to worry about meeting their housing costs (10% vs 20%) and losing their homes within three months (5% vs 11%).

### **Can being in work help reduce the impact?**

It may not be the case. JRF's research showed that it is not a guarantee. This affordability crisis is actually hitting working households hard. 748,000 households who cannot afford their rent have one or more adults in work, two-thirds of whom work full-time. Many low-income privately renting households where nobody is in formal employment - e.g. those who are retired, have caring or parenting responsibilities, unable to work because of illness or disability, or looking for work - also face rental affordability pressures. A quarter find housing costs unaffordable and a further one in ten face unaffordability pressures. While many will receive support towards housing costs through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing cost allowances, it often isn't enough and forces them to use other sources of income which are designed to meet other essential costs, such as disability or other benefits, to cover rent.

For the category of people that we largely work with – those who are single homeless individuals, face severe impacts. 43% of privately renting single adults (535,000) are in the bottom 40% of incomes compared with 23% of couples without children. Stumping up the rent for a one-bed flat is clearly much harder for a single adult than a couple with a combined income; over half, 304,000, low-income single adults in the private rented sector are paying rents they cannot afford. It is very noticeable. We work with many who have found themselves with virtually nothing to live on once housing costs have been taken into account and come to us looking for help in getting some relief. We absolutely try and achieve this by accessing schemes such as Discretionary Housing Payments, relief on Council Tax payments, crisis relief on basic costs such as food, energy bills etc. but these are not long-term solutions.

### **Rental Properties – Fitness for purpose:**

The English Housing Survey shows that 23% of private rented homes fail the Decent Homes Standard, compared with 16% of owner-occupied homes and 12% of homes in the social rented sector. Shelter's report "*Denied a safe home*" reported that lack of affordability means individuals can be forced into unsafe, overcrowded, poor quality homes. 7% did not have enough bedrooms for everyone in their household, 23% were living in homes where there was significant levels of damp, mould and condensation, 7% reported safety hazards such as faulty wiring, fire risks or areas in the property that could easily cause a fall. When these housing condition were combined, 27% of people said they had at least one of these four issues in their home – damp, thermal efficiency, hazards in the home or an issue with structural integrity of the property – the possible impacts on safety and health can only be imagined.


### **Longer-term impacts:**

We not only have to think about the immediate effects a lack of security can have – we have a client in local authority temporary accommodation where it is common for people to be moved at short notice. We have a client in temporary accommodation who has already been told that they will be moved into another accommodation – they don't know when and they don't know where. They already have severe mental health issues, and the uncertainty is exacerbating this. But research has also found that the future of children in private rented accommodation and the potential chronic instability affects children's cognitive skills, academic performance, social ability, and behaviour.



## Can current housing offers resolve this housing emergency?

Joseph Roundtree Foundation looked at several of the housing offers that sit under the umbrella of “affordable housing”. Largely they found that this was unlikely. The research found that 25% of families currently paying rents they can’t afford would find this tenure affordable. However, this leaves three-quarters of this group unable to afford ‘affordable’ rents. To quote from the briefing, *“The homeownership products that form the cornerstone of Government housing policy are out of reach for the majority of this group: homes bought through Help to Buy would only be affordable to 2% of low-income private renters”*

JRF came to the conclusion that these products work for people already on the cusp of homeownership and that there was to quote *“a policy black hole for low income private renters”*. The Social Mobility Commission back in 2019 recommended that three million social homes be built over the next 20 years, which would mean building an average of 150,000 social homes per year. 

Coming up to the holiday season, we reflect and hope for a fairer, more just future – something we want for our clients. Just recently, I spoke to one of our clients who at 51 is living in shared accommodation. They said “I’m 51 and at this age I really hoped I would have a home of my own”. We’re working on trying to help him towards what should be a modest ambition and a basic right for everyone.

J K Chesterton writing in an essay entitled Christmas raised an interesting conundrum when he wrote ***“Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home.”*** He went on to explain that as someone who was committed to the Catholic faith *“Anyone thinking of the Holy Child as born in December would mean by it exactly what we mean by it; that Christ is not merely a summer sun of the prosperous but a winter fire for the unfortunate.”*

One can only achieve if we have hope and this is so clearly encapsulated in this final quote from the great Maya Angelou- *“When you do nothing you feel overwhelmed and powerless. But when you get involved you feel the sense of hope and accomplishment that comes from knowing you are working to make things better.”* – Maya Angelou

Knowing that our readers are involved re-enforces our desire to make things better on an immediate basis for our clients and through being active in calling organisations to account by working towards a better future for those we serve. My best wishes for a peaceful and joyous holiday season.



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## Feeling Christmassy

By  
Eleanor Smith  
Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



Whether you love Christmas or hate it, this time of year can be an emotional rollercoaster. You may be looking forward to seeing loved ones, especially those you missed last Christmas, or you may be feeling the pressure of trying to arrange a family gathering that keeps everyone happy. Most likely it's both! Conversely, you may be facing a Christmas without a loved one for the first time, especially as there has been so much loss over the past two years. You may be experiencing Christmas alone, perhaps for the first time. You may be worrying about all the things you need to buy and wondering how your bank balance will look come January.

Many people enjoy the immense spiritual and emotional satisfaction of giving to others and trying to share their happiness as widely as possible at this time of year. Perhaps this particular emotional charge is part of why many people do think so seriously about other's needs at this time of year and do what they can to reach out to others. High emotion is in the air; love, pain, excitement, longing and loss, along with the smell of pine trees, mulled wine and roasting meat. I think this captures the bittersweetness of the Christmas season – there is joy and giving but there is also sadness and need. There is also a particular opportunity to bring these together and make amends. These contrasting emotional elements are inherent to the Nativity story; the initial hardship and rejection, the stress and anxiety of a woman on the brink of giving birth with nowhere to go. To find oneself in a fraught, precarious, and houseless situation because of the arbitrary seeming bureaucratic requirements of the state is one that our clients would be very familiar with. But this is balanced with the miracle of birth, and with adoration, joy and hope.



It is also a break from our routines, it is a festival and a celebration, a chance to have a break from our routine, even if it isn't particularly restful! We are more likely to be able to remember events and episodes which stand out from our day to day lives and are different from our usual routine, as well as times of emotional intensity and times which are both 'highly demanding and highly rewarding'. So, because it can be such an intensely emotional time, Christmas is likely to be a time that you remember, that makes up part of the rich tapestry of memory which is a part of who we are as individuals.

Christmas then, as an emotional time, is one that may be particularly challenging for those struggling with their mental health in general. The weight of expectations, bad associations, and the dissonance of what may seem like enforced happiness for somebody experiencing depression can all exacerbate existing emotional problems. Combined with this, helping services may be closed and healthcare may be harder to access. We know that many environmental factors can negatively affect a person's mental health; poor housing, financial difficulties, immigration problems, and sadly Christmas can act as just one more stressor.

However, we can use this time when we are so aware of our own emotions, to be more aware of others emotions. We know in the Manna Centre that asking for help can be really difficult. Even acknowledging to oneself that something is wrong is hard for some people, let alone telling others about the problem. But taking our own emotions seriously, noticing our own emotional state without judgement can help us to do this for others. In the same way, remembering to look after ourselves can make it easier for us to be there for other people. Being given permission to talk about not being okay at a time when there might be a lot of pressure to fit in and be happy can paradoxically make way for relief and the possibility of happiness. In embracing the bittersweetness of Christmas, the lows as well as the highs, we can ensure that we don't overlook those who are struggling in the darkness and clear a path back to the light.

# Manna Centre - Christmas Appeal 2021



It costs approx. **£36,600 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 [HERE](#))**

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")

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: \_\_\_\_\_

## Standing Order Form

**Name and Address of your Bank/Building Society;**

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

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

Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_

**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:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Post Code \_\_\_\_\_

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 \*\*