



The Manna Society Newsletter

Summer 2023

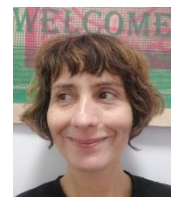
Working with homeless people & those in need

A typical day in the office

By

Karolina Muszynska

Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



I would like to give you a taster of a “day in the advice office” so you can get better understanding of the customers we support and the issues we deal with. I have changed the characteristics of my customers to protect their confidentiality, but all the stories are real and is a good representation of our work. On a typical day at the centre, each advice worker sees five people on average. We start seeing customers at 9:30am and we finish at 1:30pm. Then between 1:30pm-4pm, we deal with emails, letters, follow-up actions etc.

Client 1:

Sara is 31 years old woman from Libya. She came to seek asylum in the UK several years ago and got refugee status. She has never used our advice service before but a friend recommended us to her, so she came to look for help. She was tearful and told me she was exhausted and tired and did not know what to do. It transpired that she was living in private rented accommodation, consisting of an open kitchen and one bedroom, with her two sons (4 and 6 years old). Her flat is very tiny, has no storage and with only enough space for one bed that she has to share with her two kids. She is a single parent and her younger son’s diagnosis of autism puts an additional strain on her. She told me she is extremely worried about the safety of her kids as her windows do not lock well and she has to climb 50 steep stairs to get to the property. She applied to her local council in Brent for help but they are arguing that she is not physically homeless or seriously overcrowded. I feel very sorry for her. She is a lone parent with no support of an extended family. She shared with me the strategies she uses to keep her kids safe in that crowded and unsuitable space. I will be assisting her to approach her local authority again as soon as we get supporting letters from her GP and kids’ school. I also put her in touch with the National Autistic Society in her local area for further help.

Client 2:

Mariam is a 23 year old refugee from Somalia. Her status was granted only 6 months ago, and she is in receipt of Universal Credit. As she is under 25 years old, she only receives £292.11 per month. (Universal Credit has different rates for people under 25 years old). She lives in supported accommodation where she has to cover service charge of about £85 per month. She has no family in the UK and has to manage her life with about £207 per month. No, wonder she struggles – I cannot even imagine how you can survive on such a tight budget. How can you pay for all the basic expenses (transport, mobile phone, cleaning and hygiene products, clothing and food) on a £207 budget per month? We support her as much as we can with small grants, a donated laptop, second hand clothes and in the meantime, we are trying to find her a place where she will not have to pay a service charge.

Client 3

Lloyd is 26 years old. I met him briefly in the service before (around 6 months ago) and now he is back rough sleeping again. He has a history of mental health problems combined with drug use and he seems to be unwell again. He appears very confused, struggles with answers to my questions and my colleagues observed him talking to himself. He was evicted from his temporary accommodation but does not really know why. He is sleeping outside and looks exhausted and desperate. We will not be able to help him with accommodation until his current mental crisis is addressed so for now the best course of action is to link him in with the mental health team and to alert statutory services.

Client 4

Jen is in 48 years old and a single mother of three children. Her first partner, the father of two of her children passed away a long time ago. She re-married later but the relationship with the father of the youngest child broke down after a couple of years. She used to work as a domestic cleaner but had to stop working because of her spine problems. Jan is well known to us and we have been supporting her with different issues over time. She was placed into temporary accommodation by her local council. In December last year, she came to see me to find out why she did not receive help with her energy bill under the government's Energy Bill Support Scheme. It transpired that her landlord had failed to register the electricity meter with UK Power Network and as result; she missed out on that essential help. We raised this issue with the temporary accommodation team who had placed her into this accommodation and requested compensation. As we have received no response from them, we will escalate the complaint further with the local authority.

Client 5

Remi came to see us as his mobile phone had been stolen. He is currently in emergency accommodation and on Universal Credit and he desperately needs to recover his old telephone number so that services are able to contact him. He bought a basic mobile phone hoping that his mobile provider, Lyca Mobile, would transfer his old number to his new Sim card. We called them but it appears that Remi needs to buy a new Sim card that has credit on it and then call them again and ask for his old number to be transferred to his new phone. Remi was annoyed and stressed as he will not get his benefit for another week and cannot afford a new Sim card now. We agreed that Manna would support him with a small grant to pay for the Sim card so he can keep in touch with the world.

Is there a difference between a Christian and a secular organisation?

By

Bandi Mbubi

Manna Centre Director



In my speaking engagements about the work of the Manna Centre, I'm often asked about whether we're a Christian organisation or not. And when I say yes, this question is usually followed by a more philosophical one: "is there a difference between a Christian and a secular organisation?" It sounds simple enough, but, I suppose, it's one of those questions which when you first think about it you think you know the answer to, but when you really think about it more seriously, you find that it isn't as simple as you initially thought.

The answer I've given to this question has changed over time. When I first joined the Manna Centre, over two decades ago, I first thought that the difference between a secular and a Christian organisation is based on the values which fuel its work. For a Christian organisation, these values are usually referred to as Christian values. These values are invariably drawn from Bible lessons and Church history. Stories such as the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan Woman at the well, and the lost sheep, to name but a few, encapsulate Christian values, along with stories of Christians who've attempted to apply them in their lives through the ages. They invariably include values of love, acceptance, justice, and the preservation and respect of human dignity. At the Manna, we talk of love and acceptance of everyone, irrespective of whether they're homeless or not, justice, the respect and dignity of everyone – as one of our old booklets put it: "no one is dispensable".

However, the longer I worked with colleagues from secular organisations, I noticed that whilst they may not couch their values in religious terms, the values that informed their behaviour were essentially the same. They loved and embraced people of all social and ethnic backgrounds just in the same way as those who purport to be Christians. Some secular workers even lived out these values demonstrably more effectively than I ever did, or my fellow Christian workers did. A telling example of how similar so-called Christian values are to secular values, in their substance, is the six Constitutional Values of the NHS: (1) working together, (2) respect and dignity, (3) commitment to quality of care, (4) compassion, (5) improving lives, and (6) everyone counts. So, if

the substance of our Christian values is essentially the same as secular values, where, if any, lies the difference?

A purely secular person tends to do good because it's good to do good, a philosophy of life which they carry in their job, whereas a committed Christian, or for that matter a believer of any major religion, does good because God, or whichever deity they believe in, requires them to do so, a personal philosophy which informs their work. At an organizational level, the same rationale applies. It isn't so much the values in themselves which distinguish both types of organisations, but rather the sources from which these values are drawn, whether from God or from humanism. For secular people these values are just part of our shared humanity, but for typical Christians, values are God-given. Of course, not everyone who works within a Christian organisation is Christian. And many Christians work in secular organisations. But the typology of values which is based on our living together as human beings, generally referred to as humanism, on the one hand, and God-inspired, on the other, isn't helpful at all. First of all because it isn't always possible to track down the sources of values and how they formed. We can't tell whether the value of love draws its origin in religion or in our shared living. Does a fish know they live in water? It's part of our human condition to live according to a set of values, regardless of whether we're religious or not. Both worlds aren't neatly divided; they are intertwined.

Arguably, our association with churches in a way that can be construed as us being an extension of church work in the community is an important feature of us being a Christian organisation. We receive tremendous support from the Christian Community as a whole, with the Archdiocese of Southwark (R.C.) providing us with the building from which we operate. But in our workings, because we don't proselytize, this association isn't in full display. We contend ourselves with living out our values drawn from Christian teaching.

Beside our close association with the Christian Community, the other key-difference is in the meaning we as an organisation attribute to the sources of our values. An important source from which our values are drawn is the story our founder, Nannette French, tells of our formation, which can be read on our website. It's told in purely religious terms which encapsulates the values on which we're founded. Our response to homelessness is based on God's call to listen to his voice: "O that today you would listen to my voice, harden not your heart!" In the same story she also says: "I claimed the building for the poor and named it The Manna Centre. Manna, because the bread we were given was distributed freely every day; manna for me personally, and for many people visiting every day."

Contrast the story of the founding of the Manna Centre with that of the NHS as the BBC tells it, in more humanistic terms, but potent nevertheless: "*in 1942, a civil servant named William Beveridge produced a report, the Beveridge Report, which identified five evil giants - want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. In identifying disease as a barrier to progress, he proposed a free national health service*". It aimed to use money from taxes to provide support "*from the cradle to the grave*". This meant free medical treatment for all British citizens, the nationalisation of hospitals under the Ministry of Health and organised into regional health authorities; the creation of health centres to provide services like vaccinations, maternity care, district nurses etc; and a better distribution of doctors around the country with GPs (general practitioners), opticians and dentists in every area.

It's clear to me at least that it isn't values which distinguish a Christian organisation from a secular organisation. They both have values in common. Our close association with the Christian Community in a way that makes us an extension of their work in the community makes us a Christian organisation. Equally important is the meaning we attach to the sources from which our values are drawn. These sources are usually stories organisations tell about their formation, how they came to be, and what matters to them. They differentiate Christian organisations from secular organisations.

Two pay packets from the streets

By

Margaret Shapland

Housing and Welfare Advice Worker



“You are two pay packets from the streets, they say. Well, it’s true”. This headline from the Guardian dates from 2009 – 14 years ago. It appears that today, the odds have shortened. It is thought that one in six individuals have no savings at all. A recent survey undertaken by Shelter and YouGov reported that nearly 40% of all UK households are a single pay check from potential homelessness. It is a sad state of affairs and even sadder that if it continues and if nothing changes, homelessness is in all probability going to get worse than ever. It is also a sad fact that as more and more people find themselves in precarious financial positions, the services that could have helped them are stretched thin to the point of disappearing. Let’s examine some of the factors that have brought us here.

The position on benefits:

In general, the majority of our clients in the Advice & Welfare area are in receipt of benefit, primarily Universal Credit. For this financial year, the Universal Credit allowance for a single person over 35 rose from £334.91 to £368.74 – a rise of £33.83 per month, which was lauded as increasing in line with inflation. Set against this is some stark realities regarding how this pans out for that sector of our population who are forced to rely on benefits for any period of time. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) conducted a piece of research entitled “Guarantee our Essentials” which looked at what it really meant.

As a starter, JRF argues that Universal Credit has never been based on an objective calculation on what things cost and this has never been the case and that it is a reasonable expectation that a social security system will properly support those who need it.

The research found that:

- 90% of low income households are going without essentials.
- Support has eroded over decades and the basic rate of Universal Credit is now at its lowest level **ever** as a proportion of average earnings.
- 66% of the public feel that the basic rate of Universal Credit is too low.
- Almost half of the households see their payments reduced through deductions and caps. For example, benefit claimants can find their benefit payments reduced by 25% to repay debts to the Department of Works & pensions (DWP).

The report argues that inadequate social security is the main driver behind the need for food banks – with the Trussell Trust reporting that distribution of 1.3 million parcels given out from April-September 2022.

Other pieces of research published have demonstrated that not only does poverty comes at a significant cost to the individual but also has an impact downstream – for example, costs to public services such as the NHS, for example. What the research proposes is that the benefit is based on the real cost of covering essentials which they have termed the “Essentials Guarantee” They have estimated that this would be set at £120 per week for a single person, worked out as follows:

Essential	Cost per week
Food & Non-Alcoholic Drinks	£37
Electricity & Gas	£35
Water	£ 6
Clothes & Shoes	£ 6
Communications (mobiles etc.)	£ 8
Travel	£16

Sundries – toiletries, bank charges, cleaning materials	£13
TOTAL (Rounded)	£120

There are other elements which would be any debt repayments would rise as an individual’s earnings rise but only to a level which does not impact on the “Essentials Guarantee” amount.

Looking after the homeless.

In 2010, street homelessness stood at an estimated 1,247 people (street count estimates – GOV.uk) in England on an average night. In 2022, official statistics put that figure at 2,900 – down from the peak of 4,750 in 2017, but still more than double the total from 12 years before. Over the last 14 years funding for homelessness services has been cut by £1bn a year, even as rough sleeping increased by 141% over the past decade. Research by the Museum of Homelessness found that the number of people dying while homeless increased by 80% between 2019 and 2021. The problem seems to be getting worse.

Over the years, the theory for managing people into housing was a stepped approach – sometimes referred to as a “staircase model” which requires engagement with a variety of services such as substance abuse service etc. before being considered to be housing ready. Learning has moved on – leading to the development of what is referred to as ‘Housing First’ – where the person is housed and services are wrapped around them in a holistic manner to deal with the support needs that person might have. This model has a proven track record in Finland. Finland chose to make housing an unconditional right, as opposed to a reward for approved behaviour. This allowed the Finnish government to move away from using night shelters or hostels and the various authorities pooled resources and partnered to buy flats, build more homes and convert old buildings into permanent housing. The aim was to build 2,500 homes when it was launched in 2008. By 2019, 3,500 homes had been built. What were the results - Finland became the only country in Europe where homelessness is declining. In the 1980s, there were about 20,000 homeless people in the country – by 2021 that number was 3,950. Where does that leave us – well, we all are aware of the lack of affordable housing but as this desirable approach also depends on an available framework of services that are enabling and accessible, what is happening there. So let’s explore the position with respect to those services.

Homelessness Services – Where do we stand?

Homeless Link (one of our sectors umbrella organisations representing homelessness providers) have reported that a fifth of homeless charities have already reduced their services due to cost of living pressures and nearly half have reported that they expect their frontline services to be at risk over the coming months (the survey was conducted between May and June 2022). Alongside these economic pressures, there is a real issue with charities reporting that viability is threatened by local authorities either refusing to increase funding in line with inflation or simply not having the resources to do so. Homeless Link’s Chief executive commented *“Due to local government funding pressures, the vast majority of homelessness services are having to scrape by on budgets set when inflation was a fraction of what it is now”*. Homeless Link also reported that there has been a fall in the number of day centres (like ourselves) providing basic subsistence needs such as food, warmth and support.

Riverside Group (a major housing and service provider) in conjunction with the University of York produced a report called *“Traumatised commissioning – Research into commissioning of homeless services in the last 10 years”*. One of the key findings was that uncertainty about budget allocations had resulted in increasing the number of short-term contracts for providers which actually reduce value for money in that providers cannot plan in confidence in areas such as attracting and retaining good staff and making investments in services. There is a further issue in that resources are deployed through necessity in crisis measures and fire fighting in response to greatly increased levels of demand with far fewer resources.

There is also a crisis in workforces in the sector. Again, Homeless Link carried out a survey among 900 providers in the homelessness sector in 2022. What they found is that low pay, the aftermath of Covid-19, high workloads and lack of ability to provide long-term contracts due to short-term funding were all reasons organisations felt that led to difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. Quotes from the research spoke about very high levels of stress and risk of burnout, leaving the profession because of unsustainable impacts on mental health and personal relationships due to the high workloads. Many of the 1,300 respondents to the survey reported difficulties due to long days, unsociable hours, taking work home, the high caseloads resulting in not being able to take a break. The overall result is that personal well-being is low on a person's priorities.

It is also the case that reductions in services elsewhere means that pressures on the services that remain inevitably increase. In terms of the Manna Society, through your help, we have managed to continue to deliver a sustainable service to the people we serve but it has to be said that demand has increased dramatically and a greater complexity in cases is apparent so the input to keep our people afloat is that much greater. We count ourselves lucky that we have that support and thank you for it.

I come back to where we started about the increased vulnerability of people to fall into a position where they could become homeless and as I close, I quote from a commentary on a letter which was entitled "A little bad luck": "We are all vulnerable people and those I meet who could find themselves homeless are like you, reading this letter – with the same hopes and dreams, family and friends, intelligence, education and opportunities for a fair and decent life. The only difference is that they crossed a very thin line and opportunity stopped knocking. A vulnerable person is only you with a little bad luck". We are back to that thin line of the one pay check.

Volunteer van driver needed

We're looking for a van driver to help with our Harvest Festival collections.

We normally pick up about 30 collections between mid-September and the end of October.

We have two volunteers already but a 3rd or 4th would ensure that all of our pickups are covered.

If you are interested, please email mail@mannasociety.org.uk

or

ring 020 7357 9363 – option 3



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Bed and Roses

By

Eleanor Smith

Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



This summer, as every summer in the advice team, we are lamenting the lack of night shelters, many of which open only in the winter. The ecology of emergency bed spaces for homeless people in London is fragmented, confusing, ever changing, and for these reasons poorly understood by the general public. People often tell me that someone asked them for money 'for a hostel bed for the night' and ask if there really are open access hostel beds that homeless people can pay to get in to. The answer is yes, of course – backpacker hostels. Hostels for holiday makers on a budget that any of us could get a bed in for £15-£20. And these places in practice are routinely, almost certainly unknowingly, accommodating a person who has run out of luck. Someone who may be working in the day and using their wages to pay by the night, surrounded by young Australians and Americans who have no idea of the desperate circumstances of their roommate. Some of our street homeless clients may also use their welfare benefits to pay for a space in such an establishment, though this would not be enough to pay for the whole month, even if the entire allowance were to go on this. It is not possible to use Housing Benefit to pay for this kind of bed.

Other kinds of shelters are normally free. They tend to be run by networks of churches or other grassroots charities and are heavily dependent on volunteers. These shelters provide very basic accommodation – a camp bed in a shared church hall, available only for the duration of the night. Almost all of these shelters require a referral from a professional. I only know one shelter in London which is open access, and is run by some of the steeliest, most experienced people in the sector. Some shelters receive statutory funding to cover some of their costs, but this often comes with the condition that the shelter only accepts homeless people with a connection to that borough. A lot of shelters are running on goodwill and a limited budget and cannot run throughout the year – only in the months where the threat to life is at its most extreme for those sleeping outside. Covid of course had a huge impact on the viability of these shelters, and many had to drop the model of everyone sleeping in one room, never to go back. This improved the experience for guests in terms of privacy and comfort, but for the most part also reduced capacity.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities last year awarded £9.88 million in grant money to 55 shelters across the UK, to improve the services they were providing – the quality of the accommodation, advice and move on support. The numbers sound like a lot, but across the entirety of the UK, it is nowhere near enough to ensure that every rough sleeper who asks for respite and relief from the situation will get it. Currently there are only 4 open night shelters across London we are able to refer into. They are extremely oversubscribed and the majority of the time that new clients come to the advice service asking if there is anywhere they can sleep that night, the answer is no. We have got very good at breaking bad news (an underrated skill).

The other types of emergency accommodation are statutory. Primarily this would be temporary accommodation through the local authority. This gets harder and harder to access as local authority homeless persons units receive applications from increasing numbers of desperate people, and budgets get tighter. In the earlier days of my career, we would advise homeless people who seemed particularly vulnerable to go directly to the offices in person, with their luggage, and wait to be assessed. This way, people could in theory be assessed on the day they became homeless. Now increasingly, homeless people are directed to approach via phone or online form and are given an appointment on a future date. Local authority staff make decisions about whether the person they are dealing with might be eligible for emergency accommodation based on a quick phone call, which may not be sufficient to appreciate the extent of someone's vulnerabilities. Local authority contracted outreach services, such as St Mungos, also have access to some emergency bed spaces for street homeless people. This is often necessarily reserved for the most complex, entrenched, and difficult to reach people which the outreach team will be working with. There are also some 'assessment' bed spaces available via this outreach

route, intended for new rough sleepers, often under the No Second Night Out scheme. These however are also massively oversubscribed, and outreach workers understandably try to use them for the most vulnerable people that they come across.

It would be good of course if resources could be directed at preventing street homelessness in the first place. Investing in plentiful social housing, well regulated private housing and a reliable and fair welfare system, would mean that these resources would be far less overwhelmed and perhaps even not needed at all. Imagine that! For the meantime, more resources and better coordination are needed to protect the most vulnerable and ensure the frightening and dangerous experience of street homelessness is not forced on anyone.

**KITCHEN VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
(9am to 1.45pm)**

We are in need of kitchen volunteers on:

1st Saturday of each month

1st Sunday of each month

2nd Sunday of each month

**If you free to help us please email
mail@mannasociety.org.uk.**

Many thanks.



Most Needed Items

At this time of year some of our supplies start to run low. Could you or your church help us with any of the following items?

FOOD

Sugar

Baked Beans

Tinned tomatoes

Tinned fish

Tinned vegetables

Soup

Basmati Rice

Tinned Fruit

Corned Beef

Chopped Ham

Luncheon meats

MEN'S CLOTHING

Jeans

Jogging bottoms

Underwear

Many thanks



Date for your diary

Our **online** AGM is on **Wednesday 20th September at 7pm**. If you would like to join us, please email mail@mannasociety.org.uk and we will send you the link needed to join.

Please come along, we'd love to see you.