The Manna Society
Annual Report
2024 – 2025

Working with homeless people & those in need

THE MANNA SOCIETY
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Registered Charity no: 294691

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Committee Members

- Kendra Schneller …….. Chairperson
- Bill Dodwell …… Treasurer
- Donna Miller…….. Secretary
- William Curran, Nannette Ffrench, Silke Junge & Cha Power

The ***Manna Society*** began in 1982 and formed under a constitution in 1988 (amended in August 1989). The Society's objects and purpose: ***'to relieve poor persons who are homeless and/or unemployed by the provision of food, shelter and other forms of Christian care with the object of promoting the physical, mental and spiritual welfare of such persons and of improving their conditions of life.'*** **(Constitution No 2a)**

The Ethos of the Manna

Our vision is the creation of a just society that respects the dignity of every individual.

The Manna Day Centre is a place of unconditional acceptance. Our task, as we see it, is not to judge but to love.

We aim to respect the dignity and worth of each person with whom we come in contact. Each and every one has an intrinsic value that deserves to be respected. No one is dispensable. Our task is to feed and care for homeless people and those in need who seek our help but we cannot be content with this. We must also seek to challenge the structures of society that lead to homelessness and poverty.

Seasons of Life

By
Bandi Mbubi
Manna Centre Director

By and large, we follow a steady rhythm at the Manna Centre. We are open 7 days a week from 8:30 in the morning to 1:30 in the afternoon. The only time we are closed is during Christmas week, for 5 days, and 3 other days when we are closed for cleanups. At Christmas, our service-users are taken care of by a project called Crisis at Christmas who enable organisations working with homeless people to take some much needed holiday. And during cleanup days, we are able to thoroughly clean up the centre to keep it clean and tidy for everyone.

We've made certain assumptions that generally hold true. We know, for instance, that when people become homeless and grow entrenched in a lifestyle of homelessness, they need a place of warmth and safety - somewhere they can restore themselves with basic necessities such as food, showers, and clothing.

Many have given up on themselves and society. They distrust themselves and people they encounter. So finding a place which accepts them as they are can be liberating and restorative. They walk in and walk out freely without needing to give us their name and fill out long forms for a piece of bread. It is only when they meet our advice workers and nurses, in private, are they required to disclose their full identity. And even then, it is not really for our benefit, but theirs. Such information is needed to apply for benefits, to look for accommodation, and to link them up with public services who can further assist. In that sense, our work is truly client centred. Like in previous years, we remain client centred.

We have provided the following services:

1. Food

Nearly everyone who comes to the Manna Centre has a meal with us. It is by far our most popular service. When people arrive at 8:30am they are given a sandwich, and at 10:00 am, we give them either porridge (in colder weather) or cereal (in warmer weather).

On average we serve 120 lunch meals a day. Lunch is served between 11:15 am and 1:15 pm and varies from spaghetti Bolognese and pasta to chicken stew with rice, mashed potatoes, and burgers.

Throughout the day, we also provide water, squash, tea, and coffee.

2. Shower Facilities

Our shower facilities are in constant use. Every day, approximately thirty men take a shower. Free soap and shampoo, as well as clean towels, are provided.

Although women account for only around 5% of our service users, we make every effort to ensure they have access to showering facilities too - with an average of five women using the showers daily.

3. Clothing

We have reduced the distribution of clothing from twice per week to once per week. We are now only able to open this service on Mondays. This reduction in the number of days allows us to better manage our stock.

4. Housing and Welfare Advice Service

After 22 years of working with the Manna, Margaret Shapland, our Senior Advice Worker, retired this year. Much loved and respected by colleagues and service users, Margaret is a tough act to follow. Her contributions to the Manna have been deeply valued by service users, staff, volunteers, and trustees, and we are forever indebted to her. With her brilliant intellect, resourcefulness, and strong work ethic, she has gone above and beyond the call of duty, both in assisting our service users and in shaping how we run our services.

Following Margaret's retirement, we have successfully recruited Abbie Brooks to replace her.

Regarding the service itself, we have adapted it in response to the evolving needs of our service users and how best they can access support. This means that clients already registered on our database are asked to call 020 7403 1931 (option 1) Monday to Friday between 2:00 PM and 4:00 PM to book an advice appointment.

Service users seeking accommodation who are not yet registered must call 020 7403 1931 (option 1) on Fridays at 10:00 am. We are only able to give eight weekly appointment slots to be able to cope with the high demand and the increasingly difficult task of finding accommodation – with very limited accommodation options for people under the age of 35.

Another change is that we are unable to assist anyone who has been in London for less than six months.

Service users seeking help with issues other than accommodation and not registered on our database can still come to the centre in person to be seen - on a first-come-first-served basis.

We are very grateful to the London Borough of Southwark for continuing to fund just over 50% of the salaries for our Housing & Welfare Advice Workers.

5. Healthcare

Healthcare provision has remained comprehensive.

Anika Davy and Sarah Smith from the Health Inclusion Team (HIT), part of the NHS, have been our nurses for much of this year, having replaced Kendra Schneller and Tsering Wangmo. They run this outstanding service twice per week – Mondays and Thursdays. They address physical health issues and help establish links to external healthcare providers such as, GPs, opticians and dentists.

The local mental health service, the START Team, has continued its vital work, offering weekly mental health support on Tuesdays.

Liza Curtis, our podiatrist, treats service users' foot problems twice a month.

Our local optician, First Vision Eyecare, has been offering eye test onsite once every quarter. It has proven to be a popular service with around 25 people accessing the service each time.

6. IT Sessions

Our IT sessions remain popular, thanks to the support of dedicated volunteers. On four days each week, employees from local private companies run sessions, while once a week, on Mondays,

Tam Cathcart, who works part-time to support herself, facilitates the IT sessions on a voluntary basis.

Many service users come not just for vocational tasks but also for leisure - especially music and films, which significantly enhances their quality of life.

Seasons of Life

This past July, staff, volunteers, family and supporters came together to celebrate our founder's 99th birthday. Though now wheelchair-bound after two major strokes and having lost her ability to speak, Nannette Ffrench was, as ever, in good spirits and form - still as charming as always. Seeing her again reminded me of our many conversations - full of warmth, wit, and her unshakeable vision for the Manna.

When I first came to work with the Manna Society, she would often come into my office, share her thoughts, her life experiences, and her dreams for the Centre. Her favourite saying to me was: "We're not here to judge but to serve, not to condemn but to love." Then she would smile and look at me intently, as though seeing straight through me.

Seeing Nannette at her celebration reminded me of the seasons of life - how everything changes: our bodies, our lives, society, the environment, and even our views.

For me, too, a new season is beginning, as I step down as Director of the Manna.

It's been 24 years since I joined the Manna Society - first as a Campaigns Officer, then two years later taking on the additional role of Housing and Welfare Advice Worker. Fourteen years ago, when Paddy Boyle stepped down as Director, I was honoured to take on that role.

It has been an enormous privilege and honour to serve alongside all of you - whether service users, volunteers, staff, trustees, or supporters of every kind: grant-making trusts, churches, companies, or simply people of goodwill.

All that is left for me is to wish Karolina, my successor best wishes for the future and a big thank you to all of you for everything!

Bandi & Nannette on her 99th birthday in July

Challenges and Successes in the Advice Service (Sept 24 – Aug 25)

By

Karolina Muszynska

Housing & Welfare Worker & Interim Director (from September 2025)

From September 2024 to August 2025, the Housing & Welfare Advice Service has faced both significant challenges and notable successes. The growing demand for support due to the difficulties of finding accommodation has put the team under pressure, but we've worked hard to help people navigate difficult situations and find solutions. This period has highlighted both the ongoing struggles of those we support and the positive impact of our service.

Here's a brief overview of the key challenges and successes we encountered over this period.

Challenge 1: Team Change and Staff Shortage

Our wonderful and exceptionally resourceful Senior Advice Worker, Ms. Margaret Shapland, retired in March. This was a significant change and challenge for the whole team, as she had worked with the Manna Society for almost 22 years. I had the privilege of working alongside Margaret for 15 years, and I can say without a doubt that she was incredible at her job. What I admired most about Margaret was her ability to handle a wide range of issues. If she didn't have an immediate answer, she would always go above and beyond to find one. She managed tasks that would typically require multiple services. Honestly, if Margaret couldn't help, it felt like no one could. She was always ready to offer support to her colleagues, and she is truly missed by both our team and our customers.

The impact of her departure has been a great challenge for the advice service, as we have been short-staffed for the past five months. We were able to offer only limited services to our customers, and it has been quite intense as my colleague Chinasa and I shared Margaret's responsibilities. That said, we are looking forward to welcoming a new colleague to our team. I'm happy to share that we recently completed a successful recruitment for Margaret's position, and we hope the new team member will start in September.

Challenge 2: Housing Scarcity and New Client Conditions

Due to the scarcity of available housing, particularly for customers under 35 years old, we were forced to limit the number of new housing cases we could take on. Additionally, from May onwards, we introduced a new condition for new housing clients: we now only accept individuals who have lived in London for at least six months. While this was a difficult decision, it was necessary to manage the overwhelming demand. It feels disheartening to impose such conditions, but it was the only option available to us. For more details on this, please refer to last year's newsletters.
When I first joined Manna, we were able to offer an open-door drop-in service to everyone, which I believe was the best way to serve our customers. Unfortunately, the ongoing housing crisis and other systemic challenges have made this unsustainable.

Challenge 3: Digital Exclusion and Pressure on Charities

Digital exclusion, alongside the lack of face-to-face services from statutory organizations, remains one of the biggest barriers for our customers. Many are losing confidence and becoming increasingly reliant on services like ours for assistance with benefit claims, document uploads, contacting GPs, the Home Office, local councils, utility providers, and creditors, among other tasks. This shift has placed additional pressure on charities like Manna, as services previously handled by statutory organizations are now being pushed onto us. This creates a "Kafkaesque"

situation where our customers feel inadequate, powerless, frustrated, and alienated. It is essential to address this issue, as it directly impacts the well-being and confidence of those we serve.

Success 1: Fundraising for Volunteer Solicitor Fees

One of the standout successes of the year was our successful fundraising campaign to help cover solicitor fees for one of our volunteers. This initiative was driven by our staff, and I am incredibly proud and grateful to everyone who contributed. It showed that solidarity isn't just an empty word for us but something we truly live by.

Success 2: Supporting a Mother in Need

I have been working with a client since I first joined Manna, a single mother with two children. Her partner passed away when she was pregnant with their second child, leaving her with nothing. Over the years, I have supported her in securing her entitlements, claiming benefits, and advocating for a change in her temporary accommodation due to poor housing conditions. I also helped her apply for a fee waiver for her children's British passports and resolved issues with a utility company. In July, she successfully bid for a housing association flat and moved in just three weeks ago. She is thrilled with her new accommodation, and it brings me immense joy to see her case come to such a positive resolution.

Success 3: Supporting an EU Client with Mental Health Issues

Since November of last year, I have been working with a man in his early 40s from an EU country, who suffers from mental health issues. When he first came to see me, he had no ID, no income, no housing, and no clear idea of his immigration status. He was in a very poor state, with disordered thinking and suicidal thoughts.

We worked together slowly to address each issue. I helped him raise money for a passport replacement, confirmed that he had pre-settled status, and gathered evidence to apply for Settled Status. I also assisted him in regaining access to his old bank account and making a successful claim for Universal Credit. Throughout this process, we also had numerous conversations to address his mental health concerns. Although he was initially resistant to engage with mental health support, I eventually connected him with the mental health outreach team. After their encouragement, he agreed to a voluntary admission to a hospital for treatment, where he stayed for over a month.

When I saw him again, he was a completely different person, he looked healthier, had more clarity, and showed insight into his problems. He is now in supported housing provided by the hospital team and has been granted Settled Status. His case, which initially seemed hopeless, has now come to a successful conclusion.

Treasurer's Report
By
Bill Dodwell

This Annual Report includes the statement of financial activities and the balance sheet for the year ended 31st March 2025. Full copies of the certified accounts will be found on the Charity Commission's website https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/294691

Our income for the year to 31 March 2025 was £669,098, up from £400,066. The significant increase in total income came from three main sources: greatly increased grants from charitable trusts, including a livery company in our area; the very significant matched appeal from Aviva over Christmas; and a legacy. We also received interest income of £16,387, up from £9,259. The major contributions from charitable trusts responded to the decline in income and thus reserves in the prior year. We were fortunate to be accepted by the Aviva Community Fund into their matched funding Christmas donation scheme, which significantly boosted our income from individuals. Legacies continue to be an important source of funding for the Society; we are very grateful to our long-term supporters who continue to leave money to the Society in their wills. We continue to receive grant funding from the London Borough of Southwark, which was at the similar levels to prior years. This grant has been renewed for 2025-26.

Our expenses in 2025 were £575,958, compared to £584,297 in 2024. Our expenses reduced compared to last year, due to a drop in utility costs and our move to much cheaper storage space. We continue to invest in a range of building improvements for the centre and food costs have increased at the centre, as everywhere. We continue to invest in our staff, through pay rises and pension contributions, which have been higher than in recent years, reflecting the increased cost of living.

The result is that in 2025 we had a surplus of £109,527, compared to deficits of £174,572 in 2024 and £39,191 in 2023. Our retained funds have increased to £484,998, which means we have about ten months running costs in hand.

Our financial position has noticeably improved during the year. Our individual donations have continued strongly, for which we very much thank our donors. In recent years we have received more support from businesses in the area, through donations, fund-raising events and volunteering. We are also grateful for the support of grant-making charitable trusts, which have increased their support in 2025.

As always, I and the whole management committee would like to thank our staff for all the helpful, friendly and productive work in the past year. We would also like to thank all the volunteers, who support the staff in helping the Manna Centre clients. The high regard that the centre is held in is directly as a result of the staff and volunteer efforts. We must also thank the Roman Catholic Diocese of Southwark for their continuing practical support in providing the Centre rent-free.

Finally, of course, I would like to thank all our donors, who continue to support the Society with donations and many fundraising efforts. Without your help the Society would not be able to continue with its work which is so important to many people on the margins of our society.

Legacies

We very much welcome legacies, which are a great support to running the Manna Centre.

Your solicitor will need the following details in drafting your Will (and we recommend that you take legal advice in drawing up a will):

Manna Society
Registered charity number: 294691 (England and Wales)

Registered address:
12 Melior Street,
London SE1 3QP

An example of the wording you could use is as follows:

"I leave £X / a X% share of my residuary estate for the Manna Society registered charity No 294691 for its general charitable purposes, and I declare that the receipt of the proper officer for the time being of the said charity shall be a sufficient discharge to my executors."

Statement of financial activities
for the year ended 31 March 2025

	Restricted funds 2025 £	Unrestricted funds 2025 £	Total funds 2025 £	Total funds 2024 £
Income from				
Donations & legacies	**66,146**	**602,952**	**669,098**	400,466
Investments	**-**	**16,387**	**16,387**	9,259
Total Income	**66,146**	**619,339**	**685,485**	409,725
Expenditure on:				
Raising funds	**-**	**7,476**	**7,476**	7,162
Charitable activities	**66,357**	**502,125**	**568,482**	577,135
Total expenditure	**66,357**	**509,601**	**575,958**	584,297
Net movements in funds	**-211**	**109,738**	**109,527**	-174,572
Reconciliation of funds:				
Total funds brought forward	**20,015**	**355,456**	**375,471**	550,043
Total funds carried forward	**19,804**	**465,194**	**484,998**	375,471

Balance Sheet
as at 31 March 2025

		2025		2024
	£	£	£	£
Fixed assets				
Tangible assets		**12,752**		14,707
Current assets				
Debtors	**68,856**		31,251	
Investments	**314,473**		165,000	
Cash at bank and in hand	**107,412**		213,079	
	490,741		409,330	
Creditors: amount falling due within one year	**-18,495**		-48,566	
Net current assets		**472,246**		360,764
Net assets		**484,998**		375,471
Charity Funds				
Restricted funds		**19,804**		20,015
Unrestricted funds		**465,194**		355,456
Total funds		**484,998**		375,471

The financial statements were approved by the Management committee on 23rd September 2025 and signed on their behalf by Bill Dodwell, Manna Society Treasurer.

Manna, a cog in the wheel to grind down homelessness

By
Chinasa Nnoka
Housing & Welfare Advice Worker

Shelter released statistics which show that as of 2025 there were 354,000 homeless people in England and this figure included children and represents a 14% increase since last year, reportedly fueled by the Cost of Living and Housing Crises. The Big Issue of July 2025 says that presently in England 1 in every 200 people is homeless, making this statistic the highest in the developed world. The Big Issue also notes that the officially recorded number of rough sleepers in England was 4,667 in Autumn 2024 and this represented a 20% increase on the year before. London's Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN - a multi-agency database specifically focused on monitoring and understanding rough sleeping across London) found that there were 13,231 rough sleepers in London between April 2024 and March 2025; this reflected a 10% increase on the previous year.

Worryingly, Homeless Link published research in July 2025 revealing that accommodation services for homeless people had decreased by almost 50%. The Chief executive of Homeless Link made a statement which I believe perfectly encapsulates the role of Manna in all this*." The wider crisis in public service funding and capacity has seen the homelessness sector become the last line of defence - a shadow health and social care sector expected to support high and increasing numbers of people with an ever-growing complexity of needs"* Rick Henderson Chief Executive of homeless Link- Quote taken from the "Big Issue 24 July 2025.

Manna's strapline is that we support the homeless and vulnerable. I can testify not only that Manna fulfils this motto, but that it's often able to offer a tailor-made service to the clients which meets their needs, though not necessarily their wants and prevents them from" falling through the net". Between December 24 and June 25, we assisted 949 people with housing advice. Over the same period there were 83 offers of housing made and 60 eventual placements. I must add that there are clients who refuse housing offers and Manna has recently adjusted its referral criteria to state that applicants must have been in London for six months before they can receive Housing assistance from its service. As always there will be exceptions which are considered on merit, but this adjustment has reduced the "footfall" to the Advice and Welfare Service.

I'd like to consider two cases and a scenario which highlights the importance and the impact upon homelessness of Manna living up to its Motto.
Case1: Mr Dav (fictitious name) was born in England and when his parents separated, he left the country with his father. He returned years later, was working and renting a property which became unaffordable and resulted in him becoming homeless. He travelled to London because he considered that the provision for homelessness was better here than in the area he had been living in.

He made a homeless application to a local council and was told that he had insufficient identification, so he would not be considered. He was estranged from his mother and didn't want to reconnect with her, so this connection could not be explored for biographical details. He was sleeping rough and had no change of clothes with him. Eventually he would have to obtain some

more concrete form of ID such as a birth certificate. I made an application to a housing provider and fortunately they had vacancies and he as he was focused on being accommodated, he was housed within a couple of weeks. As his Universal Credit award had not been finalized, he had no money nor an Oyster card for the long journey to his new home. We were able to secure an Oyster Card and put money on it, give him canned and dried food and some crockery which had been donated plus items from our clothing store. He was also allowed to use the Centre's address for correspondence purposes until he moved into his accommodation. He was very grateful.

Case 2: Mr Jay England was housed but owing to an accident sustained at work he was now receiving sick pay. As he had a spare room in his council flat, he was subject to the spare room tax. He soon found himself in financial hardship, and accruing rent arrears. This was a position he hadn't been in before and as he was due to be off work for a considerable period there didn't seem to be an immediate solution to this problem. He told me that he had reduced the numbers of baths he was taking per week, and was coming to Manna for breakfast and lunch, all to save money.

He had heard of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to combat his housing costs but didn't know how to apply. I applied for him and the DHP was granted and later renewed thereby clearing the rent arrears and sustaining his tenancy. I applied for DHP again this year but as his rent account was now healthier- it was denied but he was content with this decision, as he now qualified for an additional disability related benefit which would provide him with additional funds to pay his rent shortfall. His tenancy had been sustained.

Finally, I offer a scenario that occurs quite frequently when one of our homeless clients is due to accept a property. Normally they do not have the start up costs to hand, such as rent in advance, licence fees or registration fees. Manna often assists with these costs so our clients can successfully move into their new homes. This action has usually also been a prudent use of funds, Our Administrator carried out an enquiry recently to check to see how many of the 34 clients placed into private accommodation since April 24 were still housed. Three of the four agencies we generally refer clients to responded to his request. Of the 18 clients referred, 14 were still housed. One had abandoned his room, another had moved out, one did not take up his tenancy and it is unclear of the accommodation status of the fourth. We were delighted to see that the vast majority (of those whose status we were informed of) were still maintaining their tenancies and that we played a small part in improving the lives of our clients.