



## Housing Justice-supported night-shelters help 1,400+ homeless people over cold Winter season

More than 1,400 homeless people were housed at Housing Justice-supported winter night-shelters over the course of the winter and early spring this year.

Housing Justice provided advice and support through its Shelter Forum for 14 winter night-shelters during a season that included some of Britain's most severe weather for two decades.

Local churches who ran winter night-shelters were supported in Croydon, Brent, Camden, Finchley, High Wycombe, Redbridge, Hackney, Kingston, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark and Lambeth (a joint cross-Borough project), Walthamstow, Islington and West London. Two of the London-based night-shelters – Brent and Kingston – were operating for the first-time ever, providing a vital service to people in need in their areas. Housing Justice provided training for 400 of their volunteers.

Housing Justice plays a very hands-on role helping groups set up and run winter night-shelters. The charity runs training courses for volunteers; and provides

other practical support. Last winter, this included giving help with the writing of funding bids and negotiating with local Council and other housing organisations to try and get homeless people housed at the end of the winter period.

Encouragement is also given to churches in areas that don't have night-shelters to come and see the work of existing projects. Jade Holtham from Newport received support and practical advice from Housing Justice's London Co-ordinator Sally Leigh as she spent a week seeing the work of church night-shelters in London. Jade later wrote to Housing Justice: 'I am so grateful for all your support last week.

It wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for you! The connections I made were incredible and I came away with much more than I expected.' Jade is now working on setting up a winter night-

### In this issue:

Housing Justice resources help Congleton Church to lead school assemblies with a difference!	2
New discussion booklet focuses on the controversial subject of rough sleeping	3
Housing Justice News Round Up	7
Supporting Housing Justice	8

shelter to help homeless people in Newport.

And the next Winter season is already very firmly in the sights and work plans of Housing Justice! Staff are busy providing a special programme of training and support for churches in Haringey and the City of London – two parts of London where local churches will be running winter night-shelters for the first time ever from December 2009 to help people in housing need.



Volunteers from Brent Winter Night Shelter

# Housing Justice resources help Congleton Church to lead school assemblies with a difference!

Will Spendilow and Sue Wood, Youth Workers at New Life Church in Congleton, write about how they used Housing Justice resources as part of four school assemblies that were attended by almost 1,200 pupils at Congleton High School.

Will writes:

Two presenters started to give a talk using powerpoint slides and statistics about homelessness. A third person dressed as a tramp sat out of sight at the back of the hall. Part way through the presentation, the person playing the 'tramp' started to make a disruption (coughing, routing through bins etc) which caused a



stir with the pupils. Gradually, the tramp walks slowly down the centre aisle, with shopping trolley etc, stopping to ask pupils at the end of the seated rows for money, or a fag, or a light etc.... quite wide-ranging reactions were given, but in the main, shock/amazement. At this point the presenters had stopped the presentation. The tramp gets to the front and one of the presenters confronts him to get him out, the point being the presenter has the opposite attitude to that which he has been telling everyone how we should actually be.

Sue writes:

We used PowerPoint slides from the Poverty and Homelessness Action Week's website and tried to make them relevant and challenging to the young people. For example we took the statistic that about 20,000 people were dying from the cold this winter and said it would be like two-thirds of Congleton not waking up this morning! (It helped that we did it on a week that was very cold and when it snowed every day)... The idea of the tramp was to give the contrast in what we were saying about caring for the people in your community and the way we as presenters treated him. We asked for him to be removed and then we said things like "give him a pound to go away", "buy a *Big Issue* off him to get rid of him", "be careful he might get violent", "keep away you might catch something" etc.



the tramp then said "I have a message for you" and read Mathew 25 versus 31-45 where it says about feeding the hungry etc. and what you did for the least of these you did it for me. We then prayed and asked God to help us have love and compassion for the homeless and those in poverty and to see them as he does. We also challenged them to think about how they could practically help, like by giving to charities etc, really asking them to be aware of the world around them and those less fortunate than themselves.

Housing Justice produces a range of resources that can be used all year around. For details, check out the Homelessness Sunday section of Housing Justice website [www.housingjustice.org.uk](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk).

Have you thought about using Housing Justice's resources for a service at your Church this year?

## **New discussion booklet focuses on the controversial subject of rough sleeping**

How should we respond to people who are sleeping rough? While this is only the most obvious sign of housing need, it is the most challenging reminder of disadvantage and exclusion in our midst.

It was the combination of the important nature of this debate coupled with a frustration that, in the words of Housing Justice's Chief Executive, Alison Gelder, "discussions about rough sleeping often seem to generate more heat than light" that prompted Housing Justice to publish a 45-page discussion paper on the subject.

The booklet itself was based on a series of five talks given in autumn 2008 at Bloomsbury Baptist Church, Central London. *Rough Sleeping: Compassion versus Coercion* was launched at a very well-attended debate organised by Housing Justice at that Church in March.

Housing Justice's Alison Gelder said: "One of the problems with discussions around this subject is that emotions are heightened and positions entrenched. The talks and our little book are an attempt to get beyond that and to enable a wide audience to listen to and to empathise with the different positions represented. My hope is that, through the process of hearing and understanding, we can create a respectful space for further debate and working together."

As part of the introductory chapter of this book, the Revd Dr Simon Perry, Minister of Bloomsbury Baptist Church, provides this account:

In early June 2008, one of our homeless visitors, Michael Blight, invited members of Xchange – a church youth group – to stay overnight at his Fleet Street residence. For the last four years, Michael has lived in an office doorway, sized about 3ft by 6ft.

Since the beginning of May 2008, Michael's residence had been subjected to forced cleansing, usually between 2 and 3am. The reason given by the Police who accompany the street-cleaners, is that Fleet Street is being cleaned. The Corporation of London had instigated an attempt to reduce the number of homeless people sleeping on the city streets to zero by the year 2012 (probably not the only one of the city's goals that involves that number!). 'Operation Poncho' is the name of the strategy used to encourage homeless people off the streets, and it has seen tremendous success in recent months. Whilst much of this success is to be affirmed, there are also a few areas where its success has not been universally celebrated. In particular, the hosing-down element (officially described as 'street-cleaning'), and the inestimable disruption it has inflicted upon many innocent homeless people who are woken in the small hours to have their



sleeping spaces saturated with water.

For those in desperate need, the charity appointed by the Corporation has enjoyed remarkable success. Equally, those who sleep rough illegally may be arrested and justice served. But what of those who, like Michael, do not fit into the categories of desperation or criminality? There is no legal way to remove them from the streets. If these people, described by the homeless charity Broadway as 'resistant', are to be removed, they must be intimidated, bullied or inconvenienced off the streets. 'Hosing down' the places where such people make their beds is an effective means of bullying them, under the pretence that it is for their own good. But surely, this would never happen in modern Britain?

However, Michael – who is hardly one to be intimidated or bullied – invited members of the church to see how this is happening under our noses. On the night of June 17th 2008, eight members of Xchange slept rough with Michael. The police had been informed that we were doing so, which meant that we did not really expect the crude actions described by Michael to manifest.

And then at 2.15am, a very polite policewoman woke us up in order to save us from being saturated by the street cleaners, who were cleaning Fleet Street. With a little reluctance, we consented. Then the cleaning began. Well, it was more a pointless watering. And for some reason, only the 30 feet of pavement where we were sleeping was watered. Apparently, it was 'a bit smelly', because unlike mere mortals, 'homeless people urinate and defecate!' Having been asleep here, I think one of us might have noticed if such supernatural aromas blighted the air. But the Police exemplified both professionalism and sensitivity as they performed their duties, and we did as we were ordered. After the wetting was completed in peace, we were told to 'go back to whatever you were doing'!



We then relocated 20 feet east, and slept under an alleyway – which I assume must have been free of the aforementioned aroma. Michael himself did get wet in the incident, and sat in the street opposite until the operation was complete.

Members of the church involved regard this event primarily as an act of radical listening. Michael's situation was heard by sharing in a small dose of the reality to which he and those like him were subjected on a daily basis. Many of those less resilient than Michael had upped and moved to other places. Success, for the Corporation.

A talk entitled 'A Window on the Green' given by Fr Martin McAnaney, the Catholic Parish Priest who chairs the Churches Together in Westminster Task Force on Homelessness, provides the material for the next chapter.

Fr McAnaney describes his own experience of working 'in one of Dublin's five heroin black-spots where I met wonderful people living in a harsh environment, unemployment reaching 85%, a climate of violence and intimidation, and a high level of poverty-related health issues.' Fr McAnaney outlines his own initial feelings of guilt at not being able to understand things fully and in a very thoughtful analysis, he reflects upon how his feelings changed. 'Things can be

understood from a different perspective. So, before responding to any need in that community, I needed to share their perspective, otherwise, my response would be born out of my perception of that need and not necessarily of theirs.'

The next chapter is based on a talk that was essentially a two-way conversation between the Revd Dr Ruth Goldbourne of Bloomsbury Baptist Church and Michael Blight, who was homeless in London and sleeping on the streets at the time of the talk last autumn. Michael had been having Sunday lunch at the Church for quite a while and during 2008, his experiences of Operation Poncho led to other Church members going and sleeping out for themselves (as described by Simon Perry in the introductory chapter).

In this chapter, Michael answers questions on many issues but begins with his own personal experience of how he became homeless:

(Question) Can you tell us how long you've been homeless and how you ended up being homeless?

(Answer) Well I've been on the streets now for nearly eight years. I came as homeless to London in June 2001. The reasons for my homelessness I'm not going to go into too deeply but in a nutshell I'll say divorce.

(Q) So it wasn't a choice?

(A) No it wasn't really a choice.

(Q) Michael was saying that he's been on the streets since 2001 – arrived there through divorce. Obviously not what you chose?

(A) What my life was like before divorce is not something I want



to talk about in public. So I think with divorce on my mind, it is fair to say this was the gateway to my life on the streets.'

The next chapter 'Killing with Kindness' is by Howard Sinclair, Chief Executive of homelessness agency Broadway:

The perspectives provided by Howard Sinclair on this subject are very different from those given in the introductory chapter of the booklet. In Mr Sinclair's words: 'Operation Poncho and the enforcement approach to rough sleeping conducted by the City of London authority and the City Police has always been balanced out by Broadway offering significant care and support to the individuals involved on an ongoing basis. All Broadway staff – me personally, my staff and our outreach team – are involved in providing positive alternative approaches to the street. Nothing else.'

The chapter also includes strong opposition to giving in response to begging:

One man regularly gave £50 to a person sleeping rough at Bank (i.e. the tube station near the Bank of England). This money was spent sustaining a rampant heroin habit of several years. So what's wrong with this generosity? Bluntly put: giving



money can kill. It gives people who believe they want to stay on the streets all the resources necessary to sustain this all too often unsustainable life choice.

According to the Government, rough sleepers:

- Have a life expectancy of 42 years, in comparison to a national average of 74 for men, and 79 for women. This drops to 35 yrs if addicted to drugs (the same life expectancy as in Harare).
- Are thirty-five times more likely to kill themselves than the general population.
- Are four times more likely to die from unnatural causes, such as accidents, assaults, murder, drugs or alcohol poisoning.

The next chapter 'How should society respond to street homelessness? and what role do Christians have in this?' is based

on a talk given by Alastair Murray, Regions Co-ordinator of Housing Justice.

This chapter covers a very wide range of issues including the unique role Housing Justice plays in representing the views of churches who work with homeless people and people in housing need to the Government and other agencies:

In London, the main work I do is working with churches at the sharp end, serving people who are homeless, people who are excluded and vulnerable. We provide forums for winter shelters, soup runs, outreach, groups like that. We do training for volunteers... Also I think it's important to say that we try to represent the work of churches in wider discussions about housing and homelessness. We did a submission to the new Rough Sleeping Strategy which has just come out today. In fact, I was pleased to see that many of the points we put to the Department of Communities and Local Government were included in the Strategy. We were arguing that churches do have a role to play in the work and it seems that quite a few of our suggestions were taken on, which is good.

The final chapter is based on a talk given by Tom Preest, Head of Anti-Social Behaviour and Street Population Services at the



London Borough of Camden in Central London. The chapter catalogues Camden Council's approach to street homelessness and enforcement issues.

This chapter covers many different aspects of Camden Council's work, including the controversial subject of how service intervention is linked with enforcement:

It is Camden's policy that we will always offer our people appropriate services before exploring the use of enforcement interventions. Not in just the street homelessness population, but across the whole phase in terms of anti-social behavior – young people, adult drug dealers, and noisy neighbours: whoever it is, we might be willing to use ASB (anti-social behaviour) legislation.

If you would like to read the full 45 page Housing Justice discussion document '*Rough Sleeping: Compassion v Coercion – Church, Community and Government Responses*', you can download one from the publication section of Housing Justice's website [www.housingjustice.org.uk](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk). If you need a hard copy in the post, please write to Housing Justice at 209 Old Marylebone Road, London NW1 5QT, enclosing a cheque for £7.50 (made payable to 'Housing Justice') and a note with your name and address on stating clearly that you would like a copy of the *Rough Sleeping Discussion Document*.



## Housing Justice News Round Up

### Church winter night-shelters 'worth' £1+ Million

Research by Housing Justice has shown that the 14 churches' winter night-shelters that the charity supports would cost more than £1+ Million if they were staffed by paid employees and run by statutory or private sector bodies.

The research showed that:

- Over the winter of 2008-9, the Church-led winter night-shelters accommodated a total of 1,405 people in Greater London alone.
- The night-shelters offered 27,748 bed spaces over an average 16 week period (approximately 250 bed sleeping spaces offered per night in Church halls).
- If the night-shelters operated as a commissioned service, conservative estimates suggest they would have cost at least £1,256,690.

- The night-shelters showed real community involvement – with each night-shelter being supported by between 200 and 500 volunteers.

"Our figures cover basic costs like the hiring of church halls, and the amount needed to buy mattresses, sleeping bags and food for basic meals. They are all definitely 'no frills' things and if anything, the costs are on the low side," said Housing Justice's London Co-ordinator, Sally Leigh. "These figures really show that as well as being unique and special in terms of human contact, church winter night-shelters also represent a real financial saving for the Government and local Councils – something that people often overlook when talking about faith-based community projects."

### Four run London Marathon to raise vital funds for Housing Justice



Charlotte Spelzini, Mike Callanan, Tom Golding and Richard Callanan all pounded the streets of London on 26th April to raise at least £1,000 a-piece for Housing Justice's vital frontline services. Over the course of the last year, every member of the team has spent many hours engaged in training and fundraising.

## Diary dates

### Friday 28th – Monday 31st August

Greenbelt (Cheltenham Racecourse) Come and meet the team at our stand in G-Space.

### Tuesday 20th October

Home or Assets? (Bristol) Round-table day organised jointly with Church Action on Poverty.

### Thursday 12th November

(London, St Martin-in-the-Fields) Service of Commemoration for people who have died homeless in the last year.

### Tuesday 17th November

(Central London) Housing Justice evening debate and AGM.

**If you would like to receive Housing Justice's monthly email bulletin of news and events (we promise we don't spam!), please email [info@housingjustice.org.uk](mailto:info@housingjustice.org.uk)**

**Housing Justice does not get large grants from either the Government or Church denominations. The charity relies on individual supporters and churches for most of the £1½ million Housing Justice needs to raise for its vital work every year.**

## Housing Justice commends government for 'significant progress' on rough sleeping but calls for new policy thinking

Housing Justice has submitted a formal response to the consultation undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government on the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy. The response produced by Housing Justice's Regions Co-ordinator Alistair Murray commended the Government for 'significant progress in reducing the numbers of people sleeping rough' and the 'commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing', but also called for some new thinking in areas of policy.

Specific attention was drawn to the problem of the 'gate keeping' of local authority services – the problem where Councils over-zealously apply tests on homelessness relating to local connection and priority need which can mean that rough sleepers don't even register as homeless: 'Many local authorities have an inadequate supply of social and affordable housing, and calls upon that housing are increasing from local families on housing waiting lists. This puts them in the invidious position of needing to ration their stock. In the light of this, responses to rough sleeping would be better coordinated at the strategic level, rather than by individual local authorities, thereby reducing the incentive for local authorities to gate keep services. This is especially true in London and other large cities. When someone is homeless and on the streets the priority must surely be to get

them into some kind of rolling shelter or other suitable emergency provision, and then start doing assessments of needs, and looking into the details of the person's case.' (Extract taken from Housing Justice's response to 2009 DCLG consultation on Rough Sleeping Strategy)

The Housing Justice response also called for:

- more good quality independent housing advice, and advice for migrants
- all local authorities to undertake street counts of homeless people
- low support hostels for working people to be delivered by private and voluntary sector agencies
- more shelters, emergency accommodation and 'wet' provision
- Government to build on existing good work with voluntary sector and to do more to involve smaller organisations with a track record of effective delivery and a good reputations with homeless people
- Government to work closely with churches in the planning and delivery of homelessness services
- Councils to pro-actively refer 'non-priority homeless people' to good private sector landlords and to set up rent deposit schemes.



**This summer marks the 10th anniversary of the death of Cardinal Basil Hume. Please remember him and his life's work in your prayers**

**Cardinal Basil Hume, RIP**  
**2nd March 1923 – 17th June 1999: Archbishop of Westminster, one of the Church's greatest campaigners for homeless people and former President of CHAS (predecessor organisation to Housing Justice).**

## Donation form

I would like to make a donation towards the work of Housing Justice.

Cardholder Name (Please print) .....

Address .....

My/our cheque made payable to Housing Justice is enclosed.

Please debit my Mastercard/Visa/Amexco/CAF Card (delete as appropriate)

with the sum of £ ..... **ref 0907**

Card No. ---

Valid from  Expires

Signature  Date

**You can also give to Housing Justice on-line** **SECURITY NO ----**  
[www.justgiving.com/housingjustice](http://www.justgiving.com/housingjustice)

**If you are a UK taxpayer your gift can be worth 28% more to Housing Justice at no extra cost to you through the gift aid scheme. Please tick here if you want Housing Justice to claim gift aid on this gift and any past or future donations.**

Many individuals and churches who care about housing issues and homelessness like to receive occasional mailings from Housing Justice. Housing Justice will never pass your details on to other organisations or bombard you with mail. If however you would rather not hear from us again, please tick here.

**Housing Justice is the national voice of Christian action in the field of housing and homelessness. We exist because we believe human dignity is challenged by the lack of decent housing. Housing Justice supports night-shelters, drop-ins and hundreds of other practical projects nationwide by providing advice and training for churches and other community groups who work with homeless people.**

**More information can be obtained from:**

**Housing Justice**  
**209 Old Marylebone Road**  
**London**  
**NW1 5QT**

[www.housingjustice.org.uk](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk)  
[info@housingjustice.org.uk](mailto:info@housingjustice.org.uk)  
**Telephone 020 7723 7273**

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