

Simon Star

Living and working with London's street homeless

Beth's story



Bethan Williams, 24, from Llanelli, Wales has been a Simon Community full time volunteer since August. This is her story:



Photo: Barry Hayden

"This Christmas will be the first time I've spent it away from my family. But as a volunteer with the Simon Community I honestly feel like I have another family now.

The people who work and volunteer with SC are amazing. So friendly and so inspiring.

I became a volunteer after coming to London as a tourist from my home town in Llanelli, Wales.

I was visiting touristy parts such as Southbank and the London Eye and saw homeless people everywhere. I saw people living on the streets, just ignored. The image stuck in my mind.

Back home I was working in a sports shop but my family always told me to go into something like nursing or caring. So I looked up homeless organisations in London on the internet and came across the Simon Community.

All volunteers spend 72 hours in the Community's house in 129 Malden Rd, Camden, to see if they're suited. I was a bit nervous but loved it. My average day starts at 9am, I get up and prepare for hospitality. We chat to people, watch DVDs, help them where they need it. Then I help make dinner, before food for soup and tea runs. We finish around 11.30pm. But it doesn't feel like work. I am doing things I'd do in my everyday life like cooking and cleaning, but I'm spending time with great people.

Any preconceived ideas about homeless people have gone. I've been taught words of Polish from some of our service users, and even though I do get teased about my accent it's good to learn something different, and I can now say 'hello', 'goodbye', 'how are you' and some of the basics. I've met people from all walks of life. One guy who regularly uses the soup run is originally from down the road from me in Wales. He lives somewhere in between the Strand and Lincoln's Inn now. His accent is stronger than mine and I don't know anything more about him expect his name but we have a laugh and always have a chat.

This Christmas I will be in 129, making Christmas dinner and sitting round the table with about 20 other people. I will miss my family back in Llanelli, but this will be an extra special Christmas for me. I am looking forward to it. It's not just about spending time with people who don't have anyone to spend it with. It's about having fun, a laugh and just being together.

And I am sure it will be one I'll never forget."

Notes from the Chair



WE have a new Director, Bob Baker and a new Services Co-ordinator, Philip Hole. You will get to know them well in the future as they write in future editions about their work in the Community. Having new people join the Community, especially when they will be responsible for the way the world sees us (Bob) and the way we work with those who need us (Philip) is always a bit nerve racking as we settle in together and help them absorb the 'Simon' way.

Bob and I went on the soup run together the first week he was here. While we were waiting to be picked up at Euston - the soup-run van had broken down and it took a while to organise a replacement - we were talking about his first impressions. He talked about the way most organisations are now focused on producing required 'outcomes' due to their financial dependence on contracts with local authorities. He said that you could search their literature and never find a reference to something you find in ours - the word 'love'.

I think we have been fortunate in our choice and I hope you will support him and Philip.

The consequences of the election are still unclear. There is a great amount of effort being put in to reducing the number of people who are homeless, especially in London. Some of this is well thought through. However, it seems likely that the results of the mooted policies may well substantially increase the number of homeless and rootless people on the streets while reducing the amount of money available to all agencies which depend on government funding.

The London Cyrenians and the Simon Community are inviting all the Simon/Cyrenian family, (there are almost twenty separate organisations, helping thousands of people, which share a common ethos and values), to explore how we can help each other in these difficult times. It is exciting to think of having more regular contact with each other and sharing the best of what we all have become. Simon started in 1963 and it will be our

50th anniversary in just over two years. It would be wonderful if we could distil the essence of the lessons we have all learned over that time and produce a definitive guide to compassionate and loving care for those most damaged and vulnerable people who are our concern.

Finally I would like to thank Caroline Love, who has been our interim Manager since May. She took over at a difficult time and her hard work, professionalism and lively intelligence has transformed the Community. It is not easy working in an office where you may be in the middle of a vitally important phone call while somebody, with little grasp of English, is asking you for some 'shooses', or needing to use the phone to talk to their probation officer. She is universally respected by some of the most difficult and exacting people you are ever likely to meet and that is a rare event. She has helped the trustees through many different processes especially recruiting and appointing Bob and Philip. We look forward to her continuing support and appreciate all that that she has done to secure our future.

MT Gibson-Watt is Simon Community Chair.



Get in touch!

The Simon Community
129 Malden Road, London NW5 4HS
Tel: **020 7561 8270**

Email: info@simoncommunity.org.uk
www.simoncommunity.org.uk

Christmas In The Community



AROUND two and a half years ago a man approached us on our street cafe and asked what we do with our clients on Christmas day. We told him we do our normal services and he said he was impressed that people give up their day to help others

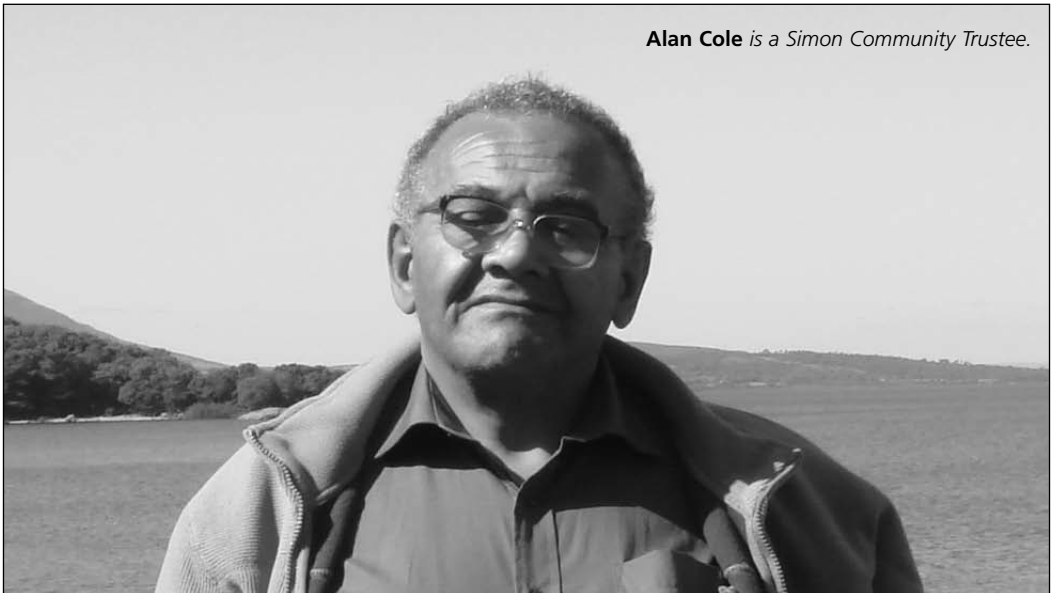
He then said the reason I have come to the Simon Community is because I have heard from a few people on the street that you are the charity who does not let them down, no matter what the weather is like. He said he would like to help us on Christmas day by opening his pub for 50 homeless people for a Christmas dinner, a few drinks and a bit of entertainment. He said he would provide a coach to pick them up at the strand and drop them back at the strand.

That was two years ago and now we have been invited to the Honor Oak pub, in Forest Hill, south east London, for a third year.

The owner's name is Rupert. He closes the pub and his staff and volunteers come in and serve the homeless from about midday to about 4pm and treat us like old friends. They go out of their way and don't expect anything for their time.

People like Rupert and his volunteers from the Honor Oak are few and far between and people should take a feather from their cap. Homelessness is not a disease it is a situation that anyone can find themselves in and a homeless person needs to know that he has people he can talk to and people that will listen.

To me the Honor Oak, Rupert, and the people who volunteer do it because they want to, not because they think they have a duty to. So finally I would like to say a big thank you to Rupert and his friends for everything and long may it continue.



Alan Cole is a Simon Community Trustee.

Size isn't everything...

It's been a busy and confusing time for those of us watching the news - with talk of compassionate conservatism, Big Society and cuts by the coalition government. But what will it mean for Simon and its community members? Trustees Dave Clark and Alastair Murray lay out some of their reflections and questions so far:

The big news is 'Big Society'. We're told it's the number one legacy that the government wants to leave but there's still debate about what it really means. As far as we can tell it includes a push to make us all more active and responsible for our local society. There is talk of 5,000 'community organisers' getting the rest of us moving and being active in our community. We've heard that decision making will be devolved from central government and put into the hands of the people and stark warnings that we'll have to be collecting our own rubbish and manning our own GPs before long! Has the British public elected closet anarchists? Collective action to solve society's ills has a certain Simon Community ring to it.

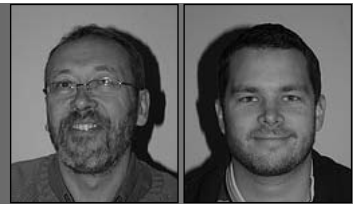
One thing at least seems certain - there won't be as much government spending over the foreseeable future. In the recent comprehensive spending review about 25% was lopped off overall government expenditure. We'll see less money spent on supporting people who lose their jobs, on social housing, on social care and even on the military. Aside from the cuts to services themselves, some of the most conservative (small 'c') are suggesting there will be half a million public sector job losses. This will have a huge impact on the people Simon works with.

To focus on just one of the issues in the news, Housing Benefit caps will have a direct impact on all tenants of private landlords on low incomes and/or benefits. The maximum housing benefit allowance will be capped to the cheapest local rents, those at the bottom third of the market. Private landlords in central London - where demand for rented accommodation is high - may simply decide it is no longer worthwhile to let to people on housing benefit, potentially causing homelessness. The shared room rate, a lower rate of benefit paid previously to under 25s, will be extended to everyone up to age 35. These changes are due to be introduced in April 2011, and London councils are already working out contingency plans - if anyone saw recent headlines about Westminster Council block booking emergency bed and breakfast accommodation in Eastbourne that is one worrying example.

And what about the call for us all to be a part of the Big Society? I'm not sure we can fill the gap left behind as the state retreats but maybe we're being pessimistic and underestimating our own capacity to be 'empowered'? What we do know is that those most likely to volunteer with a charity are white and middle class. There's obviously nothing wrong with that but the cuts mentioned above can only make this disparity between people worse. Those most affected by the cuts will have even less capacity to be involved in their community. Whose Big Society is it anyway?

Even if we accept that this is an interesting experiment in collective action, what will the costs of the transition be? Will our society be big enough for migrants? For those affected by drink, drugs and other addictions? Will the

with Dave Clark and Alastair Murray



drive to separate between the deserving and undeserving (individuals and organisations) leave us poorer as a society and less willing to accept difference?

We've heard some pretty encouraging noises about charities in general too. 'Civil Society' is the next big thing. But what is meant by Civil Society. Do we have to be civil? All the time? What about those who oppose or do things outside of the mainstream? Take our example. Will we be supported in carrying out our excellent soup runs and outreach to people on the streets as we are taking collective action to address society's problems? Or will we get the sharp end of the stick as we're not part of the programme?

Charities are also being invited to bid for 'commissioned' services by local authorities. The worry about this trend (which has been building for many years) is two fold. The shopping list for what services are commissioned is often decided without much transparency and can lead to the government agenda being adopted without question by charities in a service provider role. Simon has not taken government money since its inception as we've felt that it's an important part of maintaining our own independent critique of the problems faced by people on the street. We may have a bit less money as a result but at least we get to choose how to spend it. The other part of this commissioning puzzle is that charities will need to compete for contracts with private companies with potentially much more money but much less compassion. Payment by results sounds great but what if you don't get the results? There is a real danger that the hardest to reach remain unreached as they're unlikely

to 'respond to treatment'. Simon's work in accepting, loving and building people up, no matter the 'return on investment' becomes even more important in this environment.

If the coalition government is serious about devolving decision making power to communities then Simon is well placed. Particularly as we are a community of volunteers and homeless and formerly homeless people working together at the most grassroots level, including people who struggle most to be included. You could say we are already the Big Society in action, but it is hard to say what these changes will really mean in practice.

If you're interested in discussing any of the questions or issues we've raised please come to our 'indaba'. An 'indaba' is a Zulu word for a gathering of like minded people to address a particular issue. We'll be holding one on February 12th at Bloomsbury Baptist Church. If you're interested please drop a line to info@simoncommunity.org.uk.





I first heard about the Simon Community when I was working in a village for people with learning difficulties in Gloucestershire. I met a guy called Steve Gould who told me he had worked with Simon in Liverpool.

When I applied to join, there had been a decision not to take on any more volunteers and a letter to that effect was sent to me. It didn't arrive and I turned up anyway. As they say the rest is history.

I was a volunteer from 1972 to 1973 and joined the management committee shortly after. I was a committee member for 18 years, during part of which I was treasurer and part of which chair. When I left the Community was in a stable financial situation, running a night shelter at St Pancras, a first tier housing association house in Hackney, St Joseph's House at 129 Malden Road, a farm in Kent, a worker house in Hackney and an office just down the road in Camden Town.

When I became involved again five years ago things were markedly different. There was an annual deficit of £200,000. There was no

night shelter; accommodation consisted of a house of multiple occupations in Willesden, St. Joseph's House and a worker flat in a distant part of Stratford East. The first tier house in Hackney was taken back by the housing association.

The Simon Community has been put back on its feet. The books have been balanced and there is a healthy capital account ready to be expended on a new first access facility (night shelter in old money). There is a strong trustee group, good leadership in the community and well organised outreach services to the homeless on the streets.

This has not been achieved without a great deal of effort and some trauma, as those who have been following Simon Star in the last few years will be aware. It has taken its toll on me. The last five years have been hard work and mentally and emotional draining. I have decided to resign as a trustee.

The Community is indebted to those who give of their time: trustees, paid workers, volunteers, co-workers and residents. We are grateful to the loyal readers of Simon Star and others whose donations are the life blood of the community. The Simon Community is now in the hands of those who can see a clear path ahead, a path that will involve the development of the therapeutic model in the current work, a greater involvement with the political issues around homelessness today and closer working relationships with others active in the field.

I wish the Simon Community and those associated with it all the best for the future.

John Yeudall

Hospitality

Questions & Answers



HOSPITALITY is one of the most popular services Simon Community provides. Hundreds of homeless people from all over London make the journey every year. Between 30 and 60 people use the hospitality at any one time.

It's held three times a week during the day when the doors of 129 Malden Rd, Kentish Town are thrown open and homeless people are given a proper welcome to come in...



Adrian Byrski is one of those who use the service. Here are his views as told to Andy O'Brien, volunteer.

Q: When is hospitality held?

A: Monday, Wednesday and Friday between the hours of 11.00am to 3.30pm

Q: What can homeless people do when they come to hospitality?

A: Showers, laundry have access to the internet, make telephone calls, have some food also and interact with others.

Q: What do you most look forward to when you go to 129?

A: Showering, do my laundry and eating

Q: If you could describe 129 in five words how would you do so?

A: Welcoming, friendly, helpful, relaxing and service

Q: Can you think of anything that would improve or you'd like to see at hospitality?

A: More hot food

Q: How many times have you used the service? Do you use it at specific times of the year?

A: I use it on all days available

Q: Does SC hospitality provide anything that other homeless organisations don't?

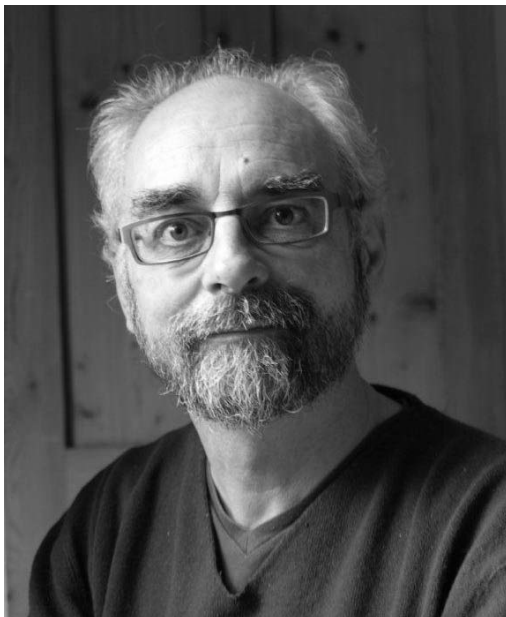
A: More options and just being accepted for who you are.

Q: Have you ever recommended hospitality to another homeless person and what did you say about it?

A: Yes I have and they, like me, keep coming back

An introduction

to the Simon Community's new Director, Bob Baker



I applied for the post of Director of the Simon Community because of my enduring commitment to working with people who need help and support but who for a variety of reasons may be rejected by other services.

The Simon Community is a very unusual organisation for a number of reasons, but not least because it has been able to remain true to its founding principles.

The fundamental ethos is based on love and empathy and a conviction that homeless and socially excluded people need more than somewhere to sleep.

We all need respect and the warmth of human contact. We all need to make our own decisions. I find myself in complete agreement with this approach.

It seems to me that by accepting government funding, many voluntary organisations and charities have lost their independence and run the risk of becoming service delivery agencies implementing government strategies and

chasing government targets and outcomes.

The Simon Community is in the enviable position of retaining its independence and its particular ethos.

A large part of my job as Director will be to continue to renew the vision of the Community and while adapting to changes in the environment, to keep us in touch with the founding principles of the organisation. This is a great time for us. Over the coming months we will be looking at forming more partnerships with a range of organisations; and while sustaining existing work we will be seeking to set up new projects. This will require more fundraising and campaigning and I shall be taking a lead in these areas of work.

My immediate background is in substance misuse – problematic drugs and alcohol use, and allied areas such as criminal justice and social exclusion. I have been a freelance consultant for more than ten years and so have worked all over the country and with a wide range of clients in the private, statutory and voluntary sectors.

Before that I worked for six years at City Roads – the emergency residential service for drug users in life threatening crisis, and before that for substance misuse charity Addaction.

In the seventies I helped to set up and run a hostel for homeless men in Hinckley, Leicestershire. This was organised under similar principles to those of the Simon Community with volunteers and beneficiaries working and living together in a community.

My appointment and the appointment of a new Services Co-ordinator, Phil Hole, gives us the chance to invigorate and strengthen the community and we are both keen to seize the opportunity.



Left to right **Sarah Harris and Lauren Edwards of the Building Lives team from the Royal Bank of Scotland and Coutts Bank.** We would like to thank them for their generous donation of £535

Calling All Snooker Fans!



The Simon Community is grateful to professional snooker referee Eirian Williams who has kindly donated an incredible set of snooker balls signed by players past and present.

This prize is worth £400 and will be auctioned through the Simon Star.

Anyone who would like to bid please send your details with your bids to: Snooker Auction, The Simon Community, St. Joseph's House, 129 Malden Road, Kentish Town, London, NW5 4HS

The winner will be announced in the next Simon Star.

The following snooker players have signed the snooker balls: John Higgins, Steven Hendry, Neil Robertson, Ryan Day, Peter Ebdon, Steve Davis, Joe Perry, Ali Carter, Andrew Higginson, Steven Maguire, Sean Murphy, Graham Dott, Jamie Cope, Stephen Lee, Mark Allen, Mark Selby, Jimmy White, John Parrott, Dennis Taylor, Terry Griffiths, Ken Doherty

The Simon Community as a Therapeutic Community



MANY ideas and practices pioneered by the Simon Community have been successfully taken up by kindred organisations. One of these is the concept of the “therapeutic community”.

Today this concept is found across the voluntary sector, in mental health hospitals, prisons and drug and alcohol rehabilitation units.

The Simon Community’s founder, Anton Wallich-Clifford, was inspired by the work of psychiatrist Maxwell Jones and his colleagues who worked with shell shocked soldiers at London’s Maudsley Hospital during the Second World War.

Wallich-Clifford took the concept of the Therapeutic Community and adapted it to the life and work of the Simon Community. Writing in the 1960s, he set out the two specific objects of the Simon Community. One was study and research, the other, “The long term care and treatment of the social inadequate and unemployable”.

The methods included, “provision of care aimed at assimilation, protection, development and resettlement through long term unpressurised and protected community life under specialised guidance.”

At that time the structures in the Simon Community which facilitated the process included houses and shelters, weekly house group meetings and daily breakfast meetings. Today, these meetings still exist with the addition of Community meetings each week for three weeks each month and on the fourth week, the Trustees Meetings are open to all involved with the Simon Community to attend.

In Britain, therapeutic communities began in psychiatric hospitals during the World War II, as traditional methods of care proved ineffective for the treatment of members of the armed forces who were admitted in shell shocked and traumatised conditions.

Maxwell Jones and his colleagues found that patients rapidly improved if they had regular meetings to discuss daily life, whilst making sure that chores and responsibilities were shared out, which in turn created more equality between staff and patients.

With the establishment of the NHS, there became scope for these methods to be tried more widely and there were many therapeutic communities in psychiatric hospitals. The concept spread to other countries. Later, when the big old hospitals closed, the meetings often continued for those who attended as outpatients.

Therapeutic communities were also held in some prisons, and research found that they had a positive effect on prisoners and reduced re-offending and drug use rates.

Therapeutic communities in drug and alcohol rehabilitation projects are often more structured and have been found to build self confidence and help settle those whose previous lives were chaotic.

Since its foundation, the Simon Community has been a way of life for its residents and voluntary workers.

The structure, meetings and the concept of a therapeutic community within the Simon Community continue to support that way of life.

Ruth Cram is a Simon Community Trustee.



NEWS

The Simon Community is looking for a treasurer. If you, or somebody you know might be interested please e-mail trustees@simoncommunity.org.uk or call the office on 02074856639.

Our AGM will be at 11am on Saturday, February 19 at St Silas Church, Malden Road, Kentish Town. Contact the office to find out about becoming a member.

Big Society Indaba (Zulu word for gathering of like minded people) on February 12 at Bloomsbury Baptist Church, Shaftesbury Av, central London. If you're interested please drop a line to info@simoncommunity.org.uk.

Andrew Thornton, the owner of Budgens in Belsize park, will be helping SC volunteers raise awareness of Homelessness Week. On January 26 the SC is planning to hold a stall in his shop, do collections and Andrew will provide a hamper for us to raffle.

On Friday, December 10, the Westport Inn, Malden Rd, Kentish Town, will be having a Christmas Quiz Night for us.

Simon Star wants you! If you have any ideas for articles, input or advice please do get in touch to let us know. We welcome all ideas new or old. Please email Shannon Kyle: contactshannonkyle@gmail.com Thanks for all your help and support.

THANK YOU

John Yeudall for all his amazing help and support over the past three decades for the SC.

Andrew Thornton who raised for £1956 for the new boiler for 129. Just in time for winter too!

Michelle O'Connell for all her help as Treasurer.

Barry Hayden (www.barryhayden.co.uk) for photographing Street Cafe.

**The Simon
Community's**

AGM

will be at 11am

on Saturday,

February 19,

at St, Silas Church,

Malden Road,

Kentish Town.

**To attend as a mem-
ber, please contact
the office.**



Ways of Giving

Please complete this form and return it with your donation to:

The Simon Community

P.O. Box 1187

London

NW5 4HW

*Alternatively you can make a secure donation online via our website, why not visit us at: **www.simoncommunity.org.uk***

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The Gift Aid scheme is for gifts of money by individuals who pay UK tax. Basic rate tax is 20 per cent, so this means that if you give £10 using Gift Aid, it's worth £12.50 to the charity. For donations between 6 April 2008 and 5 April 2011 the charity or CASC will also get a separate government supplement of three pence on every pound you give.

Title: _____ **Initial:** _____ **Surname:** _____

Address: _____

_____ **Post code:** _____

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Please treat:

- The enclosed gift of £ _____ as a Gift Aid donation; OR
- All gifts of money that I make today and in the future as Gift Aid donations until I notify you otherwise; OR
- All gifts of money that I have made in the past 6 years and all future gifts of money that I make from the date of this declaration as Gift Aid donations until I notify you otherwise.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____ / _____ / _____

Telephone: _____ **Mobile:** _____

Email: _____

Please notify us if you change your name or address OR if your circumstances change and you no longer pay sufficient income tax and/or capital gains tax.

Please tick the appropriate box(es).

I would like:

- further information on including Simon in my will;
- I would like further information on volunteering as a trustee, co-worker OR worker;
- I would like to receive Simon Star by email OR post.

I enclose:

- a cheque/postal order made payable to "The Simon Community".