



Simon Star

Living and working with London's street homeless

Head Count Gives Disturbing Insight

FOR several years the Simon Community has organised a twice-yearly headcount of rough sleepers in central London in a bid to get accurate and independent figures.

Although headcounts are carried out by local authorities, many homeless agencies now use a system known as Chain – the Combined Homelessness and Information Network – which gathers information from outreach services and day centres.

A Chain report for the last quarter of 2009 found there to be 203 more people than the year before, with 1,400 seen people bedded down on the streets and a further 891 verified rough sleepers who were not seen rough sleeping.

Given current trends, more than 4,000 people are estimated to be on the streets in 2010.

We conducted a headcount in March, and also asked people what help was being offered and whether it was enough to get them off the streets. We also wanted to gauge the extent of heavy-handed enforcement approaches, such as "Operation Poncho" used in the City of London.

With the help of volunteers from Housing Justice we talked to homeless people in the Strand, Victoria, Lincolns Inn Fields, Oxford Street, Covent Garden, Temple, Embankment and Waterloo.

More than 60 people responded positively to our requests for information. Many had been on the streets for some months and even years and most alarmingly, had not been offered any help or accommodation.

One had been sleeping rough for 10 months and was in contact with outreach workers – but as he had no serious support needs under mental health or substance misuse he had not been offered any assistance. Other issues raised included reluctance to take up the offer of a hostel bed, problems faced by people from

the EU – one interviewee was about to be deported although he had joined the workers registration scheme and worked for two years in the UK – and people who did not want to use the benefit system.

Almost half of those spoken to had experienced some form of enforcement pressure, such as being woken up and told by police to move on. One person was "dragged by their sleeping bag by officers from Charing Cross Homeless Unit" in the middle of the night from their sleeping place in Victoria. Others talked of 48 hour ASBOs and their repeated use when a magistrate had dismissed the case from court.

Later the same night, 109 people were counted rough sleeping in Westminster between midnight and 2.30 am. This is of particular concern as almost all shelters are reported to be running at full capacity.

These disturbing findings refute claims made by some local authorities and homelessness agencies that there is no need for the services we provide, along with all the other voluntary outreach workers and soup runs in central London.

We hope our report will be spur outreach teams into making greater a effort to engage with and help everyone who is on the streets, whatever their needs, circumstances or entitlements.

For the full report visit www.simoncommunity.org.uk

Alastair Murray is a Simon Community trustee and acting head of Housing Justice.

Simon Star Easter Edition

If you would like to make a donation
turn to the form on the back page.

Thank you.

Notes From The Chair That Was



These are my last Notes.

MT Gibson-Watt has taken over as chair for the coming year.

I remain a trustee, so no doubt will be asked to contribute to future editions of the Simon Star.

So how was it for me? From previous notes you will have gathered that it has been hard work and stayed that way 'til the end. In fact the last three months have been exhausting. After sorting out the succession and, in the week before the AGM, preparing to hand over to the new chair, it became apparent that a coup was being planned. The time for handover was taken up with consultation with the Charity Commission and our solicitors and planning how to ensure that the Community continued with its philosophy and trustee board intact. In the end the AGM went smoothly. The current trustees who were standing again were re-elected along with four new trustees. Since the AGM I have been trying to catch up.

In the last three years the trustee board has gradually acquired the skills that a small charity with limited resources needs. A trustee with fundraising qualifications would complete the range of skills. The community owes a great deal to the trustees. They have taken on support roles that complement the skills of the paid staff. Many are actively involved as co-workers. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their commitment and hard work and the support they have given me during my time as chair.

The Simon Community was established in 1963 by Anton Wallich Clifford to work with the homeless on the streets of London. Although it has in the past had many branches in different parts of the country including Eire and has spawned such

organisations as Cyrenians, St. Mungos and Centre Point, it is now working out of one house providing exemplary outreach services to those still left on the streets. It seeks to work with those for whom no other provision exists in a way that enables them to take back ownership of their lives. In the house, day on day, support in a community environment with a family atmosphere offers an accepting and befriending framework in which human relationships can be nourished. Simon seeks to be an exemplar of how those with the greatest need can be cared for and with and shown a path from the streets into the wider world.

To ask someone to come from the streets into a community environment is to ask a great deal. Living in the Community and adopting its inherent and specifically Simon values requires much thought and effort, often having to subordinate one's own wishes to those of the community. It is hard enough for the workers let alone the residents. On a few occasions in the past it has been possible to say that we were fully implementing Simon philosophy that the community was working well and all were contributing. Most of the time we are a work in progress. We look forward to further good progress in the coming year.

John Yeudall is a Simon Community trustee.

Join us for a Ceilidh

April 30th | 7:30pm
at St Mark's Church,
Myddelton Square,
Islington, EC1R 1XX.



Homelessness Update



With government spending on homelessness increasing by 23 per cent since 2005 – to £220million over the last three years - it might initially appear that enough support and assistance is being provided to those who remain living on the streets of London.

Indeed, new hostels have opened and old ones have been refurbished. And the Community and Local Government's (CLG) much vaunted list of the 205 most entrenched rough-sleepers in the capital - who will receive priority treatment from outreach services to fast-track them indoors - is another example of just how determined the authorities are to clear the streets before the Olympics.

From this snapshot it would appear that the government have a handle on the issue of homelessness. However, the actual picture is more complicated. To get a true idea of the extent of homelessness in the capital one needs to venture further afield to the churches, the squats, the bendy-buses and the small, independent charities that work on the margins, providing assistance to those who are not entitled to any from the state.

Every year in Central London from December through to the end of March the winter night-shelter program accommodates somewhere between 100 and 150 people – many of whom have no possibility of moving-on because they do not have any right to benefits or housing. By the time you read this, all of these shelters will have closed and its residents will be back on the

streets. Often for these people squatting is the only possibility to get a roof over their heads. No research has been done into how many squatters there are in London. However, a report in the Independent on Sunday in 2003 estimated that there were around 15,000 squatters in England and Wales. I hear on an almost daily basis stories of people being evicted from their squats. For these people the battle to find accommodation can be never-ending. Then there are those that sleep on the buses. The homeless charity Thamesreach has two outreach workers dedicated to trying to assist these people. They cover only two London bus routes and so far they have found 84 homeless people living in transit. And then there's us, the Simon Community, whose aim it is to work "for those for whom no other provision exists". And despite the extra funding, the new hostels and the heartfelt pledges, the number of people coming through our doors with no home, no income, and no opportunity to work has never been higher. What will happen to these people come 2012 is unclear. Michelle Binfield the head of the CLG has stated that they are "testing the legal waters" around deporting those "A10 nationals" who are deemed to not be taking up their "treaty rights". A report by the "Empty Homes Agency" for 2009 has the number of vacant properties in London at over 75,000. Naturally, there is no connection between all of these different issues and you'd be a fool and a Communist to think otherwise. Happy Easter!

Steve Barnes is a Simon Community trustee.

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www.simoncommunity.org.uk

THE
Simon
COMMUNITY

The Trustees

Steve Barnes

Steve has been volunteering on and off with the Simon Community since the year 2000. During this time he has been a full-time, live-in worker for a total of three and a half years. He now helps out as a part-time volunteer, and works professionally in social care.



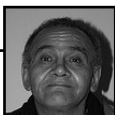
Dave Clark

Has been a co-worker for 5 years and a regular fixture on outreach work, mostly on a Thursday night. He works on Community campaigning projects with and helped draft the Simon Community response to the 'Rough Sleepers Strategy'. For his day job, he works with refugee led organisations on governance, fundraising and general organisational development.



Alan Cole

Joined the Community as a co-worker in 2000, and was elected as a trustee in 2004. He was formerly a worker within The Simon Community and joined the Management Committee in order to repay the community for all it has given to him. He is also an active co-worker, regularly helping out with the early morning tea runs and organising social events for the Community.



Ruth Cram

Ruth has been a Trustee since mid-2008. She enjoys working behind the scenes to support the work of the Simon Community. After being a young full time Simon worker in 1969-70, Ruth married another volunteer at Centrepoint, a project started up by the Simon Community. She has combined raising and supporting her family with a variety of caring work, both voluntary and paid. Now retired from her work as a priest in the Anglican Church, Ruth hopes to see the best Simon principles lived out in the present day.



M.T. Gibson-Watt

Chair

Joined the Community in 1967 as a volunteer worker where she met and married Anton Wallich-Clifford. She continued to live and work in the Community with Anton until his death in 1978 and remained working in Simon until 1980. She has been a trustee at various times since then and was acting director in 2002. MT has also been a trustee of other organisations concerned with social justice, the environment and the arts. She is the Chair of the Community.



Cynthia Jameson

Joined the Community as a co-worker at the beginning of 2008. From initially an engineering background, she has had a varied career and was at one time a social worker, working with the mentally ill. Cynthia has served on many charity committees over the years. She is still a very active co-worker within the Community. She is Vice Chair of the Community.



THE Simon Community's Trustee Board, its Management Committee meets monthly to manage its affairs and plan its strategy. Day-to-day management is delegated to the Community Manager, who in turn is supported by a part-time administrator and a number of full-time volunteers. The Management Committee is currently comprised of the following members:



Shannon Kyle

Shannon became a co-worker in 2009. She lives locally to St. Joseph's House in Camden and is a journalist and writer. She currently works freelance for newspapers and magazines, including the nationals and the women's weekly market. Shannon will be dealing with media enquiries.



Ian Lock

Ian became a trustee in 2006, having been the Community's Interim Director for 12 months from April 2005. His background is in general management and HR, including four years as business services director for Ordnance Survey and eight years as HR director for St Mungo's. He is secretary of the Community.



Robert McNeill

Robert joined the Simon Community in 2005 as a resident in the Anton Street project. He has been actively involved in Community affairs ever since, as well as previously serving a two year term as a trustee. His current passion is reviving the community spirit in our residential projects. His background in owning and running small businesses goes back some 35 years.



Alastair Murray

Alastair has been involved in the field of homelessness since 1991. In 2003 he became development worker with UNLEASH, Church Action on Homelessness in London, which merged in 2006 with the national Christian campaigning organisation Housing Justice. He has been a supporter of the Simon Community for many years and became a trustee in February 2008. He is Vice Chair of the Community.



Andy O'Brien

Andy joined the Community in October 2009. A former bookmaker and pub manager, he is now involved in fundraising for the Community. He also goes out regularly on streetwork and soup runs.



Michelle O'Connell

Michelle joined the Community in September 2008. She is currently an accountant in the City and has previously worked in both the public and private sector. She is an active co-worker, regularly going out on the Thursday night soup runs. Michelle is the current Treasurer of the Community



John Yeudall

John is a retired architect. He Joined Simon as a volunteer in 1972 and worked in the Community for 1½ years. He was a member of the Management Committee from 1974 to 1990, during which time he served as chairman and treasurer. John rejoined the Management Committee in 2005 to be part of a process of renewal: to help put the Community back on its feet financially and reintroduce the Simon philosophy. He was Chair of the Community for the last 3 years.



E-mail us if you have
any questions or concerns:
trustees@simoncommunity.org.uk



Community Report



Simon News



We are holding a Ceilidh on April 30th at 7:30pm at St Mark's Church, Myddelton Square, Islington. EC1R 1XX

Easter is a time of rebirth and renewal. Spring is still around the corner but the feeling of excitement is rising.

The community is up with the lark to deliver tea, coffee, sandwiches and a friendly word every Sunday and Monday.

We meet one hundred and twenty people, huddled under their blankets or wiping the sleep from their eyes.

We are greeted with friendly banter or inquiries as to our well being.

All of the people we meet have interesting stories to tell of the trials and tribulations of street life.

We receive requests for all types of things – long Johns, gloves, air-mail notepaper, the words to Freddie and the Dreamers' song "you were made for me". We meet all demands.

The city is quiet. The weather is still cold, and frequently wet. We get a warm reception from all that we meet.

An early morning cup of tea, often delivered whilst the person is still in their sleeping bag, is a welcome way to start the day.

The community plays a vital role in bolstering self confidence, delaying signs of depression and combating isolation and despair.

The level of support received from our supporters allows us to continue and develop our work.

Spring is the time of year for optimism. Those that live on the streets are not convinced that tomorrow will be better. Our job is to be there whatever each day may bring.

Jo Nurse is Community Manager

Music will be provided by the Jacket Potatoes, with other musical interludes by members of the Community. Supper will be included in the ticket price and there will be a bar serving alcoholic and soft drinks.

Budgens stores in Belsize Park and Crouch End, have generously donated 10p to the Community, for every Easter egg sold in their stores up to Easter. The group, headed by store owner Andrew Thornton, have also granted us a donation for a 'green' improvement to St. Joseph's House.

RBS have adopted us as their Charity of the Year. They will be holding various fundraising events for us in the coming months, so look out for more details.

The Lord Mayor's Show committee have once again invited us to apply for a float in the show. If selected, we will be given a grant and a project manager to re-create our ideas. We must submit our plan by the end of April, so any ideas or suggestions will be gratefully received by the Fundraising Committee, via our website.

For more details, of all our news and current events, or if you would like to contact us, please see the News Page on our website at www.simoncommunity.org.uk.

We welcome your thoughts, comments, story ideas & feedback.

To get in touch, please email Simon Star editor *Rebecca Evans* on rebecca.c.evans@gmail.com or visit our website: www.simoncommunity.org.uk.

Who Is Simon For And Why Love Matters



Anton set up the Simon community for those he termed "socially inadequate". But what does that mean? Most people, whatever the range or depth of their problems, somehow manage to survive without becoming homeless. Those people who do become homeless fall into two major categories, the majority, whose homelessness is temporary, and the minority who are likely to be homeless on a long-term basis. It is this smaller group that Simon was set up to serve. These are usually lonely and isolated people. They commonly see relationships in simplistic black and white terms, and are often frustrated and bewildered by the complexities of day-to-day life. Many of them have difficulty in reading and writing, which adds to their burden of frustration. A number of them have problems such as attention deficit disorder, Asperger's syndrome and other symptoms of neurological difference. On top of this, they may have any of the more obvious symptoms of a life out of control, alcoholism, mental illness, addiction, poor self-control, sometimes leading to violence, and so on.

When the community was started, although this pattern was plain, the deeper reasons were more difficult to see. People usually had difficult family circumstances, but then so do many hundreds of thousands of other people who never become homeless. With the recent developments in neurology as a result of new scanning techniques we now know that the events in a child's first year are crucial to its ability to develop the part of the brain which deals with complex social and emotional relationships. If the child suffers chronic stress in its first year it produces the stress hormone

cortisol which inhibits this development. This process shuts down after the first year and the child is left with whatever development has been possible in that time. If this has been severely limited it will only be possible to deal with the consequences by long-term input. Without proper research it is impossible to know if this early stress is implicated in causing people to become long-term homeless but it seems to offer a possible explanation not only of the cause of long-term homelessness but also of why Simon methodology works so well with this group of people.

It is very difficult to know when one meets someone who is homeless if they have the problems outlined above, and anyway, since we care about all those who are homeless the people we invite into the Community may have short or long-term problems. Our purpose is to offer unconditional love and acceptance (easier said than done). To provide an environment that supports and helps develop everyone whom we deal with. At the same time, identifying and encouraging those with short-term problems to move on as rapidly as possible through all the many other agencies out there who are "outcome" or success based.

It would be good to see if we can encourage research in this area. If you are interested in reading more on this issue the book "Why Love Matters" by Sue Gerhardt is the source of most of the ideas in this article.

Next issue of Simon Star: - How do we meet these challenges in our work?

M.T. Gibson-Watt
is Chair of the Simon Community

Check out our website
www.simoncommunity.org.uk



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***

giftaid it

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

I enclose:

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