

Spring 2013

ISSUE 121



THE
Simon
STAR



www.simoncommunity.org.uk



FROM THE DOORSTEP & MY NAME IS PHILIP

Stories from a full time volunteer and a resident pages 6 & 7...



www.simoncommunity.org.uk
info@simoncommunity.org.uk
020 7485 6639



Editor

Rachel Cullen

Contributors

MT Gibson-Watt
Bob Baker
Karen Barker
Mike Coleman
Tim Snell
Philip
Marika Van Harskamp

Design

Sam Peacock

Photography

Rachel Cullen
Philip
Rosina Curren
Karen Barker

Thank You's

Pret a Manger
Wiltshire Foods
Waitrose
Marks & Spencer
Hyperion Insurance
Kester Hynds
Snugpak
Christchurch School
Coutts
Faithful Companions of Jesus
Institute of Our Lady of Mercy
Franciscan Sisters of Mill Hill
The John & Susan Bowers Fund
St Pancras Old Church
Standard Chartered Bank
Google Ads
Aztech Solutions
Queens Crescent Library
Residents
Part time volunteers
Full time volunteers
Trustees

All our donors and supporters

WELCOME

Welcome to the first newsletter in our 50th Anniversary year. It feels wrong to use the word 'celebration' in this context. How can we 'celebrate' the fact that there are still thousands of homeless people who need us and the many other homeless charities that try to help? There is little to 'celebrate' about the lack of affordable housing in both the rented and the ownership sector.

The current changes in benefits and rent requirements are social upheavals that can cause vulnerable people to lose their fragile hold on having a place of their own, dropping them into homelessness and despair. We are already seeing some of the consequences of the recession on the streets. The recession has made life harder for almost everyone, increasing the pressure while diminishing resources. But we are afraid that the worst is yet to come and that our services will be needed more than ever.

We usually make our annual appeal during Lent. This year we are not asking you for money directly (though we will not turn away any donations) as we know that many people are facing financial hardship. So we have put together some fundraising ideas to help you get other people involved. If you would like to help us please contact Rachel at the office (0207 485 6639) who will send you a leaflet filled with fundraising ideas or look on our website.

Despite the gloom Spring is coming with all the hope and light we long for. Wishing you the joy of the season.

MT Gibson-Watt
Lent 2013

CONTENTS

Cover story

From the Door Step & My Name is Philip
Experiences of a volunteer and a resident

pages 6 & 7

News

AGM Notice
page 3

50th Anniversary Plans
page 4

Updates

Music Tuesday
page 8

News From The Front Line
page 9

Other

Having fun raising funds
page 10

Bloomberg
page 11

NOTICE OF AGM

13th April 2013

The Simon Community Annual General meeting will take place at the Day Centre at :

1 Hilldrop Road, London N7 0JE.

The meeting has been scheduled for Saturday 13th April 2013 at 11:00am.

The meeting will comprise reports from the Chair, Director and Treasurer, Trustee nominations, election results and appointment of Auditors and Solicitors.

Only members will be eligible to vote. Membership forms are available from the office (details below) and must be returned to the office by Monday 18th March in order to be considered at the Trustee meeting on 19th March.

Please contact Rachel in the office on **02074856639** or **rcullen@simoncommunity.org.uk** for membership forms or further information.

FIFTIETH YEAR PLANS

Trustee Mike Coleman talks about our plans for the 50th Anniversary and why we need the help of our supporters.

As you may already know, the Simon Community reaches its 50th anniversary this year. From April we will kick off a year of celebrating all we've achieved, and we want your help to do it. This is our chance to say 'thank you' to all those who played a role in driving the Community forward and acknowledge their contribution to our history. But we've one eye on the future too, by looking to enhance the work we do with people experiencing homelessness in London, shouting louder as their campaigning voice and raising more funds to help this happen.

Anton Wallich-Clifford's original vision of a therapeutic community of equals, where volunteers work alongside residents to run residential and outreach projects, has proven both effective and resilient despite huge changes in the social fabric of the city we live in and (mostly) love. The Simon Community has never stood still, nor has it bowed to the passing trends of policy and politics (as in 1963, we still do not take any government funding, to avoid entering any Faustian pact we might later regret!). We have adapted to fit the needs of those we work with, listening to their views rather than foisting a preconceived set of solutions on 'clients' or 'service users'. The Simon Community has always seen people as individuals, not a faceless problem that requires a homogenous response. Of all the Community's strengths and of all the features we most treasure, this is possibly the greatest.

Perhaps the most telling verdict on the success of our approach lies in the many organisations that owe their origins, even their name, to our original model, but which exist independent of the 'parent'. They're doing their own thing in their own place because that is what works best for the people they encounter in Dublin, Belfast, Glasgow, Swansea, Newcastle and so many

other places. Acknowledging that heritage will be part of this year's celebration, just as building links with many of those who drew inspiration from the Simon Community could be a part of our future, through the Federation recently created. We are proud that we have lasted 50 years without evolving into something markedly different, far removed from our original ethos. But nothing stands still, and pride is best measured out in small doses! We are quite right to wish to celebrate all that the Simon Community has achieved, while preparing for the future and the challenges it will bring. To that end, we have set up a group dedicated to working up proposals to mark this milestone, as well as using it as a springboard to raise our profile (and our funds) further. Membership comes from a mix of residents, full and part-time volunteers, staff and trustees. Our plans include:

- » A celebration event for those who have worked and lived in the Community.
- » A picnic in the park (or two...) for those we work with on the streets.
- » Establishing a website so that friends of the Community can submit their anecdotes and memories of their time as residents or volunteers.
- » A conference to discuss the legacy of the Simon Community's approach and how it continues to influence support for people experiencing homelessness.
- » An exhibition showcasing how the Community has helped people since its creation.
- » Numerous (essential!) fundraising events to allow us to deliver our plans for more residential accommodation and services to meet the needs of London's street homeless.

Making all of this happen takes some organising and we would love to have your help to mark our anniversary with the fanfare it deserves. In return we can offer you a chance to shape our celebrations and participate in laying the foundations of our next 50 years. If you are interested in working with the group to plan events, or would like to help with the events themselves, please get in touch with us at admin@simoncommunity.org.uk or call 0207 485 6639. Even a few hours of your time over the coming year will make a big difference to how successful this year will be. We look forward to hearing from you!

- Mike Coleman

YOUR MEMORIES OUR HISTORY

Trustee Marike introduces the new Simon History website and explains how you can contribute by sharing your memories

Talking, and listening, are essential to the Simon Community work and ethos. Sharing experiences, plans for the day or the future, stories and memories are ways in which people relate, recover, belong and maintain a community. They also capture beautifully the Simon Community history – and what the community means to people.

“We would really like to celebrate your experiences and memories as our history”

In 50 years of the Simon Community, thousands of homeless people, volunteers/workers, staff, trustees, donors, supporters and Simon Star readers have each contributed in their own unique and invaluable way. We would really like to celebrate their and your experiences, memories and stories as our history. During this anniversary year we will therefore be collecting people's memories of the Simon Community at the www.simoncommunityhistory.org.uk website. We would love to include your stories which may cover, but are certainly not limited to:

- Your time in the community in general
- Anecdotes about specific experiences or encounters, e.g. during a soup run, street work or community meeting
- Describing a residential project, night shelter or day centre in London or elsewhere in the UK
- The volunteer experience and how this might have affected your later (working) life
- Why you have or your school/church/business/organisation has supported the Simon Community
- Photos!

Making your stories into our history is simple: please send them to history@simoncommunity.org.uk or to History Project, Simon Community,



A house meeting in 2005

129 Malden Road, London NW5 4HS. If you prefer to tell instead of write your memories, then please let us know. Meanwhile: don't forget check the history website regularly to read new contributions.

- Marike van Harskamp

Great donation from Dr Martens

We were recently contacted again by our friends at Dr Martens and offered 300 pairs of brand new boots and shoes to give out to our homeless guests.

People experiencing homelessness often have to walk long distances just to get to outreach services so well made shoes are a great donation and it did not take us long to give them all away.

Thank you Dr Martens on behalf of all the people who have had warm, dry feet this winter!

FROM THE DOORSTEP

Full time volunteer Tim shares his experience of his time in St Joseph's House

I have lived and worked at 129 Malden Road, for the past four months, at least I think it's four. It was about mid-October when I walked the streets of Kentish Town, searching for the house, so it must be four. Thankfully at the time there, almost as a signpost, was a girl eating cereal on the doorstep, marking the house out for my benefit.

I soon discovered that there is something about the doorstep. It has seen a lot of people come and go. People smoke there, talk their secrets there, eat their cereal there, and I have thought it is therefore somehow wise. It isn't wise, it's a doorstep. And if anything it probably laughed when I proffered my hand awkwardly to the girl whilst she was mid-spoonful. She shook it, graciously and with a smile, before I hurried an introduction and trailed behind her with my suitcase.

It was by accident that I found out about the Simon Community, on a gap year website. For a long time I have been motivated to help homeless people so perhaps I should have discovered it by design rather than aimless accident. The role itself is a simple one in essence: living and working with London's street homeless.

There are a lot of tasks, most of them different from each other and not many of them too easy. We live with residents who were formerly homeless and together form a community all the while assisting residents where necessary.

We have tea runs, soup runs, street cafes, hospitality at our day centre, street work and, for the moment, our Winter Shelter. For this I receive accommodation, food, expenses, training and a unique experience that won't be forgotten.



The essential idea of the community is that we act without officialdom. It means our guests aren't coerced into accommodation or anything in fact, and are treated as individuals rather than numbers that can be turned into 'move-on' targets. As you can imagine, being non-professional as we are can make day-to-day life chaotic at times. Things are never routine. One morning I found myself dealing with Norwegian journalists at our day centre, and another morning I was passing by airport-type security at City Hall on my way to a workshop on food waste. As ever, the strange also includes the banal, like my carrying a pot on the bus to the bemusement of commuters, or struggling against the rain as Elly and I carry a mattress across a North London park. Being a full-time volunteer with the Simon Community is an inimitable experience!

Soon however I will have to leave. Only recently I was on the doorstep when a prospective volunteer introduced himself. Although the house will remain the same the people will always change and volunteers have to pass the baton on - as I'm sure he will have to one day. When I do go, I can be happy that my time has been challenging enough to leave me with lasting skills and my future career will benefit from that. I can also be happy for the life experience and the great people I have met. Thankfully however I haven't left yet, and can enjoy this beautifully chaotic and productive life some few months more.

- Tim Snell

MY NAME IS PHILIP

Resident Philip tells us about his journey from guest to resident at the Simon Community

My name is Philip. This is my story of how I ended up living and working at the Simon Community.

I was homeless living on the street and using St Martin in the Fields day centre every day. St Martin's closes at 1pm every day and I would go to gambling shops to keep warm. One day a friend of mine at St Martin's told me to come with him, he was going to Camden Town to the Simon Community because there was a day centre that was open until 6pm.

I was excited to know that there was a place where I could spend the rest of the day then only have a few hours left before going to sleep.

“Last year I slept in the Winter Shelter as a guest - this year I am helping to run it!”

Hospitality then was at 129 Malden Road in the house where the residents and volunteers live. My first impression of the Simon Community was that it did not feel like other day centres, there were no staff going behind your business and you don't get patronised. There were no staff chasing you around forcing their help on people.

The Simon Community hospitality felt like a community of homeless people rather than just a place for homeless people. They don't put any pressure on anyone who uses their services. The spirit of the community was there to be felt for me and from that day I never stopped going to the Simon Community hospitality.

In winter 2010 I was approached by two friendly full time volunteers, Rosie and Beth, who I had got to know very well. They invited me by asking



whether I would be interested in coming to the Simon Community Winter Shelter. I was very excited about this because by this time Simon Community was in my blood, it was part of me. I knew everyone and everyone knew me.

I was in the Winter Shelter for two years in a row in 2010 and 2011. In July 2012 Mr Phil Hole (the Services Coordinator) approached me and asked me what I thought about joining the community to live and work as a resident at 129 Malden Road. Mr Phil Hole said to me that they are trying to invite the people they work with to have a go at working with the Simon Community in a way that will have a positive outcome for them.

I joined the Simon Community as a resident six months ago, now I am a Winter Shelter Coordinator alongside hard working resident Ian. Last year I slept in the shelter as a guest and this year I help to coordinate it.

I am enjoying my time in the Community and I am gaining a lot of experience every day. I live with nice, friendly full time volunteers from different countries and I work with a lot of part time volunteers every week. When I am out on soup runs I meet new people from all different walks of life.

We have a lot of fun in the house with other residents and volunteers in our free time so I feel good and positive being part of the Simon Community.

- Philip

MUSIC TUESDAY

Director, Bob Baker, reports on an exciting new development at the day centre

Thanks to funding from the very generous Coutts & Co we are able to run music sessions twice a week at the day centre.

We are very pleased to have the services of Robbie Knight, an experienced music tutor who has worked with different groups including people with learning difficulties; socially excluded young people and refugees. He is keen to bring music to the Simon Community.

“ Music has the power to bring people together”

We plan to engage people in practical music making activities, music appreciation - listening to and talking about music and eventually composing and performing. So why do we think it's a good idea to run music sessions for homeless people?

The sessions are designed to provide respite from a very hard life on the streets. There is a huge therapeutic benefit to listening to and playing music which is simply unavailable to most people experiencing homelessness.

“The sessions are designed to provide respite from a very hard life on the streets”

By working together in these sessions we hope that people will enjoy an activity which will bring a sense of achievement and fulfilment.

This is an opportunity to learn and experience music in a group and to make progress in practical music making that might surprise some people.



Robbie Knight

Clearly our guests come from a wide variety of backgrounds, some will be musicians, others will be new to making music. So all sessions will be “mixed ability” providing the opportunity to learn from each other as well as from Robbie.

“A way for people to move on and take control of their lives”

It can be important for people seeking to move away from homelessness and to take more control of their lives to have access to a range of experiences which they are denied on the street. Music is an international language and one which has the power to build self esteem and a sense of achievement.

The opportunity to work in a group can be very rewarding and beneficial. Music has the power to bring people together.

It is rare to find someone who does not like music in one form or another so these sessions will provide an enjoyable break from a hard life and for many this will also provide a way for them to move on and take more control over their lives.

- Bob Baker

NEWS FROM THE FRONT LINE

As Bob has said in his article about Music Tuesday, we are delighted to welcome teacher Robbie Knight to the Day Centre every Tuesday. It is great to be able to use the day centre for something new, the day centre is a great space and we look forward to using it for more activities in the future.

One event that will be taking place at the day centre is a play that is being performed by Cardboard Citizens called Glasshouse, written by Kate Tempest and directed by Adrian Jackson. Cardboard Citizens are a theatre company who employ actors who have experienced homelessness and perform plays inspired by the people they meet.

“For the first time, members of the women’s group will be joining our guests at the day centre”

They perform in daycentres, hostels, prisons and theatres in London and we look forward to have them visiting our day centre at the end of March for the production of Glasshouse.

For the first time, the members of our women’s group will be joining our other guests at the day centre to see Glasshouse. Regular readers who have been following the progress of the Women’s Group will know that one of the functions of the Women’s Group is to give homeless or hostel based vulnerable women access to experiences that they would not ordinarily have, such as outings to museums or social events.

We are looking forward to bringing the women from Westminster up to Islington for the evening to join us for the play.

Our night shelter is now up and running very smoothly with 7 guests staying every night of the week until the end of March. Thank you to all the volunteers who are making this happen including the people who are giving up their time to cook the evening meal and the people who are sleeping over every night. Snugpak let us have some very good quality sleeping bags for our guests so we know that everyone is warm enough!

As you will see on page 11 the winter warmer packs were a great donation from Bloomberg and went a long way to making life a touch more comfortable for people who were out on the street this winter. Also we had another large donation from Dr Martens and were able to give away many pairs of brand new shoes and boots to our guests at the day centre and out on the soup runs. The day centre is going well and we are encouraged to see more women guests lately. We welcome our new apprentice barber Neil who is visiting us weekly to provide much needed haircuts to our guests. We are glad to see more part time volunteers at the day centre too, having extra people who can chat to guests and take a bit of time to have a game of chess or help on a computer really contributes to a general atmosphere of warmth and friendship. Thanks again to all our volunteers and donors who make all our work possible.

JOIN THE BOARD

The Board of Trustees are currently looking for people to join them who have experience in fundraising, HR or psychology.

**If you have skills in the above areas that you would like to share please get in touch with us at admin@simoncommunity.org.uk
You can see full details of our Trustee advert on our website at www.simoncommunity.org.uk**

HAVING FUN RAISING FUNDS!

Are you up for running 26 miles? Cycling 100? Climbing a towering mountain? If so, we'd like to hear from you... If you are thinking of entering a marathon, riding London to Brighton for the hell of it, or want to shin up Ben Nevis in your lunch hour, we'd love you to consider raising money for the Simon Community.

As you know, we are celebrating our 50th Anniversary this year. One of our aims is to increase the number of residents we can bring into the Community and get off the streets for good. Your help would be invaluable in turning that aim into a reality and making a massive difference to the lives of those sleeping rough on the streets of London.

If you have been harbouring thoughts of tackling that Big Endeavour, please let us know and we'll do all we can to convince you it's a really Good Idea... And we can help you make a home for someone homeless by giving you some tips and support on how to raise sponsorship.

Please contact our fundraiser Karen at fundraiser@simoncommunity.org.uk or on 02074856639 for a fundraising pamphlet, some free encouragement and our eternal gratitude.

GREAT IDEAS FOR FUNDRAISERS



Hyperion Insurance Christmas Jumper Competition

Colleagues at Hyperion Insurance raised £120 with their Christmas Jumper competition. We thought that this was a great idea and we loved the photo! As MT mentioned on page 2, fundraiser Karen has put together a fundraising pack with lots of ideas of how to raise money such as having a bake sale, hosting a quiz night or events to be held at work or school.

It costs just £21 per week to provide a guest with dinner, bed and breakfast at our winter shelter. We hope that this example reassures our donors and fundraisers that we make their money go a long way to provide resources that will make a real difference in the lives of people experiencing homelessness.

HATS OFF FOR THE HOMELESS

The second annual Hats Off for the Homeless sponsored walk will be taking place on Saturday 16th March at 10.30 on Hampstead Heath. Last year participants all raised £20 each and had a great time walking round the Heath in silly hats raising some £700 in total.

For details please contact Karen at fundraiser@simoncommunity.org.uk

THANK YOU TO OUR FRIENDS AT BLOOMBERG

The people at Bloomberg do a lot for us all year round. Every year on World Food day they give us a generous donation, they have a volunteer programme that keeps us well supplied with helping hands on our soup runs and they turn out to serve our annual Christmas Dinner for homeless people in December. Another great service that Bloomberg provide is the Winter Warmer packs. These are packs that are designed to hand out to people who are street homeless. Each pack contains:

- » Shampoo
- » Toothpaste
- » Toothbrush
- » Deodorant
- » A fleece
- » A wool and fleece hat
- » Thermal long johns
- » Thermal t-shirt
- » 3 pairs of thick ski socks
- » A mounaineering head/neck warmer
- » Thick fleece gloves

Everything in the packs is very good quality and they come in a lightweight carry bag that is also useful. Each comes with a personal handwritten message from the person who put it together.

One of their volunteers explained to Bob at the Christmas dinner that the packs are put together at the Bloomberg offices as part of their working day. Bloomberg delivered 500 of these to us to give out at our day centre and on our soup runs during the cold weather.

These packs will certainly have made a great difference to those people who have spent the winter out on the streets trying to stay warm. On behalf of everyone who benefitted from one of these packs - thank you Bloomberg!



Winter warmer pack contents

THANKS ALSO TO...

Jane Belshaw's 5 Rythm's dance class raised £50 cash and a bumper bag of lovely toiletries to give to our guests at the Women's Group.

Chartered Standard Bank collected toiletries to give to day centre guests.

Children at Christchurch School in Hampstead raised £410.39 at their nativity play and through carol singing.

Kester Hynds raised £68.31 from a collection at Monkey Caberet.

Shoppers at Waitrose raised £929.00 when we were named as one of the charities of the week in the green chip collection.

Snugpak gave us a very reduced rate on great quality sleeping bags for the winter shelter.

Thank you to everyone for all your efforts!



giftaid it

PLEASE GIFT AID YOUR DONATION

If you pay tax you can increase your donation at no extra cost to you.

Title: _____ Initial: _____ Surname: _____

Address: _____

_____ Post code: _____

'I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCS) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 28p of tax on every £1 that I gave up to 5 April 2008 and will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give on or after 6 April 2008'

Signature: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

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.

Please complete this form and return it with your donation to: The Simon Community, Issue 121, 129 Malden Road, London, NW5 4HS. Alternatively you can make a secure donation online via our website, why not visit us at: www.simoncommunity.org.uk

