

August 2012

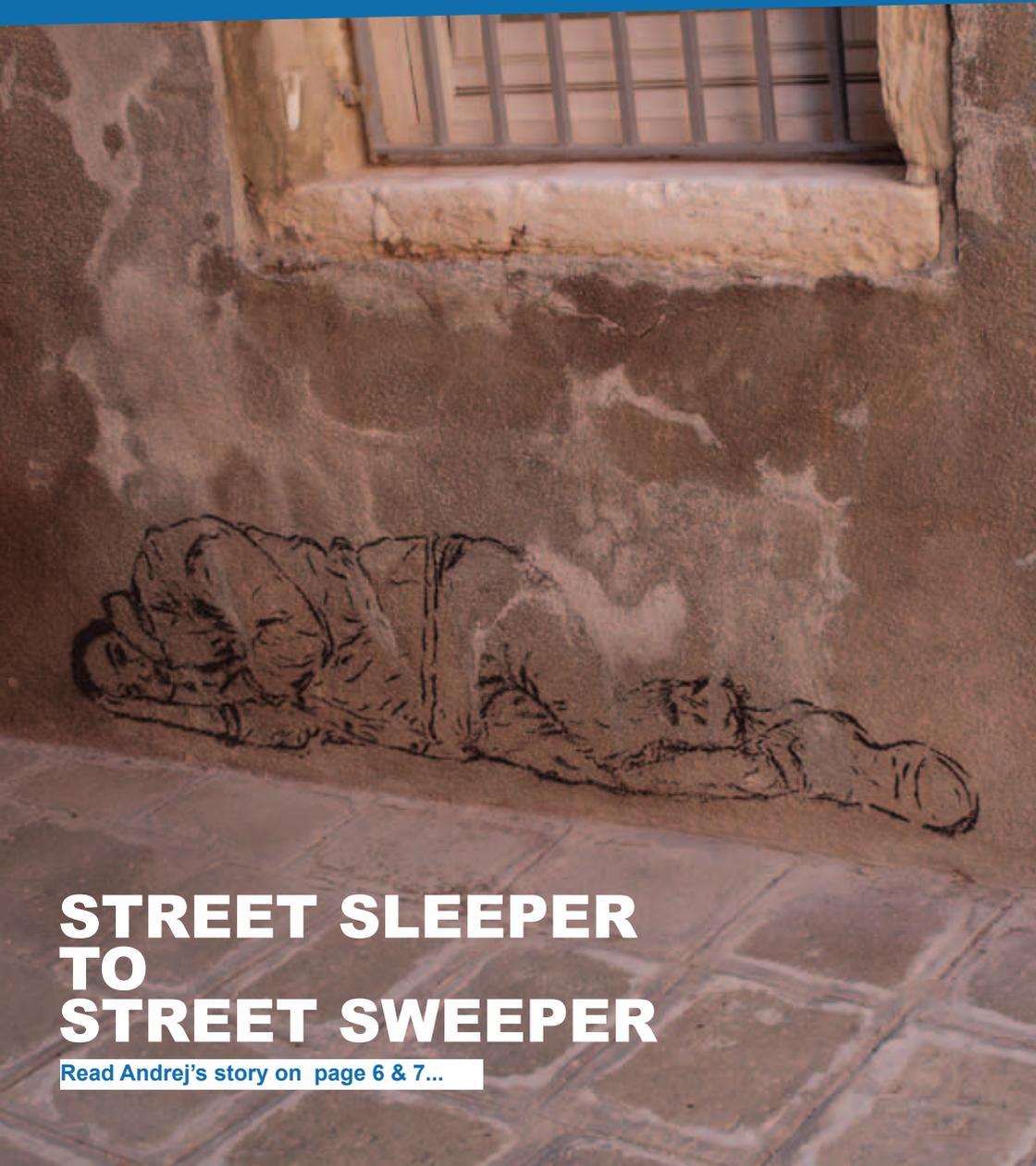
ISSUE 119



THE  
*Simon*  
STAR



[www.simoncommunity.org.uk](http://www.simoncommunity.org.uk)



# STREET SLEEPER TO STREET SWEEPER

Read Andrej's story on [page 6 & 7...](#)



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



**Editor**  
Rachel Cullen

**Contributors**  
Bob Baker  
Sally Leigh  
Philip Hole  
Karen Barker  
Rosie Rogers  
Mike Clare  
Ian Heirs  
Lydia Armitage

**Designer**  
Sam Peacock

**Photographers**  
Bob Baker & Rachel Cullen

**Thank You's**  
Tikun  
Pret A Manger for their continual supply of sandwiches  
Jenna Roberts for raising £116.47 for the Community by holding a bake sale

# WELCOME

Welcome to the summer edition of The Simon Star!

We hope you have enjoyed the Olympics and that those of you in the capital did not find it too disruptive. Thanks to St Giles in the Fields and Bloomsbury Baptist Church we have been able to host static soup runs as a solution to the problem of road closures.

We have plenty more news about services that you can read in News From the Front Line on page 9.

If you have any comments or news you would like to share, please contact the office at [admin@simoncommunity.org.uk](mailto:admin@simoncommunity.org.uk) or write to us at 129 Malden Rd, London NW5 4HS

# WELL DONE HENRY!

A big thank you to part-time volunteer Henry Ellis-Paul who ran the Paris Marathon in April this year to raise money for The Simon Community. While he was training Henry told us:

“I’m not just running for myself, but for the Simon Community and for the people to whom they give a helping hand.”

Henry was particularly keen on raising sponsorship to contribute to the development of the Day Centre. You’ll be pleased to know Henry that the sponsorship is still coming in and the Day Centre is looking great!

## CONTENTS

### Cover story

Resident Andrej shares his story  
pages 6 & 7

### News

Meet the Trustees  
page 3

AGM  
page 4

### Updates

News From The Front Line  
page 9

Women’s Group Outing  
page 8

### Other

Goodbye to Rosie  
page 10

Line in the Sand  
page 5

# MEET THE TRUSTEES



Emma, Mike & MT

**At the AGM some talented and experienced individuals put themselves forward to become the Board of Trustees of The Simon Community. Now that all the nominating, seconding and voting is done and dusted we are pleased to introduce the Board:**

## MT Gibson-Watt (Chair)

MT joined the Simon Community as a full-time volunteer in 1967. She met and married Simon Community founder Anton Wallich Clifford when they worked together in the Community. When Anton died in 1978 MT continued as Director until she retired in 1980. Since then MT has remained close to the Community and is currently the Chair of The Board of Trustees.

## Emma Ciechan (Treasurer)

Emma qualified as a chartered accountant over ten years ago. She has worked as a financial and management accountant in both London and Edinburgh, taking a year out for voluntary work in South Africa about seven years ago. Emma was drawn to Simon because of the inclusive and accepting ethos of the community and she held the position of Treasurer for the previous year. Emma oversees all matters financial and carries out a vital role in the Community.

## Mike Coleman

Mike is a civil servant working for the Department of Education. Mike is a familiar face out and about on outreach services; he regularly goes out with the full-time volunteers to do 'street work', chatting

to homeless people on a one to one basis and giving them a sandwich and a cup of tea.

## Georgia Jones

Georgia has been volunteering in the Community through the outreach services, mostly with the early Monday morning tea run. Georgia started going to Trustee meetings to gain a deeper insight into the Community and felt that her professional background in law and business development gave her valuable skills to contribute to the Board.

## Colin Robinson

Colin has over 30 years experience in community issues as a front line worker, manager and researcher in both Australia and the UK. As a trustee, Colin wishes to assist in bringing the work and methodology of the Community to the public's attention and raise significant issues that affect the lives of those we represent.

## Marike van Harskamp

Marike works as a homelessness Project Manager for another charity and became a Trustee after coming to the Community as a part time volunteer. Marike wants to contribute her hands on experience at Trustee level during these times of increasing homelessness. Marike once raised money for The Simon Community through sponsorship for a 48 hour marathon dance session!



Marike and Colin

# AGM

## The Simon Community reflects on the successes of the past year at the Annual General Meeting

It was great to be able to meet in our new day centre in Islington for our very successful Annual General Meeting in April this year.

As usual the AGM brought together a mixture of old and new members and gave us the chance to reflect on the achievements of the past year and to look forward to continuing to improve our work as we approach our 50th anniversary next year.

In her speech to the AGM last year Chair of the Board of Trustees, MT Gibson-Watt had said: A lot of work is in hand to revitalise the Community. Finances are sound and there is scope to develop our core work. This will be done by:

- Good training
- Moving hospitality to a more suitable building
- Finding a new office
- Obtaining another residential house
- Helping people who are ready to move on
- Reconnecting with the wider Cyrenian family

Director Bob Baker reported that we have achieved five out of six of these aims (we do not have a new residential house yet) and much more. Bob outlined in detail some of the many improvements in the Community including communication, health and safety, volunteer induction and training, positive outcomes for residents, better relationships with our neighbours and the wider community, improvements in administration and finance.

He said that the Community environment is calmer, more respectful of people and resources and far closer to our original ethos than before. A long held ambition: we have returned St. Joe's to a residential home by moving hospitality and the office. He was very pleased to report far fewer bed bug infestations.

Bob talked about the marked increase in the quantity and quality of our services. We have developed two new projects – the Day Centre and the women's group. The winter night shelter ran brilliantly for four months with seven guests every night – run by countless volunteers. All services: tea runs, soup runs, street cafes, street work, day centre and women's group have continued. This itself is a fantastic achievement.

The reputation of the Community has increased phenomenally over the year with staff and volunteers working more closely with other organisations.

We have taken a lead in setting up the Federation of Simon and Cyrenians. We are now widely known and respected as a campaigning organisation and have had media attention throughout the year with published letters and articles in local and national newspapers.

Bob concluded that this has been a year of significant change for the better. He acknowledged that there remains a great deal to do but was confident that we are heading in the right direction. Bob thanked the whole Community and all our supporters for their continuing contribution.

He ended by restating his ambition to continue the work to develop the Simon Community in the modern world without losing touch with our founding principles of love, kindness, acceptance and tolerance and our tried and tested approach to offering support to people experiencing homelessness.

## SIMON'S BIG 50TH BIRTHDAY!!!

Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of The Simon Community and we are thinking about our celebrations already. If you have been part of the history we would love to hear from you.

Please write to us at the office or email is at [admin@simoncommunity.org.uk](mailto:admin@simoncommunity.org.uk) to share any photos and stories about your experiences of Simon.

# LINE IN THE SAND

**Our friends at Housing Justice and The Pavement are working with charities, colleges and individuals on a project to boost awareness of human rights for people without homes, and to demand more public lavatories and drinking fountains.**

You can develop kidney disease if you lack access to clean water; women get cystitis because they can't find loos even if they can find water; stomach upsets and periods are humiliating; and going to the loo in the street leaves you liable to arrest.

The Homeless Human Rights Project will build on the Rights Guide for Rough Sleepers, which was made possible by help from charities including the Simon Community.

**“it affects everyone, not just people without homes”**

The current project will focus on the basic rights to water, sanitation, food, shelter and sleep.

Lawyers from the human rights organisation Just Fair will explain these rights to the members of day centre art classes and ask them to respond with drawings, paintings, sculptures, poems, stories or photographs – any creative means, basically, to stop the public in their tracks. Open Cinema will film homeless people discussing how the lack of rights affects them.

The final report will draw heavily on qualitative analysis of the transcripts of these interviews. Graphic design students from Saint Martin's School of Art will produce work based on the same rights. The work of all these groups will form the basis of an exhibition and will be featured on the project website. The site will provide legal information about the rights. “Homeless people are key to this project”, say Sally Leigh, of Housing Justice, and



Val Stevenson, of The Pavement: “We want your voices and opinions. We intend to place a line in the sand. We want a wake-up call to tell the public: ‘This is happening, and it affects everyone, not just people without homes.’”

In the decade before the current cuts, says Sally, the number of public lavatories halved. Life is more difficult for people without homes, and for the elderly and disabled, visitors – even the police. The “bladder leash” keeps elderly people trapped at home; Blue Badge Guides found that tourists drank less to avoid the hassle of finding loos; and police in a force outside London were told not to drink so they wouldn't have to keep coming back to the station.

A drinking fountain campaign was one of Boris Johnson's initiatives when he came to power in 2008, but since then? Nothing. The fountains that Victorian philanthropists provided for people and cattle have been decommissioned. Today's Londoners need what 19th century cattle had! The costs are not huge: basic fountains cost under £200, and even contamination and vandal-proof models are around £1,000.

But the project is part of larger debate. How can members of our society aspire to health, employment, family life, self-respect and achievement when they can't access water, sanitation, food, shelter and sleep? How can the government expect rough sleepers to work when they can't get a decent night's sleep or keep themselves clean?

If you would like to know more please phone Sally Leigh on 020 3544 8094 or email [info@housingjustice.org.uk](mailto:info@housingjustice.org.uk)

# ANDREJ'S STORY

**From living on the streets to cleaning them - one resident's journey from homelessness to full time employment**

Andrej is one of our residents living in the Community. In this issue, we'd like to highlight his story and some of the problems facing our friends on the street. As a community, we have always strived to find those who are missed, and oftentimes, abused and neglected. We hope that this inspirational story may hold out hope to all those who have no hope, and nowhere to turn to.

## **When did you first come to England?**

I first came to England, from Lithuania, in November 2007 to work in Cornwall in a fish packing factory. This was only for three months though, so by January I was out of a job but still had to pay my rent of £80 a week. As I could no longer afford this, I decided to come to London in the hope of finding better prospects there. When I arrived at Victoria coach station, I knew nothing about London and could speak very little English.

The little money I had managed to save soon ran out, and I found it very difficult to find any work due to my poor knowledge of English. Soon after, I ended up on the streets, where I slept rough for almost two years. I stayed around Victoria station and slept at the back of Sainsbury's.

**“ I didn't find the Simon Community - they found me”**

I soon made a few friends, who told me about an agency in London Bridge who I could register with. I managed to get some employment there, but the work was on and off and I was never



earning enough to get my own accommodation. A little time later, I stayed in a local mission house that was offered to me for 3 months but I had to be in at certain times. This meant I could not get work as I could not get to the agency on time to see if work was available. As I could not claim benefits, I had to make the really hard choice to go back on the streets, as I saw my only way out of my situation was by working, and I couldn't do that while staying there.

## **How did you find out about the Simon community?**

They found me. I was attending services such as soup and tea runs and I was noticed and befriended by the volunteers at the time. They invited me to come and live at one of the houses which was just newly opened and to be part of the community. I moved in May 2009 and was pleased to find out that I had an established home and could stay as long as I needed in order to get back on my feet.

## **How did things change for you when you moved in?**

One of the first things I did was to have a proper long bath and I think I spent about 4 hours in there! I enjoyed the security of my new home and having a key to my bedroom and front door. I had a lot more freedom and it felt like a proper home.

When I told people I knew from the streets about it they could not believe there was not even a



reception desk as they were used to hostels. It was hard at first to get settled after such a long time on the streets – I had to sleep on the floor for two months before I got used to a bed! Luckily, I shared with people who cared and accepted me for who I was, and now am.

I have received not only help from fellow residents and volunteers, but have made friendships for life. It's really hard to explain how valuable it is being with Simon.

#### **What did you do next?**

I did a course at London Electronics College. I was there from 2010 until 2011 and achieved my level 1 certificate. I got agency work sweeping roads and loading the trucks and I was offered a contract as a loader. I now have a full time job here in Camden and my bin lorry drives right past my house!

#### **Where do you see yourself going in the next couple of years?**

I am happy here in the house for the time being and wish to continue my full time employment. I would consider doing another college course if this was ever financially possible. My English is much improved and I now even help interpret Russian for those guests at the Community who have English as their second (or even third, fourth) language!

#### **Do you have anything to add?**

I would like to say thank you to the Simon Community and that I am not sure what would have happened if they had not found me

**- Ian Heirs & Lydia Armitage**

### **HELP US SPREAD THE WORD**

We would like to thank you, all our readers and donors, who donate to The Simon Community after every issue of the Simon Star. As you know we do not receive any government funding whatsoever and so rely on donations like yours and legacies left to us by Simon supporters.

We are appealing to you, our supporters, to help us spread the word and increase our list of supporters by recommending to your friends to subscribe to the Simon Star. They can do this electronically by emailing the office at [admin@simoncommunity.org.uk](mailto:admin@simoncommunity.org.uk) or if they would rather be put on the mailing list for a paper copy they can phone the office on 0207 485 6639 - Many, many thanks.

## WOMEN'S GROUP OUTING



As you will know from our previous Simon Star issues, the Community provides a Women's Group every week where homeless women and Community volunteers cook a meal together, chat and relax in a safe and welcoming space. We had always talked about venturing out for a group trip and the All Work and No Pay exhibition seemed like the best place to start.

**“Not every place in London accepts Homeless people so warmly - especially homeless women”**

Everyone really enjoyed the exhibition, especially seeing photos of women in work throughout the ages and the various protests that have allowed us more equality in the workplace. They also enjoyed the end of the exhibition where visitors were asked to leave comments about their experiences of being a woman in the workplace which sparked

conversations and debates within the group which continued later over fish and chips!

Not every place in London accepts homeless people so warmly, especially homeless women. Being a homeless woman in London is very challenging and at the Simon Community we strive to provide a safe and friendly space to enable women to feel empowered and free to make their own choices. However, the staff at the Women's Library were very friendly and welcoming. Our tour guide must have enjoyed herself as much as we did... she emailed us after the trip to say that we had been her first guests and to say how much she had enjoyed our visit and asked if she could come and volunteer for The Simon Community!

Many of our guests have not been to museums or group outings in years, this exhibition in particular gave us some interesting food for thought about equality in all areas of society including the workplace and on the streets. It was a really great afternoon out at the Women's Library, and we are looking forward to doing more of this in the future.

# NEWS FROM THE FRONT LINE

## News from the front line, a report from our Services Coordinator, **Phil**

I am pleased to report that the refurbishment at our original house, St. Joseph's House 129 Malden Rd, is almost complete. The decorating is finished and the new carpets are being laid this week. The house looks great and the residents are really pleased! The next property issue in the near future will be to update the central heating system in the Vicarage and put in a new boiler.



As London gears up for the Olympics, we have had to make plans to see that core services face as little disruption as possible. We were worried about the soup runs and early morning tea runs as we knew that driving around central London during the games wouldn't be possible.

Thanks to St Giles in the Fields Church, Bloomsbury Baptist Church and everyone involved in the planning we found a solution.

On Wednesdays the soup run was at St Giles in the Fields and on Thursdays it was at Bloomsbury Baptist Church. The Sunday tea run was held at St Giles in the Fields and on Monday it was in Covent Garden Market. These venues were



Ian at the Day Centre with a great selection of Pret sandwiches!

arranged for the duration of both the Olympic and Paralympic games.

The day centre that opened this year is seeing a lot of new faces, showers have been installed and we now have industrial washing machines and tumble dryers. These are proving invaluable for our guests to be able to get their sleeping bags clean and dry in this miserably wet summer. A hot meal is provided twice a week and is greatly appreciated by guests.

Recently we have been working closely with Homeless Health Care, a new project in collaboration with St Mungo's and Ela who is a district nurse with an A&E background has been visiting the day centre. The intention is to set up an onsite clinic to provide a much needed service to guests facing all manner of health problems without access to medical services.

As well as a clinic, in the longer term we would like to open the day centre to provide other activities for guests such as English classes, exercise classes, women only sessions and movie nights to name just a few. The feedback we are getting from guests is that this is the friendliest day centre and they like coming here because it is a safe and sociable place.

Guests appreciate how the volunteers are always available to help out with filling in forms and advocating on their behalf when needed. We would like to thank all the day centre volunteers for all the work they have put into creating this atmosphere.

## GOODBYE TO ROSIE...



**Rosie Rogers worked as the Community Administrator for a year and reflects on her time with us. The Simon Community thanks Rosie for all her work and wishes her luck for the future.**

It was a pleasure being welcomed into the Simon Community and I take with me a lot of great memories.

When I started working in the Community, some things were pretty challenging to say the least. Gaining the trust of such a close knit group and getting used to the rhythms of the Community was difficult at times.

However with patience, respect and kindness I think I got there in the end. That is one thing I learned working at Simon, that things take time. Trust and friendship don't just happen overnight and especially in a Community that has been running in its own way for such a long time. Throughout my time in the Community I saw a huge transformation. Not just on the administrative side, but gradual things like an increased awareness and care within Simon for the surrounding community and environment, not to mention the big things like starting the Women's Group and opening the Day Centre!

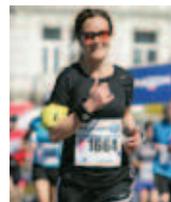
I have worked in various charity organisations, but it was so refreshing to work in a place that was unrestricted by the targets that accompany Government funding. Many other homeless organisations have a limit on how much support or care they can provide for people who need it, but not Simon where we will house and support someone for years if that is what it takes for them to be ready to get back into society on their own terms. In a country that is fixated on targets and outcomes it was so refreshing to work somewhere that is truly based on the simple but essential things like friendship and trust.

I had a wonderful time working in the Community and would like to thank Bob and Phil for all their support and good humour through some difficult times. It was also a pleasure to work with such a wonderful group of dedicated volunteers and trustees (and I hope everyone is remembering to recycle and use the compost!). I was always struck by how resilient Simon's volunteers are - living and working with homeless people is no easy feat and they are all wonderful!

Although some people in the Community are probably glad I'm not there to nag them for receipts every day, I have not left the Community for good! I am still a part of the Women's Group which I am so proud of I cannot express it in words. I am really looking forward to seeing everyone in the Community at the next Community Day and the 50th anniversary celebration!

- Rosie Rogers

## ...AND HELLO TO RACHEL!



**As we say goodbye and thank you to Rosie, we also say hello and welcome to Rachel, our new Administrator. She tells us what it has been like so far.**

It was a scorching Thursday afternoon when I came for my interview (during the week that was summer this year!).

When I got to the house at 129 Malden Road the residents and volunteers were waiting for me. They were very friendly and welcoming as they asked me questions and explained their own roles in the Community.

During the second part of my interview I met Bob, Phil and Rosie at the Vicarage. I had a great time meeting everyone that day and was so impressed with the work they were doing. A few hours after I left I was delighted to get a phone call from Bob

to tell me that I had got the job and to ask if I could start on Monday!

I had a few days with Rosie before she left. Her handover was extremely thorough and I have been very grateful for all the notes she left for me. As well as getting to grips with the administration, I have also had the opportunity to go along to the day centre and the women's group.

I have also been out on a soup run, which is not only interesting, but very useful in helping me understand the work of the Simon Community. I applied for the job because of the vital work the Community does for those who need it most.

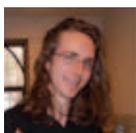
My role is varied and interesting and my new colleagues are kind, knowledgeable, and generous with their time and encouragement. It's a great work environment and I am really enjoying getting to know everyone.

Outside of work hours I am a keen distance runner and this October I will be running the Liverpool Marathon for The Simon Community.

If anyone would like to sponsor me please have a look at my Just Giving page at:

<http://www.justgiving.com/Rachel-Cullen129>

## GOOD LUCK MIKE



**As full time volunteer Mike prepares to leave the community, he reflects on his time spent with us.**

I joined the Simon Community about a year after graduating from University. I had been trying to pursue a career in social care, but had found I lacked the necessary experience. Volunteering full-time with the Simon Community seemed like an interesting way to gain experience because it would allow me to work closely with a diverse range of people.

Having room and board provided to me as a volunteer also allowed me to make the move from Suffolk to London, which I was keen to do.

When I came for my seventy-two hour trial I didn't know what to expect, but I was pleasantly surprised by how welcoming everyone in the house was.

In my fourteen months as a full-time volunteer I have seen many significant changes in the community; from the chop and change of volunteers and residents to the relocation of hospitality services into our day centre or most recently the renovation of the house which nears completion.

However, the welcoming atmosphere of the house has come through these changes intact, and I see this as one of the great strengths of the Simon Community.

vThe Community's long history of nonpartisan, secular and non-judgemental work with homeless people means the people who use our services are willing to speak honestly and openly about their experience sleeping rough.

This has given me a level of insight I might not have gained from other voluntary work and I realise just how much I have learned when I find myself in discussions about homelessness.

I certainly feel I leave the community better able to pursue a career in social care. I would like to thank the Community for giving me the opportunity to discover that I truly enjoy working in this field.

- Mike Clare

### GOODBYE CHRIS, LAURA AND SHELLI

Goodbye and thank you to full time volunteers Chris, Shelli and Laura who left us recently. Thanks for all your hard work and we wish you all the best for the future.



# GIFT AID

Please complete this form and return it with your donation to: The Simon Community, 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](http://www.simoncommunity.org.uk)

If you are a UK taxpayer, the value of your donation can increase by 25% under the Gift Aid scheme at no extra cost to you! To qualify for Gift Aid, you must have paid an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax for each tax year (6 April one year to 5 April the next) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that The Simon Community will reclaim on your donations for that tax year. Please tick the appropriate box below to join the Gift Aid scheme.

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Surname: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Post code: \_\_\_\_\_

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,  part-time volunteer OR  full-time volunteer;

I would like to receive Simon Star by  email OR  post.

I enclose:

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

