



# Simon Star

*Living and working with London's street homeless*

## The Numbers Game:

Government plans to change guidance on how rough sleeping is measured



FOR more than a decade, the Simon Community has been out in the streets of London counting rough sleepers. We did this twice a year, every year, because we wanted an independent insight into the situation - allowing us to take control of these politically charged numbers.

Over the years we've seen heavy move-on tactics, particularly in the weeks before a council head count. We have seen people not be counted as homeless because they're not lying down on the pavement. And we have always spoken out against these tactics. As we approach 2012 and the target of reducing rough sleeping to zero, the numbers will get more and more attention. It is reassuring to see the new Government - who spent years in opposition criticising the homeless situation - planning to shake up the way things are done. But what exactly are they planning?

Some good changes include plans to appoint "verifiers" from the voluntary sector to check homeless head counts follow correct guidance - replacing the previous system where central government did this. There are also recommendations for bordering local authorities to do their counts on the same night - something we think is essential to prevent rough sleepers being pushed around the city from borough to borough. And there are calls for the counts to be moved to 2am with a better definition of rough sleeping, with stronger guidance for counters to help them access parks and other spaces so those people will be included. But there are also some worrying changes, such as how local authorities who think they don't have a rough sleeping problem will be allowed to give an estimate instead of carrying

out a proper count. We believe this could lead to fudging of the numbers and if any of the London boroughs did that it would be a serious problem. There are also concerns as to how the role of police in counts remains unclear and this is a big issue. In the past police and other local authority agencies have been involved in moving people on in advance of a head count. There must be really clear guidance on this to stop it happening. There is also mention of waking people up to gather intelligence about other rough sleepers. This is a very bad idea and an invasion of privacy. There are also plans to do annual counts across the country in late autumn. This could hide the issue of what happens in summer with people looking for seasonal jobs or in winter when cold weather shelters reach many but not all rough sleepers. This is the really sharp end of homelessness and cannot be overlooked. Overall, there are some good steps but the proof will be when the next count happens in autumn. Will we see manipulation of figures and a heavy police presence?

The main database used by all homelessness agencies (CHAIN) says that rough sleeping is going up not down. As we approach 2012, who do we believe? This data or sporadic figures gathered by local authorities during a few autumn nights and some estimates drawn up by civil servants?

Simon will keep its eyes on what's going on and make sure the real picture is the one that makes it into the press and not just the one which tells the best political story.

# Notes from the Chair



As the new person in Chair, I would like to thank John Yeudall for the enormous amount of work he has done to bring us to the good, stable place we are in now. John's history

with Simon goes back to the early 70s, when he joined as a volunteer worker. Since then he has twice been a Trustee and his loving care for the essence of Simon and for the practical bricks and mortar too, has been outstanding. I am glad of his continuing support for the Community and for me in this busy role.

There have been major changes in the Community since the last Simon Star. Jo Nurse, who was Community Manager since early 2008 has left and we have an Interim Manager, Caroline Love.

Jo brought a passion and fierce commitment to our outreach work. She cared deeply for all those still outside and focused the work of the Community to that end. We wish her well in the future.

Caroline works with organisations to help them deal with change. She has overhauled our essential policies, revised our volunteer recruitment processes, advised us on our paid staff requirements, made sure we are up-to-date legally. That sounds rather dry but she has captured the heart of the Community by her willingness to muck in, to listen, her patience and no nonsense approach to everything is appreciated by everyone.

We will advertise for new paid staff in September and hope to have them in place well before Christmas. We would be delighted for any ex-workers out there who are interested to get in touch.

At a more practical level, there have been major works in the garden of St. Joe's. The garden party-wall was crumbling and with the help of a grant we were able to fix that, redo the garden, and build a new storeroom to house the fridges and freezers necessary to hold the donated food from M&S, Pret a Manger and others which help us feed those still on the streets.

It is still unclear how the results of the election will affect what happens to people on the street and to the agencies which deal with homeless people. There has been a huge political and financial effort to clear the streets of rough-sleepers by 2012. This initiative has helped many entrenched homeless people and forged (largely) good relationships between homelessness agencies and local and national government. Whether there will still be money for that to continue is uncertain. In some respects we are insulated from major changes as we do not accept any government aid and so, unlike most other agencies are not tied into contracts which may not be renewed as the financial screw tightens. However, apart from charitable grants towards our paid staff costs, we are largely dependant on individual donations, which may well diminish, so we will need to look carefully at our costs and also new fundraising strategies.

*MT Gibson-Watt is Simon Community Chair.*

Join us for our  
Simon Community

**Christmas  
Extravaganza**

**Friday 26th November  
@ 7.30pm**

St Marks Church, Myddelton  
Square, Islington EC1R 1XX

**Good Music, Good Food, Great  
venue. Come along and enjoy!**



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# Alan Cole: A True Story

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"It was 1965 in Edinburgh when I first came into contact with the Simon Community at the night shelter. I was 19. I'd been living with my grandparents as a child after my mother remarried. Then my grandfather died and my grandmother had to go into a home in 1964 after falling and breaking her hip.

I found myself in the situation where their house was being sold and I had few places to go.

The SC was a special place as people didn't ask you questions. I found a sense of belonging and community. Yes, there were ups and downs but the level of tolerance and communication was better than other homeless places.

So I started volunteering. It was better than walking the streets.

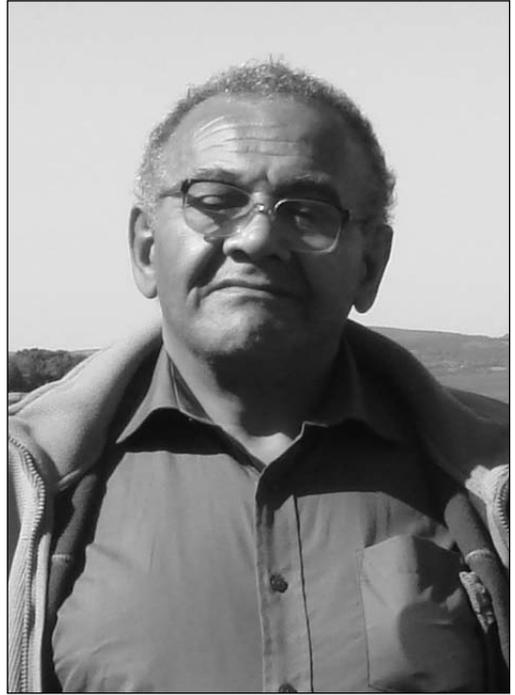
I came down to London in 1965 to start the soup run seven nights a week.

I didn't think it was possible at the time but we did it. We went down to the market in Queen's Crescent and begged the fruit and veg stall holder to donate some food there. They did and we made the soup to hand out.

I've been back and forth to the community since. Simon is unique in the way it deals with people. It doesn't always work, granted, I've seen people get a sock in the eye and leave.

But there are so many cases that stand out for me where it does work.

One of residents being Christine, she died aged 87 this year and she lived at 129 between 1981 and 1987. We'd helped her



during the 1960s and half of the 1970s when she was a complete alcoholic. I don't know how she survived that period, she'd do all sorts like stand in the middle of a busy Euston Road.

I've seen people come off booze completely at Simon. Doesn't always work but a couple of times people have found a sense of belonging, got sober, then moved out and got married or jobs and lived happy lives. I've seen people completely change their personalities.

That to me is what Simon is about. Helping people who other charities or homeless organisations can't help."

**Alan Cole, 64,** *is a co-worker, Trustee since 2007 and former resident of Simon Community.*

# A Day In The Life Of The Simon Community

with Andy O'Brien



## Wednesday

The day starts at about 7.30am when the workers start preparing for hospitality. Homeless people can come to the house between 11.00am and 3.30pm.

The house is open for people on the streets who get a chance to do their laundry, have a shower and also have food. They can also relax watch television and have use of the internet to write e-mails or do job searches.

Volunteers come in to help wash up and clean - allowing the workers to spend valuable time with the homeless people.

They help them with forms, making phone calls or just sit and have a chat with them - something that does not happen very often on the streets. In between that we then start preparing for our Wednesday night soup run by getting all the ingredients ready to make the soup and also 25 litre urns of tea, coffee and orange juice.

Then we make ten loaves of bread and gather two to three boxes of sandwiches which are kindly donated by Pret A Manger.

We then have a Community dinner at 6.00pm where we invite four homeless people to share the meal with us. After the meal we then start loading the van for the soup run which departs at 7.45pm and arrives back at 11.00pm.

There is also street work which is done by part time volunteers where we take a flask of coffee and a flask of tea plus sandwiches and cakes if donated.

We always take fliers with us about our services so if we meet new people we let them know what we do and direct them in the right direction. When the soup run gets back the workers clean all the stuff up and then can say goodnight!

**Andy O'Brien** is co-worker and trustee



# Simon Community Street Café

## Q & A



Trustee Andy O'Brien started to volunteer with Simon because he was a user of the outreach work and hospitality. Here he explains about the Community's Street Cafe.

**Q:** *What is Street Cafe and where is it run?*

**A:** It's an outdoor temporary cafe set up with tables, chairs, newspapers and food, held at St Giles church in central London. It's all about getting together and having two hours of chatting, reading and sometimes playing chess. It gives people a sense of community.

**Q:** *Who comes to the Street Cafe?*

**A:** Homeless people but also people who have just been housed and are staying in touch with the people they met on the streets.

**Q:** *Can you describe what you do on an average street cafe?*

**A:** We set up a make shift cafe and then serve food and people help themselves. We chat to people and give out clothes or helpful bits and pieces if people ask.

**Q:** *Why do you think the service is important?*

**A:** It gives homeless people someone to talk to, share their ups and downs in a relaxed, informal atmosphere.

**Q:** *What sort of people volunteer for the Street Cafe and what skills do you need to have?*

**A:** We have a very wide range of people from all walks of life from other homeless people, accountants, journalists, students. The only real skill you have to have though is to be able to listen.



**Tom Moore has been homeless for several years and is a regular user of the street cafe.**

**Q:** *How did you come across the Street Cafe?*

**A:** Word of mouth on the streets.

**Q:** *What does it provide for homeless people that other services don't?*

**A:** It's a place where the volunteers are non-judgemental and the food is free. There is also a sense of real understanding about homelessness.

**Q:** *What do you look forward to most at the Cafe?*

**A:** The social aspect. It's a place where I can properly interact with people and talk about what's happening. This isn't always possible at other outreach places.

**Q:** *Have you ever had an especially memorable time at the Cafe?*

**A:** Christmas dinners always stick in my mind. And people's happy faces.

**Q:** *Would you recommend the cafe to other homeless people?*

**A:** Yes. It's up there with the best..

# Inside The Simon Community



IN THE last issue of Simon Star I wrote about who the Simon Community is for. In this issue I will look at how we try to work with people who are willing to come from the streets and live in the Community

To begin, we need an intake house.

This is where the sorting process begins. It is a place for people to lick their wounds. Recover from lack of food, warmth, comfort, security. To start to learn or relearn how to relate to other people, to care for themselves and others, to take responsibility for their lives.

Our houses are designed to be an intensive course in how relationships work. We use meetings and the daily rhythm of looking after a house as our workshop.

The function of the house is to recreate, as far as possible, the processes which take place in a "healthy" family environment. So the things we try to "teach" are: physical, social and emotional care for oneself, others, the immediate and wider environment, how to speak to others, how to listen, how to plan and organise, how to budget, how to contribute, how to learn new skills and many other things.

We do this in two major ways. Firstly by using volunteer workers as "influence leaders" or mentors. Their job is to be alert to every opportunity to turn routine events into learning opportunities. Secondly, by providing a structured routine which is the backbone of the method. This works largely through the meeting cycle. Each sort of meeting has a different purpose.

The breakfast meeting is the most obvious and useful tool we have. It uses the profound-

ly important bond which comes from preparing and sharing food together as the emotional heart of the work. It is the engine which powers the informal learning we provide. It is an opportunity to experience the processes by which we cope with the joys and disappointments of life for ourselves and other people. We achieve this by using simple routines. The most important is that of discussing with each individual what they did the day before and what they intend to do that day. The daily routine is organised. Any difficulties talked through and resolved as far as possible. Events are planned; outings, shopping, birthdays etc. Every resident is encouraged to play as full and active a part in the life and organisation of the Community as they can, and they do.

A weekly house meeting and a community meeting twice a month continue the process and look at the bigger picture of the house in relation to the Community and the Community in relation to the world outside.

At all times we try to identify people who have short-term problems and help them to move on rapidly to other organisations or to independent living.

The houses which follow on from intake level work in the same structured way with those people who need to stay with us for longer. Undoing the profound damage which brings people to long-term homelessness can take a long time. So we come back to the essentials, patience, acceptance, time and love. We cannot do this without the selfless commitment and passion of our volunteers and without the continuing help of our supporters. Thank you.

**MT Gibson-Watt** *is Simon Community Chair*

**We are looking for a part-time Director and full-time Co-ordinator/Manager.**

If you are interested in applying, the jobs will be posted on the Simon website or you can email, [trustees@simoncommunity.org.uk](mailto:trustees@simoncommunity.org.uk) We would be delighted to be able to appoint suitably qualified ex-volunteer workers."

**We'd like to thank Maggie, Joe and Anne for volunteering with the Community. They have made a big contribution to the work of Simon and we wish them well for the future.**

The new Simon Community website [www.simoncommunity.org.uk](http://www.simoncommunity.org.uk), has been up and running now for nearly a year. Within this time it has attracted much new interest in and support for the Community.

**The Getty Foundation recently followed one of our soup runs and we are grateful to them the pictures they supplied. The BBC have also accompanied us on several occasions, and we look forward to appearing on a new programme, due out later this year, hosted by Andrew Marr.**

We have worked hard recently to produce a new comprehensive guide to volunteering with Simon. Anyone interested in volunteering in the Community can now download all the information they are likely to require, in the Volunteering section, together with applications forms for both part-time and full-time positions.

**If you are reading this as a paper copy, sent to you by post, and you would prefer to receive your copy via e-mail, you can do this simple by the link on the website.**

**Thank You:**

Libby Bell of Vitteflor UK for writing a Fire Risk assessment for 129 Malden Road, and gave it to the Community as a gift in kind. The Albert Hunt Trust (£5,000), Margaret Beard (5,000) Ann Daley (£3,000) and Edward Lingham Carr (£13,000).



*The Community needed a new shed as the old one was falling apart to hold fridges for food. As the back garden is landlocked we needed a crane to get the crane into the garden. The road was also have to be partially closed for this to happen. The council gave us permission for this in March and the shed arrived in a small flat pack. The first crane that arrived was too small. But an enormous replacement crane arrived and the shed was lifted into the back garden and installed. Thanks to Shedstore Ltd. for holding their January offer price, to Ainscough Ltd. Cranes for a generous discount, Buttles, who supplied the timber for a generous discount and to Andrew, Paul, Alex and Norbert for helping to assemble it.*

# 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*

Using GIFT AID means that for every pound you give between 6 April 2008 and 5 April 2011 we get an extra 28p from the Inland Revenue, helping your donation go further. You may cancel this arrangement at any time simply by notifying us.

**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.

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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".