

Winter 2020

ISSUE 138



THE  
*Simon*  
STAR



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#### THANK YOU

The Outside Project  
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The Leather Sellers  
The Cruise Portfolio  
Construction 21  
David Cassidy Group of GB

Thank you for reading this winter edition of Simon Star and for supporting the Community. We use this newsletter to let you know what is going on and invite you to share your stories.

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Hello & Goodbye

If you would like to update, edit or remove your contact details then please get in touch.

You can email us on [admin@simoncommunity.org.uk](mailto:admin@simoncommunity.org.uk) or call the office on 0207 485 6639

# WELCOME TO THE SIMON STAR

Welcome to our winter Simon Star, we hope that this finds you well in these strange times.

Since we last wrote we have been in tiers rather than tears (joke credit to @Streetcamper69 - thanks Martin!), and into another lockdown. During this time we have managed to stay safe and all the street work activities have carried on uninterrupted. This has been particularly important as the weather gets colder and the needs for hot drinks, warm clothes and kindness become more pressing.

Going into winter is always daunting, but much more so this year. Usually while we would always be worrying

about how our guests will fare in the harsh weather, there are activities (such as Christmas dinner and opening the winter shelter) that we can throw ourselves into. But sadly, not this year.

For now we are focusing on what we can do rather than the things we can't and making sure we stay safe and keep getting out on the streets.

We wish you a peaceful and safe Christmas and hope that the next time you hear from us we will all be starting to emerge from this pandemic and planning new services and ways to support our friends on the street.



# A SIMON FAMILY STORY

## By Jeremias Tacke

When I was asked to write this article I was sceptical that anyone would be interested in reading about something that for me developed in such a natural way. Inexplicable decisions, coincidences and experiences are part of every life. I did never question the fact that they lead not only my father but also me to live and work within the Simon Community. However, a wide range of people made me realize that the close interweavement of my family history with Simon is indeed incredible in the face of the changes our world underwent in the last thirty years. Hence, I would like to share this story of hope but also frustration. Thirty years have passed. Nevertheless, the guests Simon sees live in the same streets under the same circumstances my father told me about when I was a little child.

My father Reiko grew up in Dresden a city which was located in the GDR at that time. When the wall came down in 1989 for him suddenly the world stood wide open. He decided that he wanted to volunteer abroad. In a book he found out about the Simon Community and applied. After being in London for his 72 hours in December 1990 he started his time as a full-time volunteer in February 1991. First, he stayed in the night shelter at Kings Cross station for three months before working in the house on Anton Street for three more months. Coming from a

former soviet country the tremendous wealth of the western city London, the advertisements, theatres, and shopping centres impressed my father deeply. On the other hand, he saw the extreme poverty of the homeless people who he worked with, something he had not seen in the socialist GDR either. He took part in soup runs, tea runs, clothes runs and the street work. Services that the community still runs thirty years later. The time in the community made him aware of what his fellow human beings must endure in society as well as how challenging it can to help those most in need. However, the spirit of community in between the guests, workers and volunteers is well remembered and made the time at Simons unforgettable for him.

Many topics he was first confronted with during his time in London would reoccur in his future career as a general practitioner be it substance abuse, social exclusion, or mental health problems.

As a kid I heard of the experiences of my father, and they accompanied me throughout my life. After finishing my A-Levels the last year I wanted to do something completely different from what I was used to. For that reason, I started a voluntary service in Riobamba (Ecuador) where I worked with kids and teenagers with special needs.



This ended abruptly when the global pandemic turned the world upside down. Suddenly I was back home in Dresden and I thought a lot about what my next step in life should be. At that point, the Simon Community came into my mind. I realized that working in the social work sector had been one of the most valuable experiences in my life so far and that I wanted to continue this journey. I hoped that working with homeless people would give me once again a completely different perspective of society. After I had spent my 72 hours with the community in August, I was incredibly pleased to hear that the group had decided to take me as a full-time volunteer.

I started working and living in the Simon house on 129 Malden Road in October. And just like my father I felt very welcome from the very beginning. The staff members, residents and guests on the streets are constant companions in my everyday life. Making sandwiches, cleaning, chatting, cooking, playing games or watching TV. All these things became part of a new routine very quickly. The street work which we are still able to do with certain safety measures is a completely new experience for me. But I enjoy the encounters with well-known

along with new guests a lot. Moreover, in this short time I have already learned a lot about the struggles of the homeless population and how important it is to understand and address these on a level playing field. I am very thankful that I can meet so many different people out there and that I can help Simon in its mission to build up long-lasting relationships with those who often get ignored. I am looking forward to the next couple of months in the Community and to all the new things I can learn from the people who surround me.

It's hard for me to imagine what will happen in the next thirty years. Thirty years ago, my father was finally able to travel all around Europe without any travel restrictions. Recently I had to apply for a visa in order to stay in the UK. Things change. What else is there to come? The future seems unpredictable. Yet I believe and hope that the work of the community will continue. The passion for the work with those sleeping rough was and will be passed on. And I am extremely glad that this happened to me on such a very personal level. I hope that there will be new strangers, friends and maybe even sons joining in since I am convinced that only as a community one can make actual change in this world.



# WHAT'S GOING ON...

With another lockdown came an opportunity to collaborate with the Museum of Homelessness (MOH) and The Outside Project as part of the *#HomelessTaskforce* in Westminster. The house have started making sandwiches that MOH volunteers then take out on the same route that we do on street work three other nights of the week (as chosen by guests). We will all continue to do this until at least March, ensuring consistency for guests and knowledgeable volunteers who can take over from us if we catch the virus and have to self-isolate.

The numbers that we see on street work have been fluctuating between 30 and 70 a night and we cannot quite see a direct reason for this. The weather, various lockdown or tier measures, days of the week seem not to have much tangible correlation on our numbers. We currently make up 6 loaves of sandwiches to take out and have rarely run out. Any that are leftover we give out on our way home or bring back to the house for everyone to enjoy for breakfast!

This Christmas is going to look very different for everyone and that includes people that are currently experiencing homelessness. Crisis at Christmas is having to operate very

differently this year (no day centres and a third of the amount of beds available as referral only) and many winter night shelters are unable to operate or have a severely reduced capacity. As such, we expect to see a lot more faces than we ordinarily would this time of year.

We will continue to do our street work services throughout the festive season and into the New Year and we hope that we will be able to re-introduce more services in 2021 as lots of volunteers have been back in touch and lockdown/ tier restrictions are lifting.



**Fred's trolley has finally hung up it's wheels and retired to the Museum of Homelessness!**

# THANK YOU

Thank you to the David Cassidy Group of Great Britain who recently raised money for us in his memory. They were unable to hold their memorial celebration due to the pandemic, so instead raised money online for a cause that they thought he would support.

We spent their donation on a brilliant new trolley for streetwork that means we can get more supplies out to our guests and spare our aching backs! It has made a great difference and also means that we can take clothes and extra necessities out with us.



**The first outing with the new trolley!**

# HELLO & GOODBYE

Just as the last issue of the Simon Star came out, Rob was in the process of leaving the house. Since then the move is complete and we had a lovely leaving lunch with him and of course a face cake!

Rob is doing well in his new flat and continues to be a regular visitor to the house. He asked us to pass on his best wishes and thanks to all the people that he has met during his time at the community and said to tell you to stay safe and keep up the good work!



