
VOLUNTEER'S NEWSLETTER

Spring 2011



Message from Colin Glover - Chief Executive

I am sure that all of you will have read about Westminster's proposed bye law aimed at preventing rough sleeping and the distribution of free food in Victoria. We have been invited to respond to the proposal and the closing date for submissions is 25th March. The proposal has generated significant media coverage, most of it voicing the opinions of those opposed to the proposals. I have been working with our Senior Management Team and with colleagues at the Passage in an attempt to put together a combined response between the agencies (and any others who feel able to 'sign up'). In doing this I have attempted to recognise that within CSTM there is a range of opinion about the role of enforcement and the issue is complicated.

In brief we are clearly opposed to the part of the bye law which would make bedding down an offence. We do however recognise that enforcement can play a role in addressing the anti-social behaviour of a minority of rough sleepers, in ensuring that those with significant mental health problems access treatment and in providing a stick to those who persistently refuse to engage and/or take up offers of accommodation. Similarly, we recognise that there are too many soup runs and that soup runs may help people sustain a homelessness lifestyle, they may however also provide some people (those who are excluded from services, or who do not have access to services and public funds) with food which they may not otherwise be able to access – although these are a minority of their users. We agree that there may be a case for restricting the ability of soup runs to operate in specific sensitive areas (because of commercial, residential, tourist and religious significance) but that the operations of soup runs are more likely to be successfully regulated through voluntary agreement and we propose that Westminster should continue to build on the attempts by the Passage to engage soup runners and persuade them either to stop or to redirect their time and energies into others ways of helping.

A copy of our response is printed here.

Response to Byelaw Consultation

As long established charities working with homeless people we share Westminster Council's vision of an end to rough sleeping and the consequential end of people feeling that they ought to take food to rough sleepers. Over the last ten or more years we have worked tirelessly to reduce rough sleeping in Westminster by providing services which are aimed at both preventing new arrivals becoming rough sleepers and at providing sustainable and caring solutions to individuals rough sleeping. We have had some considerable success and numbers of rough sleepers are significantly less than they were 5, or 10 years ago. This progress is confirmed by whatever measure of counting rough sleepers is used.

Our approach is based on voluntary engagement with our services, by gaining trust and by responding to need. We do also recognise that some services help to sustain a homeless lifestyle, indeed this was the thrust behind the move to building based services which in Westminster are aimed to increase the incentives for homeless people to engage with day centres and hostels rather than to receive a 'service' on the streets. We also recognise that enforcement has a role to play, particularly in addressing the anti-social behaviour adopted by a small, but visible and noticeable, minority of homeless people and street users. By and large this enforcement is a response to behaviour and not to being homeless per se. We have however supported the use of the Vagrancy Act in exceptional circumstances where persistent and aggressive refusal of offers of accommodation has happened. In other circumstances we support the use of Mental Health legislation to ensure that people with severe mental health problems are – at times compulsorily - provided with the safety, security and treatment options which they desperately need. We also do everything we can to manage our local areas and neighbourhoods through protocols with the police, local businesses and the Council and we are acutely aware of the issues we create by being where we are in the centre of Westminster and where homeless people have historically sought support. As part of this and as part of our commitment to partnership we work jointly with the police, sharing information and resources as appropriate.

Like all agencies we are constantly searching for new ways to improve our services. We have worked with Westminster Council and the Greater London Authority to pioneer new ways of working with the most entrenched rough sleepers. This personalised approach has been a success and needs to be built on. More recently we have been looking at ways in which new arrivals (flow) can be assessed, advised and assisted before they are ever in a position to spend a second night on the streets. We are also looking forward to introducing new ways of working, to addressing the other end of the 2012 (no rough sleeping) target by working with those who have been on the streets for more than 14 days and those who are on a revolving door and often return to the streets. These initiatives have either not started or not run their course.

To achieve further progress we need to continue to be agencies who work with homeless people, we need to be able to respond to individual need, to support homeless people and to find the best possible solution to the issues which led to their homelessness and to their homelessness itself. It is true that we need to do everything we can possibly can to ensure that our organisations, our services and our cultures do not unwittingly create dependence and sustain people on the streets. To this end we are working collectively on a robust 'single offer', to ensure that our agencies work together to deliver solutions, and help service users recognise the reality of the very limited options which are open to them. We are also collectively addressing the issue of our eligibility criteria to ensure that we do not provide services to those for whom there is an alternative and/or to those who over time show that they are unwilling to engage and/or to move off the streets as and when possible.

We have also in our own areas and with Westminster been supportive of the City Councils' views towards soup runs and their work on this sensitive topic. We recognise that there are far too many soup runs, that they are uncoordinated, and may in some circumstances help homeless people stay on the streets (they can also provide a point of contact, emergency food and for people without recourse to public funds access (and others who for whatever reason are outside the 'system') to food which they may not otherwise be able to get). We

VOLUNTEER'S NEWSLETTER

also recognise that for local residents and business they can create particular problems in terms of concentrations of people, litter and anti-social behaviour. We appreciate that Westminster City feels that it has run out of options when it comes to dealing with soup runs and indeed with some rough sleepers but as things stand we cannot support the current proposals. We do however recognise that there is a case for restricting soup runs from operating in particular tourist, religious, commercial and residential zones/

We also do not believe that it is appropriate to make bedding down an offence. It would make our work difficult if not impossible. We would be forced to oppose the City Council at the very time when we need to be working together, and the issue would also split the homelessness sector (which is increasingly working together) in harmful ways. This would be counter-productive and is unnecessary, and could lead to unhelpful assumptions being drawn by the general public as to the Olympics being the catalyst for this approach. We believe it would be disempowering for our street teams and we could never support (no matter how well intentioned) what many would view as the criminalisation of rough sleepers over a huge area in Westminster.

We were very surprised about the geographical extent of the zone. There may be a case for a very limited restriction of free food around particularly sensitive areas of Westminster, but again we feel that the current proposals run the risk of creating soup run martyrs and be counter productive. We wondered whether a different approach (such as utilising the work The Passage has recently started which is funded by central government) might be more constructive. We also believe that dialogue with soup runners should be continued as there are - or were - signs that this approach was having some success. We are also prepared, as before, to see whether there is anything we can do to divert the energies and motives of soup runners into our own services.

In summary, we are proud of the partnership that has been developed between voluntary and statutory agencies and the Council; this partnership has undoubtedly led to a massive reduction in rough sleeping, and we look forward to pushing on further in this work. We fear however that the proposed byelaws will not improve on this work, but do harm to it; all at a time when, due to the economic downturn, we will need all parties (those currently within the mainstream and those not) to pull together to ensure we continue to work towards ending rough sleeping.

The Passage - The Connection at St Martins



User Group – Cuts in Services

On Wednesday 16 March 2011 clients of The Connection at St Martin's were invited to meet staff and discuss the changes in opening times and services. 20 Clients attended this meeting.

Present: Colin Glover (Chief Executive), Mick Baker (Director of Services), Bill Williams (Manager, Workspace), Beki Winter (Manager, Outreach), Kaz Mayes (Deputy Manager, Day Centre), Angela Protain (Manager, Day Centre)

Colin introduced himself to the group and spoke about the changes in the services at CSTM due to cuts. He outlined that evening sessions will close, hot food in the Night Centre will no longer be served, and weekends will be for Night Centre clients and targeted rough sleepers only.

Colin spoke about the organisation needing to make a saving of £300,000 due to cuts in our funding. This meant that 9 staff were being made redundant, resulting in us having to reduce or change some of our services. He mentioned that in the last seven years since we merged as The Connection at St. Martin's we have never had to significantly change any of our services.

The rest of the Management team were introduced and the client group were asked if there were any questions.

Why have you chosen to close evenings?

It was explained that this was the service that, in our opinion, would have the least impact, as we would still be able to run a seven day week service, with no loss of housing advice, medical services, employment and training services, and all the other services that happen in the morning sessions.

Who can come in at weekends?

It was explained that the Outreach Team would be out on the streets early on Saturday and Sunday mornings so as well as the people sleeping in the Night Centre that weekend, the Outreach Team will also be inviting people in who they have seen that morning to do specific follow on work with.

Why don't you fundraise more?

We have 5 fundraisers who spend all their time exploring ways of bringing money into the organisation, but all charities are doing the same as everyone becomes more affected by Government cuts. At CSTM we have people running marathons, companies donating money, lottery funding, sponsored events, funders visits, etc.

Clients suggested other ways that felt that they could be involved in helping the organisation this way, events in partnership with the Church, sponsored walks etc. They also spoke about us raising our profile more perhaps through tv and the wider media.

Clients also talked about the practical skills they had that could be used around the building in terms of small repairs, decoration etc. One client said that he would appreciate having the opportunity to do something like this as it would give him a chance to give something back and feel good about himself. It was mentioned that we were looking at various ways that clients could contribute to the organisation, e.g. clients being trained up to act as volunteers in the building.

VOLUNTEER'S NEWSLETTER

Will other services change?

In general we will be looking more closely at our client group and concentrating our resources on the clients who need us the most and who are willing to work with us to help them move on in their lives. This may mean that clients who are successfully housed, clients who are not willing to work with us in any way to help us to help them improve their situation, those that use CSTM purely for our practical services etc. will be directed to other services. CSTM believes that a rough sleeping lifestyle is both dangerous and unacceptable and we aim to prioritise work with these clients to successfully help them off the streets.

However we will never give up on clients either in the building or outside as we recognise that clients have various reasons and issues as to why they remain on the streets and we are committed to working with clients if they will allow us to work with them.

The Workspace Team (training and employment) are looking at their daily IT drop in and there may be some changes to what happens in that space on specific days. Other than this all Monday to Friday morning sessions will stay the same, as will the groups in the afternoons (although the times may change).

This newsletter is produced by and for the volunteers of the Connection at St Martin's-in-the-Fields. Is there some aspect of volunteering in the homeless sector that you would like to see grace these pages? An important event coming up that you'd like people to attend or a personal story to tell? Why not contact Lance to discuss your ideas? Telephone 020 7925 7893 or email lance.kuhn@cstm.org.uk.

We have a Twitter account, to follow us visit: www.twitter.com/homelesslondon

These pages reflect what's going on at The Connection's and we're always looking for content. Do you have a story? This could be details about your role as a volunteer, an anecdote from your day, a client success story or achievement. If so, please send this through to info@cstm.org.uk



We run a number of short introductory courses for volunteers in our day centre. These are facilitated by trained and experienced members of the service delivery teams and are a great way of developing new skills, increasing your knowledge of working in the homelessness field and can help in building confidence. We work in small relaxed groups where the focus is on your participation and they are an excellent way to meet and interact with other like minded volunteers and members of staff.

VOLUNTEER'S NEWSLETTER

If you would like to register for any of the courses listed below please get in touch with Lance Kuhn – Volunteer Manager – on 020 7925 7893 or by email lance.kuhn@cstm.org.uk

Date	Course	Time
Wednesday 18 May 2011	Dealing with Aggressive Behaviour – how do you react with faced with aggression or potential violence. Learn ways of making yourself and keeping yourself safe in the working environment.	5:30pm – 8:00pm
Wed 8 June 2011	Introduction to Mental Health Issues – this course offers a brief introduction into the issues facing a person with mental health problems. Will increase your understanding and empathy with clients who may be experiencing mental health issues.	5:30pm – 8:00pm
Wed 13 July 2011	Introduction to Substance Misuse – what are the main substances we see clients using and what to do when confronted with someone under the influence? We also discuss what treatments and interventions are available to users.	5:30pm – 8:00pm

Stuck Inside a Dream

You get ready wherever you are, when you are tired for a nights sleep. It maybe on a bench, under a tree, someone's bed or on a floor and you drift off into a world of your own. You still get interrupted by the sounds of trains, horns, the howls of foxes and magpies. The talking or shouting of passers by.

In between you get an hour here and there to reflect upon people, places, ambitions and your worries.

To make things better or worse you sometimes think too hard and make things worse as they become nightmares and you wake up to the sound of a loud noise.

Then it takes you a while to go back to sleep. If you can't, you go for a wander till your warm and tired again, to dream again, but it seems never to be the same dream as before.

You dream about fantasies of your own, the exotic regions of the world. You dream about that smooth bar of dairy milk or the creamy pint of beer or that next puff of the cigarette. You dream about your next adventure wherever it may be...

Anon

VOLUNTEER'S NEWSLETTER



A Revealing Look at Life On The Streets Of London

Last summer we established a photography workshop to give homeless people the chance to document their lives on the streets of London with disposable cameras.

Over the course of several weeks the group has been sharing their photos which have provided a fascinating insight into their personal experiences of homelessness. It's a very creative workshop and the group has been experimenting with different digital technology to develop audio slideshows using their photos and words.

Homeless people can feel that they don't have a voice so developing short films has given people a chance to express themselves and challenge stereotypes of homelessness. Have a look at them on our Youtube channel.



Each photographer's style is unique and interesting themes have emerged from their photographs. Week by week they've been building a portfolio and uploading their photos on Flickr, take a look at them here:

www.flickr.com/photos/homelessphotography

The group is ambitious and has huge potential and recently won TalkTalk's Digital Heroes Award. The accolade recognises communities which are using digital technology to empower marginalised groups. This endorsement from TalkTalk has really helped motivate members of the group and the sky's the limit!

Members of the group also scooped the Media Trust's Inspiring Voices award which commends groups using digital media to empower people. The group has lots of potential and wants to build on what it's learnt so far. It's exploring the possibility of developing a website which will create a community for homeless people where they can contribute and engage. It's early stages but we'll keep you updated!



The Guardian newspaper has built an online gallery displaying some of the photographs taken by clients from Thursday's digital media group. It's great to have their work recognised on such a high profile site and good for promoting the creative and innovative ways in which we're working with homeless people. It will also be displayed in the Guardian's e-bulletin and Facebook page. Follow the link below to have a look:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/gallery/2011/mar/18/homeless-photographers-views-of-london>

VOLUNTEER'S NEWSLETTER

Unwanted Mobile Phones & Ink Cartridges

We can recycle used ink cartridges and old mobile phones to raise funds for The Connection. Each item is worth between £1 and £150 to us! If you have any items to donate then please post them to us labelled 'Recycling', or call 020 7766 5555 for further information, a Freepost bag, or a collection box for your workplace.



Art Show

We will be holding our summer art show at The Crypt from the 28th June – 3rd July. The exhibition will display an inspiring and diverse range of artwork including paintings, photography and sculpture by homeless artists. To have a look at some of the wonderful artwork created by the group visit our Facebook page -

www.facebook.com/homelessart

More information will be sent out shortly but in the meantime put the dates in your diary!



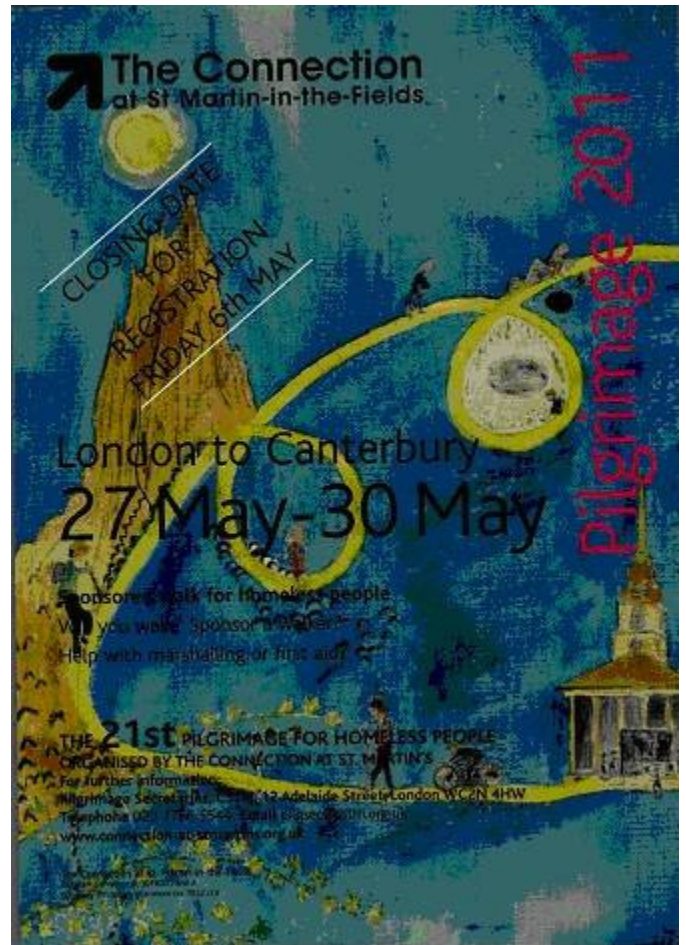
Exciting Challenge Events

Want to take on a new challenge while helping us raise money? We're in the process of organising a series of London themed challenge events and there'll be something for everyone. We'll have more details shortly but here's a sneak peak at what we're planning; Canoe challenge, Climbing challenge, Football tournament and Abseil. Interested in hearing more or want to take part?

Email events@cstm.org.uk

Join Our Pilgrimage

Our Pilgrimage from London to Canterbury is perfect for people who want to help raise money for us while being able to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of 4 days walking. The Pilgrimage takes place over the Spring Bank holiday weekend, Friday 27 May – Monday, 30 May. There's lots of ways you can get involved from walking to volunteering. For more information email pilgsec@cstm.org.uk



Spring into action: Runners Needed!

It's a great time of year to get fit, and we have just the thing to inspire you: run for us at the Asic's British 10K on Sunday, 10th July and not only will you be raising funds for us, but because we've teamed up with Runners Need, fitness experts, you'll also receive support, training tips, advice and discounts on their running gear. To find out more or to book your place email events@cstm.org.uk