



The Connection
at St Martin-in-the-Fields

connect

Spring Newsletter 2018

Stuart shares his experience
of volunteering in our kitchen

We are central London's homelessness charity supporting over 4,500 people every year. We work around the clock to provide immediate relief from homelessness and long term support leading to housing, work and independence.

Take on a Challenge Event for us:

Running Virgin Sport Hackney Half Marathon – 20th May. Edinburgh Marathon Festival – 26-27 May. Virgin Sport British 10km Run – 15th July. London Triathlon – 4-5 August. Royal Parks Half Marathon – 14th October

Walking The Pilgrimage – 25-28 May. Iceland Remote Highlands Trek – 25-29 July. TrekFest: The Peaks – 1st September. Inca Trail Trek – 9-18 November

Cycling London to Paris Bike Ride, Tour de France Edition – 25-29 July. Prudential RideLondon-Surrey – 29th July. Queen Eleanor Cycle Ride – 24-27 August

Challenge Rough Runner Manchester – 16-17 June. Zombie Evacuation – 15 September. Rough Runner London – 15-16 September. Broadgate Tower Run Up – 24 November.



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Recovering from homelessness

Welcome to the Spring newsletter! In this edition we're focusing on the different activities we provide which help people recover.

We know that once people move in to housing the key to well-being, and staying away from the streets, is dependent on having something meaningful to do. Toby, Deputy Day Centre Manager, explains:

“It's obviously good news when people aren't homeless any more but then what do you do? You need something, a purpose in your life and to achieve things.”

A large proportion of people using our service would like to find work and be financially independent. But, the jobs market is competitive and entry level positions are in short supply.

This is one of the reasons why we introduced our Step Up volunteering programme so people can get hands on experience in a safe environment. The placements give people a chance to discover their strengths, what they're good at and how these skills can be made useful for life and work Toby explains more:

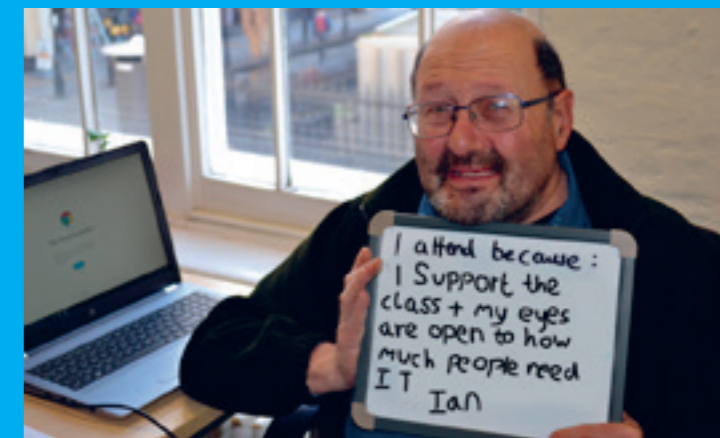
“By volunteering at The Connection it instils in people the skills they need to get employment elsewhere, the self confidence that you need in a job interview, the structure to your week so you can get up in the morning and those attributes are so transferrable in life.”

Step Up has gone from strength to strength! As well as helping people find work and build networks of support, people also get involved because they want to give something back and help others who have experienced homelessness. Find out more inside the newsletter!

Better Connected to IT

We now live in a digital world where nearly everything in life from paying bills, doing grocery shopping to finding work involves using IT and computers!

We have a group called Better Connected, supported by Step Up volunteers like Ian, who you read about in the opening letter, to help people get essential online skills.



Above: Ian is a Step Up Volunteer for our Better Connected Group

IT can be intimidating for people, so the group focuses on learning in a fun and interactive way which makes the sessions accessible and inclusive for everyone.

In the morning people learn how to play games like Pictionary and Connect 4 using smart technology like iPads. The games are displayed on the big screen which gets people talking to one another and proudly sharing what they've learnt. In the weekly afternoon workshop the sessions are themed and cover IT skills which are essential for living independently and finding work.

One session focuses on how to complete online forms. This might seem an uninspiring topic but it's essential so our clients can submit benefit applications, register for various services, book appointments and improve employment prospects with job searches. The session was made engaging with a quiz, short film and resulted in people creating their own forms so they're now experts!

The Winter Exhibition

Art is one of our popular activity groups. As well as being therapeutic it boosts people's confidence and unlocks their hidden talents.

We hold regular exhibitions to celebrate people's achievements and give them a chance to sell their work!

The Winter Exhibition, which was on display in the Crypt at St Martin's in February, was a colourful and diverse show with over 14 artists involved. Some of the artists share the benefits art has in their lives.

Andy, top right: "The journey of healing began in the art room for me. Art allowed me to access pain I never knew was there, it was buried so deep. It's been a journey of compassion from everyone around me, allowing us to be lost but always supported. Beautiful."

Margaret, right: "I was very stressed out losing a load of members of my family all in one month and the art helps me concentrate, relieving stress and I love the art classes. But recently I've been unable to go due to my illness. But I have tried very hard to get back to the classes because I miss the people I've made friends with."

Robert, right: "My 'art' is mainly watercolour sketchcards, mostly A5 but also A6 and A4 size. These cards get sent to friends through the post. I've been drawing them for about 20 years, since a friend gave me an A6 watercolour pad - 300 gsm. "Send them back to me!" he said. I do roughly one a week."

John, bottom right: "I have always been interested in art and the famous artists but only started drawing four years ago in the art class here in the Connection. I sold a few in the last exhibition which is a great booster of confidence for me. I find drawing very therapeutic."



Meet our Step Up Volunteers

Neville – Day Centre Volunteer
Role – Welcomes newly homeless people in to the building and provides tours

How does your experience help people? "Well, I think because I'm an ex-rough sleeper and because I've been there myself. I've stayed here [night centre] so I know what people are going through. I try and tell them to be patient and reassure them that things will be sorted out."

How do you put people at ease? "I try to help people to relax. I try and be nice and polite and always take the time to explain things to them as we walk around. Sometimes when I get to know people I'll catch up with them and ask who they saw and how things went."

What have you learnt? "Well, I suppose it's given me a bit more confidence as well as getting along with people. I enjoy volunteering."

Stuart – Kitchen Volunteer
Role – Helps prepare the breakfast, lunch and dinner for people eating in our centre

What do you hope will come from taking part in Step Up? "I ran a kitchen for sixteen years for voluntary work in Zimbabwe where I'm from. It's been good finding out what skills are needed in England if I decide to get some temporary work, they'll see that I know how to chop up a carrot!"

What have you been learning to make? "Today we made pancakes with some lemon curd, a vegetable roast with pastry and a potato and vegetable salad. I've been cleaning, washing up, tidying up and assembling everything in the right order. We've also been making cookies, which have gone across to the church. We made apple flapjacks as well!"

What makes you want to volunteer every week? "We've got a happy environment. The nice soothing radio in the background. Time also seems to fly. I'm happiest when I'm busy. I find it great. 100%."



Neville at reception waiting to show new people around the centre



Stuart proudly showing a cake he made with Debbie our Deputy Catering Manager