



FAITH IN ACTION

helping with homelessness

10th Anniversary Review

October 2014

Where next for Faith in Action and the Homeless Drop-In Centre?

The Faith in Action homeless Drop-In Centre in the Salvation Army hall has been running for ten years, and the need is greater than ever.

Every service user has their own story. Their path to homelessness may have stemmed from a relationship breakdown, loss of job, mental health problems, or alcohol and drugs issues. Many lack family support in the community either through being in care, the armed forces, prison or from abroad. In Merton we also have a high number of homeless people from Eastern Europe, many of whom come for work but struggle when this dries up and then don't have the language skills or community support to recover.

The tightening up of housing and welfare benefits, whilst good for the taxpayer, can have the unintended consequence of leaving some who become ill, unable to cope or facing hard times to fall through the gaps. This coupled with the national shortage of affordable housing especially in the London area means we have a steady stream of people desperately needing our services.

So what can Faith in Action do to help?

We began with a strong desire to provide food, comfort and friendship, and this remains a key part of what we do. We can do more to help service users move on in their lives and make changes for the better. One of the best ways to avoid being homeless is to have a job. Service users often need to tackle issues such as housing and health before they can ready themselves for employment.

We have successful placements with Hope World Wide and the Fresh Start Housing Group. There is a programme of annual TB screening and an autumn flu clinic. We have a strong relationship with the Merton Recovery Team who deal with drug and alcohol treatment.

Our long term plan is to invest further in four areas.

1 Preparation of service users for entry into employment

We are helping service users compile job-seeking workbooks, so they can claim Job Seekers Allowance and access the Job Centre networks. Training for our volunteers is enabling them to encourage and assist as many service users as possible to develop their own workbook.

We are looking into the provision of pre-employment courses, so we know what is available and can signpost and support users to apply.

We are developing a bank of information about local entry-level job opportunities for service users, using existing links with the Merton Job Centre, and creating new ones through organisations such as the Merton Chamber of Commerce.

2 Investment in the training of staff and volunteers

Staff recently completed training in the new benefits system, and we continue to enhance their skills and those of the volunteers. Our Project Manager and Senior Project Worker are investigating

relevant courses in housing policy, benefits, pre-employment support, community care facilities, and so on. They will devise a training strategy and funding plan to enhance the body of knowledge and skills needed to help people move on.

3 Investment in physical facilities in the Drop-in centre

We work in close partnership with the Salvation Army to develop the Drop-In Centre based in their premises. The laundry area has been refurbished. The washing machines go non-stop when we are open and there is a big demand for clean towels for showers and clothing. Soon we'll need a new washing machine, and funds have been set aside towards this.

One of the most useful and popular services we offer is access to the internet, essential if service users are to move on. We have several computers, but demand far exceeds supply. We plan to invest in two additional computers initially to enable users to compile their job seeking workbooks. This is an area for expansion.

4 Individual support

There is a small ring-fenced fund to help individual users.

We try to keep a supply of tinned food through donations, but this is not always consistent and we want to be able to top it up when necessary.

With no washing facilities, homeless people need fresh underwear and we already supply what we can for a small number. We'd like to increase this service, tracking the cost and monitoring usage as appropriate.

Rent in advance is sometimes needed if someone is to acquire a place of their own. We are developing the discretionary capacity to provide this, if they have the means to pay rent thereafter.

A one-off Oyster card top-up may help someone get to a first Job Centre interview, night shelter or hospital appointment. We are devising a discretionary system that allows this to happen.

We work closely with Merton Council which funds a worker with Polish language skills. This has enabled targeted help for Polish service users, including help with getting passports and an alcohol support group.

An ambitious programme?

Yes, it is! But we have a highly active management committee, excellent staff and an amazing team of volunteers who cook, manage the laundry, befriend, support with IT access, raise funds and act out their faith and belief in the value and potential of everyone to lead a productive life.

Donor support

Generous donors make the work of the Faith in Action Homeless Drop-In Centre possible. To you we extend our deepest gratitude. We very much hope you will continue to join us in helping people realise their potential to change and take advantage of opportunities. We are confident that, with your support, we have a programme that will provide service users with the chance to move back into mainstream society, making our neighbourhood and community a better place.

Yvette Ball, Chair Merton Faith in Action

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