



Simon Star

Living and working with London's street homeless

Community report



Our main point of contact with homeless people is on the street, through our outreach services. Numbers are rising. Between the beginning of August and the end of October we met a total of 3160 people through our tea-runs, 3703 through soup-runs and 3291 through our street cafes. There are two main reasons for the increased numbers. Firstly, due to extra publicity – our street-cafes now provide a hot meal two days a week, and word spreads quickly! Secondly, contrary to “official” figures, the number of homeless people in Central London is once again on the rise. The Simon Community’s recent headcount found 263 in Central London, a considerable increase since our last count in April. In Westminster, for example, the “official” number remains artificially low, largely as a result of the police moving on homeless people, effectively pushing them out of the borough before the headcount takes place.

A dry list of numbers can never tell the full story. As the temperature drops and conditions worsen, we are in daily contact with numerous people without accommodation, and – often – with no access to any money. During the winter especially, it is hard to imagine how they manage. Perhaps for a week, a month, survival is possible, but many of those we meet – often from Eastern Europe – are seemingly stuck in this position without hope of housing, benefits or work. The Simon Community aims to offer unconditional, non-judgmental care to everyone

we meet. Support often comes in the form of a sandwich or a hot cup of coffee. Sometimes we are able to offer a little more. Our small community provides a point of connection and support for people in a generally disconnected and unsupportive city. Through our fortnightly Community meetings we are in the process of reviewing our ethos, to ensure that these long-standing ideals are not just words in the books of our founder, but are put into practice on a day-to-day basis.

In practical terms life has been made easier by the purchase of a brand new and – so-far – dent-free mini-bus. The journey between stops on the soup-run is now smooth and somewhat less alarming. We continue nightly to receive hundreds of donated sandwiches from Pret a Manger, to feed those on the streets, and last month we received the usual harvest of food from a number of local churches. It is being put to good use! Thankfully, new, enthusiastic volunteers contact us on a daily basis. This month we are grateful for the arrival of new full-time volunteer, Malcolm McDonald – welcome and good-luck!

So, the work continues. As I type, Jo Nurse, the Community manager, is in the process of finding a hall in Central London for an “open door” Christmas party. A feast and live music is planned, and – no doubt – a great deal of disorganised and hectic, festive cheer. Should be good. Have a great Christmas.

Steve Barnes is a trustee and a co-worker.

Notes from the Chair



In early October we held the second Community day to decide our future.

Last year we agreed to continue as we are by:

- Implementing urgent cost saving measures
- Recruiting a manager whose post would be funded
- Agreeing a clear timetable with objectives to be met by certain deadlines, and at the same time pursue a merger, so that if we were unable to achieve the above aims we would be in a position to merge.

As you will have seen from Simon Star we successfully achieved our aims.

This year the four options up for discussion were to:

- Continue as we are
- Merge with another organisation
- Work in partnership with other like-minded organisations
- Form an umbrella group with other like-minded organisations

After a lively discussion, the following priorities for the year ahead were agreed:

- To maintain and develop the Simon Community's ethos, practice and philosophy
- To continue to develop services for street homeless people within current capacity, especially hospitality and outreach
- To maintain and improve the Community's internal systems, for example administration, office, finance, fundraising, property maintenance, IT, website, training, policies and procedures

- To explore and develop links with other organisations sharing the Simon Community's aims and core values in:

- resources and information
- outreach
- day services
- accommodation/shelter
- campaigning
- training
- administration

Such links with other organisations might lead to formal partnership agreements and could lead in the longer term to the formation of an independent umbrella group, aimed at developing more accommodation, especially a first access facility.

We also agreed to hold an annual Community day to review progress against these headings.

These priorities were endorsed by the trustees. My next task is to write this year's plan.

John Yeudall is chair of the trustees.

AGM

THE
Simon
COMMUNITY



Our 2009 AGM will be held on Saturday February 14th at the church hall of

St Silas the Martyr, NW5

(the same venue as in 2008, entry on Malden Road, by the corner of Prince of Wales Road).

Doors open at 10.30, AGM starts at 11 sharp

E-mail:

info@simoncommunity.org.uk

Not just Irish eyes smiling ... the annual trip to Mayo.



I'd heard that "Ireland is beautiful and the people are friendly", but was unprepared for such captivating landscapes, genuine enquiries of health and ceaseless pots of tea. We were treated, as Alan put it, "like old friends" at the Welcome Inn – a posh yet unpretentious hotel at the edge of Castlebar. After 20 hours on buses, ferries and plastic seats, this was most welcome. Martin flew, clever man.

The first night we befriended groups from Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester over a tremendous dinner. Next day we visited the museum of Father Peyton, the 'Rosary Priest', and later in the week joined over 1000 people for mass at Knock shrine.

At Hennigan's Heritage Centre (Tom Hennigan being the Chair of the Mayo Emigration Liaison Committee) a hot toddy of a welcome awaited us. After some raucous tunes from

the assembled, we stood to attention as the Mayor of Wigan and entourage arrived. Christine soon befriended them all. It is 100 years since the Maypole colliery disaster in Wigan killed 75 people, many of them from Mayo, hence their visit.

At Croagh Patrick, Davis and Lizzie were prevented from scaling the summit only by time constraints. No mention of the mountain of sandwiches consumed beforehand. We stood by the National Famine Monument nearby, hands in pockets, moved by the powerful poignancy evoked by the twisted, charred-looking bronze limbs of the victims interlinking with each other and the ship's flagpoles.

Many thanks to the Mayo Emigration Liaison Committee for their hospitality – here's to next year. Sláinte!

Alan Cole, Christine O'Mahoney, Davis St Marthe, Martin Campbell, Lizzie Pitt.



left to right, *Lizzie, Davis, Christine, Alan, Martin*

Community extravaganza



On Friday September 26th, the Simon Community held a musical extravaganza at the Irish Centre in Camden. It was a great success.

The evening was arranged by our Community manager, Jo, who has done a wonderful job since she joined Simon – and the same must be said about Martin Fowler, our new administrator. Gary, Liz, Radu, Ruth, Steve, Simon and Alan all helped as well.

We hoped to raise money for warm clothes, sleeping bags, rucksacks, and so on. We had songs from some of the people who use our services, and from a couple of trustees. We had a live band – ‘The Jacket Potatoes’ – and

we had a proper meal. We organised a raffle, charging £10 per ticket and when we counted it at the end of the night and deducted all the expenses, we’d made a profit of over £600. And the credit for that goes to Jo, Martin and everyone who helped.

I would like to say a very big thank you to all those who contributed to the extravaganza and to those who were there – I hope you all enjoyed yourselves. All the money made will go to making the winter a bit easier to cope with, so thank you for your generosity.

Barn camping at Coldblow Farm in Maidstone, Kent



We left, eventually, after a hoohah with the hired van – apparently they hadn’t realised Kentish Town wasn’t in Hackney! Not even the Dartford Crossing held us up for we were going on a winter holiday and we weren’t scared. We arrived at our converted barn in a very merry state. It had a cooker, washing up facilities, and a log fire. Radu was very good at fire lighting, chipping kindling off a log with a bread knife. Mattresses on the floor were the comfiest things ever and there was a shower available to us in the next building with fabulous washing and shaving facilities.

Each day Taff cooked a wonderful breakfast and then we went tripping: a wildlife park, Sheerness, Folkestone, Dover ... All roads seemed to lead to Margate but somehow we never made it there. The weather was changeable but we didn’t let that dampen

our spirits. We went for long walks along the beach and had fish and chips.

On the Wednesday Gary took the people who only wanted to stay two days back to London, and brought back a few more. Then the merriment recommenced. We made up new rules to Rummy and cooked chicken in an oven much too small – but no-one was poisoned.

Our days were full, we had a lot of fun and a lot of laughs. We trundled back to London on the Friday, full of fresh air, our thoughts on higher things.

Many thanks to Jo our Community manager for arranging the trip, and to Gary who did all the driving and without whom the trip would not have been possible.

Alan Cole is a trustee and co-worker.

Streetwork – an insight



What are you doing this evening?" ask my colleague. "Streetwork," I reply. Our new junior member of staff giggles and the accounts manager comments that I seem to like hanging around the streets of Kings Cross in the evening!

It's 6 o'clock and I've just got home from work. It's cold and dark and the last thing I feel like doing is going out again, but I have an appointment to meet my partner for the evening at Malden Road, so I must get on. We prepare coffee, tea and sandwiches at 129 and head to our allocated area. We walk around the usual places, without seeing anyone. Then round the corner, in what appears to be a wind tunnel, sits our first customer. "Hello, would you like a cup of coffee?" I ask. "Yes, please. You're from the Simon Community aren't you?" And so, after a chat, sandwich and roll-up, we move on. We meet a 'regular', so we sit for a while

and talk about, among other things, the weather!

Down the road, under the shelter of the church portico, sits a very sad and cold man. He is new to the streets, following a relationship breakdown. He has little idea how to cope, but fortunately, my partner, who is homeless himself, gives out some good advice on where to sleep, get cardboard and a good free breakfast. After a hot drink and a sandwich, we leave him in much better spirits.

It always surprises me how much better it make me feel, knowing I have cheered someone else up, by just simply offering a few kind words, a hand of friendship and a conversation between equals, and I am always very proud to say that I work with the Simon Community.

Cynthia Jameson is a co-worker.

Sunday Street Café – a visit



I arrived at 12.45pm on a cool August day. There were already many people gathered in the grounds of St Giles, waiting for the van to arrive. I went for a walk and when I returned 15 minutes later, the van was there, and meals and drinks were being served.

Dishes of rice and peas with a sauce of minced beef and vegetables were being speedily dished up, along with hot and cold drinks. Jo and Robert were responsible for handing out tobacco and papers for cigarettes. Robert was playing chess, challenging a succession of opponents, and Bill kept count so that statistics could be maintained.

Over 70 men and four women had hot food and drinks. As many as 40% of them were from Eastern Europe. Of these, some had beds in short term hostels, while others are sleeping rough. It was good to see everyone enjoying the sunny weather and to watch groups gathering to talk. The Simon workers and co-workers mingled and a lot of gratitude was expressed for both the food and their friendliness.

Ruth Cram is a trustee and a former worker.

The numbers game... why headcounts count.



Dave Clark spoke to Bill Moore as he prepared to organise the second of this year's head counts, which took place in the early hours of Saturday November 1st. Here are Bill's thoughts on what the headcounts involve, and why they are so important.

"Twice a year 40-60 volunteers go out into the streets in trained pairs and simply count the number of people sleeping rough in central London. We do it to prove that the government statistics aren't right. Sometimes our numbers are double the official ones. We regularly see between 250 and 330 people, and afterwards we issue a press release with the figures – it goes to national and local media who put the message out far and wide.

The headcount is important because over the years it's made people think about homelessness. When we do the head count we're refusing to ignore the problem. We're still seeing people on the streets, so the government's policies aren't working. If you rely on people going to buildings to access services, well they just won't do it. You've still got people left outside and the government is trying to sweep them away before the 2012 Olympics.

The headcount began in 1998 when a daily paper reported a very low number of rough sleepers. We'd seen more than that so we got together and checked. We've done it twice a year ever since".

Dave Clark and **Bill Moore** are co-workers. Bill is a former trustee.

Results of the November 2008 headcount:

Borough	People
Westminster	194
Camden	7
Islington	6
Tower Hamlets	5
Lambeth	16
The City	30
Southwark	2
Kensington	0
Others	3
Total	263



Bill Moore co-worker and former trustee.

The way we were



On our 45th anniversary, we look back at earlier times and initiatives within the Community.



FOUNDER'S CHRISTMAS APPEAL

ANTON WALLICH-CLIFFORD

Ten months ago I asked you to support my Challenge of the Seventies Appeal. Your response was wonderful. £8,000 has since come in.

But this is only enough to maintain existing services. It gives no room for improvement or expansion.

Other voluntary and statutory agencies are crying out for Simon work in many areas of concern. We cannot help due to lack of money.

1970 has seen us handle 3,000 youngsters who were stranded penniless and homeless in London and 700-plus families and socially inadequate at our 24-hour emergency accommodation centre in Malden Road, Kentish Town.

In Liverpool, work among the alcoholics and dossers has continued—though, here again, pressures from the statutory authorities has resulted in Simon helping problem homeless families. A night shelter in the crypt of Liverpool Cathedral is likely to soon come to fruition. Associated, independent communities in Ireland are becoming widely known and expanding following my three visits there this year and the enthusiasm of the workers themselves.

The future holds forth prospects of our first truly international centre—in South

America.

But it is the present we are concerned with. Our cash position can best be summed up by events on December 1st. Head Office staff were ready for their mid-day meal, when it was found there was no food or money. Some of the staff toured the second-hand shops with me in Hastings trying to sell a table and some crockery to buy food.

The Challenge of the Seventies Appeal asked for £100,000. It is a target that must be reached as quickly as possible.

My thanks for all your support in the past. Please pray for our projects if you cannot afford to send a donation. With every good wish for the New Year.

God bless.

Yours sincerely,

Please complete this form and return it with your donation to:
The Simon Community,
St. Joseph's House,
129 Malden Road,
London, NW5 4HS

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 we get an extra
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or if your circumstances change and you no longer pay
sufficient income tax and/or capital gains tax.

You may cancel this arrangement at any time simply by
notifying the Simon Community.

I wish to make a donation to The Simon Community of £ _____

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I would like more information on:

- Making regular donations through standing order
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- Including Simon in my will

Please tick if **no** acknowledgement is required

I would prefer to receive Simon Star by email

My email address is _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

THE SIMON COMMUNITY IS A REGISTERED CHARITY, NUMBER 283938