

Simon Star

Living and working with London's street homeless

Christmas Simon



Welcome to the Christmas 2007 issue of Simon Star. On behalf of all involved in the Simon Community, we would like to wish you a very merry Christmas and a peaceful and happy New Year.

The outreach work of the Community continues apace, and we are still providing our essential services to those we meet daily on the streets.

In the New Year we will be inducting a brand new team of workers. We give thanks to Jo who left as project leader after over 18 months with the Community. In addition, we also thank Louise, Michael, Jared from the United States and Vincent from Germany. We also especially thank Eunice who has continued to support the work of the Community as a co-worker after leaving as a worker in October.

The dedication of our co-workers must not go without mention. Their commitment to the causes of the Community has helped to ensure the continuation of services to those on the streets and in our visits programme to members of the Community who have been re-housed. In particular we would like to express our thanks to Annelie Eddy who, along with her husband Steve and Adrian Evans (our new treasurer), worked tirelessly to help in getting the Community ready for its audit.

As mentioned in the last edition of Simon Star, we have been looking at ways of increasing our sustainability in the longer term. In the light of this we will be moving the office back to 129 Malden Road early in the New Year, which should help us to cut costs, although it will mean that we will have reduced capacity for residents and residential volunteers. There will also be staffing changes, as noted elsewhere by our chair, John Yeudall.

We would like to thank the Mayo Emigrant Liaison Committee for generously hosting a group from The Simon Community for a week back in September. All involved had a refreshing and much needed break in the beautiful surroundings of Castlebar in County Mayo. We hope that our relationship with the Mayo Emigrant Liaison Committee will continue to develop in the years to come.

Tim Nicholls, Director.

We have moved!

Our office address is:
129 Malden Road, London NW5 4HS
we will be moving again on Jan 9.

Tel: **020 7561 8270**
Email: **info@simoncommunity.org.uk**
www.simoncommunity.org.uk

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The Future of the Community



As you know, The Simon Community has been discussing its future. The Community gathered one Saturday in September, to talk through the proposals under consideration. We had a good turnout – over 40 Community members, past and present, attended. Four options were under consideration: to continue as a volunteer-based outreach organisation, to merge with another homeless charity, to become a trust or to hand over our assets to another organisation.

We asked Mick Carroll, formerly of St Mungo's - and good friend of The Simon Community – to help us organise our discussion. Throughout the day we divided into smaller groups, to encourage everyone to speak-up, before feeding back to the main group.

The four proposals facing us were extremely varied, and there was some trepidation surrounding the idea of a merger. Simon has long cherished its independence and flexibility. Talks of a merger (or a takeover) have been clouded by fears that the values and ethos of the Community could be lost. Initially, in our groups, we concentrated on what it is that makes The Simon Community unique. Regardless of whether we continued or merged, what must we hold on to? This process turned up some interesting and inspiring ideas – love and forgiveness, to name two - certainly ideas that seemed to embody the Community, at least in theory! One word that came up in each of the groups was “family” – something offered by Simon but not by so many of the traditional homeless “services”.

By late afternoon we had agreed that the

option of a take-over or becoming a trust did not allow us to retain the vital, defining aspects of Simon's work. We continued to discuss the possibility of merging with a similar organisation. Many believed that the new Community model of outreach and hospitality was – with some careful financial pruning – now possible. Typically, when presented with four proposals, The Simon Community is always likely to opt for a fifth, and this is indeed what happened. By six o'clock the majority of us had concluded that we should continue as a volunteer-based Community, providing outreach services and hospitality. But we also agreed that the possibility of a merger should be pursued further, should the new stream-lined Community model prove unsustainable.

Ultimately, the fate of The Simon Community lies in the hands of the trustees. This difficult process of discernment about our future has continued, informed by the opinions expressed at the meeting. Whatever the final decision, we can rest assured that this thoroughly rigorous process gave all our members a chance to be heard.

Many thanks to Mick Carroll for his time and patience.

Steve Barnes,
Co-worker and trustee.

Get in touch!

The Simon Community
129 Malden Road, London NW5 4HS
Tel: 020 7561 8270

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Anton Street



The Simon Community no longer has St Theresa's, 10 Anton Street, Hackney. The last 18 months has seen a slow end to a very happy relationship between the building and the Community. In the early 1980s Simon began renting the property from the then Newham and Islington Housing Association (NIHA), now known as Family Mosaic. 10 Anton Street was a friendly happy family house, even though it saw many changes.

In 2005 I moved to Anton Street from our first tier project at Simon House in Harlesden. I had heard what a happy place it was, and this was often demonstrated by the many workers who supported us in our time there. In the last eleven months, Family Mosaic decided to take the property back. The six of us living there have now all been supported into other accommodation by Family Mosaic. But I know when we meet up that we have many happy memories of our time in Anton Street with The Simon Community. In particular we remember the happy meetings, the Bingo and Quiz nights, the birthday parties and the Christmas celebrations. Thank you to all who support The Simon Community, for you made it possible to keep that project running for so long, with all the support that was offered as a result.

Anthony Downes is a trustee and an ex-resident of the Simon Community.



THE
Simon
COMMUNITY

Email: info@simoncommunity.org.uk
www.simoncommunity.org.uk

Threat to Soup Runs



Recently The Simon Community, along with the other soup run providers in London, heard of a proposal going before London Councils to prohibit the distribution of free refreshments on land designated by a London borough council' (Westminster). This proposal, if passed, was a clear attempt to prevent all soup runs from providing sustenance to the hungry and homeless on London's streets.

Apparently the provision of food to the homeless and hungry is a serious 'problem' to some local authorities in London concerned with the 'unfettered distribution of free food and refreshments', as it causes 'nuisance to occupiers of premises'. This incorrect accusation concerned all involved in our Community due to the fact that our soup runs stop at places away from residential areas, such as Lincolns Inn Fields, The Strand, or behind the House of Fraser near Victoria. The Simon Community's members always clean up before they leave an area, so as to ensure that no rubbish is left behind and there isn't a negative impact upon residents.

Soup run providers pick up where the other agencies leave off. Many of the hardest to reach and most entrenched rough sleepers are unable to or do not wish to go into day centres or hostels. Many of those newly arrived from other parts of the European Union, who end up street homeless in Central London, find that they are often being excluded from homelessness services. The majority of the homeless people we encounter do not have any money, and

have neither the means nor the ability to cook for themselves. Consequently, the provision of food is necessary to prevent many exceptionally vulnerable people from going hungry.

On 13th November, members of the Community joined ranks with other soup run providers to protest at London Councils offices, all the while offering tea and coffee to supporters and passers-by.



Fortunately the proposal failed to achieve consensus and has been temporarily shelved whilst an attempt is made to pressurise other local authority-funded homelessness agencies to support this proposal and endeavour to lobby the politicians to accept the banning of soup run provision. The Simon Community and other soup run providers were grateful for the support of the many who wrote in to complain about this proposal, including the Bishop of London and the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone.

We are also grateful to the principled stance of the members of the London Councils who rejected supporting this proposal, and must in particular mention Clyde Loake, Leader of Waltham Forest Council, who strongly supported the work of front line homelessness charities involved in outreach on London's streets.

Soup runs have not caused anti-social behaviour, they have merely endeavoured to provide a compassionate and sensitive approach of support. Long may that support continue.

Tim Nicholls, Director.

From a Former Worker...



For the past few months I have been researching the history of The Simon Community and the life of its founder, Anton Wallich Clifford.

Seventy years ago, Anton was counting the days to Christmas. In his first term at a Roman Catholic seminary in Lancashire, he was looking forward to going home to his mother at the term's end. A typical teenage boy, he enjoyed playing football and had overcome homesickness to make new friends. Atypically, he was deeply religious and had taken vows to become a Tertiary Franciscan at the age of fifteen.

By the late 1950s, Anton was a probation officer in inner London, following stints as a youth leader and a housemaster in an approved school. In all three jobs Anton came up against the issue of homelessness and the lack of smaller scale homely accommodation to which he could refer clients. He understood that long-term homelessness required more than just accommodation – a supportive, accepting and caring environment was also essential.

Ten years on saw The Simon Community founded, the members committed to a life of voluntary poverty and care. Anton was preparing to get married and much experimental work was being done, such as street cafés, shelters for methylated spirits drinkers, houses of hospitality, and soup runs. Out of this period came Mungo's, Centrepoint, the Cyrenians, Simon Ireland and Simon Communities in Glasgow and Exeter.

Anton died in 1978. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Community was forced to change, due to new laws for charities, new

requirements for housing standards, changed health and safety rules, and developments within society itself. Some things are constant, though. The commitment and care that led a reflective and faithful man to give up his job and found a new community for the homeless is still evident in the Community today. Anton saw a need and set out to meet it, offering himself, his gifts, talents and flaws. The need is still there.

Ruth Cram was a Simon Community worker in 1969-70. She would like to hear [via Simon HQ] from anyone willing to discuss their experience of Simon, past or present.

129 Malden Road, London NW5 4HS



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Service of Commemoration



This year's Service of Commemoration for homeless people who died in the last year was, as always, a deeply moving occasion. It is held each year at St Martin's-in-the-Fields Church during remembrance week, and staff, volunteers and those who use the many different homelessness services and agencies in London take part. A central part of the service consists in the reading out of the names of those who have died, and sadly this year's list was a long one. We received more than 120 names from the day centres, hostels and other organisations working in the field.

While the list was long, the service also tries to be a celebration of the lives being com-

memorated. I think this year this was especially, true thanks to the participation of Streetwise Opera, who performed "Somewhere a place for us" from Westside Story. Everyone was invited to take a stone with the name of one of the people being commemorated and place it by the altar, calling to mind that we are all "living stones" in God's house.

The service is organised jointly by staff from the Church, Connection at St Martin's and Housing Justice, with freelance artistic director Rosemarie Cockayne.

Alastair Murray, UNLEASH Coordinator
www.housingjustice.org.uk

Notes from the Chair



Well, the decision has been taken. At the same time we are going to establish and run a sustainable community – in all senses, but particularly financial – and pursue a merger. Both are in progress. The cost saving and income raising measures are being implemented, and merger partners are being sought and approached. As it was put at the recent trustee meeting, we are at "the flirting stage".

One of the outcomes of these measures is that there will only be one part-time paid member of staff (an administrator, Marie) and one full-time (a co-ordinator, yet to be appointed). Sadly this means that our director Tim Nicholls will be leaving early in the New Year. Although Tim has been with us only a short period of time he has made a big difference. He has ensured that the Community face up to and tackle its unsustainability. He has been and still is a power-

ful campaigning voice on behalf of the street homeless and a great pursuer of causes, lately the proposal to ban soup runs. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tim for his tireless efforts on behalf of the community and wish him all the best in the future. I hope he will keep in touch with the Community – we know his mobile number.

It is important that Simon is put on a sound footing for the future. Whether this is via a merger or on its own will be decided at a later date. We need to be strong in all areas and provide a professional service appropriate in the present era to those homeless on the streets. This is what we as trustees – as a community - are trying to do. We value your continuing support and ask that you stand by us through this time of change. After all you are all part of the Simon family.

John Yeudall

Simon Street Café



My involvement with Street Café came after some pretty intense nagging by one of our workers to start a chess club at the Street Café which takes place on Monday afternoons and Wednesday mornings. It was love at first sight! It is now eighteen months later and not for one second has that chessboard been idle.

Street Café is a wonderful mixture of people who help to make it the success it is. Quite a few of our helpers are either living on the street or used to.

These events take place in the courtyards of two churches, thus ensuring the privacy of our guests. We take chairs along so our guests can relax with the daily newspapers whilst they enjoy their tea, coffee, juice and biscuits (and soup in the winter). A recent development is the introduction of sandwiches, kindly provided by the Prêt a Manger chain.

It can be pretty ugly out there on the streets and we provide a warm atmosphere, with people who care about our guests' welfare. We have many part-time volunteers who, over time, gain the trust and respect of our guests. There are times that simply listening can make a difference.

Six months ago we started a third Street Café – on Saturday afternoons, when most day centres are closed. We had to change our venue for this event to St Giles, which is just behind Centrepont, in the centre of London.

The area is a notorious hangout for drug addicts and as a result of this the profile of our guests has changed somewhat. Despite this, we have not had one single incident of

bad behaviour. I am always touched by the comments that come our way because, while our guests appreciate the goodies on offer, what really impresses them is in fact the time that we give to them. We are currently serving some 60 people every Saturday and this can be regarded as a roaring success.

I would like to thank all those donors who make Street Café the success that it is, and issue an open invitation to you all to come and join us for a cup of coffee, so that you can see how, and for whom, your money is being spent. After all, what is so bad about caring for someone less fortunate than yourself?

Robert Mc Neill used to be on the street himself, and is currently a resident of one of our projects. He is also a trustee.



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The Simon Community,
129 Malden Road,
London
NW5 4HS

Alternatively you can make a secure donation online via our website,
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