

Threshold

Homeless Care supporting Homeless & Vulnerable People

Threshold newsletter number 23

HOMELESS CARE

From the manager

We are now well into 2017 with a difficult year behind us and national homelessness figures still on the rise. At least we are now seeing government recognition of the problem with the homeless reduction bill so we are expecting some positive changes in the near future. At Homeless Care we are doing whatever we can to support homeless and vulnerable people by thinking outside the box and stretching our resources.

With funding shrinking across the sector and our own local authorities facing further cuts to their budgets, it is more challenging than ever to provide sufficient help to those in need. It is heart-warming to see so many people in our community supporting local charities and caring about the wellbeing of those who are less fortunate. With the help and support of people in Maidstone, we will continue to look after homeless and vulnerable people in our town and to raise awareness of the plight of some of the most disadvantaged people in society.

Homelessness Reduction Bill



The Homelessness Reduction Bill has made its way through Parliament and is now awaiting Royal Assent. The private members bill, sponsored by MP Bob Blackman (above), proposes new robust and speedier measures to help people in danger of losing their homes. Government is backing the bill by giving councils a further £61 million funding, spread over two years, specifically to help them prevent and reduce homelessness; a review is promised at the end of this period. Realistically though, if the money were equally divided between the 418 principal authorities and the many other councils, it would only make a dent in the problem but it would definitely be a step in the right direction.

If you are looking for some bedtime reading, we suggest The Homelessness Reduction Bill 2016-2017. You can find it at: www.parliament.uk

BBC Radio Kent live at Maidstone Day Centre



It was still dark when Radio Kent presenter John Wernett and his crew arrived at Maidstone Day Centre to set up for a live broadcast. The breakfast show goes out at 6am and the day's special feature, 'One Good Deed' asked listeners to donate fresh food to us or, because of logistics, to any other food bank in Kent. John interviewed Homeless Care staff, volunteers and clients during the programme. It wasn't long before people were ringing in with offers of fresh food, starting with donations of trays of eggs and packets of bacon each month. We and several other food banks in Kent profited handsomely from this appeal but the other very important benefit was raising awareness of the ever increasing problems of homelessness and hunger in our county. Radio Kent is a station for local people and these are the men, women and children who, because of their ongoing support, make our work possible.

Supermarket donations

Our thanks to Morrisons Parkwood and Morrisons Larkfield who have kindly agreed to let us place a food basket for donations all year round. Michelle Dunlop and Sharon Sidebottom, Morrisons Community Champion.



Find out more about Homeless Care on <http://www.homelesscare.org.uk/> and <http://www.maidstonedaycentre.org.uk/>

Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter



Alexa Kersting-Woods Project Manager

The Winter Shelter 2016/17 has now closed, it is the 4th year the shelter has run. It provides 15 beds per night for street homeless people. The shelter this year was held in 7 different venues including Maidstone Day Centre. Guests arrived at 7.15 pm and were provided with a warm welcome, fresh cooked meal and a safe place to sleep. The shelter was mainly run by volunteers, this year 260 people signed up to help.

The shelter relies on referral of guests from a number of different organisations working with the homeless, including the Day Centre. Zofia and Tracey are in regular contact with the shelter workers and let us know which of their clients would most benefit from staying. Priority is given to those persons most vulnerable due to health, emotional wellbeing, gender, etc. Joint working with the Day Centre is invaluable as it means the guests are able to receive consistent support from both organisations including encouragement to access addiction services, reminders about appointments and a listening ear if something is effecting their emotional well-being.

The guests really enjoy the night they stay at the Day Centre because it's a familiar place and they feel at home, the venue chef Sacha and her team also cooked a lot of their favourite dishes including beef stew and yummy puddings!

So far the shelter has seen 30 different people staying and also a few others that choose not to stay but come in for the evening meal and the opportunity to socialise.

The guests always thrive during their time at the shelter, you can see physically how having a good sleep and regular meals does them good but also the socialising with fellow guests and volunteers has a positive impact.

This year the shelter was open until the end of March and next winter's arrangements are already at the planning stage.

Too young to care

John Smith was only six years old when he started acting as a carer for his mother Pauline, who was an alcoholic.

"She was unable to look after herself," said John, "and my stepfather Matt worked long hours, so he wasn't around much. This meant that I was left to carry out the adult's role."

Unsurprisingly John suffered from depression and anxiety from a very young age. By the time he was 15, his mum's drinking

had worsened and she became verbally and physically abusive towards him and to Matt. John moved to Hastings to stay with his old friend, James. Both young men smoked cannabis heavily but James also used Class A drugs. John strongly disapproved and returned to Maidstone.

Being accepted into a hostel didn't help as his anxiety and depression got worse and he would only leave his room to buy food or to go to the job centre. He developed epilepsy and after 18 months of living at the hostel his pent up frustration got the better of him and he was evicted for causing criminal damage to a door. There followed a succession of sleeping rough, sofa surfing and a brief respite with his sister.

Then things seemed to be looking up He found a job as a cleaner, rented a flat and met a girl who moved in with him. Sadly, by the time he realised that none of the money he had given her had been used to pay the bills it was too late. He was evicted from the flat he had worked so hard to pay for.

Devastated, he attempted to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge. Someone must have been smiling down on him as the police intervened. As a consequence, he spent some time in Priority House, a psychiatric hospital, where he could find the support he needed.

We know John well and his story could be that of many of the people we meet. We encourage these men and women to realise that it is possible to turn a life around and to make a fresh start.

We are delighted to report that John has just moved into a place of his own. We send him warmest wishes for this new phase of his life.

You can find support for young carers in Kent. Tel: 0300 111 110 www.imago.community

Sadie, Singer songwriter



"My dad and my brother are the most important people in my life but they don't talk to me now, not even a Happy Birthday," said 30 year old Sadie as she chatted to Threshold about what by any standards, would be called a tough life. Sadie has been homeless for some time. She had been living in a tent when a group of teenagers set it on fire, igniting the gas bottles that she kept for cooking and lighting. Out of all her possessions, only a tennis racquet survived but sadly not her beloved guitar. Sadie minded most about losing her guitar as she loves to sing and to write her own songs. Many songwriters weave their own life experiences into their music and Sadie had stored up a wealth of material to draw on. Family life as she was growing up was dominated by her mother's struggle with alcoholism and she

You can give online through www.maidstonedaycentre.org.uk or text MDCC15 £2 / £5 / £10 to 70070 to donate now eg MDCC15 £10

was only eighteen when her mum died. Sadie then battled with grief, guilt, depression and her own growing drug and alcohol dependency. This is a pattern that is all too familiar to children who have been deeply affected by the actions of a parent for whom the drink or drugs come before anything or anyone else. There followed a relationship that started happily but ended in acrimony. Sadie went through a mother's worst nightmare, when because of her lifestyle, her 19th month old daughter Adele was taken into care; when the little girl was just three and a half years old she was adopted.

If the future looks bleak it is now adding to Sadie's determination to make changes for the better. "I can't let all this darkness get to me," she said. "I have to get myself right, because one day my daughter will want to find me and I have to be there for her."

Until Sadie has a roof over her head that she is able to sustain, recovery will be very difficult. Unless she is able to move away from the people and situations that are influencing her current lifestyle, it may be all too difficult. We will be there for her as long as we are needed.

If you or someone you know needs advice take a look at:
Narcotics Anonymous
Tel: 0300 999 1212 Open 10am until midnight.

Meet the volunteers



Anita

People are often drawn to volunteering once they are freed from the constraints of a 9 to 5 job. Anita retired at the end of 2014, after 26 very happy years in the music industry. She has a son of 42 and a daughter 39.

The reason that I started volunteering for FFT sounds strange now, it was because of my son. His online gambling pastime had spiralled out of control, causing him to lose his job and his home to be repossessed. He came to me for help saying that he had lost everything, couldn't sleep and he didn't know where to turn. But this was the second time we had been through the same scenario. The first time I had rushed to help him, paying his debts 'making it all right' but 5 years on and it was happening again. I knew then that by picking up the pieces this time, I would probably be condemning him to a revolving door of failure and a life of misery for us all. I realised that I had had my head in the sand before and that if he was to make something of his life, he would be the one to do it, not me.

Having to stand by and know what he must be going through was agonising if I couldn't stretch out a hand to help him but I knew that it was the only way. For my own sanity, I had to do something to take my mind off all the terrors that crowded my

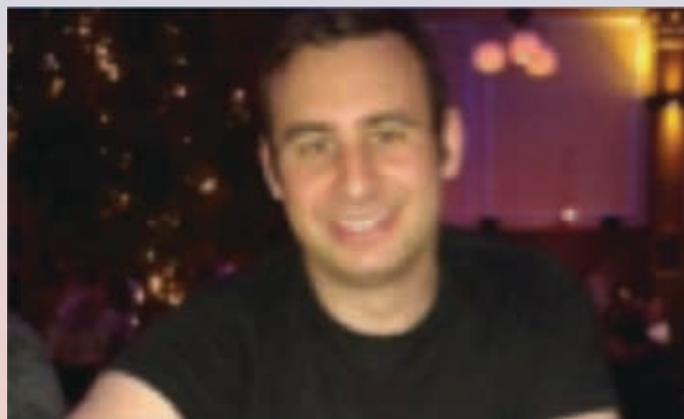
thoughts. When I heard that Maidstone day Centre was looking for drivers to collect food that could be cooked into hot meals for homeless men and women, I jumped at the chance. It might not help my son, but maybe someone else's and it would give me something positive to concentrate on.

Driving for Homeless care gave me a reason to get up in the morning. It means an early start, I have to be at the Day Centre by 7.30 in the morning but I am finished by 10 am which leaves most of the day ahead. The job entails driving one of the two Homeless Care vans to collect food donations from local supermarkets and other food traders so there is a lot of heavy lifting but I keep fit by attending a ballet class three times a week.

Gradually things changed. It was about three years later that my son rang me to say that he was well established in a job and was renting a flat. It will be incredibly difficult for him to save enough money to own his own house again but he is safe and he now has a future to look forward to.

For further information about available support:
National Gambling Helpline Freephone 0800 8020 133
8am-midnight 7 days a week
www.begambleaware.org

Saturday volunteer Chris



Chris is an architect and can't help out during the working week but come the weekend.....

Volunteering for Maidstone Day Centre has been an insightful experience that has broadened my understanding of the homeless situation in the Maidstone area. I have learnt that the function of the centre is vital in ensuring a resource is available to people whose circumstances have led them to be homeless. The centre offers an opportunity for clients to shower, change clothes and have something to eat but is also an important contact point. The staff of Maidstone Day Centre have an understanding of the profound issues that the clients are going through and are on hand to offer support and guidance.

Volunteering on a Saturday generally means offering a helping hand for the staff with day to day tasks such as cleaning, washing up and sorting through donations of food. It feels good to know that assisting with these tasks makes a difference and it is something I am proud to be a part of.

PS

Want to volunteer with us?

We are currently seeking early morning drivers on one or more days a week, for our community *continued overpage column 2...*

Please help us to help others

Maidstone Day Centre is there to help homeless and vulnerable people turn their lives around. The initial need is usually for hot showers, a good home cooked meal, clean clothes and a warm sleeping bag for cold nights. After that work starts on obtaining benefits, medical attention and addressing any drug/alcohol or mental health needs. The search for accommodation will be next on the list, way before job seeking, because you are unlikely to find work if you do not have an address.

We rely on donations and grants to run this service and we are always grateful to receive financial support whether by regular giving, wills or a one off gift.

Increase the value of your gift

Using Gift Aid means that for every pound you give, we get an extra 25 pence from the Inland Revenue, helping your donation to go further. This means that £10.00 can be turned into £12.50 just so long as donations are made through Gift Aid. Imagine what a difference that could make to our work and it won't cost you a penny more. So if you would like your donation to go further, please Gift Aid it by completing the form left and returning it to Homeless Care.

How to give

By cheque payable to: Homeless Care and send to: The Treasurer, Homeless Care, 6 Denton Close, Maidstone, ME15 8ER or by direct transfer to Homeless Care's bank account: Sort Code 40-52-40 Account Number 00023904

Log on to our website: www.maidstonedaycentre.org.uk and click on the 'donate' button on one of the pages. To find out more about giving through regular donations, wills or with cash, please ring The Hon. Treasurer on 01622 202239

GIFT AID DECLARATION To: The Hon Treasurer, Homeless Care, 6 Denton Close, Willington Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 8ER

I wish Homeless Care to treat all donations I have made in the last four years and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise as Gift Aid donations

Signature _____

Date _____

Full Name (in caps) _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone number _____

Email _____

I am a UK taxpayer and I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. If you pay income tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return. Please notify the Treasurer of Homeless Care if you wish to cancel this declaration, change your address or no longer pay sufficient tax on your income or capital gains.

Registered charity number 1151412

food share scheme. Some of our volunteers work with us on a regular basis but there are those who may not be able to commit in this way. At certain times during the year, we need extra help for a few days or just a few hours so you may like to join our ad hoc team.

To find out more, talk to Zofia on 01622 674064 or email: manager@maidstonedaycentre.org.uk

Thank you for supporting us and making a difference...

Homeless Care Volunteer Team - Lib Dem Group - Maidstone Lions - Morrisons Parkwood and Larkfield - Restoring Hands

If you would like to help us to make a difference

... and you have space in your premises for a food collecting basket to help collect food please contact Zofia the Maidstone Day Centre manager on 01622 674064

manager@maidstonedaycentre.org.uk



Homeless Care

received an unannounced visit from Environmental Health and we have again been awarded 5 stars for another 2 years. Our standards are higher than some of our local restaurants!

Every £ is one nearer our target.



JustTextGiving by Vodafone

HOMELESS CARE

MAIDSTONE DAY CENTRE

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
Community Food Share Scheme

GOODSELL HOUSE

MAIDSTONE CHRISTIAN CARE



@MaidstoneDayCtr



Like us on Facebook

Remember we need volunteers
please call 01622 674064 for further information!

Maidstone Day Centre
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01622 674064 manager@maidstonedaycentre.org.uk
www.maidstonedaycentre.org.uk www.homelesscare.org.uk

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