

Threshold

Homeless Care supporting Homeless & Vulnerable People

Threshold newsletter number 14

HOMELESS CARE

On the funding campaign trail!

In the same way that many hands make light work, many small donations can help homeless people in Maidstone to turn their lives around. We are once more on a mission to raise money to run Maidstone Day Centre for the homeless and vulnerable men and women who come to us for help. Like other households in the community, we see our bills go up and up and we are concerned as to how we will continue to make ends meet.

We are very fortunate to have had so much financial support from the people of Maidstone and for this we will be ever grateful but here we are again, asking for your money to help our work to continue. Any amount, however modest, will help to make a real difference to some of the most disadvantaged people in our community. A regular monthly donation of, £10, for example, grows to £12.50 if it is Gift Aided and having an idea of how much income we can expect, gives us the opportunity to plan ahead.

It is a frightening thought that anyone can become homeless; we see people who until recently were in a steady job, living in a nice home with their families until the unexpected happened and there was no money left to pay the rent or mortgage. The causes of homelessness are many. It could be a relationship breakdown, spiralling debt because of a partner's illness, redundancy, a loaded credit card that wasn't a problem with two decent wages or unplanned expenses like having to replace a car, the only means of getting to work. There are many routes to losing it all and it could happen to any one of us. Happily, because of people who care enough to give, homelessness isn't forever, just a difficult path that has to be walked, but not alone. We are there to help, advise and signpost to a better place.

If you or someone you know is in danger of becoming homeless, come and talk to us.

If you are able to help, please get in touch. We would love to hear from you.

You can telephone 01622 674064 or email: contact@homelessinmaidstone.org.uk

Thank you for caring.

For a free copy of our newsletter Threshold: please e-mail your name & address to mcd@homelessinmaidstone.org.uk



Mike receiving food donations from pupils at Maidstone Girls Grammar School



Mike FitzGerald (L) with Keith Taylor Green MEP for South East England and his p.a. Emma Leigh, visiting Food for Thought



Waitrose volunteers transforming the gardens at our hostel Goodsell House.

L to R, Danny Vickers, Kieran Moore, Justin Etuate and Aaron Daniels

Brett –Remember him?



Last time we met Brett he was at a pretty low point in his life, sleeping in a tent and wondering if he would ever have a proper roof over his head. Happily, a lot has changed since then.

"I am in a place of my own now," he told Threshold, "it is a bedsit in a hostel and there is no set time limit to how long we can stay here. I have my own TV in my room. I have a chair and a bed so all I need now is a wardrobe and a table to put my laptop on. The bedsit is in a converted pub – only thing is there is no letter box so we have to go down the road to the office for our mail; mind you it means that we don't get any junk mail!

When we asked about the prospect of finding work, Brett told us that he plans to look for work but that he is suffering from a chest infection, "so I can't do much at the moment," he said. "I am on antibiotics and steroids and I have had a chest X-ray so I am waiting for the results. I would like to get back into engineering, trouble is it is all computerised now." It is some years since he has worked and his skills in toolmaking and lathes will have to be updated. Things move on so fast in industry that this is a problem for many people who have been out of work for a long period of time. As part of our service, we will be using our contacts to find out where he can get help he will need. Meanwhile, Brett is looking forward to meeting up again with his brother who has recently moved from California to Oregon. "He is supposed to be coming over here," said Brett, "we keep in touch and he was very pleased that I had got into my flat. Everything is going well."

Vusa

For most people it is impossible to imagine being homeless but as we always say, it can happen to anyone. 34 year old Vusa is a case in point, a smart, well educated man who only recently lost his home when his relationship broke down.

"I am temporarily homeless and I have been sleeping rough for several weeks now but still carrying on my job," he told us. Vusa is 34 and he came to the UK from Zimbabwe in 2001 to be with his aunt. He studied electrical engineering at college before deciding that it wasn't for him and he switched to a nursing degree access course. Caring is his first love and he continues to work in nursing homes, looking after elderly men and women. Knowing of the strong family traditions in his native Zimbabwe, we asked him for his thoughts.

"It is a different culture, in Zimbabwe old people stay in their homes with the family until they die and you look after them. When I first came here I thought, 'how come people put their parents in homes?' I just didn't understand, but eventually I got it, people here have to go out to work and there is no one at home to look after the elderly relative. When I was growing up my dad became blind and I would come home from school and look after him. He was unwell and often fitting and I had to take him on public transport to the hospital for an appointment so I know how difficult it is."

Alongside his access to nursing course, Vusa has studied Autism and is working to go to university. "I am a hands on person," he told us, "so I didn't take more senior jobs because that would have meant more time at a desk; and I am not doing this because of the money."

Vusa went to the council for help when he became homeless but because he had had no local connection and is a fit, young man he was deemed not to be a priority need. Staff at Lily Smith House hostel, next door to Maidstone Day Centre, couldn't offer him accommodation either but they told him to come and see us. "I have found it very helpful here, it is so homely and the staff are really amazing," he said. "I had heard of places like this but I had never been in one. They treated me so nice here. At the moment I am sleeping in the park or anywhere I can find and it has been pretty cold and uncomfortable. It is such a long night and it was a real shock to find myself sleeping rough. All the guys here at the Day Centre have their problems. You just don't know what other people are going through so you should never ridicule or criticise them."

But things are really looking up for Vusa. "I am quite good with money and I have secured myself a nice flat but I have to wait until next week until the other person moves out. So never say never because becoming homeless could happen to anyone and it must be part of the bigger plan for me."



Police Training

We are always pleased to welcome students from the Kent Police Training School to spend a week or so with us at Maidstone Day Centre, in plain clothes, as part of their training. At the end of each Community Placement we receive a copy of the Student Officer's feedback form and we are grateful for permission from Kent Police to publish PC Turner and PC Vigar's observations.

PC Natalie Turner was already aware of Maidstone Day Centre from her previous role as an Offender Management Officer.

She said: "I appreciate the importance of working with partners such as Maidstone Day Centre, and how vital these links are. Attending the placement has given me a greater knowledge of the wider community the centre supports. I joined drivers in the morning to pick up food from locations which had donated to the charity, then in the afternoon assisted in delivering food parcels to families struggling financially. I also had many opportunities once back in the centre to mix with the clients and to learn about their backgrounds and experiences."

PC Alex Vigar was pleased that the clients of Maidstone Day Centre were willing to engage with him openly. He said: "They were happy to talk and soon my occupation was not a barrier. I feel I gained a good overview of how centres run and how Food for Thought was helping the community. As well as picking up and delivering food, I helped clients use the computer to fill in job applications and benefit claims, I prepared food for them in the kitchen and spoke with them about their lives. "There are many different reasons which cause people to become homeless, often through no fault of their own. I am now more aware than ever of the help available to the homeless and will take what I have learned and draw upon those skills when advising and dealing with homeless people in my role as a police officer in the future."

A word of warning

Killing with kindness

Telegraph readers might have seen the article about a beggar in Maidstone 'who made huge sums of money pretending to be homeless but he actually lives in a £230,000 home, a court has heard.

The 34 year old man lay in doorways pretending to be destitute so that sympathetic shoppers would give him cash. In reality he went home every night to his mother in

a two-storey semi-detached property in an attractive village outside Maidstone, Kent. His act was so convincing that he tricked the head of a homeless charity, who tried to help him'

Our very own Chairman, Mike FitzGerald became involved when he suggested that the man go to Maidstone Day Centre where he could get a hot meal, a shower and clean clothes. He claimed they didn't want him there, which I found strange," Mike said. "He was a very convincing homeless person because of the way he sat and acted."

Bill Moss, Maidstone town centre manager, said that the man had spent months on the streets, receiving "huge sums" and "sees begging as an easy way of making money".

A uniformed security guard said that he appeared daily, sometimes on his own and sometimes with a pet. I don't even think he owns a dog, because I've seen him with at least three different animals," he said.

"It's sickening, but this latest punishment won't stop him. He'll be back. Why wouldn't he? It's free money."

The imposter eventually appeared before magistrates for begging for the third time in just nine months. The £35 fine probably won't deter him though. He was nowhere to be seen in Maidstone as the news of his deception broke, but shoppers criticised him for "taking advantage of the kindness of strangers".

It is really hard to know what to do when you have money in your pocket and you are confronted by someone begging for your help.

Day Centre staff know who in Maidstone is genuinely homeless and our advice to those who want to help is to please give to a recognised local charity such as us Maidstone Day Centre www.maidstonedaycentre.org.uk or telephone 01622 674064

Or Porchlight www.porchlight.org.uk or 0800 567 76 99



Cllr Dan Daley presents Homeless Care Chairman, Mike FitzGerald with cheque from the Liberal Group KCC Christmas Charity.

Helping homeless and vulnerable people at Maidstone Day Centre

Text CARE88 £2 / £5 / £10 to 70070 to donate now. eg CARE88 £5

Homeless Care
Registered charity number 1151412



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 on the top right and returning it to Homeless Care.

**For a free copy of our newsletter Threshold:
please e-mail your name & address to
mdc@homelessinmaidstone.org.uk or write to the
Day Centre or see it online from
www.maidstonedaycentre.org.uk**

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 _____

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I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/ or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities (including churches) and Community Amateur Sports Clubs that I donate to, will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year.

I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

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

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



Chairman: Mike FitzGerald. Company Secretary: Angela Clay **Maidstone Day Centre** 15 Knightrider Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6LP
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HOMELESS CARE



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