

NEWS FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES ERROL CHAMBERS

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LIES, DAMNED LIES AND STATISTICS! DECLAN FLYNN

CHRISTMAS HAMPERS JANET HELDER

WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR?

bench *outreach* Newsletter

Bench Outreach is a crisis recovery project working with alcoholics, drug users and homeless people in South East London. Based in Deptford, our mission is to provide immediate and on-going support to vulnerable people. We offer an inclusive, confidential and non judgemental service founded on equality and the sanctity of human life. We are a Christian charity and believe that the story of the lost son in the Gospel of Luke is as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago. We offer services to those who need us regardless of their background, religion or ethnic origin.

Welcome to our second Bench Outreach Newsletter.

Since we wrote last December, the political landscape around us has changed much and brought with it new challenges. Due to the changing economic climate, many of our clients are now facing uncertainties in terms of the support they receive from the benefit system but also from organisations who have had their budget drastically cut or even stopped...

For example one of our clients was directly and immediately affected by these changes on her recent release from prison. Having battled deep emotional trauma in her childhood and drug addictions for over 25 years, she has never worked. On her day of release, she had to visit her GP in order

to be signed off and claim the benefits she had been receiving in the past. Her GP signed her off for a month and warned her that she would be interviewed by another panel to assess her physical ability to work. This was all new to her and when she arrived to us, her eyes were filled with fear and anxiety. How could she ever believe in herself enough to feel worthy to be trained and apply for a job?

Bench is committed to work with clients like her through these changes; helping them to build their self esteem and to gain social skills. We help people to address their dependencies, we signpost and refer them to appropriate agencies.

The number of clients we are seeing is increasing almost daily and our involvement with individuals can last for months, even years. God in his infinite faithfulness has enabled us to increase our team. Thanks to some successful fundraising initiatives, we have been able to increase Janet's hours and have welcomed Kate, a part time volunteer.



Last September, our chairman Nick Russell-Smith announced he was stepping down. He joined Crisis Recovery UK (now called Bench Outreach) in 2002. His ability to listen to God, to lead us, to manage change, to challenge us and to support us unconditionally has brought Bench Outreach to a very healthy place as an organisation. We are so grateful for all that he has given to us.

I also wish to thank you, our readers for all the encouraging comments we received about our last newsletter. Thank you for supporting us in so many ways – expertise, prayers, friendship, finance and time. More than ever, we need each other to continue this work that we all love so much. ●

Brigitte Gobbe, CEO of Bench Outreach



News from the Board of Trustees

WE ARE REALLY DELIGHTED TO BE

able to introduce to you our newest Bench Outreach trustee, Errol Chambers. To find out more about him, read on..

"Although I was born in Camberwell, I was brought up in Lewisham and have in fact spent all but three months of my life living here.

Growing up, every Sunday was filled (it seemed) with Sunday school. My mother would pack us off to the Parish C of E church, St Margaret's for their 9.30am service, we would get back by 10.45am to be picked up by the minibus from the Pentecostal Church that kept us till 12.30 then finally the Assemblies of God minibus would get us for their service that went on from 2.00pm until... forever! At least they provided food!

My family and I attend Kings Church in London and have done for around 10 years. We are both involved in providing sign language support to our Deaf church members. We also lead a house group for both Deaf and hearing people, which is signing only. We love going to Kings and it is a lively diverse community, where we feel greatly at home.

From quite a young age I realised that I liked to run and developed quite a skill for



both cross country and sprinting, an odd combination, which due to my getting asthma led me dropping the cross country and concentrated on sprinting, which ultimately led to me attaining the silver medal in the 200 metres at the London school championships a long time ago. Sadly, due to injury, my athletic career was cut short. I still maintain a healthy armchair interest in this sport and my support for West Ham United.

I am employed as a social worker and work for a local authority in London, a job which I find both greatly challenging and highly rewarding. Through my experiences

in both church and work, I have grown a heart for those who are marginalised and disadvantaged and seek where I can to make a difference in the lives of those I work with.

I was introduced to Bench Outreach and their work by Jannet and Stephen. Jannet and I had worked together on the board of Governors of the primary school our daughters were going to at the time. I believe that the work that Bench Outreach is doing is making a real difference and I pray I will be able to help in us being able to achieve all that God has set before us." ●

Errol Chambers, Bench Outreach Trustee

First Impressions

I WAS THINKING ABOUT DOING SOME voluntary work when I heard about Bench Outreach. I was at a crossroads in my life: I'd learned to manage many of my own life challenges and I wanted to move forward by supporting others the way I had been supported.

This small charity in Deptford helps vulnerable people through their housing difficulties, and it intrigued me. Being a local service for local people, it seemed human-sized, a good size. I talked to the manager and felt inspired, filled in their application form and was invited for interview.

All was good; I started volunteering two hours a week in autumn 2010. This was perfect for me: a small beginning tailored to where I was at. The Bench Outreach team were very welcoming and enthusiastic people, they made me feel useful and valued. I was invited into the very centre of Bench Outreach and experienced a wide variety of work from the beginning, allowing me

to gain much insight into how Bench Outreach works.

That was the beginning of a real, positive learning curve. I have faced my fears and done it anyway, I've been open to learning and have been encouraged. Seeing the tolerance and respect Bench Outreach have towards people with challenging behaviour is wonderful. People in need of help receive active, non-judgemental listening and focused assessments, and I can see that the general respectfulness really works.

I felt so touched when I came in one week and a desk had been put in the office for me; I had a space and recognition. It made me feel a little bit grown up. My hours have increased since New Year 2011 and my time at Bench Outreach continues to be interesting. I began advocacy training in parallel with my volunteering in February, and the adventure continues ● *Kate*



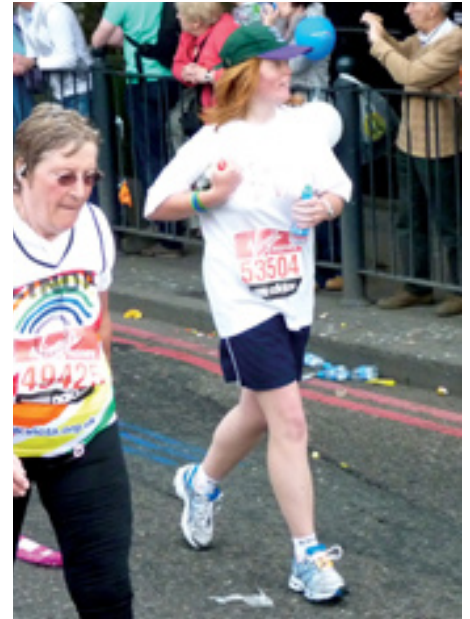
Update from the Jessica Mather's Trust

THE JMT WERE VERY FORTUNATE TO be given a place in the London Marathon by the Mayor of Lewisham, Sir Steve Bullock. Anna Mather's (Jessica's sister) ran on April 17th, having taken the Cardiff Marathon last October in her stride! She wore her special t-shirt with Jessica's picture on it and we supported her along the way from Jessica's Heart and waved our new JMT banner. Anna raised £3,577.53 for the JMT (Jessica Mathers Trust), TCF (The Compassionate Friends) and Bench Outreach. All the money she raised will be divided accordingly between the three charities. Friends of Bench Outreach raised a further £246.68 from the street collection.

The building now renamed " Jessica's Heart" which was purchased by the JMT is slowly but surely being renovated. It is a big project which will take at least 2 years to complete. The ground floor will become offices for Bench Outreach and the top two floors are being converted into flats for letting which will give JMT a regular income. The cellar will become a meeting room primarily for use by the Compassionate

Friends; a group supporting those affected by premature bereavement.

If you would like to find out more about the JMT and to join their mailing list, please visit their website or call us at the Bench Outreach Office ● *Jannet Mathers*



A young supporter: Danielle Vorster with the Bench Outreach-themed kite she made for a school project.

Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics!

MARK TWAIN ATTRIBUTED THESE

words to Benjamin Disraeli and, in this business of dealing with pain and suffering, never was there a more apt description of the monitoring process. The addition of a number to a column in a spreadsheet does nothing to convey the pain and joy that is so often involved for both client and worker in managing even the smallest change in a person's circumstances.

However, every organisation using other people's money must justify how it spends those funds. Here in Bench Outreach, we do that by recording our interventions. This helps us carry a picture of the client's story in our heads – and hearts – and keeps us honest to our funders and ourselves. We meet once a week to review each client's progress, and every six months we compare the facts against targets in the business plan.

So here is the story - in numbers – since July 2010:

New clients seen:

113 (90 male, 23 female)

10 more for Oct to March than estimated in the business plan

Average age:

37.9 years

Housed

32

Referred to appropriate housing provider

32*

Referred to rehab

3

Advice and signposting

29

Advocacy

7

Resettlement Assistance *Outside London*

2

Homeless Prevention

9

** This covers people on waiting lists who will be housed imminently and others with no local connection referred to other boroughs. Sometimes we never get to know how things worked out in the end.*

We are also involved with a further 22 clients as part of our ongoing support package. This usually involves long-term tenancy support and advocacy with other services – housing, primary care, mental health and benefits providers – when needed.

Lastly two current clients and one ex-client died recently. We hope that their relationship with Bench Outreach was as beneficial to them as it was our privilege to be with them for part of their journey ● *Declan Flynn*

Christmas Hampers from Emmanuel Pentecostal Church

THE CONGREGATION AT EMMANUEL

Pentecostal Church based in Lee High Road in Lee have been lovingly putting together hampers for Bench Outreach for the last four years.

This Christmas, myself and Brigitte collected Christmas hampers from the dedicated staff at the church. They even helped us load them into our car! We set off like Santa's helpers to deliver these lovely hampers to both clients who had used our services in the past, and some that still do. I felt like Father Christmas delivering toys to children and felt privileged to be part of something so very special and rewarding.

This was the first time I had delivered a hamper to a client at their home so I was wondering what to expect. We were welcomed with a wonderful hug which proved to me that this was all so worthwhile. What more could I have asked for? It was wonderful.



Our client was very pleased to see us, and wasted no time in making us tea and coffee and biscuits. It was a lovely thought. Our client asked us if he could show us around his new

'I felt privileged to be part of something so very special and rewarding.'

flat too. He was filled with such joy at having a place to call his own. We gave our client his Christmas hamper which also included a wrapped Christmas present, of course, from Father Christmas.

For some clients, our hamper and present were likely to be the only presents they received, and we could have been the only people they would

have had contact with over the Christmas period. We exchanged Christmas cards and it was great to be able to give out a Christmas card designed specifically for us at Bench Outreach.

As we believe that giving should not be restricted just to Christmas, we also hand out hampers all year round. Included in these hampers, are toiletries, tins, long life milk, cereals and biscuits. These items are often seen as a God send by many of the people who receive them.

We would like to say a very special thank you to Marleen and her team at Emmanuel Pentecostal Church. Without them and the support of their church, this ministry could not happen ● Janet Helder

What are friends for?

INDIVIDUALS MEAN A GREAT DEAL TO

us at Bench. We see all our clients as individuals with unique personalities and relationships with both those whom we help and those who support us are at the heart of our mission. This year, we are appealing to individuals like yourself to ask you to consider becoming a Friend and

financial supporter of Bench Outreach. People who give regular amounts make a huge, huge difference to small charities like us. We are able to plan and budget with insight if we can predict how much income is coming in each month. Even a regular gift of £5 would help. We can pay wages, pay utility bills and feel a bit more secure.

We would like to be able to find **50** Friends this year. Would you become one? Please fill in the separate "Become a Friend of Bench Outreach" form and send it back to us. Thank you.

If you are unable to become a regular supporter and would like to help us with a one off donation, you could send a cheque to our office. Don't forget to sign the Gift Aid form if you are a UK tax payer or you could send us a donation through Stewardship Services with whom we are registered.

