



Continuing work for the homeless

The blight of homelessness is as evident now as it was when the Drop-In Centre opened its doors in 2004 to provide hot meals, companionship and support in helping to rebuild lives.

Today about 70 people visit the Drop-In each session and benefit from the services we offer. These include access to hot showers and laundry; IT access to assist the search for work, access to medical services, and support in seeking accommodation. We've bought a new freezer to store donated food, a new washing machine to increase the number of washes available, and a new laptop to help with job searches.

We are grateful to our local pharmacists who provide a health check for service users including for problems linked to diabetes, and to the agencies who provide specialist help for those afflicted with drug and alcohol problems.

A recent initiative, welcomed by service users who come from Eastern Europe, is our help with funding English lessons; this increases service users' confidence and their chances of finding work. Occasional trips into central London help broaden the horizons of some service users, including a trip to the British Museum.

Photo above right shows volunteer Tony with service users. There's a good lunch coming up as you can see from the board behind them: chicken or vegetarian casserole with rice, followed by apple crumble. We continue to have a good supply of chicken thanks to the generosity of Nandos.



Help with moving on ...

The current housing benefits environment presents significant challenges for our service users, especially those from overseas. However we have some success in helping to move people into accommodation. A service user out of detox found temporary housing with the help of one of our volunteers, and this helped him to move on and avoid going back to life on the street. We have also helped two of our long-term users into local housing and a place at the YMCA.



Help with seeking work

We also help in the search for work. Staff and volunteers are trained in assisting service users get the best out of the Government's own jobs website Universal Jobmatch, and in completing Job Seekers' Workbooks. We also support service users in putting together CVs and making job applications online, hence the importance of the IT facilities at the Drop-In.

One of our women service users was successful recently in obtaining temporary work at the Post Office, and some of the men gained short-term jobs in the run-up to Christmas which we hope might turn into longer-term work.

The photo shows Philip working with a service user

Support from Wimbledon Synagogue

Long-term supporters of Faith in Action and the Winter Night Shelter, the Wimbledon Synagogue Mitzvah Day featured the work of both organisations. Guest of Honour (and local resident) Lord Ahmed chopped vegetables to help cook for the Night Shelter and helped young people make a banner advertising the work of the Merton Homelessness Project. The next day he talked about the Synagogue's work for local homeless in his speech to the Department of Communities and Local Government – the government department of which he is a Minister.

Working with Winter Night Shelters

Fourteen faith groups are providing Winter Night Shelters from December to March. The close working relationship between Faith in

Action and the Night Shelters has meant that the majority of those taking up places are referrals from the Drop-In Centre.

Support at Christmas

This Christmas a group of thirteen service users spent a week at the 'Crisis at Christmas' Chalk Farm Centre for guests from Night Shelters across London. During the week the group was well fed and had access to a wide range of medical services and a visit from local hairdressers. They have returned to our Winter Night Shelters fitter and healthier.

Those who came to the Drop-In over the Christmas period enjoyed an excellent Christmas lunch mainly funded by Sainsbury's in Kingston Road, who also donated tins of food. This was supplemented by twenty lunch packs from a local church group. We thank them for their support and generosity.



10th Anniversary: our Chair Yvette Ball cuts the cake with a former service user at our October 2014 event which was attended by Mayor Agatha Kyiginya

CASE Study: Leszek

Leszek, a skilled carpenter, came to this country with his family some years ago and settled in Birmingham. Subsequent family difficulties and other problems meant that he ended up alone and homeless in London, and sought the help of the Drop-In Centre. He has been a regular attender at the Drop-In and, given his very limited English, has benefited from the professional and volunteer support of the Polish-speaking team.

Leszek is now rebuilding his life and looking for work as a carpenter, but applying for jobs is very difficult given his poor English. However his English is improving since Drop-In staff arranged for him to go each week to the Migrants Resource Centre in Victoria for classes on 'Speaking English with Confidence'.

As a result Leszek hopes to find work soon.

Funding the work of the Drop-In

To ensure that we continue to provide and develop services for the homeless and vulnerably housed we need support from across the local community, businesses and faith groups. We are very grateful to those who are supporting us.

We are seeking to broaden the support of those who contribute to our Square Meal Appeal across the faith communities, local communities and businesses in Merton. A monthly donation of £5 can provide two square meals for our service users. For how to give, please visit our website.

Further information

To learn more about the Drop-In and how you can help, contact Andy our project manager on 07843 280419 or email faithinaction@wimbledonguild.co.uk or visit our website.

www.mertonfaithinaction.org