



## News from the Merton Homeless Drop-In

The needs of the Merton homeless and vulnerably housed are as great as ever. The Drop-In continues to provide for their basic needs as well as helping them to move on.

### Help with moving on

We are expanding the services we offer and have links with a wide variety of other organisations which help with move-on in different ways.

**New Opportunities worker Viv** is focussing on individual service users and helping them back into work. She assesses their needs, identifies barriers which are preventing them from progressing, and helps them to overcome these. Among other things, Viv is arranging for service users to go on Kitchen Hygiene and Health & Safety courses to help them into employment.

Volunteers Paul and Johanna are providing a basic **English Language Proficiency course** for those who need this, and much-appreciated certificates are provided after four weeks' attendance. See the photo on the right.



**Caroline, the Outreach worker from the Department of Work & Pensions Job Centre Plus** is in the Drop-In every week, helping service users obtain the correct benefits and pensions, and helping them find employment. See photo.

Volunteers Cathy, Nikki and David are our new **Digital Champions**, helping service users improve their online skills – vital when all applications for jobs, housing, and benefits have to be done online. Thank you to 'Evolve Housing + Support' for their free Digital Champions training workshop.

**Housing and Shelter organisations:** We work with the London Borough of Merton, Kingston Churches Action on Housing, Fresh Start Housing, Glass Door, and many more to try and find the right accommodation for homeless service users. Service users also move into accommodation provided by, among others, the YMCA, Evolve Housing, Emmaus, and SPEAR's Merton hostel. During the winter we work closely with the Merton Winter Night Shelter which provides safe accommodation, hospitality, and so much more for the guests; many are then able to move on to work and secure accommodation.

We continue to work with the Merton-funded **Westminster Drug Project**, the successor to the MACS Project, which helps service users with alcohol or drug addiction problems.

**Former service user Kieran** is housed and happy, proud to have been alcohol-free for 5 years and 5 months, and is now providing support for those still fighting alcoholism. He says that without the Faith in Action Homeless Drop-In he'd be dead by now.

## Case studies

### Marcin

The first thing Marcin needed help with was getting a National Insurance number. Then he completed Paul's English Proficiency course at the Drop-In. With New Opportunities Worker Viv's help Marcin updated his CV, and was then able to find full-time work in a restaurant in Sutton.

### Bob

Bob had worked for forty years without a break. He was devastated to be diagnosed with a serious illness and had to give up work immediately. Bob was totally unprepared for the complications of applying for sickness benefit, and came to us homeless and income-less, while awaiting a major operation. Caroline from the Job Centre helped Bob to apply for benefits, and he found a room in a shared house. Despite his impending major operation, the DWP assessed him as fit for work and stopped his benefits. This meant he would lose his accommodation. Caroline helped Bob appeal against this decision. Eventually he won and received a substantial back payment. This gives Bob some financial security. His operation was successful, and he is now convalescing and regaining his strength. Bob now hopes to find more secure housing back in Merton.

**Looking respectable for interviews:** we provide service users with a shower and second-hand clothing, and there are haircuts too. All this makes them feel very much better about themselves. Volunteer Alvin provides haircuts for our service users, and welcomed Ella and Stewart from Haircuts 4 Homeless. They are helping Alvin learn new skills in cutting women's hair, and in return he is teaching them the best ways to cut Afro-Caribbean hair. See the photo of Ella and Stewart at work in the Drop-In.



### Thank you to Volunteer Dot

Dot our splendid volunteer has retired after working at the Drop-In ever since it opened in 2004, making tea and coffee for service users and providing emotional support – and Christmas presents and Easter eggs too.

**Thank you to all the local organisations which support us financially and provide the goods we need.**

### **Funding the work of the Merton Homeless Drop-In**

To ensure that we continue to provide and develop services for the homeless and vulnerably housed, we need continuing financial support from across the local community.

With our costs rising and homelessness on the increase, we appeal for help in broadening our support. We greatly appreciate the regular donations of generous contributors. Can you help? For how to give, please visit our website.

### **Further Information**

To learn more about the Drop-In and how you can help, visit our website or contact Andy our project manager on 07843 280419 or email [team@mertonfaithinaction.org](mailto:team@mertonfaithinaction.org).

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