



Manifesto

Background

BCAN has been operating in Bristol for some years, and undertakes a range of activities. One of these activities has been the establishment of the Homeless Forum.

The BCAN Homeless Forum ('BHF') started as an experiment: people were invited to a single meeting, and decided that it would be helpful to continue to learn from each other and explore ways in which we can work with each other more effectively. Since the initial meeting in September 2001, the BHF has been meeting every two months.

In November 2004 a steering group was formed to determine whether the BHF could develop further its capacity as a forum. It was at this point the plan for a formal membership was considered, and was agreed at the next BHF meeting.

Ethos & Philosophy

The BHF functions in several ways. We are open to all groups working with homeless people, but we especially focus on the voluntary sector groups, where people generally have less access to other support structures.

In the bi-monthly meetings, we are a 'Community of Practice' serving the active members – please see the document describing this in more detail. We believe it is important that all groups working with the homeless discover how to work together more effectively.

We also provide services to the whole membership – in practice, to anyone who contacts us and asks for help with something related to our area of work. This often takes the form of distributing information to the whole mailing list, but sometimes it involves other forms of advice and assistance.

We would like to see our influence used to publicise the needs of the homeless in Bristol, and to see better resources made available to help them.

Faith in Action

BCAN (the Bristol Christian Action Network) is a Christian organisation, sponsored by the Bristol and District Evangelical Alliance.

The BCAN Homeless Forum was initially established as a resource for the Christian groups in Bristol working with homeless people. However, all groups working with homeless and ex-homeless people in Bristol are welcome: the only requirement is that members respect the beliefs of the groups involved.

Membership Benefits

The real benefits of membership are gained through involvement with the Forum: attendance at the meetings, and participation in the discussions and decision making. As you do this you will:

- Improve your knowledge and understanding of what is happening in the sector.
- Build useful relationships with other BHF members.

- Shape the development of the BHF policies and guidelines to reflect the needs of homeless people in Bristol and your own organisational issues and priorities.

To assist with this you will receive:

- The right to participate in policy making at the BHF meetings.
- A copy of all BHF documents as they are produced and updated.
- Access to the members' section on the website.

In addition, the full Members will be entitled to:

- Voting rights for future decisions / developments.
- A copy of all steering group documents as they are produced and updated.
- One place at the monthly 'Helping Vulnerable People' training.

Aims & Aspirations

The aims of the BHF are to support its members, and to raise awareness of the issues relating to homelessness within Bristol.

Beyond the benefits of membership described above, it is hoped and expected that the BHF will be able to do at least some of the following.

- Provide a platform for joint funding applications, and gain access to funding members.
- Distribute 'windfall donations' among member organisations.
- Share the cost of attending relevant conferences and training events
- Sponsor member to attend selected events on the basis that they feed back to the BHF afterwards.
- Become an 'umbrella' for members with similar needs, such as Criminal Records Bureau checks.
- Provide a confidential evaluation and monitoring service to ensure good practice within member organisations.
- To establish a steering group to co-ordinate the BHF, meeting once a month, and continue to hold forum meetings bi-monthly.

Initial Objectives

- To promote the forum with other organisations and authorities.
- To collectively campaign and promote good practice.
- To establish a membership scheme and encourage full membership.
- To actively share information between members and associated members about their work.

Members' Commitment

- Work together with other BHF members to meet the needs of the homeless people in Bristol more effectively.
- To attend the forum meetings where possible.
- To share and promote good practice.
- Operate, as far as possible, according to the standards and policies adopted by the BHF.
- Share relevant information, policies, procedures, and guidelines.
- Where possible, to share resources with other members
- Communicate about changes to service provision, such as opening times, closure periods (planned and unplanned) and altered facilities.
- Communicate relevant news, such as funding sources, other support opportunities, significant events with service users (such as acts of violence, bans imposed, etc.) and local developments.

Good Practice

It is our hope and intention that the guidelines and policies will reflect the current good practice of the members: we do not intend to impose any unnecessary or irrelevant requirements on anyone.

The purpose of the guidelines and standards is to be:

- Educational: members can use them when inducting new members of staff and volunteers.
- Accountable: we commit ourselves to maintain these public standards and demonstrate our willingness to be accountable for the ways in which we operate.
- Helpful: the existence of public standards should reassure funding bodies that their money will be used wisely and effectively.

The commitment to the guidelines and standards is to uphold them as and when they apply. So, for example, if you do not engage in outreach work, the Outreach Guidelines will not apply to your activities. But, if you do decide to start outreach work, you will have guidelines already in place for you to use.

Charges

Full members will pay an annual membership fee of £40.00. Associate members will not be required to pay a fee, but will be asked to contribute on a voluntary basis £5.00 towards the cost of the meetings and mailings (these figures were correct on 1 February 2005 and should apply until March 2006).