

BCAN
Homeless Forum
'Feeding the Homeless'
Crisis Centre Ministries
6 September 2001

Introduction

The meeting was chaired by Paul Hazelden. Steve Abbott opened with prayer.

Those Present

Susan Harvey, Sisters of the Church; Yanie Nichols, Sisters of the Church; Alison Beard, Key to Life Church; Medina Johnson, Caring at Christmas; Clive Richards, Trinity Tabernacle; Janet Bryant, Easton Salvation Army; Richard Barrett, Bristol Methodist Centre; Andy Paget, Trinity Tabernacle; Graham Wheeler, Bristol Soup Run; Stephen Abbott, BCAN; Richard McKay, St Nicholas of Tolentino Church; Betty Wear, St Nicholas of Tolentino Church and St Vincent de Paul Society; Mary Hopper, St Nicholas of Tolentino Church; Heather Grinsted, Salvation Army Candle Project; Anne White, Bristol City Councillor; Cecilia Bowyer, Vineyard; Helen Hill, One25; Dave Jeal, Woodlands; Ann Banks, BCF; Paul Hazelden, CCM; Trudie Lane; CCM.

Apologies Received

Andrew Dow, Christ Church Clifton; Alastair MacSorley, BCF; Neil Edbrooke, BCF; Kevin Mortimer, St Mary on the Quay; Roger Allen, BCF and Christian Aid

Meeting Content

Anne White

The City Council have been asked to put together a strategy not just for rough sleepers but homeless people in general, including those living in hostels. An important factor is how homeless people can be helped to move forward and supported into meaningful work. The problem is helping people get out of the mess they are in and giving them new hope. Anne had available a copy of the Council Draft Strategy on Homelessness and offered to send copies to people who would be interested. Organisations can also tell the Council that they would like to be involved in parts of this strategy.

Paul mentioned the article in the Evening Post, concerning the Council's proposal to make Bristol into a 'fortress' and move on homeless people who cannot prove a link with the area. This report was based on an inaccurate reading of the document Anne had brought with her.

Places To Get Food

CCM has been trying to put together information on resources available. This was circulated to those present at the meeting with the request that they add/amend as appropriate to their situation and knowledge of resources. The amended document will then be made

available to anyone who is interested. It was requested that provision of food parcels be itemised separately.

Why Are We Feeding People?

Paul Hazelden provided a brief introduction. Clearly, feeding hungry people is a Christian and Biblical response to their need. However, if what we are doing is mainly just providing food, it can be seen as simply enabling people to carry on in their present behaviour on the street – a lifestyle that we know to be ultimately destructive. As well as providing food, we need to be providing people with what they need in order to be able to change.

Dave Jeal from Woodlands said that as a church, they have responded to demand. Between 20 and 30 people from the streets turn up at an evening meeting wanting church. In response Woodlands run 'Open Access' each Thursday. This is a Christian service for homeless people and those with life disrupting problems generally. They are able to learn about God and also get a meal, help with accommodation, detox, etc.

Heather Grinsted from the Candle Project said their aim is to love people unconditionally and to meet the needs as they arrive at the door. If people want to be part of the church, this is encouraged.

Clive Richards from Trinity Tabernacle indicated that their aim is similar. They want to build relationships and trust, and give people a sense that they matter.

Richard Barrett of Bristol Methodist Centre felt that food is an important part of the service they offer. They aim to provide facilities that someone would find in a good home – safety, hospitality, opportunity to build relationships. They want to respond to people who feel they are outside of society.

Helen Hill of One25 said that they aim to provide something people need – a point of contact to make relationship, homemade cakes, and other services they need.

Clive Richards talked about the difficulties arising when homeless people move into a flat and are suddenly on their own, out of their depth and unable to cope.

Anne White – the Council are not keen on food being provided free of charge, as they feel this can have the effect of enabling people to spend all their money on drugs. Christians can, perhaps, provide a buddy system. There could also be the possibility of supported lodging.

Graham Wheeler of the Soup Run – we are dealing with an underclass with very complicated lifestyles. It is important to provide food in a responsible way, which means we must also offer advice.

Dave Jeal – charging people for food could have the effect of putting them in a position where they feel they need to steal even more to feed themselves. Also, his experience of government funding is that it is a minefield.

Richard McKay of St Nicholas of Tolentino introduced the faith dimension and how that can relate to funding. Government/City Council on the one hand encourage us to get involved in service delivery whilst on the other hand make it very difficult for us to do so by not providing help to faith based groups.

Steve Abbott, representing BCAN mentioned the forthcoming BCAN meeting - 4 October, 12 noon at Trinity Tabernacle where Nathan Oley (Steve Chalke's Assistant) of

Faithworks will be talking. He indicated that it would be good to have someone sympathetic from the Council at that meeting.

Richard McKay described his situation. He lives in a house at the end of the church, right in the middle of hostel-land and people knock on his door. He is therefore providing an 'on demand' service. Involving other people in this is not easy; the levels of violence have increased.

Graham Wheeler mentioned Christine Boulton, CAT (Contact and Assessment Team) Manager, who says people can ring the bell at the Cyrenians Day Centre in New Street and get help at any time.

Richard Barrett said he is sympathetic to the question 'are we just colluding?' but has never heard a good argument for not feeding the hungry.

Anne White – Bristol is known as an easy place to get drugs and to beg, which is why we have so many people here. The police and the local authority need to try to deal with this. In terms of cities, we are fourth in the country for violent incidents and problems caused by begging. The new police force, as from 1 October, will try to address this situation by a direct response to beggars. Anne also mentioned the possibility of BCAN as a group having a joint voice with the Council.

Richard McKay – what is happening to help people move on? A bed in a hostel is not enough. Providing something like life skill training can help someone to move on. If the police's response is part of a wider strategy it may be morally justifiable; otherwise what the police are intending may have the affect of further abusing people who have already experienced abuse.

Dave Jeal – the way forward is to find the source of the problem for the individuals we want to help.

Richard McKay pointed out the situation for people serving a prison sentence of less than 12 months: though they have a discharge grant, they have no support or help on leaving prison.

Helen Hill also wondered about the possibility of a mentoring system.

Richard Barrett – attitudes and values surrounding the giving of food are important, aiming not to increase dependency.

Working Together

Paul Hazelden – most of the work of CCM is through volunteers who give their time to work for us, and this can be quite a sacrifice for them. In addition to helping, we encourage them to be better equipped to help people through the training we provide. What is the approach of other groups?

Helen Hill – One25 provide training, some of it mandatory. She wondered at the possibility of joint training and how this may relate to the specialist needs of each group.

Heather Grinsted – the Candle Project has mandatory training.

Medina Johnson – Caring at Christmas provides training to encourage workers to listen effectively, maintain appropriate boundaries etc.

Steve Abbott asked about mental health issues and whether there is the need for specialist intervention.

Paul Hazelden – there seems to be some potential for working together in training volunteers.

Sisters – the availability of volunteers could be an issue. Just a few of their workers may be interested.

Key to Life – an issue for them is physical safety and training on this would be very valuable.

Sisters – they operate zero tolerance and have a notice indicating that where there is any intimidation, violence etc, the police are called.

One25 – they provide training on self defence and assertiveness.

Dave Jeal – in the case of difficult clients, he finds it helpful to carry cigarettes, and handing them out can calm down situations.

Richard Barrett – establishing that you demand respect and give respect, and observing boundaries are important issues. Also handling relationships and incidents, together with helping people to grow as people.

The Way Forward

Cecilia, Vineyard suggested sheet with tick boxes asking ‘would you be interested in ... ?

Other suggestions included:

- a meeting specifically for those interested in joint training;
- visiting one another’s projects;
- contact list of phone numbers, emails; and
- sharing information on ways of getting food.

Paul Hazelden – there seems to be enough material for another meeting to look specifically at food practice and training. There was consensus that a meeting was preferable to circulating bits of paper.

Richard McKay – when the information sheet circulated at the beginning of the meeting is complete, are there issues from that which we would want to discuss? Are the different amounts of provision affecting each other positively/negatively? It is important to recognise the different dynamics between institutional and individual ministry.

There was a suggestion to include organisations such as Cyrenians and there was general agreement to this.

Helen Hill felt that it could be fairly straightforward to consider shared policies and guidelines and it was suggested that organisations circulate policy statements, good practice document, safety procedures, training materials etc. before the next meeting.

Next Meeting

22 November, 8 pm, at City Road Baptist Church.