

**BCAN**  
**Homeless Forum**  
City Road Baptist Church  
21 March 2002

## **Introduction**

Steve Abbott chaired the meeting. Steve opened the meeting with prayer, then welcomed and introduced Christine Boulton.

## ***Those Present***

Steve Abbott (BCAN), Felix Alcock (Woodlands Christian Centre), Richard Barrett (Bristol Methodist Centre), Alison Beard (Key to Life, Bradley Stoke), Christine Boulton (CAT Manager), Philip Budd (Bristol Soup Run Trust), Martin Clement (Key to Life, Bradley Stoke), Sam Colgan (Crisis Centre Ministries), Charlotte Coppin (Bristol Vineyard), Debbie Foster (One25 Project), Matthew Germain (Woodlands Christian Centre), Zoë Germain (Woodlands Christian Centre), Stuart Grinsted (Candle Project, Salvation Army), Paul Hazelden (Crisis Centre Ministries), Medina Johnson (Caring at Christmas), Richard Reddrop (Emmaus Bristol), Clive Richards (Trinity Tabernacle), Dorothy Richie (Christchurch Breakfast Run), Gary Underhill (Woodlands Christian Centre) and Graham Wheeler (Bristol Soup Run Trust).

## ***Apologies Received***

Apologies had been received from Heather Grinsted (Candle Project, Salvation Army), Martin Spink (Bristol Soup Run Trust) and Jill Thomas (Crisis Centre Ministries).

## ***Previous Meeting***

There were no corrections to the notes of the previous meeting. Paul had been unable to find details of any child protection training that Müllers will be running, although they have provided details of someone who could be asked to run such training.

## ***Contact Details***

Nobody had objected to the suggestion that we circulate the contact list between members, so Paul Hazelden distributed a copy of the names, organisations and email addresses of people on the BHF contact list. He also provided an updated copy of the 'Food for Homeless People' handout, which now includes details of the Tuesday lunchtime food provided by 'Open Door' at Ivy Church.

## **Christine Boulton**

Christine is the Manager of the Contact and Assessment Team ('CAT'), which arose from a government initiative, and is funded by the Rough Sleepers Unit. She set up the "Practitioners' Forum" last year to facilitate communication with the organisations working with homeless people in Bristol.

## ***Health and Safety***

Christine is very concerned about the safety of people working on the street with homeless people, as well as the safety of the rough sleepers and the need to help them move on. Evan Jones, the recent murder victim on Stokes Croft, was someone who worked with homeless people. It is not clear if this was a factor, but it should make us more concerned about physical safety on the street.

Organisations have a legal duty to provide adequate health and safety training for both their staff and their volunteers.

The key message for people working on the street is: trust your instincts. If a situation feels unsafe, get out. "God doesn't want you to get killed!"

- Be very careful about lone working.

Whenever possible, you should work in teams. Be careful about where you go – especially derelict buildings, which are very dangerous. Agree a signal beforehand: if anyone feels uncomfortable, they give the signal and you all leave straight away without questions. One signal that has been used is: "Isn't it time to pick up George?" – this works when nobody on the team is called 'George'.

- Be careful about where you park: it is better to leave the car somewhere safe and well lit and walk a bit further. You do not want to be going into a badly lit area with few people around late at night to recover your car.
- When you head back to your car, have your car keys in hand: you do not want to be standing by the car looking for your keys.
- Wherever you go, think about your exit route. Remember, you could need to make a rapid exit at any time, and you are more likely to need a rapid exit if people are blocking your way.
- Remember that most problems are not with rough sleepers, but members of the public at pub kicking-out time.
- Don't wear trainers: wear shoes with good solid soles – Doc Martens, or similar.
- Have Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and tuberculosis (BCG) inoculations.
- Be aware that you can pick up Hepatitis from saliva, such as the saliva on a plastic drinking cup (the HIV virus is far more fragile, and is very unlikely to be passed on in this way).
- When you go out, don't take handbags or purses, credit cards or jewellery – don't put temptation in people's way, even if you will only be out for a short time.

Possibly the most serious problem is not the people on the street, but the people in B&B and asylum seekers. Christine believes that there is more violence on the streets these days, probably due to increased drug (especially crack) use, although some of this violence could be a consequence of the Mental Health Act.

The question was asked: is there a formal procedure for making a risk assessment of outreach work? Unfortunately, as far as we know, there is neither a formal nor any standard procedure at present. It was suggested that the BHF should start to draft one.

## ***Liability***

Linked to the question of health and safety is the issue of liability. Organisations that send people on outreach work have a duty of care to the people going out, whether these people are members of staff, full or part time, or simply volunteers. This duty of care requires that the workers have received adequate training and that they are given an appropriate level of supervision in the activities they undertake. This duty rests on the shoulders of the leaders of the organisation.

It was noted that the Bristol Soup Run Trust has insurance cover for all volunteers while they are on outreach work, but it seems likely that some other groups doing soup runs do not have this cover. Providing insurance, of course, does not reduce the need for adequate training and supervision.

## ***Strategy and Assessment***

Christine said we need to be sure that we are reaching the right people. They can be very manipulative. Are we helping them move on from the streets? This produced a mixed reaction: some people were very much in agreement, others felt that simply feeding hungry people was valid in itself and does not always need to be part of a more comprehensive programme.

It was suggested that the BHF should decide a policy on this subject, but Paul suggested that there was no need for a policy on whether groups should be providing food alone. He thought there was a role of the BHF in encouraging people and groups to provide the best possible service to homeless people, and for many groups this would involve much more than just providing 'soup with a smile.'

For the groups aiming to help people move on, referral and follow-up are both needed. This means they will need to take notes, which prompted the question of a confidentiality policy, discussed below. They will also need to collect evidence that they are actually helping people.

Christine can help you evaluate the service you provide and work more effectively. She will visit projects, and would welcome invitations – she can be contacted on 0117 907 9916. It is also important to understand the reality of helping homeless people and drug addicts. People often go through treatment many times, and some never succeed. Three quarters of the money to help people with drug problems goes into the criminal justice system.

## ***Accommodation***

If people are homeless, the first thing to do is to get them into accommodation with support. The Outreach Team have access to both hostels and treatment: they have access to £58,000 to purchase treatment.

You can contact the Outreach Team on 0117 955 6745. The office is open in principle between 8 am and 4 pm Monday to Thursday and between 6 am and 2 pm on Friday, but you will usually get an answering machine as they are generally out of the office making contact. If you leave a message, they will get back to you as soon as possible.

It is also possible to visit the Outreach Team: they are based at 1 New Street. Use the side

entrance, not the main Cyrenians entrance, and ring the doorbell marked 'Outreach'. The best time to call at the office is between 9 am and 10 am, but it is wise to ring first and check someone will be there. At night, the best option is for people to go to the Night Centre.

## ***Police***

The Police are our allies, but be careful about how this is viewed by the clients. It should be a priority for you to make contact with your local Beat Manager.

Working with the Police used to be very difficult, but there have been huge improvements over recent years, and they are generally very skilled in dealing with homeless people and the issues they raise.

## ***Confidentiality***

There was some discussion concerning the need for a confidentiality policy, and what such a policy should say. It was noted that confidentiality is not the same thing as total secrecy, and there will be times when confidential details need to be shared with a manager, other members of staff, or even other organisations.

No confidentiality policy will ever cover (that is, tell you what to do in) all situations. Individual judgement, wisdom and experience will always be vital, whatever policy is in place.

People can get worried about complying with the details of a confidentiality policy. Part of the answer is to remember what the policy is there for: to enable us to help clients and to protect the workers and organisations. Christine described her experience of working with a confidentiality policy: it reminds workers of the basic framework within which they need to operate, and offers something simple and helpful to say to the clients. In essence, the message is that we aim to maintain confidentiality but there are some exceptions.

## **Other Business**

### ***Training***

Various training opportunities were mentioned. Possibly the most immediately relevant for the majority of groups in the BHF is the one day event being organised by Life for the World on June 13 at Trinity Tabernacle. This is being offered for the bargain price of £10 for the day. The title is "Equipping the Church in an Addictive Society, a training and Envisioning Day". It will be led by Pat Prosser, who is an excellent communicator.

The other sources of training included: Dr Ian Bourne, who might be able to provide training in Anger Management; Gerry Graham from English Churches, who can provide training in Mental Health, Drugs and Alcohol and Anger Management; and the Police

CCM is planning to organise some training events, probably with an outside speaker and a modest charge for each event, on the basis that people value the things they pay for. If any other organisation would like to be involved, please talk with Paul.

## **Supported Housing Forum**

Steve Abbott reported on the Supported Housing Forum meeting he had attended on behalf of BCAN.

There will be a 'Supported Housing Festival' in June, which aims to raise the profile of the sector. As part of the festival, there will be an exhibition in The Galleries, probably on 10 June.

Sue Strickland presented the Council's new Homelessness Strategy, which will be formally launched on 25 March. (Post-meeting note: there is a copy of this policy available for inspection in the Crisis Centre office.)

The next Supported Housing Forum meeting is on 9 July. If anyone from the BHF would like to go and represent us, please contact Steve for more details.

## **Other Places**

One very relevant question was asked: how do other cities coordinate feeding homeless people? We know that the Salvation Army does this in London. People were asked to go away and see if they can discover what other places in the UK (or abroad?) do.

## **Shared Policies**

Some policy and other documents were made available for people to pick up. These included:

- No Home & Alone (educational material aimed at school children)
- VOSCUR Membership Forms
- Bristol Soup Run Trust – Code of Practice
- Cold Weather Group Volunteer Handbook (some extracted guidelines)

If anyone would like a copy of one or more of these documents (apart from *No Home & Alone*, of which we only have a single reference copy left), they are available from the Crisis Centre office.

## **Next Meeting**

The next meeting has been arranged for Thursday 23 May 2002, 7.30 pm, City Road Baptist Church (side entrance). It was agreed to spend more time looking at the issues surrounding outreach work, and Richard Barrett will guide the discussion.