

**BCAN**  
**Homeless Forum**  
City Road Baptist Church  
23 May 2002

## **Introduction**

Steve Abbott chaired the meeting. Steve opened the meeting with prayer, and then welcomed everyone.

## ***Those Present***

Steve Abbott (BCAN), Richard Barrett (Bristol Methodist Centre), Philip Budd (Bristol Soup Run Trust), Sam Colgan (Crisis Centre Ministries), Stuart Grinsted (Candle Project, Salvation Army), Nigel Hardman (Nailsea Methodist Church), Paul Hazelden (Crisis Centre Ministries), Medina Johnson (Caring at Christmas), Val Moore (Christchurch, Clifton), Dorothy Richie (Christchurch Breakfast Run) and Graham Wheeler (Bristol Soup Run Trust).

## ***Apologies Received***

Apologies had been received from Anni Davey (Crisis Centre Ministries), Mary Hopper (Saint Nicholas of Tolentino), Rev Richard McKay (Saint Nicholas of Tolentino), Clive Richards (Trinity Tabernacle), Jill Thomas (Crisis Centre Ministries) and Betty Wear (Saint Nicholas of Tolentino).

## ***Previous Meeting***

There were no corrections to the notes of the previous meeting.

## ***Matters Arising***

Minutes are available from the Supported Housing Forum. The next meeting of the forum is on 9 July: Medina Johnson will represent the BHF and report back at our next meeting.

The Shared Guidelines on Outreach Work were briefly discussed and welcomed. A few changes were suggested. Paul will make these changes and then circulate the notes to the BHF members.

## **Continuing Discussion on Soup Runs**

### ***Introduction***

There was a strong feeling that the problems of working in the voluntary sector are not always appreciated by those in more formal groups and the statutory sector.

We need to make a strong defence of the principles underlying the work we are doing: there is always room for improvement in our practice, or reconsideration of the details of our work, but these are comparatively minor considerations. The important point is that the voluntary sector provides vital support for homeless people, and offers a level of personal

care that is difficult or impossible to duplicate in the statutory services. It appears that Government-funded projects often consider the work we do is not appropriate, while the truth is that much of the official work would not be successful without the voluntary groups working alongside the statutory ones.

One example was given to illustrate the attitude of official and semi-official groups towards the voluntary sector. The Greater Bristol Foundation had turned down at least three of the groups present (Bristol Methodist Centre, Bristol Soup Run Trust and Crisis Centre Ministries) when they applied for money from the Broadmead collection scheme. When the groups objected, the GBF changed its guidelines and gave them grants. It is hard to understand why, at first, groups working directly to help homeless people were not considered suitable to receive money that had been donated for the purpose of giving help to homeless people.

It was agreed that we need to put more effort into explaining the work we do, and the need for it, so that people will understand why it is not only valid but also essential. We touch the lives of people that the official agencies cannot reach.

It was also pointed out that a lot of the workers with official agencies are on short-term contracts, and have less experience than many of the volunteers who work with us – even if they have received better training. And we can improve the amount and quality of the training offered to our volunteers, even if we cannot bring it up to the level of a vocational qualification.

Some people present wanted to know if there is any evidence to back up the view that most people are on a con? Our contact with homeless people suggests that most of those we help have genuine need, even if they lie about details of their circumstances.

Very strong feelings were expressed about the idea that Soup Runs ‘keep people on the streets.’ Those who express this view were challenged to try living for a few days on the food provided by Soup Runs, and see for themselves if it is such an easy life. The truth is that life on the streets is hard and nasty: nobody lives that way unless they have no choice, or unless the alternatives open to them are even worse.

There needs to be a variety of help – no single package, method or approach to helping people will be appropriate or right for everyone. Variety is essential, which means that a degree of duplication and overlap needs to be built into the system.

## **Numbers**

It is hard to say precisely how many are sleeping on the streets, and how many come out for the food the breakfast runs and soup runs provide. There is a high turnover of people sleeping rough, and there are always new people turning up. Many of them sleep in car parks, and are not obvious if you simply walk the streets.

The Police move on the homeless people they find early in the morning. To avoid this, the rough sleepers often hide away, sometimes behind bins or in other corners where they will not be found, and therefore do not feature in the statistics.

We also need to take into account the unstable and chaotic lives of the people selling the Big Issue: it has been observed over a period of 2 to 3 weeks that most of them have changed. The number of Rough Sleepers has gone down (the current official figure is in the mid to high

teens), but the number of 'No Fixed Abode' has gone up considerably.

Soup Runs help far more than just the Rough Sleepers, and this is a deliberate strategy. We must remember that hostels are not homes! People in hostels need a great deal of support, and some of it is provided through Soup Runs. And if people who have been found accommodation use the Soup Run occasionally, then the Soup Run has a role in 'Tenancy Sustainment'.

### ***The Aim of Soup Runs***

The aim of the BSRT was described in four words: food, contact, care and advice. It is their intention to help people move on from sleeping rough if and when they are ready.

But some people doing a Soup Run know very little about the services available, and all they can do is to hand out soup and sandwiches. It was suggested that people who volunteer once a month can't generally offer any more than this. If advice and information is an important part of the service, further training for volunteers is going to be a part of the answer. It would be interesting to find out how many of the people who volunteer once a month would be prepared to take part in some training.

Finding out more about the people being helped by the Soup Run is an attractive idea, but some people feel that the idea of something formal like a questionnaire would be far too intrusive.

### ***Insurance***

Nick Ball (the BSRT Treasurer) has negotiated insurance cover for volunteers. Paul will circulate details of the insurance cover.

The question of 'Needlestick Injury' was discussed. It is possible to buy a service from the BRI to cover this risk.

It is important that any incidents are properly recorded and monitored, both from the Health and Safety perspective and for insurance purposes.

## **Other Business**

### ***Open Day***

Paul invited everyone to the Crisis Centre Open Day on Friday 12 July, between 2 and 7pm.

### ***Shared Policies***

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

- Training Opportunities
- Shared Guidelines – Outreach Work
- Shared Guidelines – Bristol Soup Run Trust Code of Practice
- Shared Guidelines – Cold Weather Group Volunteer Handbook extracts
- VOSCUR membership Form

- Accommodation in Bristol for Homeless People
- Food in Bristol for Homeless People

If anyone would like a copy of one or more of these documents, they are available from the Crisis Centre office.

## **Next Meeting**

The next meeting has been arranged for Thursday 18 July 2002, 7.30 pm, City Road Baptist Church (side entrance). The main focus will be on Training.