

**BCAN**  
**Homeless Forum**  
City Road Baptist Church  
15<sup>th</sup> January 2004

## Introduction

All welcomed to the meeting and all wished a Happy New Year.

### *Those Present*

Max Beseke (St Pauls Advice Centre), Charlotte Coppin (Bristol Vineyard), Michelle Evans (Bristol City Council), Paul Hazelden (Crisis Centre Ministries), John Knuckey (Carmel Christian Centre), Ailsa McWilliam (Caring at Christmas), Susanna Misson (Hope Centre & Christ Church), Val Moore (Christ Church, Clifton), David Perry (Emmaus Bristol), Ginny Short (Bristol Vineyard), Kevin Stone (Candle Community Centre, Salvation Army), Mark Stonham (Redland Parish Church), Sue Strickland (Bristol City Council) and Graham Wheeler (Bristol Soup Run Trust).

### *Apologies Received*

Steve Abbott (BCAN), Anni Davey (Crisis Centre Ministries), Rhi Day (One25 Project), Helen Hill (One25 Project), Barry Penn (Bristol Methodist Centre) and Clive Richards (Trinity Tabernacle).

### *Previous Meeting*

The notes were approved without change.

### *Matters Arising*

Designing of Publicity – Paul has not yet received any offers of help, or suggestions of who to contact.

<b>Action:</b> Everyone
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There have only been a few comments on the idea of membership fees for the BHF, and as yet no suggestions concerning what might be a fair level.

<b>Action:</b> Everyone
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The idea of a BHF Newsletter has received positive feedback, but nobody has yet offered to help produce one.

<b>Action:</b> Everyone
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***Caring at Christmas*** – the best publicity had been for them was on the back of the Council pay slips. They had not had any response from the big advert in Broadmead; however the Evening Post was a good method of publicity, as was Radio Bristol.

***The Hub*** – The new edition of the Bristol Homeless Directory is meant to be out in January 2004. The Housing Options Pack should also be out this month.

## Information Share

**Caring at Christmas.** The police had only been called once this year. The entertainment and the services provided had been very good; even the hairdresser stayed until late.

The major concern is to do with drugs and the amount of drugs on the premises. They are concerned as to what is best to do, and therefore need to have a meeting with the Police, Bristol Drugs Project and the trust (who own the building) to help with ideas.

**Soup Run.** There are currently 3 or 4 nights where volunteers are needed at the moment. There have been two resignations. There are new volunteers coming forward and so four new teams are being prepared to fill up the gap on two Sundays a month and two Thursdays a month. The numbers being fed vary from three to four people up to about 20 people depending on the days.

**St Pauls Advice Centre.** The centre provides for specialist legal advice concerning housing, debt and employment matters. The housing work deals a lot with private tenancies including landlord harassment and illegal eviction. They work closely with the Hub and Shelter. The *Bristol Debt Advice Centre* is there on a Monday afternoon to help advise.

**Val Moore.** The breakfast run is still going on a Saturday morning. She had noticed a change in the numbers and believed these numbers to have been reduced due to the provisions being made by the Caring at Christmas team although there were a number of people who hadn't attended either, and she was surprised at this.

**Emmaus Community.** They have been open some three months now, and have a maximum capacity of 18 people. At the moment they have between 8 and 10 Companions, and the community is going well. The workshop is ready to open next Thursday to the public where they will be selling goods that have been repaired and refurbished. There is literature available if people would like it.

**Candle Community Centre.** They are starting a Fathers' group in February to provide family support. Peter Bruce is overseeing this. They are only doing the breakfast run on a Monday morning at the Bus Station due to lack of numbers.

## Streetwise Initiative

Sue Strickland and Michelle Evans from the Bristol City Council spoke about the Streetwise initiative. The aim is to tackle begging and work with people who are sleeping rough and who are homeless.

The Council employs Michelle Evans as the Begging Co-ordinator: she works on the ground, meeting the people concerned.

Streetwise was launched 18 months ago. It deals with a chaotic client group who are often unable to sustain treatment and are violent. There had been a visible increase in begging in Bristol and there were justifiable concerns from the public.

Streetwise is the first pilot of a national scheme. It has been helped in its development by the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Three main areas to tackle :

1. Promote a campaign to educate the public to stop giving money to beggars as this

just helps them sustain their lifestyle on the street. A large number of beggars are using up to £100 a day on heroin and this is funded by the public.

2. Provide help and support to beggars in their drug treatment. Figures to date suggest that 65% of the people going into treatment through this programme are still in treatment 6 months later, which is an amazing achievement.
3. Clear message that Bristol will not tolerate persistent begging on the streets and people who do this will be arrested. To date, three people have been taken to court for breaching their injunction preventing them from begging, as they will not engage in treatment.

A great deal of the success to date comes about through the flexibility of the scheme. Michelle is often out on the streets until 2 – 4 am meeting with the people. There are drug treatment workers who have about 12 clients each but who are flexible and through this are able to keep them in treatment. Michelle works alongside police officers on the streets as this client group are often violent and can carry weapons.

When the Streetwise initiative was launched there was a great deal of criticism including moral arguments around civil liberties stating that people's civil liberties will be infringed by stopping the public from giving beggars money. But having spoken to beggars on the street they say that they need people to stop giving them money so that their supply is cut off.

Streetwise has 24 priority places in drug treatment places and so far the initiative seems to be working as the numbers of rough sleepers has been reduced. It is a 'tough love' approach.

A lot of organisations tell beggars that they must go to the Hub, but as most of the guys on the street don't have diaries and cannot keep appointments and are up most of the night getting money for their next fix, they are not able to go down this route. Most of them do not have a GP and a lot of GPs will not prescribe them medication such as methadone anyway. They (the beggars) also tend to play the different services off each other.

What Michelle and the other workers do is talk to them about their history, where they are sleeping, where they have come from, why they are begging and what can we do to stop them from begging. A lot of the guys feel that as the public give them money, they might as well stay on the streets, as no one cares any other way.

Streetwise have therefore taken a carrot and stick approach – after 5 arrests if they keep begging then they will have an injunction taken against them; if this is breached they will be back in court. But all through this process, Michelle is still working with them, trying to get them into a priority drug treatment program and off the streets.

At the moment the referral time into a drug treatment program is only 3 weeks as they have a number of priority places. This is because Streetwise is paying for the treatment and for people's scripts; they have also got extra workers who can get referrals in quicker. They had initially thought that people might deliberately beg in order to get the benefit of their services but this had been proved not to be the case.

As from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2003, begging has become a recordable offence, which means that the person arrested is now fingerprinted, has photos and DNA taken.

Some 95% of the people they deal with have previous convictions for robbery, shoplifting, burglary and/or violent crime. If they remain on drugs they will still commit crime.

Graham Wheeler raised the point that he had been giving out blankets to people if they were sleeping rough, but as Michelle pointed out, often these guys will sell the blankets for money so that they can buy more drugs.

Streetwise have also found that forcing people through the drug treatment program produces the same outcome as if they had done the treatment program voluntarily.

Streetwise is continuing to battle for funding. They have funds up until the end of March 2004 and Michelle has funding for her job after that because the job has been 'mainstreamed' now, but funding for the other aspects is difficult and it is a real struggle.

Questions were asked about what constitutes begging. Begging is defined in the *Vagrancy Act 1824*, which says a beggar is someone who places themselves in a position to gather alms. So they don't have to ask for money to be begging.

Streetwise is also working closely with the Big Issue, who have taken on some of their clients. 75 people are now vending for them. There needs to be a stricter policy in place though regarding the wearing of badges as there are a number of non-genuine / legitimate vendors.

There was a discussion on the pros and cons of taking food to people on the streets:

1. The public feel intimidated by this and for their own safety, which is a genuine concern. Their fear is mostly based around the fear of crime.
2. It is better for there to be a place for beggars to go to get food, rather than handing it to them where they are, as this simply sustains them on the street. This is why it is important for soup runs to be at specific locations at specific times. It would be helpful if there were a list of central meeting points and times for all the groups involved in soup runs and food distributions. Although people agreed that it is sometimes difficult to organise volunteers, we decided to try and fix some locations at the next meeting.

We discussed the differences between beggars and buskers: you cannot be arrested for simply busking. However, the busker needs to play continually (apart from stopping to have a drink, etc.), and if they start to just ask for money then they can be arrested. It is an interesting question whether music being played badly, e.g. by people who are simply playing anything so as to be thought of as a busker and avoid arrest, could constitute anti-social behaviour.

It was also queried whether this initiative simply acted to push people further out of the centre and into different areas. It appears, however, that this has not been the case as a lot of drug addicts have severe health problems and are unable to walk very far away from the drug dealers.

It is difficult to foresee what the position will be in 5 years time as it depends on a number of factors such as :

1. What the drug market is especially with regards to the categorisation of drugs.
2. What people's income levels are
3. What the accommodation situation is like in Bristol including the level of support that is provided for private tenancies. Bristol is at saturation point at the moment.

We discussed the impact of Street Wardens. The difficulty is that they have limited power, and in some cases no power at all, and they are often simply abused, chased and spat at.

The key thing though is for there to be a link up of all the systems including the voluntary sector. Partnerships need to be formed between all groups to be effective together. There also has to be a balance between strategy and just getting on with the job.

## Other Business

**Paul Hazelden** to amend and update the list of Food in Bristol for Homeless People.

**Paul Hazelden** also discussed the NTA (National Treatment Agency) documents, which deal with the way we keep records and store information on other people. We discussed the Data Protection Act and the fact that people will need to make a reasonable search of their filing system to see if the name is mentioned. There is more information in the documents which Paul has copies of if anyone requires any further information. The NHS will be producing further documents in the future on helpful related matters.

**Vineyard** confirmed that they are not doing soup runs at the moment, and will shortly come to a decision about their future strategy in this area.

**First Aid Training.** Clive Richards was not there to confirm dates and availability. The possible dates are 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> May 2004, which are two Saturday afternoons. The course will be a recognised “Life Saver” Course and there will be Certificates of Attendance given.

**Phoenix Training.** There is further information available with regard to Phoenix Training and tips on fundraising.

**Shelter Conference.** 3rd February 2004 in Covent Garden London. This day conference on “Beyond the Homelessness Act” goes into the matters concerning the prevention of homelessness and what has developed since the Act. Please speak to Paul Hazelden if you require any further information.

**Bristol Equalities Network.** There is to be a course on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2004 between 10.00 am and 12.30 pm for anyone that is interested. The event is free, but you have to book in advance.

**BCAN Website.** It is now live! If you would like any information put on it please send it to Paul and he will try to respond in a day or so if there is not too much information.

**The Hub.** It was reported that The Hub is bringing out a new, updated version of the Bristol Homeless Directory, and this should be available by January 2004.

## Other Documents available

1. **No Secrets in Bristol** documentation – this deals with matters relating to vulnerable adults and there is a lot of useful information contained here for people who work in this type of environment. Paul Hazelden can get copies and pass them on if people are interested.
2. **Compact** – This sets out the Council’s obligations to the voluntary sector and what the expectations are. Please notify Paul should you require a copy of this.
3. **Basic Guide for Small Charities** – helpful information in this document on how to maintain small charities. It is quite an accessible document.

4. *Isaac* – International Group looking at Addiction. There is a course in Birmingham on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2004. If anyone is interested please speak to Paul.

The usual set of documents were made available for people to look at and pick up, along with a few new ones:

- [Volunteer Training 2003-2004](#) – BCAN and CCM
- [Information about the Volunteer Training 2003-2004](#) – BCAN and CCM
- [Outreach Work](#) – Shared Guidelines
- [Bristol Soup Run Trust Code of Practice](#) – Shared Guidelines
- [Cold Weather Group Volunteer Handbook extracts](#) – Shared Guidelines
- [Client Details](#) – Caring at Christmas
- [Feedback Form](#) – Caring at Christmas
- [Weekly Programme](#) – The Candle Project
- [Membership Form](#) – Voscur
- [Accommodation in Bristol for Homeless People](#) – CCM
- [Food in Bristol for Homeless People](#) – CCM
- [Confidentiality Policy](#) – CCM
- [Official Numbers of Homeless People in Bristol](#) – CCM
- [BCAN Homeless Forum: An Introduction](#) – BHF
- [Communities of Practice](#) – BHF
- [Bristol Employment Action Team \('BEAT'\)](#) - CCM

If anyone would like a copy of one or more of these documents, they are available from the Crisis Centre office, and on the BCAN web site ([www.bcan.org.uk](http://www.bcan.org.uk)).

### *Future Meetings*

As we have agreed to meet on the Thursday evening following the second Saturday of every other month, the next few meetings will be 18 March, 13 May and 15 July, all between 7:30 and 9:00 pm.

**Please Note:** The meeting on the 18th March will be at the Candle Community Centre on the corner of Ashley Road and Brigstocke Road (The Salvation Army Building). There is a car park there for our use.