

The Manna Society Newsletter

Christmas 2024

Working with homeless people & those in need



Every act of kindness matters

By

Karolina Muszynska

Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



We are back in the winter season and that certainly means more pressure on homelessness services. It is getting colder and being outside is becoming very challenging. Winter is definitely the most intense time for the Manna Day Centre. We are busy serving people; collecting Harvest donations; assisting them to find accommodation; advising them on their welfare entitlement so they can cope with raising energy costs; distributing warm clothes, gloves and hats. Our customers are often more frustrated and that can make the atmosphere more tense in the centre.

It will never cease to amaze me how many people get involved to make winter more manageable for homeless people. The world we live in is far from perfect, there is a lot of suffering and poverty, but I believe that as long as there are people who are willing to offer their time, money and skills to relieve it – it is not all lost. We are changing the world and every act of kindness matters. Irrespective of what religion or spiritual path we are practising, we are missing the point if we are not kind towards other living beings. Love, compassion and kindness are the best life guides.

The untold benefit of my work is that I am meeting a lot of amazing likeminded people. My colleagues, our volunteers, people from partner organisations, those who bring us food and clothes, those who send us unused oyster cards and many others. Thank you! This work can be very challenging but knowing that there is so many of you supporting us makes a huge difference. Let's continue working towards a juster society together!

In this newsletter I will share a story of one of my Eastern European clients, who we have helped this year. I have chosen him as he is a very inspiring character, a fighter who does not give up. N. is a gentleman from Latvia in his early forties. He initially approached me for help in July this year. He was really down and sad. He told me that he came to London to look for a job but on the day of arrival, he was attacked, and all his belongings were stolen. What was even worse was that he was assaulted and that resulted in him being taken to the hospital as he had lost consciousness. He regained it in A&E and there he realised that his right hand had lost the ability to hold things. The doctor in the hospital carried out checks and advised him that there did not seem to be any danger to his life and that the issue with his hand should resolve itself within a few weeks. N. was upset as most of his life he was working and did not like the idea of being dependent on benefits.

N. told me that he lived in the UK from 2017. For the past 5 years he lived and worked in Leicester but following a relationship breakdown he decided to move to London for a fresh start. He made a claim for Universal Credit (UC) but now did not have access to this account and was not sure what to do. We learned that he has pre-settled status despite being in the UK much longer than 5 years. We assisted him with a new mobile phone and sim card so he could regain access to his Universal Credit. We helped him inform the Department of Works & Pensions (DWP) that he no longer lived in Leicester and asked for the next appointment to be booked at the London Bridge Job Centre. We signposted him to a GP practice to get the issue with his right hand addressed. He was given a sick note as he was not fit to work and assisted him to inform Universal Credit about it.

The next step we took was to switch his pre-settled status to the settled one. I assisted him to do this before my summer annual leave. When I came back, he already had been granted Settled Status, his Universal Credit

was flowing, and we could start to looking for housing for him.

We did few a housing referrals and in mid-October we found accommodation for him in a hostel. His hand is getting better, and he is hopeful that he will be able to work soon. We had a chat in my office, and I learned that he was once in the army in his country. He was sent on a peace keeping military operation to another country and spent 2 years there. He returned traumatised by what he experienced there and, as he did not receive emotional support in his home country, he started to self-medicate with alcohol. That had a detrimental effect on his family life and led to a relationship breakdown and him drinking even more. He decided to move to the UK and for a fresh start. He went into therapy and stopped drinking completely. He has been now abstinent for 3 years.

N. amazes me with his positiveness and endurance. While he was waiting for his first payment of UC, he would walk sometimes for hours in London to get from one day centre to a soup run in another part of London, in order to get fed through the day. He would never complain but soldier on with a smile on face. I am very happy we managed to help him.



The Increasing Crisis of Homelessness in England

By

Bandi Mbubi

Manna Centre Director



Christmas is meant to be a time of joy, warmth, and community. It's a season where many of us gather with loved ones and share the comforts of home. Yet, as we prepare for the festivities, the reality for many in England is far from this picture. The state of homelessness has become more dire than ever, casting a sombre shadow over the holiday season.

Over the past ten years, the situation for homeless people in England has steadily worsened, with a sharp increase over the last 2 years. At the Manna Centre, our dedicated team has witnessed this firsthand. We continue to do everything we can for those seeking our help – offering meals, healthcare, shower facilities, computer access, and clothing. However, one of our most challenging tasks remains finding secure, truly affordable accommodation for those in need.

Recent figures underscore the severity of the crisis. In 2023, 1,474 homeless people died in England, marking a troubling 12% increase from the previous year. London bore the highest number of these deaths, recording 309 cases. Alarming trends include a 42% spike in deaths occurring directly on the streets, underscoring the dangerous conditions many homeless people face. Substance misuse and overdoses were linked to approximately 35% of these deaths, while suicide contributed to 10%, showing a 20% rise in such cases ([The Independent](#)). The average age of death for homeless people remains heartbreakingly low - 35 for men and just 30 for women ([Shelter England](#)).

Homelessness in England is not only a matter of inadequate shelter but also one of significant personal risk. Reports have shown that homeless people are up to three times more likely to be murdered compared to those with secure housing. These statistics reflect the deep vulnerability and dangers faced daily by those without homes ([Big Issue](#)).

Finding a path out of homelessness through the private rented sector is becoming increasingly unattainable, particularly for those under 35. The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) - which determines the amount of support received for rent, has failed to keep up with rising rental prices. Despite a booming private rented sector, LHA rates have remained frozen at 2020 levels. This leaves many unable to meet rent costs, trapping them in a cycle of instability.

For younger people under 35, the situation is even bleaker. They often qualify only for the shared accommodation rate of LHA, which is significantly lower than the actual costs of shared housing, especially in

high-cost areas like London. This restriction makes it difficult for younger people to secure even basic shared accommodations, putting them at high risk of homelessness.

The scarcity of social housing further compounds the problem. Many homeless people are forced to seek housing in the private sector, which is often priced far beyond what LHA can support. This results in more people either remaining homeless or living in temporary housing, which can be unstable and inadequate.

Shelter, along with other housing advocacy organisations, has consistently called for policy changes to help bridge these gaps. Aligning the LHA with current market rents, increasing investment in social housing, and bolstering support services are among the critical reforms needed to prevent the crisis from worsening.

Despite the difficulties, we remain hopeful and committed to serving those in need, doing what we can to alleviate suffering and build an oasis of love and support.

On Friday, December 20th, we will host our annual Christmas celebration, offering warmth and connection with two sittings of 75 guests each, followed by a dinner for our hardworking staff and volunteers.

At the Manna Centre, we've weathered many challenges over our 42 years of existence. Our core values of love, respect, dignity, and justice continue to guide our work. Each year, especially this celebration, we are reminded of the importance of these principles.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and hoping for brighter days ahead!

“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”



By

Margaret Shapland

Housing and Welfare Advice Worker



Following our last newsletter, you look back and can see that the backdrop against which we work can seem very overwhelming – but often we are writing to demonstrate how the impact of policies or just plain economics affects the people we serve.

Yet again, the period between July to September has shown that rough sleeping – the most extreme measure of homelessness has risen by 18%, as figures published by CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) reveal and that 49% of those were new to the streets. However, there is hope to be found and there are measures and levers that have been introduced which we can all hope will have a significant impact on those that are enduring such difficult circumstances.

A brief overview of what's happening:

In London, since 2016, 17,600 people have been able to leave the streets due to interventions and funding from City Hall – a hopeful number.

The current Government pledges on homelessness give us reasons to hope

- a) A cross-government strategy that works with the metro mayors and councils across the country to increase building of more homes.
- b) A degree of protection for current social housing with local authorities being able to retain all receipts from the Right to Buy programme to put towards building properties to replace that stock.
- c) Measures to reduce the anxiety of private renters through greater protection.

Against this backdrop, are the economic pledges to grow the economy so that ordinary people can feel more prosperous. That said, these measures take time to deliver and that is where organisations such as ourselves become so important.

The long-term relationship we have with our people:

Let me tell you about Simone's story. We have known Simone since 2017 when she came to us – she had originally come to the UK as part of a married couple. However, due to domestic violence, she fled the partnership. As a result, she had no legal status in the UK and had been staying with family or friends, but she had exhausted all those avenues and simply had nowhere to go.

We were able to assist her initially by placing her in a night shelter while we set to work looking into her immigration status. Simone then was diagnosed with cancer and staying in a night shelter became impractical. The Advice & Welfare team approached the local authority's No Recourse to Public Funds team in the hope they would provide more stable accommodation (we could not place her into accommodation as she did not have access to any public funds nor did she have the right to rent in the UK due to her immigration status) - after three attempts, we were able to partner with our local law centre to force a judicial review of the local authority's decision – this action was successful and Simone was placed in accommodation.

This provided space for us to work again with a solicitor to resolve her immigration situation and Simone was granted discretionary leave to remain – giving her a proper legal status in the UK and access to public funds. As a result, Simone was placed in local authority temporary accommodation and was able to apply for support through the benefit system.

Over this period, the cancer treatment continued resulting in a mastectomy and a considerable deterioration in her mobility as a result of osteo-arthritis, culminating in a need for a knee replacement operation as one of the bones in her knee was crumbling. It was clear that Simone would not be able to work for some time and we made an application to the Department of Work and Pensions that Simone should be classified as having "limited capability for work-related activity". The DWP agreed with this opinion and accepted that Simone should not have to seek work for a period. Alongside this decision, we had already helped Simone to apply successfully for Personal Independence Payment to help her financially with her mobility needs and daily living – being able to pay for someone to clean her windows, for example.

The local authority accepted full duty to house Simone and that she should apply to the local housing register. The initial temporary accommodation that Simone was currently residing in was the subject of a re-development by the authority and everyone in these accommodation was to be moved into other accommodation.

Over a number of months, Simone was offered viewings –some of which we attended with her and were able to bear witness to their unsuitability. Simone's local authority medical assessment clearly stated that she would not be able to negotiate steps or be offered a property above ground level – the viewings offered did not meet the criteria set by the medical assessor.

The situation came to a head when she was offered accommodation that was a considerable distance from her GP and other health support networks as she was now receiving treatment for a second incidence of cancer and also required her to walk a significant distance from the nearest public transport to the property up a considerable up-hill gradient – simply not possible due to her poor mobility. At this point, we consulted with a housing solicitor who agreed to take on the case and we were able to secure accommodation that met the medical assessor's criteria and was nearer to her health and social support networks.

Since then, we have assisted her with obtaining a grant to cover the costs of moving into that accommodation and replace a broken bed with a new bed and mattress to give better orthopaedic support. Simone can look forward to a future where her immigration situation is secure, where financially she can budget to meet her outgoings, where she has accommodation and where she is able to bid for a longer-term property through the local authority's housing register.

This is just one example of the long-term relationships we are privileged to have with our clients and our work to help prevent vulnerable clients from facing being on the streets.

Keeping a client in accommodation

At the end of last year one of our oldest clients (a person of 80 years) whom we had known for a number of years approached us as they had been served by the local authority with what is known as a Community Protection Notice. "Community protection notices (CPNs) are designed to stop a person aged 16 or over, business or organisation committing antisocial behaviour (ASB) which spoils the community's quality of life."

Both the client and ourselves could not imagine how the notice was justified. We arranged a meeting with the police officer involved, the local authority officers responsible and the client's housing provider as the CPN was issued on the basis of noise affecting a near neighbour. The Advice and Welfare team queried why no alternative to issuing the notice had been explored and that it should be treated as a neighbour dispute, given the behaviour of the neighbour. The neighbour had maintained that our client was repeatedly knocking on the ceiling. Given our client's medical conditions which were provided to all parties, it would be almost impossible to execute the alleged actions. The local authority had advised the client's housing provider of the CPN, and a warning had been issued by the housing provider that the tenancy was at risk.

The local authority maintained that recording equipment had recorded noise levels outside a reasonable range. We submitted an appeal to the Magistrates Court and the local authority made the decision to defend. As Legal Aid is largely not available for this action, with the help of a pro-bono barrister, we prepared a case reviewing the evidence supplied by the local authority. At this point, the local authority chose to withdraw their case giving no reason as to why they had decided to do so. We assume that given the strength of our client's medical evidence and obvious physical frailty they saw no point in pursuing the case.

Obtaining financial support for a very vulnerable client


We were approached by a carer of an individual whose vulnerabilities included a diagnosis of autism, double incontinence amongst other medical issues. Financially, there were a number of needs - the washing machine in the property had broken, a replacement cooker was needed to replace one which would under current standards be considered unsafe, a new orthopaedic mattress was requested as due to the client's medical conditions, they were forced to spend a considerable amount of time confined to bed and better support from a mattress was required. Overall, the estimate for all the items was well over £2,000 pounds.

An average grant for an individual is usually in the range of £350-£500, so this was a considerable challenge. We were lucky enough to find a charity who was willing to provide a grant for an individual that would be above that average, and we were successful in the application acquiring sufficient funds to meet the immediate needs.

This is just a small sample of the types of work we take on for our clients and it through people like you, dear reader who help us continue to do this whilst we await the "sunny uplands" that we hope to see delivered. Even should that happen, there will still be people who fall into cracks in the system or experience a temporary crisis. Sometimes, a gesture as small as being able to offer a food voucher to tide someone over or help with transport costs to get them to a job interview or to accommodation we have secured for them can make a relatively large impact for that person. To quote Aesop, "No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted".

Thank you for all your help over the past year, your kindness and commitment allows us in turn give that necessary help to the people who come to us.

A very peaceful and joyous holiday season to you all.





New Pressures for homeless people

By

Chinasa Nnoka

Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



As a practitioner I have noticed at least three pressures on the supply of housing available to single people and two are recent.

Supported Housing

On 20/03/23 a report entitled *“Unsafe and unregulated London’s rogue supported housing providers”*. was published. Amongst its findings were that ‘exempt accommodation’ (often known as Supported Accommodation) providers were charging between £500 and £700 a week for their accommodation without the council knowing whether the accommodation offered was of an acceptable quality or if support was also being provided. Exempt accommodation consists of properties for which Landlords provide care and support in addition to housing and can charge above average rents for an equivalent property and have the costs fully covered by housing benefit. There had also been an increase in the numbers of organisations offering supported accommodation; the report noted that rogue providers had entered the market to exploit the housing benefit system and it’s difficult to ascertain how many there are.

The Report further noted that £107 million had been spent by 16 local authorities on Supported Accommodation in the year 2022-2023 and that 17,000 were living in exempted accommodation across 22 London boroughs. This financial aspect came into focus when Universal Credit was introduced, as applicants had to specify whether they lived in Supported Accommodation or not. As there is no longer a *“Supporting People”* budget available to housing providers to fund their exempt accommodation and the subsidy rules that govern the amount that Housing Benefit Offices can claim back from the Central Government, Local Government often pays the costs for these placements. The conclusions of the March 2023 Report formed the basis of the *“Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act 2023”*

Budgetary pressures have caused Local Governments to be prudent in their spending generally and on Supported Housing in particular, following the 2023 Act (above) here and one of the recent manifestations of this is to reject the Housing Benefit applications of people who would once have been considered vulnerable, on the grounds that they do not have the support needed to meet the criteria for Supported Housing. Prior to the enactment of the recommendations of the report and the increased demand; the types of residents who entered such accommodation included those who were homeless, or facing imminent prison discharge or circumstances which made them vulnerable and constituted a challenge to independent living.

I met Y here at the centre. He was a homeless Refugee, with a positive outlook. During our interview he stood out as someone who would thrive if given a little support. He was placed with a supported housing provider, and despite the standard of the accommodation being poor he did his best to make the most of it. He told me that the walls were scratched as it seemed the previous owner had a dog. The carpet was also filthy. When he asked for it to be changed this was refused so he cleaned it as best he could. A few months later he became homeless again having received notice from his housing provider. Notice had been served because, five months after he had moved in, the Council decided he had insufficient support needs to justify payment for the Supported Accommodation that he would occupy. As Y could not pay the housing cost from his Universal Credit Income (£311.65 per month) for those under 25 (unless additions are paid in respect of disabilities) he had to leave. I have learned from other Providers, that their Local Councils are now taking similar actions.

This is one of many such cases Manna’s advice team has dealt with recently. Refugees who are under thirty-five, in good physical and mental health cannot secure Supported Accommodation as easily as they used to. I would argue that this contingent is socially vulnerable, being unfamiliar with this country and the language barrier is a significant issue in most of these cases.

The Government's early Release Scheme 2024

In September this year the Government released 1,700 from its prisons after having served 40% of their sentences rather than 50%. Some may have had families or alternative accommodation to go upon release, but one could safely guess that quite a number did not. Recently the Justice Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, conceded that the recall rates of these newly released were quite high.

I interviewed two former inmates I'll call S and P. For S, there had been a bureaucratic error with his housing arrangements leaving him homeless and frustrated with the benefits system because his payments were delayed, so additionally he had no income for a period; he told me that he was tempted to *"do something - break a window just to go back inside"* – where at least he would not be sleeping on the streets.

P was discharged as part of the Government's early release scheme, but at night, owing to another bureaucratic error. He had no identification with him. I referred him to a hostel who requested information about his convictions and subsequently decided that he was unsuitable for their accommodation. I applied to a Supported Accommodation provider which houses ex-offenders and I was told that his support needs were not high enough and they needed to know whether he had local connections to any of the boroughs in which their properties were located. I have heard nothing from the Night Shelter that I applied to, this process has taken weeks and he remains street homeless in the interim. I can understand his frustration.

Estate Agent Practices

Affordable private rented accommodation for single people is in short supply, particularly for those under 35, on a low income, or in receipt of benefits. If no up-front costs are required, clients will often need a guarantor. For example, one Estate Agent informed me that a guarantor would need to be earning 30 times the weekly rent, so if the rent was £1,000 a month the guarantor would need to be earning £30,000.

Where the Agents accept low or no up-front costs it is still a property owners market. Two of my Clients: E- a female and K a male both work part time and are homeless. E has a health issue but was considered not to be in priority need for housing. The relief period, during which she was entitled to some help from the Council, with a deposit, had expired. She had been to view a property, was asked to provide proof of her income sources which I supported her to demonstrate, then she didn't hear any more from the Agents despite making numerous calls. I sent her to view another one; the Agent seemed interested, asked about her housing history then E heard nothing more.

I sent her for another viewing yesterday, she took time from work to attend but I learned from the Agents that morning that they *"would not be able to assist as she had been rejected by a previous Landlord"*. I was shocked that neither Manna nor the client had been informed about the rejection - had I known I would not have sent her. The reasons for it are unknown and regrettably she did not listen to my voice message notifying her of this, before making a journey to the property to find that no one was there. I told the Estate Agent it would have been useful to have known this earlier, he told me that someone would contact me with an explanation, I have not received one.

K attended a property viewing, advised the Agent that he was interested and told me excitedly that the Landlord was going to accept him. I contacted the agent afterwards and we negotiated move-in costs; when I followed up this conversation, I was told the property was still being shown to others as there was considerable interest. I contacted K who was very disappointed because he thought accommodation was imminent, and this was the second time he'd been rejected by an Estate Agent recently; apart from the certainty of a Night Shelter in a few days, his homelessness continues.

There are no easy answers to these issues, but if Local Government and the Third sector can work together to address these issues, it would be a good place to start.

Manna Centre – Christmas Appeal 2024

We finished the 23-24 year with a £175,000 deficit between our income & expenditure. You can help us address this deficit in a number of ways:

- **YOU CAN DOUBLE YOUR DONATION (AT NO EXTRA COST TO YOURSELF) BY DONATING ONLINE VIA THE RED ‘DONATE’ BUTTON ON OUR WEBSITE. THE AVIVA COMMUNITY FUND WILL MATCH £ FOR £ ANY DONATION WE RECEIVE UP TO A MAXIMUM OF £250 PER DONATION UP UNTIL CHRISTMAS DAY.**

If you are unable to participate in the Matched Funding option above, you can:

- make a bank transfer directly into our bank account (bank account details below):
 - Account Name: The Manna Society reg Charity 294691
 - Account Number: 50109537
 - Sort Code: 08-9299
- or by sending a cheque to The Manna Society, 12 Melior Street, London SE1 3QP

If you would like to **support our work on a more long-term basis** you could consider:

- setting up a regular donation via standing order (currently about 14% of our income comes via this method) – please contact us for a Standing Order form.
- leaving us a legacy in your Will (over the last number of years legacies have been crucial in supporting our work)

If you are a taxpayer and would like to increase your donation by an additional 25%, at no extra expense to yourself, please consider Gift-Aiding your donation. On average (over the last 4 years), we have received an additional £15,000 per year approx. thanks to Gift-Aided donations.

I would like to donate £ _____ to the Manna Centre. (Cheques payable to “The Manna Society”)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Email address: _____

If you are a taxpayer and would like to Gift Aid your donation, please tick here and sign below:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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