

The Manna Society Newsletter
Summer 2025

Working with homeless people & those in need

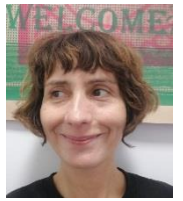


Difficulties facing vulnerable individuals in the Digital Age

By

Karolina Muszynska

Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



We are living in a world that is becoming increasingly unfriendly to “irregular” people. For those who are uncomfortable with IT, for those without access to the internet or internet-enabled devices. For those who don’t have a regular ID to prove their identity, a clear housing history to show local connection, or a document to serve as proof of address. It’s also difficult for people with physical disabilities and those who have mobility issues. For people with mental health challenges or those whose lives are chaotic due to substance misuse, it can feel almost unmanageable.

It’s not easy for the “regulars” either. Sometimes I want to scream when I have to create another account, remember another password, or wait an hour to speak to yet another helpline advisor. If I, someone with relatively good access to resources, feel overwhelmed, how are my vulnerable “irregular” clients supposed to cope? Let me share the story of Alice (name changed for confidentiality purposes).

Alice is 72 years old, speaks basic English, and was granted Humanitarian Protection by the Home Office at the end of last year. She is almost a “regular” person, but unfortunately, she lacks the necessary documents required by various institutions, which makes every step she takes incredibly difficult and time-consuming. She’s also not very confident using computers and is unfamiliar with UK welfare arrangements. You would think that receiving immigration status would be a step toward a smoother life, but so far, it has been a painful process filled with refusals and complaints.

Alice came to us for help at the beginning of this year. By then, she was already homeless and without any income. She was fortunate to have friends who supported her with food, occasional cash, and allowed her to

stay on their couch from time to time. She reached out for help, unsure of her next steps. She was hoping to get assistance with a Freedom Pass so she could travel more easily. This was particularly important as she had regular medical appointments. She suffers from a chronic condition that requires monitoring, and on top of that, doctors discovered a tumour in her breast that needs further investigation.

We identified the issues she faced and spread them over several appointments. First, we needed to apply for a Freedom Pass so she could travel to her medical appointments, then we applied for Pension Credit, and finally, we began her homelessness application with Southwark Council. On top of this, her bank had blocked her account because she couldn't present her E-Visa (a process that can take up to six months with the Home Office), and the Home Office had also lost her original (still valid) passport.

We started with the Freedom Pass application, thinking it would be straightforward since Alice meets the two main criteria: she's over 66 and a resident of London. Unfortunately, Alice didn't have the necessary documents listed on the website. We tried to explain this to the customer service team, but they kept sending the same message requesting documents she didn't have. We started the process on 04/02/25, exchanged 22 emails with the Freedom Pass team, filed Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints, and finally, in late April 2025, Alice received her Freedom Pass.

In the meantime, we also began discussing housing. Alice had made a homelessness application to the Local Authority in January 2025 but had received no help. We contacted her caseworker, who informed us that Alice's Application had been accepted and referred to the private sector. They expected her to attend viewings with private landlords. This was a poor decision, as Alice had no valid ID, no benefits in place, and no National Insurance number yet. We advocated on her behalf, exchanging 8 emails and making 4 phone calls. In the end, Alice was able to sign a tenancy for temporary accommodation on 02/04/25. She was so relieved that she didn't even complain about the fact that the property was completely unfurnished and in disrepair (no carpet, no furniture, a broken boiler, no cooker, no fridge).

We also helped Alice apply for Pension Credit at the end of January. As with everything else, this process was not straightforward. She didn't have the right documents, nor did she have a National Insurance number. We've called the Pension Credit helpline 6 times (each call taking at least 40 minutes to get through), responded to two letters asking for additional information, and we are still awaiting their decision.

Since Alice has been housed, she also had to apply for Housing Benefit. We submitted her claim in early April, explaining her situation, but initially received a negative decision because the documents we submitted were insufficient. We've since asked them to reconsider, and we're awaiting their response.

On a positive note, we've lifted the block on her bank account after two telephone interventions and three visits from Alice to the bank. Now, we are working on applying for a new passport and chasing the Home Office for Alice's E-Visa. This week, I contacted her country's consulate to request a priority appointment. We still have a long way to go, but I'm happy with the progress we've made. More importantly, Alice is now engaging with her treatment plan, something she wasn't able to do before. She was too stressed and exhausted, feeling powerless due to her poor grasp of English and lack of digital skills. She is incredibly grateful for the support we've been able to offer.



Should You Give Money to Homeless People?

By
Bandi Mbubi
Manna Centre Director



One of the most frequent questions I'm asked when I speak about homelessness relates to the attitude the general public should adopt when they meet homeless people on the streets. They often ask me whether they should give money to homeless people when they beg.



My thinking is that they wouldn't be asking such questions if they weren't already conflicted to begin with. If the answer were straightforward, they wouldn't bother asking me. After discussing the matter further with them, I often discover that there's an underlying

fear based on two main concerns: 1) that they would be giving money to people who would use it to feed an addiction to drugs or alcohol; 2) but then again, it could be that the person may use it for a valid reason – food, transport, or paying towards accommodation. What is certain is that their motivation is to be caring and ensure that they're behaving in a way that helps homeless people.

Organisations that work with homeless people differ in the guidance they give their supporters about what they can do when they meet homeless people who ask them for money. At both extremes, we have those who advise never to give and those who advise always to give – and they all provide compelling reasons for their stance.

Those who say not to give at all base this on their experience of seeing people who beg using the money they receive for alcohol or drugs. Feeding such a habit isn't caring at all – in fact, it may have the opposite effect of keeping people on the street longer by maintaining the habit. Depriving people of money could force begging homeless people to choose a different lifestyle, which can help in the long run to stay off the street. Such organisations often favour supporting organisations that help homeless people as a better way to address homelessness. It's tough love.

At the other extreme, we have organisations that advise their supporters to give money to homeless people who ask for it. Their reasoning centres on the human connection: even in that simple gesture, people can

perceive genuine care, which warms their heart and helps them feel valued. Yes, the money may very well end up feeding an addiction, but there's no guarantee it will. And even if it does, what's necessarily wrong about people consuming alcohol, when most people in society do the same? Why must we be so prescriptive about the money we give to homeless people? Even advocates of this liberal attitude concede, however, that they wouldn't want to feed an addiction to hard drugs.

Both extremes are somewhat caricatured because most organisations aren't quite so rigid – they operate somewhere along a continuum between these positions.

At the Manna Society, although we haven't necessarily formulated an official policy on the matter, it's fair to say that our natural inclination based on our ethos is liberal. We don't set out to be assertive in our interventions with our service users. We favour creating the right conditions for people to come to terms with their homelessness and address it. We believe that by accepting people the way they are, they'll ultimately end up choosing more constructive ways of living to achieve more independent living. But I've lived long enough to recognise that such interventions work only for some people, not everyone. We're all different, and we all respond differently to situations. This means that for some people, more assertive interventions prove effective. Human beings are complex creatures whose motivations are varied and intricate – no single method works universally.

This means that charities who advocate more assertive interventions – removing all means of supply for alcohol and drugs – can indeed be a disincentive for some people, which may cause them to reconsider their ways of life. We've seen this when, for instance, the police in some areas choose to move people on when they're sleeping rough. But there are limits to this method, in that such coercive approaches must always be accompanied by possibilities to rehabilitate people and offers of help with housing or detox. When this is lacking, it's perverse, and it can drive people further underground.

The advantage of a more liberal approach is that when people choose to leave homelessness behind, they tend to maintain this independent living because the decision was genuinely theirs. They've invested personally in that choice, making it more enduring.

When inevitably asked whether people should give money to homeless people, I encourage them to treat every encounter as a unique meeting with a real human being. Homeless people represent the full spectrum of society – some are genuinely lovely souls who wouldn't hurt a fly, whilst others, like people everywhere, are less agreeable. Some simply want the money; others are lonely and desperately want to connect with people, almost like a cry for help.

Just as we don't donate to every charity we encounter, we don't have to feel obligated to give to every homeless person we meet. Sometimes the decision is not to give; sometimes it feels right to offer something because we sense the money might go towards food or other necessities. We can get this wrong – it might indeed go towards something less beneficial. But making such a mistake isn't necessarily catastrophic. It's a calculated risk.

So I don't have a blanket rule to give, but an encouragement to use wisdom and love in our interactions with homeless people.

If we're serious about addressing homelessness, personal giving must be accompanied by supporting organisations that work with homeless people. It's not either-or, but both. These organisations work alongside homeless people as they come to terms with their circumstances. They help navigate the welfare benefits system, which can be bewilderingly bureaucratic, and assist in obtaining financial help for deposits and rent in advance for housing. Without such professional support, ending homelessness would be vastly more difficult.

At the Manna Society, we additionally provide healthcare, food, shower facilities, clothing, and access to computers – recognising that addressing homelessness requires meeting people's immediate needs whilst supporting their journey towards independence.

Helping William Fly
By
Chinasa Nnoka
Housing & Welfare Advice Worker



When the 2014 Care Act was enacted it had a number of aims, two main ones were:

1. To deliver care and social services in a person centred way in partnership with the third sector (Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Sectors).
2. To deliver Care and services which were innovative and preventative encouraging interventions, promoting and prioritizing well-being which would ultimately decrease reliance on reactive and acute need service.

I found a quote which in my experience has stood the test of time and sums up the value of the third sector, *“The sector is in its nature different everywhere, reflective of its local history. But the Sector’s defining features include its responsiveness, flexibility and roots in the community”* (taken from *Volunteering and Social action and the Care Act. An opportunity for Local Government. LGA Voluntary Matters 2016*). My recent encounter with a long-standing client whom I’ll call William exemplifies the truth of this statement. Additionally, he is one of a few clients who have effectively told me that if it was not for Manna, they don’t know what they would do.

William has multiple health challenges including visual impairment, poor mobility, challenges with his memory and a mild speech impediment occasioned by a Stroke. He wanted to make an important trip abroad and sought the help of Manna to do this. It was clear from the outset that he was heavily dependent upon me to execute all this. After securing written approval from his doctor that he was fit to travel, I proceeded to fulfil William’s wishes.

He needed a Visa to travel and the country he sought to visit insisted that the plane tickets be purchased before applying for the Visa. Owing to the clashes between his schedule and mine it eventually became a race against time, I envisaged having to change his booking, even as I did my best to meet the deadline. On the day I tried booking the Visa, the system wouldn’t allow me to correct a mistake I had made with his email entry or create a new Visa account with the correct email address and none of the contact numbers for the Embassy were working! I decided the best thing was to create a new email address for him and create a new visa account. I called William to send the Airplane ticket receipts from his email to the new one that I had created. He was unable to do this because of his sight and the dexterity needed for this action. I decided to go to his home after work and send the emails from his phone myself. When I arrived and he handed me the phone, I noted that he had received alerts from the Visa department previously so I could have created an account earlier, but he had not seen the messages, further attesting to the fact that he could not do this alone.

The following day was one on which I didn’t interview clients, I needed his signature and the online form would not accept any of the older documents he had signed when I tried to submit. I asked him to come to the office and give me a signature. Although he lived within walking distance from the office, he was concerned that it would take time because of his mobility, so I went and collected his signature. I completed the form then returned to the office to pay for it. The arrangement was that I would call him and he would read his card details to me. He asked how much he owed, when I told him he informed me that he had insufficient funds in his account.

He added that he had the equivalent in cash at home. I went to his home for the second time that day, collected the money then paid the bill using Manna’s debit card. After work that day I returned to his place to hand him the receipts, the next I now had to go to the Embassy the next week. As he wanted an express service, the Visa

had to be collected, it could not be sent. I told William this and I could see the fear and anxiety in his face when, seeking reassurance, he asked whether I would contact him, I could see and feel that he was alone in all this. He told me his itinerary as though seeking assurance and unfortunately he had his flight dates wrong!! I became concerned that he might miss his flight, he said that he would stick the details onto his lounge door to remind himself.

I noted that the inside of his home bore the telltale signs of someone who lived alone and needed help. Outside, some pottery or a similar substance which had been dropped directly on to his pathway and made for a perilous walk for him between the front door and his gate. He told me he had reported this issue but wasn't sure when anyone would come, I moved some pieces aside to make it safer for him.

After submitting the documents to the Embassy, I returned two days later to collect them and had to rearrange appointments at the Office to facilitate this. When I returned to William's home for the final time in this episode, not only was he pleased, but he had also organised the transport for his trip which was a few days away (he'd got the days right, so I was relieved!!). I reflected on how varied my job can be and just how its' flexibility allows many of Manna's service users to achieve the seemingly impossible.



Noticeboard



Most needed items

We are in need of

- *Rice (Basmati or easy cook)*
- *Sugar*
- *Pasta Sauces*
- *Coffee*
- *Tinned Tomatoes*
- *Tinned fish*
- *Tinned meat for soup*
- *Sandwich fillers:*
 - *Cheddar cheese*
 - *Corned beef*
 - *Luncheon meat*

Any help you can give would be appreciated.

AGM

Invitation

We will be having our AGM at 7pm on Tuesday 30th September here at the Manna Centre and we would be delighted if you could

join us 😊

If you are coming along, please email Paddy at

mail@mannasociety.org.uk

Many thanks

Kitchen volunteer vacancies

We need kitchen volunteers on:

- **Mondays**
- **1st Sunday (once a month) and the 5th Sunday (4 times a year)**

If you are free to help please ring 020 7357 9363 – option 3 or email mail@mannasociety.org.uk

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