

Chair's Report for Routes to Roots AGM 2013

God's love in Action - Reaching out to the Homeless in Poole

Our Partnership Working Routes to Roots (R2R) continues to work in partnership with Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) and we jointly submitted a tender for the new contract for outreach to rough sleepers with Poole Borough Council which was due to commence in December 2012. At the last stage we were advised that the existing contract would continue until April 2014, as Poole were now considering a cross-conurbation provision with Bournemouth Borough Council which would not commence until then. Much work had gone into the submission and meetings and we are grateful to all those who worked so hard to put this together. We anticipate going through that process again when the new contract comes out for tender in the near future.

In the meantime R2R and BCHA continue to provide the Poole Outreach Support Team (POST). The team consists of outreach workers from both organisations: Liz Bailey from R2R, Katrina Knight from BCHA and most recently Scott Jones now also working with R2R. Scott joined us at the beginning of March for two days a week. Scott comes to us with a wealth of knowledge as he has previously covered absences in the POST office and he has worked (and still does) at St Paul's Night Shelter. We thank Liz, Scott and Kat for all the very dedicated hard work they do. Thanks also to our volunteer outreach workers who go out either with Liz, Scott or Kat, to do early morning outreach. At 6am, armed with a flask of coffee and backpack of information, they search out the rough sleepers in car parks and other areas to make sure they are safe, remind them of appointments and check that they know where to access help and support.

As part of the POST role, in the winter of 2011-12 the first Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) was made available in the Poole area. SWEP is triggered when the temperature is forecast to be 0°C or below for three consecutive nights. The arrangements were again in place for this winter for 19 nights with 96 bed spaces used over the period. A new development for POST which started mid-February this year has been the provision of emergency beds of which there are three in the Poole area. The intention is to provide emergency temporary housing for rough sleepers with a view to moving occupants to more permanent accommodation within two to three weeks. Our success with getting people off the streets has continued through 2012/13 with 43 people being homed in Supported Housing, Private Rented Housing or in Local Authority Tenancies.

Homelessness is an increasing problem across the country and Poole is no exception. In November 2012, as part of the POST monitoring system, a night outreach took place where 16 rough sleepers were located in the Poole area. This was an increase of 25% over the previous year. With the introduction of new rules on benefits, it is anticipated that this could become even worse.

Caring for the Most Vulnerable We are very grateful to the Fisherman Café for again working alongside us and providing a cooked breakfast to those who are out rough sleeping. The Trustees agreed this year to increase the provision to six days of the week – the Friday breakfast being provided by the Salvation Army. The service ran for 21 weeks as we extended the provision into April which started out so cold this year. The average number of clients per week was 9 (50% up on the previous year); the number of individuals assisted was 39 (up 30%) and the number of breakfasts claimed 604.

Our outreach and support is not just to the rough sleeping community but also to those who continue to visit our drop-ins both in the afternoons and evenings, who perhaps have previously been rough sleeping or who find themselves in danger of losing accommodation. We continue to support them and offer guidance to appropriate agencies. Much more than this we build relationships providing not only food but friendship, with volunteers prepared to listen to their stories and help them to regain a sense of self-esteem and enabling them to rebuild their lives.

Caroline our administrator continues to work hard at maintaining a band of volunteers so that we have been able to open our Drop Ins for most of the year. Some volunteers have been with us for many years and some are new each year. We are enormously grateful to all of them for their generous giving of time and other donations and also to Caroline for sorting out rotas and ensuring all runs so smoothly.

Projects QHA in partnership with R2R launched the mobile library in June 2012. Some of the clients have been engaged in helping to set up the library cards and shelf-sorting. The library van

attended at the Salvation Army on Friday mornings as well as attracting attention at various events in Poole. We are still building a group of volunteers to be able to roll this provision out to other areas.

The daytime drop-ins have continued as a place of rest and refreshment with the light lunch and social activities, board games, table tennis. We have developed these sessions by introducing the attendance of workers from SMART addiction services who look to make initial engagement with those who have addiction problems and encourage them to attend SMART offices for formal assessment and help. We also have benefitted from the attendance of workers with The Poole Passion Play providing outreach drama workshops and who again talk with the guys, helping them to express themselves in non-threatening ways. On August Bank Holiday Monday we had a BBQ lunch with Active Performing Arts providing a Junk Percussion Workshop.

We started a project with Holton Lee where some of our clients have been able to volunteer, undertaking ground clearing work and assisting with the refurbishment of some of the visitor areas. Since January we have been involved with the Holton Lee Flourish Project which has provided further opportunities for clients to learn new skills and participate in team work including creating raised flower beds, imaginative carved fencing and a bench. They also have opportunities for walking through the extensive grounds and observing wildlife in the area. Those involved have declared that it is one of the best things they have done and they find it not only enjoyable but peaceful. All of this takes place on one day a week and clients are accompanied by volunteers from R2R.

Sustainability We have been richly blessed with the marvellous work Susan Gittins has been able to do in producing our regular newsletters, improving our information leaflets and packs and developing our website together with Richard McLester of Conical Sphere Group.

We are delighted to advise that we have appointed Liz Bailey to a changed role, looking after the day-to-day project work, researching new opportunities for practical and social activities and assisting with fund raising. Liz has only recently taken up her duties for two days a week and on the other three days Liz continues with her Outreach work. This allows her to forge an important bridge between the rough sleeper side of our work and the support opportunities offered through R2R. Liz will seek to identify individual support needs not covered by the Borough of Poole contract and to address these by matching to appropriate befrienders and other providers.

We are pleased to say that Germann Keeling Ltd and specifically Gabi Sanger-Stevens have continued to work with R2R. Gabi has been instrumental in securing additional funding and has been the main person undertaking our partnership working with BCHA on the contract tender and on general and business management for R2R. The appointment of Liz to a Support Co-ordinator role will release Gabi to further develop links with the local business community and pursue more funding opportunities.

Last but not least And so as we come to the end of another report all that is left for me to do is to say a very heartfelt thank you to Skinner Street United Reformed Church and Hill Street Baptist Church for continuing to allow us to operate our Drop Ins from their premises. Thanks also to our small army of volunteers who provide the much needed food and friendship, as well as the motivational and social activities we encourage at our afternoon Drop In sessions. Finally our thanks go to all churches, funders, corporate sponsors, members, trustees and employees, for all their hard work and support during this last year, as without you Routes to Roots would not be able to function.

Once again it has been a privilege to be the Chair of Routes to Roots for another year and to experience how we are evolving and growing. We pray that God will continue to bless us so that we may carry on this work with the homeless, the vulnerably housed and the marginalised in Poole.

The Peace and Love of the Lord be with you.

Pat Southgate

The Revd Pat Southgate
Chair and Chaplain of Routes to Roots
On behalf of the Trustees of Routes to Roots

Website: www.routestoroots.org

FaceBook: www.facebook.com/RoutestoRootsHomeless

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