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Charity No 1093689

Chair's Report for Routes to Roots AGM 2012

Celebrating 10 years as a registered Charity



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

On Sunday 25th March we held a service in St Peter's Church to mark the 10th Anniversary of being a registered charity. It was a time of joyful celebration for all of us but especially for those of us who have been involved from the very beginning, as we remembered how one church hearing God's call and setting up the first soup run, has grown into a charity which now has over 80 volunteers. It was a time of thanksgiving for all that God has enabled us to do in his name, over the last ten years. We were very grateful to have the Bishop of Sherborne, Dr Graham Kings, with us. His words affirmed and encouraged us to continue our mission to reach out with God's love to some of the most vulnerable people in Poole.

Caring for the most vulnerable, particularly those who have nowhere to sleep apart from a multi story car park, is our core work and during this past year Routes to Roots (R2R) has continued to work in partnership with Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) to provide outreach and support to rough sleepers. Together we provide a service known as POST (Poole Outreach and Support Team) which consists of an Outreach worker from both organisations. We are very grateful to our own outreach worker Liz Bailey and to Katrina Knight from BCHA for the all very dedicated hard work they do. Thanks also to our volunteer outreach workers who go out either with Liz or Kat, to do early morning outreach at 6 am. They search the highways and byways for the hidden homeless to make sure they are safe and know where to access help and support. This initial contact can be a vital first step in obtaining a positive outcome. Since we began this partnership working in 2009 it has achieved considerable success in getting people off the streets and is now widely acclaimed for its good practice. Liz reports that 28 rough sleepers have been housed in 2011 and a further seven in the first quarter of 2012.

During this past year R2R has also continued to do the best it can to protect those who despite our best efforts are not yet housed. One of the ways we do this is by making sure that those who have had to spend the night sleeping outside during the winter months can access a cooked breakfast and a hot drink in the morning. The appeal we put out in the autumn to 'Buy a Guy a Breakfast' raised enough money to provide 300+ breakfasts between December and the end of March. Thanks to all who donated and especially to the Fisherman's Café who not only provided the breakfast but also a warm welcome to the cold and hungry.

In the winter once the temperature is predicted to fall below zero for three consecutive nights, the council has to provide shelter for those who are rough sleeping and this last winter POST were able to work alongside Poole Borough Council to provide a meal and somewhere to sleep. We are grateful to Gateway Church who provided the much needed hall for the sleepovers and to Mark from BCHA for setting it up.

Supplementing our Outreach work is all that we do to build relationships with our clients and this has been a priority for us since we first began. We continued to do this throughout last year through our Drop Ins which provide not only food but friendship. Inviting them in and serving them with a hot meal and then taking the time to sit with them and listen to their stories, can gradually build up their sense of self worth and self confidence. It can take time to build their trust but we believe it is time well spent when we realise that these are people for whom many have no time at all. Maintaining and sustaining this vital service has been a priority for us over the last 12 months and Caroline, our administrator, has worked hard to build up our core group of volunteers to ensure that we always have enough cover to operate safely.

During the Summer and Autumn of 2011 we saw a higher level of chaotic and unsociable behaviour from some of our clients than is usual. Although not directed at our volunteers, the unpredictable nature of these outbursts led to there being an unusually tense atmosphere at our Drop Ins and we enlisted the assistance of the local Police Community Support Officers. Their presence was welcomed by clients and volunteers alike and with their help we were able to keep our Drop Ins open during this troubled time.

The Trustees also thank 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 holistic activities we encourage at our afternoon Drop In sessions.

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We were all very sad when he heard that one of our most loyal supporters, Dorothy Cuff had passed away just before Christmas. Dorothy was much loved by many of those on the streets and many of them showed their love and respect by attending her funeral.

Befriending and Social Inclusion. Last year, having completed our pilot project which had been generously funded by Quaker Homeless Action, we set up our own Befriending scheme. The pilot project proved to us that having befrienders can enable clients to access facilities and recreational pursuits that they may otherwise feel excluded from and over a period of time this can build self worth and self confidence. Throughout the year we have been making plans to provide more opportunities for our clients, accompanied by a befriender, to engage in meaningful outdoor activities and projects during the summer months.

Also during these last few months we have signed an agreement to work in partnership with QHA to provide a mobile library for our homeless friends. This is something QHA have operated in London for many years and they are now looking to extend this service further afield. Initially the library will be at our own Drop Ins and soup runs but we hope in time to have enough volunteers to enable us to take it to visit other homeless projects, eventually covering the whole of Dorset and Hampshire. All the running costs for this exciting project will be provided by QHA with R2R supplying the books and volunteers.

Sustainability. It became increasingly obvious for us during 2011 that the time had come when it was no longer possible to maintain and sustain the work of the charity simply with volunteers, essential though their enormous contribution is. We prayerfully considered our options and decided that we needed more business and management support to enable the essential work we are engaged in on a day to day basis to continue and also to assist us to develop new initiatives and raise the funds needed to implement them. We contracted with Germann Keeling Ltd, Gabi Sanger-Stevens' company, in October 2011 to provide these services. Gabi's years of experience as Honorary Secretary of R2R combined with her commercial and professional expertise, meant that she was well aware of the task ahead and was able to get on with the job swiftly; we are already seeing the many benefits of this appointment.

Last but not least. Someone I haven't yet mentioned is Susan Gittins who has greatly improved the way we publicise ourselves by providing interesting and informative newsletters on a regular basis as well as articles for other publications. We are also grateful to Richard McLester who initially designed and implemented our website. We have now contracted with Richard's company Conical Sphere to provide regular website support and we look forward to greatly improving the way we publicise all that God is doing here in Poole.

At this year's AGM we will be saying goodbye to three of our trustees. Jennifer Harrison, Paul Richards and Dick Dyke have worked tirelessly over the years to keep R2R going and to ensure that we implement our statement of faith and ethos. It's time for them to take a break now and we pray God will bless them with good health and happiness in all they do in the future.

And so as we come to the end of another report all that is left for me to do is to say thank you to Alison Dalton of Bridging Communities, Ann Bishop of Faithworks and all churches, funders, corporate sponsors, members, volunteers, trustees and employees, for all their hard work and support during this last year, as without you Routes to Roots would not exist.

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 improving our provision to the homeless here in Poole. Let us always remember that we are a Christian charity and as such, our own roots are in God. In all that we plan and do in this coming year, I pray that we will not forget that God is our true Vine and we are His branches, and as long as we continue to abide in Him, we will bear much fruit.

The Peace and Love of the Lord be with you

The Revd Pat Southgate
Chair and Chaplain of Routes to Roots