

Chair's Report for Routes to Roots AGM 2014

The last twelve months have been more eventful than usual for R2R: we were registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation on 26 February 2014 and undertook a comprehensive review of our activities resulting in a new three-year Business Plan in January 2014. This demanded a great deal of time from our Trustees, staff and Sarah Percy, our Treasurer, in particular and we are grateful for their dedication to our future.

It's been a year in which some of the activities that we have been doing since we became a Charity in 2002 came to an end, but this gave us the opportunity to reflect on our past achievements and how we would like to move on, how we could do more to achieve long term outcomes for our clients. In Routes to Roots, change is always embraced as an opportunity to make an improvement, to begin a new venture, sometimes in response to a new challenge. Changes are never made for change's sake but are always made with the desire to change things for the better for our homeless brothers and sisters here in Poole.

Outreach

In partnership with Bournemouth Churches Housing Association, our outreach staff and volunteers continued to go out at 6am each day to search for the hidden homeless. The team of paid staff worked closely with the Borough of Poole Housing Options Team, Brokerage team and Poole Addictions Community Team (PACT) as well as other statutory and voluntary agencies to provide sustainable housing and support packages for clients. This partnership achieved considerable success and was widely acclaimed for its good practice. However, the programme ended in March 2014 following R2R's decision not to tender for the new contract because it covered both the Poole and Bournemouth Boroughs. The new contract was awarded to CRI (who currently do this work in Bournemouth) from April 2014. We have been, and are, in contact with CRI to discuss how they will operate in the Poole area and how we can co-operate.

Our Outreach & Support Co-Ordinator, Liz Bailey, had already decided to leave at the end of 2013 and we were fortunate to find replacements, firstly in Scott Jones and then in Alan Cook. Scott joined us at the beginning of March 2013 for two days a week. Scott had previously covered absences in the POST office and he has worked at St Paul's Night Shelter. He left us to take up a full-time position as a Police Community Support Officer in February 2014 and was replaced by Alan one of our active volunteers. The two did a marvelous job and Alan has now transferred to CRI under TUPE.

Ben Tomlin, Housing Services Manager at the Borough of Poole, recognised the excellent work done by all those who have worked for The Poole Outreach and Support Team (POST) since it was set up in 2009: "The service has helped to significantly engage and influence a range of stakeholders, provide person-centred support in a multi-agency setting, to a complex group which is difficult to achieve, let alone sustain. Although there is much work still to do, the council recognises the progress made by the service in recent years (& is appreciative of your cooperation with CRI in the handover)."

Despite the ghastly winter of 2013-14 the Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) was not triggered in the Poole area as the temperature was never forecast to be 0°C or below for three consecutive nights.

In association with The Fisherman Café and for a short period The Kings Arms, we again provided a much-needed hot breakfast to rough sleepers over the winter months. This year the service ran from the end of November 2013 to the beginning of April 2014, a shorter period of 18 weeks in

comparison to 21 weeks last year when the weather in April was severe. In that shorter period, the number of individuals assisted rose to 40, the average number of rough sleepers per week accessing the service increased by 33% and the number of breakfasts claimed rose by 38%, indicating an increasing need amongst our clients. We are grateful to The Fisherman Café, The Kings Arms and to all those funders who have made it possible to make this service available to rough sleepers. This proves a real lifeline to our clients

In addition to our early morning work, we delivered outreach at our Drop-Ins and at Poole Soup Runs. In January 2014 we were fortunate to be able to centralise all our Drop-In and office operations at Skinner Street URC. We are grateful to Hill Street Baptist Church for their hospitality for our Tuesday evening drop-in since 2000.

Providing Basic Necessities of Life

The four Evening and Afternoon Drop-Ins, run by volunteers, provide a safe environment for people to meet and talk and attracted over 20 people on average. This is an important time for our volunteers to listen to those who attend, which allows everyone to build relationships with trust. A hot meal and hot and cold drinks are provided at each session. We distributed packed lunches to rough sleepers, clothing, sleeping bags, and move-in packs for those moving into accommodation, as needed. We also signposted rough sleepers to the Salvation Army shower facility, their breakfast provision and local soup runs. A volunteer chiropodist provided monthly care at the Friday Drop-Ins.

Prevention and Social Inclusion

As well as working with rough sleepers, we worked with the vulnerably housed to help minimise the risk of repeated homelessness. Many are in danger of losing their tenancies because they are unable to manage their money and pay rent top-up fees or utility bills. Others struggle with addictions or might choose to give up their housing because of their isolation and loneliness. As well as giving help ourselves, we directed our clients to the appropriate agencies that can provide them with assistance in resolving the problems that are keeping them on the streets, or may return them there, for example introducing those with drug addictions to the drug action team at a Drop-In.

Life Skills and Wellbeing

Our Afternoon Drop-Ins continued to provide an environment for creative projects, guidance, and support. Through these activities we aimed to help the participants move on from meeting their most basic needs to moving back into 'normal' society that would include housing and independent living. As funding was available, various activities were offered, such as cooking, table tennis, board games, art, the Poole Passion Outreach Drama Workshops.

Since summer 2012 R2R has worked in partnership with Holton Lee, near Poole, a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Our clients, along with some of our dedicated volunteers, were involved initially in ground clearance activities across the site and then included in the launch of Holton Lee's Project Flourish established in January 2013 to engage with disadvantaged groups across Dorset. Following our successful involvement in Project Flourish, R2R continued to select clients to take up places that become available as the initial volunteers complete their commitment. In an exciting new move over the summer of 2013, R2R became an allotment holder at Holton Lee. Three Project Flourish 'graduates' were the first to take part in the allotment scheme. They have planted a variety of vegetables and intend to provide the harvest to R2R Drop-Ins. We now have two allotments and these will be a long-term project, which will provide opportunities for engagement for many years to come. Undertaking these activities helps our clients to build on their team working and social skills as well as developing land-craft and horticultural skills, all of which improves their CVs.

Engaging the Local Community

R2R continued to offer opportunities to volunteer, support and fundraise in order to involve groups, businesses and individuals in Poole in our vision and mission. We also gave an increasing number of presentations and talks to inform and inspire businesses, schools, local community groups, and churches. This resulted in several, including Little Red Roaster, Halifax Poole, Hillbourne School & Nursery and Greendale Construction, adopting us as their charity for the year and many providing us with one-off donations and free office materials.

With Project Flourish, involving our guys and people in need from other areas well underway, some of our guys took the opportunity to talk about their volunteering activities and achievements at Connect 2013, a four-day family teaching and worship event hosted over the May holiday weekend by Holton Lee. We took a stand in the event's Market Place with a display on the work our guys have been doing at Holton Lee since summer 2012.

We have continued to be blessed with the active support of churches who provide the venues for our Drop-Ins as well as many of our small army of volunteers. Our volunteers, along with our outreach team, provide much-needed food and fellowship as well as lead the motivational and social activities at the afternoon Drop-Ins and our Holton Lee outdoor project, which will help our guys to regain a sense of self-esteem and enable them to start to rebuild their lives.

Our Fundraising Committee implemented new ways for individuals and groups to make donations to us – by mobile phone and via a MyDonate page on the internet. In both cases all money comes straight to us and gift aid applies. In December 2013 we also set up a page on the Easy Fund Raising website, which allows all those who shop on line to secure a percentage of what they spend for us. Information on this can be found on our website.

Advocacy

R2R continued to monitor the current situation for homeless and vulnerably housed people in Poole and acted as an advocate for them with police, local government and services.

Acknowledging Our Teams of Helpers

Caroline, our Administrator, continues to do sterling work maintaining the membership and volunteer databases and sorting out the various drop-in teams and rotas. She also looks after the day-to-day finances of our charity, does the payroll, and ensures that all those who contact us with enquiries, receive a reply.

During this last year we have been thankful for the time fellow Trustee Susan Gittins has given to improving the way in which we communicate with our members. Quarterly newsletters and a more up-to-date website are helping to raise our profile in the town as well as keeping our loyal supporters up-to-date with what we're doing.

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; was the main person undertaking our partnership working with BCHA on the contract tender; has played a leading part in raising R2R's profile through networking with the many groups and organisations in the area and has provided the general and business management for R2R.

We welcomed back Lynn Foster as Honorary Secretary in June 2013. Lynn started with R2R in 2007 as Administrator and retired from formal duties in 2010 when grandchildren called on her time, although she has continued to help out as a volunteer.

At our last AGM we welcomed John Parson, one of our clients and Holton Lee volunteers, to the Executive Committee and also Ruth Meaden to represent the churches involved in the Soup Runs. John organised and ran a quiz for clients at our popular Christmas Day lunch.

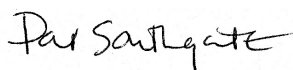
Bishop Rt Rev Moses Deng Bol of Wau diocese of the Episcopal Church of The Sudan again joined us at a Friday evening Drop-In in June 2013 (following a first visit in 2011). Bishop Moses paid tribute to the volunteers preparing the food and also singled out those of our clients who have gone on to become volunteers themselves with R2R. One, George, is a regular helper at the Drop-Ins and was there on the night.

Our clients, staff and volunteers participated in Poole's Walk of Witness on Good Friday. This culminated at Skinner St URC with a short service outside the church, after which all gathered in the hall for tea and hot cross buns. Afterwards the R2R group joined together in the parlour to hold a short, very moving service remembering our friends who have passed away since we first became a charity: including five who had died in the last six months. Richard, Sean, Simon, Ron and Dominic were all well known to us, all of them had been in and out of accommodation and all were of a similar age, mid to late 40s. It's a dangerous age for a former rough sleeper for it seems that, even when housed, years of sleeping rough eventually take their toll.

It always grieves us when we lose those we have tried so hard to help and we always wish we could have done more. Holding services of remembrance and when necessary conducting funeral services, has been a good way for us to demonstrate our love and care for those who otherwise would have no one. In all we do, whether in life or in death, we never forget that what we do for the least of these, we do unto him.

I feel privileged to have been Chair of such a wonderful organisation for another year and pray that with your help and with God's blessing we continue to be God's love in action, for the homeless, the vulnerably housed and the marginalised here in Poole.

The Peace and Love of the Lord be always with You



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