

Amos House January 2017

Routes to Roots started this journey with our partners, Green Pastures, in early Autumn 2015, when they purchased a three-bedroom town centre flat for us to use to house rough sleepers. The first task was to transform it into a house of multiple occupancy, the guidelines for which are very clear. R2R also had to find our first three residents, whom we hoped could get along well enough so that they could share a flat together. It took about 12 weeks to finish the preparation and, when the guys started moving in, R2R was elated to have created a snug and warm home for them, off the streets, in the lead up to Christmas.

That elation we had at getting the flat ready was a very good thing, since it kept us going while we still had so many things to sort out. The first of these was clarifying the benefits that the guys would receive from the Borough of Poole and how much rent we would receive as a result of this. That was important because Routes to Roots has to pay rent to Green Pastures, who in turn pay their investors interest. It is vital that we keep up our payments so that we can keep the guys in the flat. It may sound easy to say this, but we owe a great debt for this to volunteer Marilyn Latcham, who spent countless hours trying to figure out the right kind of tenancy agreement and also the right kind of benefit claims for the guys. Because of her hard work in the Winter, and a substantial donation from a Bournemouth football player, our Amos House financial account became viable, which gives us a great deal of confidence going forward.

Consider what moving into Amos House meant for our three residents. Sleeping rough is usually the end result of a series of failures, whatever their root cause. Not being able to maintain a tenancy or own a home is the most obvious failure. It is important to remember this when considering the challenges of bringing rough sleepers off the streets into a tenancy. Their self-confidence at being able to maintain the tenancy by paying their bills on time will necessarily be very low. And, each individual needs a great deal of support to believe that he or she can live inside again.

Therefore, R2R also had to sort out how to support the guys living in Amos House, both in terms of befriending and also in terms of maintaining the living space. Three volunteers, including the Chair of R2R, agreed to befriend the guys and the Salvation Army agreed to look after the flat to ensure repairs were made and faults rectified. There were quite a few teething problems that we have now resolved, so that the flat is well maintained and the guys are well supported.

By early Spring we finally felt that we had Amos House up and running the way that we had hoped. It had taken about six months. The impact on the guys has been tremendous. Two of the residents agreed to share their thoughts on their experience of living in Amos House.

These are some of their comments:

"If I hadn't gone to R2R then I would probably still be on the streets now. I was pretty messed up mentally. I was very stressed and depressed at having reached rock bottom. I was letting myself go.

"Now I see other guys in the same position as I was, sitting in doorways, and it makes me feel sad. But it also makes me feel grateful that it's not me."

"It was a huge adjustment to be inside. Sleeping outside had become the norm. I think of the amount of damage the cold did to me when I was outside, all day. The cold gets in your bones. If I was back on the streets again now, I don't think I would survive."

"What is so great about Amos House is not just that I have a roof over my head but that R2R are always there to support us if we have any problems. Whatever the problem is, they help us sort it out."

"I don't normally stay in the flat all day. Where the flat is located, it is only 5 minutes from everywhere. I still like to go out and see people, have a walk along the quay, just pop out for a pint of milk."

"I now volunteer at the drop ins. It gives me something to do and gives me an opportunity to give something back."

As a Board, R2R took some time together over the Summer to examine the process that it took us to set up Amos House. We considered our mistakes and how we could improve. We also considered what went well and what we would like to repeat. It was important for us to learn. And, now that we have a solid report, it has been fun for us to share this information with other charities considering a partnership with Green Pastures.

We are now well into the second year of the project, and we are considering the next phase. That phase will be to help the guys move into their own accommodation, hopefully with the courage and experience to keep it going. Then, we will recruit more residents. By this time next year, we hope to be entering a new phase with three different residents in Amos House.

Thank you. Thank you very much for your support.