



**Acton
Homeless
Concern**


Advice • Support • Hope

**2014: Marking 25 years
of helping those in need**

**25
YEARS**
1989-2014

**Our mission is to provide
advice and support for
those who need shelter
and hope**

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A Look Back on 25 Years...

It's hard to believe that I'm writing this brief history 25 years on, to celebrate that 'beacon of hope' which is known as Emmaus House – Acton Homeless Concern.



Congratulations to the many people who shared their skills, time and energies over the past 25 years in order to make a difference to the lives of so many; enabling the dignity of each person to be respected and indeed enhanced by quite magnificent efforts. It's unbelievable to think that more than 45,000 meals are shared out with love and justice each year. Not to mention the amount of people whose lives have been transformed! What a miracle!

The seeds of Emmaus House were sown and inspired by a man called Philip who slept on the doorstep of the Presbytery in Berrymead Gardens for many years. Morning after morning and night after night we had to step over Philip's bare bum as his over-sized trousers exposed him to the elements, often provoking derogatory comments from passers-by.

We found out later that Philip had suffered a bad fall, injuring his head in an accident some years before, and due to this injury his mind, physical ability and coordination were affected. As a result he was forced to stop working on building sites and took to the streets. I was told that he had been known as 'the best dressed man in the area,' and he was always quiet, shy and well-mannered.

It reached a point where giving Philip – and others who came knocking on the church door, sandwiches, clothes and a few bob simply wasn't enough; there were many more unmet needs. We soon realised that the church needed to tap into local resources in order to provide a more comprehensive response to the immediate needs of the many others sleeping in poor conditions and presenting themselves at our doorstep.

Our vision for Emmaus House was to be a wrap-around, caring environment where each unique person felt respected and valued. The acknowledgement of dignity and uniqueness has always been a priority in the vision and mission of the charity, in the belief that 'we are all made in the image and likeness of God'. It is on this foundation stone that the miracle story of Emmaus House and Acton Homeless Concern is built.

May the God of Justice continue to reign in all of your lives. I still think of you all with great affection.

Pdraig (Pauric) Lyons MA BA

Chairman's Message

When our charity was founded 25 years ago, by three priests from the Parish of Our Lady of Lourdes in Acton, it was little more than a soup kitchen supported by donations and serving a community of street drinkers and rough sleepers.



No doubt our founding Fathers would be astonished at the extent to which we have grown, becoming an organisation that not only serves up to 250 meals daily, but which provides clothing, hygiene facilities, advocacy and support – and even access to a GP clinic and other medical services.

For most organisations this level of growth would be cause for celebration: for us, the annual increase in clients represents the fact that extreme poverty in this part of London is still very much part of life. Our charity may have changed a great deal over the years but, sadly, society around us remains difficult and often unforgiving.

That said, there is no better time than our 25th anniversary to celebrate the tenacity, hard work and dedication of so many people who have taken what was a simple soup kitchen and transformed it into a comprehensive service that provides the best to those who need it most.

I am enormously proud of how Acton Homeless Concern has become a professional organisation with the capability to train staff and volunteers, so that the appropriate care and support is given within a safe and pleasant environment.

The word 'homeless' is often misconstrued as a catch-all term that simply refers to the destitute. For us, our clients are individuals with often complex needs and this is why our work goes far beyond the provision of a hot meal and respite. Delivering this effectively takes considerable organisation and expertise, and each year sees more work carried out to improve and develop what we offer.

This is also why the financial generosity and goodwill of a number of organisations is absolutely vital. We are testament to their continued support, something which cannot be underestimated during one of the toughest recessions this country has ever seen.

There is also a dedicated team of fundraisers and individuals who tirelessly contribute valuable donations for which we remain so grateful.

Finally, it is no exaggeration to say we simply could not do what we do without the army of angels who volunteer for us at both Emmaus House and the Damian Centre. And as you can imagine, there have been hundreds of angels over the past 25 years! It is fitting that all those volunteers past and present are thanked wholeheartedly for their selfless contribution.

If Acton Homeless Concern represents anything it is this: while the world is a tough place for many, there are many others who will work hard with vision and determination, to make it better. Poverty may still exist in west London but so too does this beacon of hope, support and kindness.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Gray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anne Gray



Case studies

“Our vision for Emmaus House was to be a wrap-around, caring environment where each unique person felt respected and valued”.

Case study 1

Name **Michael O’Shea**

Nationality: **Irish Republic** Age **59**

Issues : **Ill health, loss of benefits**



Michael O’Shea is a fifty nine year old man from County Cork. He has been unable to work for a number of years due to ill health having been diagnosed with cancer and suffering from depression.

Michael is unable to read or write and he came to

the centre in January 2013 looking for benefits advice. He was agitated and distressed because he thought he was losing benefits with no opportunity to appeal – although the letter did provide details about making an appeal. We immediately contacted his GP who was very willing to provide written confirmation of Michael’s ill health as well as contact details for the psychiatrist treating his depression. We helped Michael prepare a written appeal, and on March 1st we accompanied him to his appeal hearing. The initial decision was overturned and all benefits were reinstated.

Michael is still receiving advice and advocacy from Emmaus House staff, and is now working at the centre for two hours each week as a volunteer. This work is helping him to rebuild his confidence and self-esteem, and he continues to become more self-assured, engaging very well with staff and volunteers. What’s wonderful about Michael is the pride he takes in his appearance – even if he is simply washing up, Michael’s clothes are immaculately clean and pressed.

Crucially, the support he has received appears to be helping to ease his depression, while the confidence Michael has gained from being financially secure again is helping him to deal with his physical problems; he is a wonderful volunteer at Emmaus House.

He was delighted to be in a position to contribute to this booklet and our anniversary.

Case study 2

Name **TD**

Nationality: **Bulgaria** Age **26**

Issues : **Alcohol addiction, nowhere to live**

TD is a twenty six year old gentleman from Bulgaria who first came to the charity a year ago looking for help and support He came to London from Sophia to look for work and had nowhere to live.

Emmaus House staff helped him to source affordable accommodation and also to find employment through its local contacts. Within weeks of starting his new job TD was experiencing difficulties at work because of his problem with alcohol. He came to the Centre for counselling and eventually asked for help to treat his addiction. Appointments were arranged with a drug and alcohol counsellor and he started to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings at the Centre.

As of two weeks ago he was still sober and is now in more settled accommodation with a new partner.

25

1989-2014

Marking 25 years of providing practical help and a warm welcome to the disadvantaged and homeless of London.

An army of volunteers over the past 25 years has enabled us to help more than 200 people every day.

18,000 volunteer hours in the last 12 months

45,000 lunches served at Emmaus house

22,500 people came to the Damien Centre for a hot drink, a warm place to sit, breakfast or an afternoon snack in 2013

4,214 people have been given clothes - in most cases this is a full set of clothes

750 people enjoyed a hot shower

Over **400** people attended the weekly doctors' surgery

To support our work please consider a donation through [actonhomelessconcern](http://www.justgiving.com/actonhomelessconcern)
www.justgiving.com

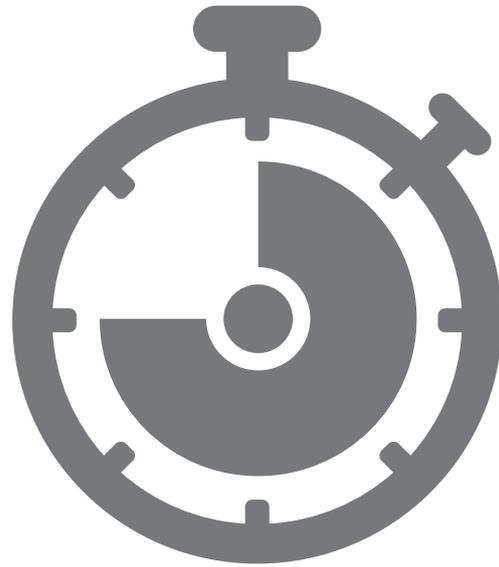
To find out more about what we do visit www.actonhomelessconcern.org



How we helped in 2014

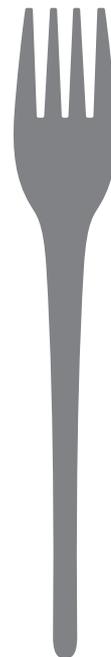


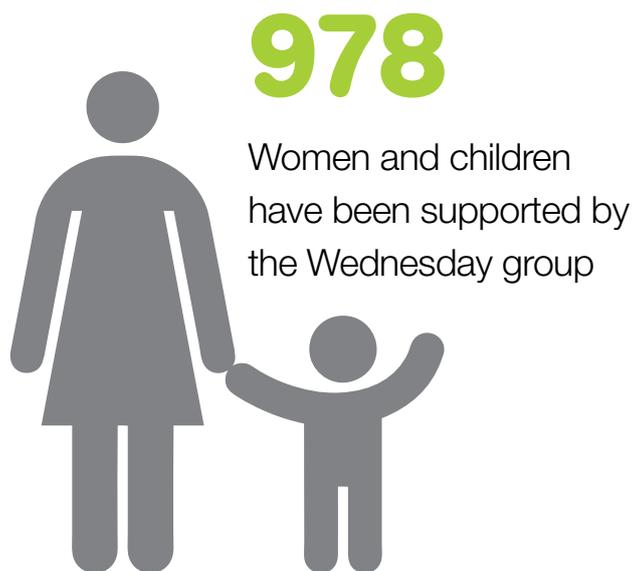
People visited the doctor



15,108

Volunteer hours have been given to help make and serve food





It has been a tremendous year full of events and get-togethers to mark our 25 years.

With enormous thanks to our friends and supporters we have pulled out all the stops to raise as much money as possible in this landmark year.

We are confident of smashing £160,000 this year which is a remarkable amount of money.

Fundraising is such hard work as there are so many worthy causes we are all asked to support. We cannot express our gratitude enough to all those who have worked tirelessly to help us reach this amount. And of course, to Nick Gough aka *Dicky Dazzler*, whose talents at extracting money from our friends at auctions and raffles is legendary.

We look forward to hosting our AGM on 12th December and a party for our amazing volunteers, without whom we would not exist. They are the unsung heroes of Acton Homeless Concern and the party is a small way for us to let each and every one of them know how much they are loved and valued by us. Thank you to all of you!

Finally, we finished off an amazing year with our very own Ian Breen being recognised at the Ealing Gazette's 'Pride in our People' Awards. Ian won 'employee of the year' and the overall award of 'local hero'. We couldn't be more proud of him. Well done Ian!



Our first big grant this year came from Ealing Council and totalled nearly £29,000

The Department for Foreign Affairs Ireland generously awarded us a grant of £33,000 in October

We hope that the very popular annual quiz night and raffle held at the end of November will have raised just under £4000

Ciaran and Tommy did their usual herculean effort with the hugely successful Golf Day which raised a staggering £21,000

**25
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The Summer Fair organised by the Shamrock Club raised a massive £11,000

Our 25th anniversary dinner, auction and casino in Chiswick this June pulled in an impressive £20,000 which included £5,000 for Wimbledon VIP tickets

The annual dance organised every year by our big supporters Jim & Betty Scully raised £2,000

In December we hope to break all records for our one day Christmas street collections. Stay tuned on how much we take but we expect in excess of £4,000

The Batchworth Trust gave us a whopping £7,000

Our Lady of Grace Church is due to give us a considerable share from this year's summer fair for which we are very grateful

The Sacred Hearts Community managed to raise £5,000 for us which we received in November

How we spend every £ given to us

We are transparent about our monetary income which provides less than 50% of what is needed to run the charity, the rest coming from donated goods and services

Here is an illustration of how we spend every £ given to us.

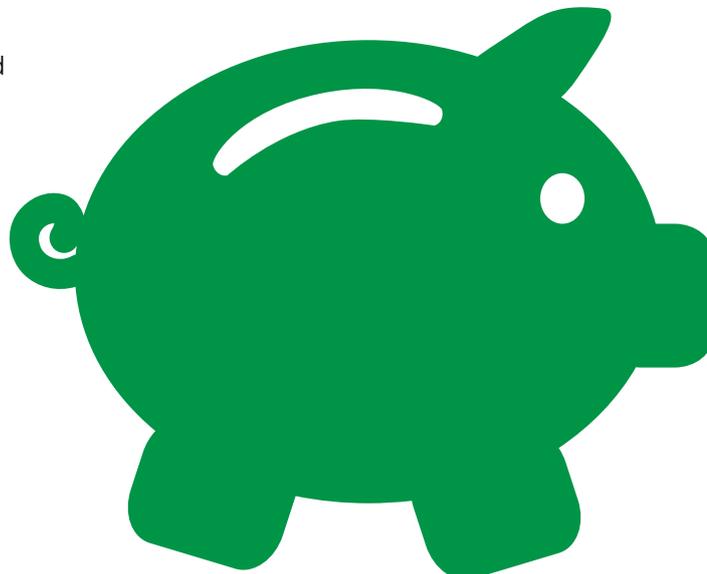
Acton Homeless Concern Expenditure for typical year – where every pound goes

Salary		65.5
Light Heat & Power	8	
Rates	1.5	
Telephone	1.6	
Insurance	3	
Printing & Stationery	1.88	
Accountancy	0.6	
Travel	0.5	17.08
Mortgage repayments		4.42
Food	7.5	
Cleaning	0.5	
General Expenses	1.5	
Repairs & Maintenance	3.5	13
<hr/>		
TOTAL(%)		100

Expenditure on food and meals is minimal because of the huge amount of donated food we receive each year.

We estimate that the cost would increase by at least £2 per person each day if it was not for this.

At the moment it costs £0.50p to feed someone for the day.



Testimonials

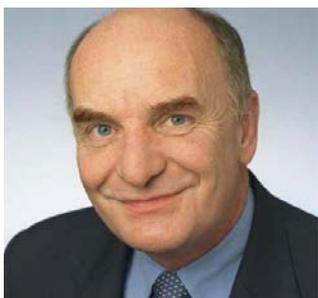


Boris Johnson, Mayor of London

“As the mayor of London, in what I assert without contradiction is the greatest city on earth, it is a scandal and a reproach to us all that here in London; so prosperous; so successful; so desired by the planet, we have so many people who are homeless; who cannot get a bed for the night; who cannot get a roof over their heads. Clearly in City Hall we work very hard to try to mitigate the problem.

We have ‘no second night’ out to ensure the people only spend one night out on the streets and we help them into accommodation as fast as possible, and we have had great success actually in reducing the numbers who spend more than one night out on the streets. But in the end we must work with the voluntary sector and we cannot succeed without the fantastic work that is being done by organisations like Acton Homeless Concern.

Thank you very much for everything you have been doing over 25 years; one million meals provided; huge numbers of people countless numbers of homeless people given help, support, encouragement and above all found a bed.”



Steve Pound, MP for Ealing North

“Twenty Five years ago I was one of the small group including the Parish Priest of Our Lady of Lourdes and Councillor Yvonne Johnson who set up Emmaus House which later became known as Acton Homeless Concern.

Then Cardinal Basil Hume attended our first AGM and an early supporter was Bertie Aherne who later became Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of Ireland.

I think that we all hoped that there would not be a 25th Anniversary and that the need would not be felt so keenly in the future.

Sadly the need has never been greater but happily Acton Homeless Concern still exists to meet the needs of those who have so little and, above all, to provide a warmth and affection that so many of the people who use the service lack in their daily lives.

There’s a lot of love in Acton Homeless Concern and it is spread throughout a vulnerable community.”



Angie Bray, MP for Ealing Central and Acton

“I want to congratulate Acton Homeless Concern on reaching its 25th anniversary and express my admiration for the amazing work its volunteers have carried out over the years and continue to do, to help those in our community who are in need. AHC feeds over 350 people every day, and provides support and a safe environment for people who are isolated and who feel marginalised.

“This work would not be possible without the dedication of local volunteers, and I hope people will give generously in this, its anniversary year, so they can continue to offer this fantastic support network.”

A day in the life of Ian Breen and the Team

Early Morning

I start the day at 8am and receive fifty cakes. They're delivered on the last Tuesday of every month by a lady whose name I don't know. It's just one example of the anonymous generosity we see all the time. Every day brings new emails and phone calls: someone has made contact because they've lost contact with a friend and hope I can help locate them.



Once I've finished, I head downstairs and, unbelievably, someone is making butter from cream that we received from the dairy! Rose is hard at it peeling potatoes. She lets me know that the water is

cold in the shower room. Thankfully, someone is on their way to fix it – the importance of a warm shower shouldn't be underestimated.

Mid-Morning

Clients start arriving. One needs a new suit for an interview and another needs a bus fare in order to get to hospital as he thinks he may have broken his arm. I write some letters for our sleeping bag appeal. They're to be sent to surrounding churches, mosques and temples. While we can't always find everyone a roof, I hope at least we can help with a warm night's sleep.

At around 11.30 I pop over to the Damien Centre to see whether they need anything. Maureen lets me know that there were around 100 served for breakfast this morning which means Emmaus House will be busy.

Queues for lunch begin. I can see Rose rushing around making sure the volunteers know what they need to do.



Lunchtime

By 12.30 Rose has served eighty lunches. The team is dishing up as quickly as they can. One of our clients is being a bit loud in the dining room so I politely ask him to calm down. Amazingly he does – that doesn't always happen!



Early Afternoon

We get lots of deliveries: some ready meals and fruit arrive and Rose goes through everything to check it. Later on, the Islamic Centre very kindly send 50kg of diced lamb for our clients.

One client arrives needing a suit for a funeral and another needs a pair of size 12 boots as his have a hole in them. Thankfully I have a pair in his size under my desk. I have a quick meeting with Lee who works for the drug and alcohol counselling service.

Mid-Afternoon

I head back round to the Damien Centre and have a cup of coffee with Mary who is always great company.

More admin: I make notes on all the clients I've seen and I write four thank you letters to local schools and churches thanking them for their donations of food. A client comes in and asks me to read a letter, scared that she may owe money when in fact she is to receive some. The smile on her face is priceless!

Rose and Emira start compiling their daily statistics. They make a note of which volunteers have been in and the temperatures of all the fridges. This level of detail means we can keep things running smoothly.

Late Afternoon

A client comes in needing help with their on-line benefit application form.

At around 4pm Rose, Emira and I head home. It's been a long but a good day.

We need your help

When Emmaus House opened its doors for the first time in 1989, no-one could have predicted that 25 years on this facility would be still in existence along with the Damian Centre. Indeed no-one could have imagined that in this time, more than one million meals would have been served to people in need.

Get Involved!

For the team at Acton Homeless Concern, every day brings a new challenge and, more often than not, a new face. With demand for our services increasing by more than 10 per cent every year, and cuts to our funding happening routinely, we are reliant on the generosity and support of individuals more than ever before. If you are willing to get onboard and see first-hand the difference you could make, then we would love to hear from you.

1. volunteer

- we always need more people who are happy to give up a few hours of their week. If you are willing to get onboard and see first-hand the difference you could make, then please get in touch.

2. donate

- support the work we do, we will make you an important promise: every penny you give us will be spent on helping, feeding and clothing those in desperate need.
- donate via our Justgiving page at www.justgiving.com/actonhomelessconcern or
- sign up for a monthly standing order of just £5 which feeds 10 people for an entire day or one person for ten whole days.

For more information about giving a regular donation or getting involved in other ways please contact:

IAN BREEN

Email actonhomelessconcern@yahoo.com

or

JustGiving™

Phone 0208 992 5768

www.justgiving.com/actonhomelessconcern



Our thanks

Put simply, we would not exist were it not for the army of people and organisations who give so generously of their time, money and resources.

Every year we thank these wonderful people and organisations for all they do, but this year, our 25th anniversary, we want them more than ever to know how truly grateful we are. It is because of them that we have been able to make Acton Homeless Concern the beacon of hope it is today.

As you would expect after 25 years, they are too numerous to list in full but they and we know who they are! Thank you to each and every one of you. And to those who worked tirelessly for AHC but who are sadly no longer with us, we will never forget all you did to get us to where we are today.

Jim and Betty Scully for our annual fundraising dance
Ciaran Casey and Tommy James for the annual golf day
Julie Giddens & Neil Littman at Farraday for designing this anniversary brochure, our website and branding
Ian Breen, Rose Mwananshiku and Elmira Hyseni at Emmaus House
Maureen Barrett and Carol Manderville at the Damien Centre
Fr Padraig Lyons, Fr Joe McGeedy RIP, Bishop Pat Lynch
Cardinal Hume and Bertie Aherne
Steve Pound MP
Sr. Victoire Mulligan
Sr. Aileen Kennedy
Sr. Martin Murray
Sr. Helen Bosquette
Christine Parminter
Fr. Tom Mullin, Fr. Pat Bradley RIP, Fr Chris McAneny, Fr John Leahy
The Shamrock Club
Dicky Dazzler aka Nick Gough
The Emigrant Support Programmes Irish Department of Foreign Affairs
London Borough of Ealing
The team at The Parish of Our Lady of Lourdes in Acton
The Sacred Hearts Community in Ealing
The Parish of Our Lady of Grace and St Edward Chiswick
The Catholic community of Great Missenden

Freshways Dairy in Acton
Julian Williams and the staff at Tower Systems in Watford
Barclays Bank
Kier Services
Bushells Estate Agents Acton
Haus Estate Agents Chiswick
Schools and churches, including St. Vincent's School, Sacred Heart, Mount Carmel School, St. Mary's Church – Acton, St. Peter & Paul Church – Northfields.
Sacred Heart High School PTFA
Ealing Rise drug & alcohol counsellors
St Mungos
Morrisons supermarket in Acton
Islamic centre Ealing
The doctors at Brook Green surgery
Fairshare
City Harvest
ASDA Park Royal
Tesco Perivale
The business community in Acton for their support, goodwill and practical help
Community Police
Danny Noonan



Acton Homeless Concern – List of services

EMMAUS HOUSE		
Meals	Alternate Mon, Tues to Fri, and alternate Sun	11.50 – 1.50 pm
Clothing	Wednesday (Women and Children)	12.00 – 2.00 pm
	Thursday (Or on request in emergency) (Men)	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Showers	Tuesday to Friday (and on request)	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Barber/Hairdresser	Thursday	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Chiropodist	First Friday of the month	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Doctor	Friday	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Optician	First Wednesday of the month	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Women & Children group	Wednesday (Nr. 3 Berrymead Gardens)	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Alcohol/Drug Counsellor	Advise and referral on request	
Dentist	On request	
Referrals/advice/Advocacy	On request	
Benefits Agency	Alternate Tuesday	
Physiotherapy Services	Friday	12.00 – 2.00 pm
AA Meetings	Saturday (Emmaus House)	11.00 am
Irish Advocacy Sundays	(Nr.3 Berrymead Gardens)	8.00 pm
Irish Group	First Tuesday of the month (Nr. 3 Berrymead Gardens)	12.00 – 2.00 pm

DAMIEN CENTRE		
Breakfast, Refreshments & Social Activities	Monday to Friday	9.00 am – 6.00 pm



EMMAUS House



Damien Centre

The Management Team



Anne Gray, Chair

I first became involved with Acton Homeless Concern 24 years ago, through a friend who was one of the founding volunteers of the charity. She asked if I would help with the first annual report in 1990. This was to be a "one off" as I was the only person they could find with a computer! The ethos of AHC and its vision as a Beacon of Hope have helped me to recognise how much most of us have and the satisfaction there is to be gained from giving some of it back. When I finished that first report, I did a spell check. For every mention of homelessness, the spell checker suggested hopelessness. I hope that everyone who visits us leaves some of their feelings of hopelessness behind. That is why I stay.



Peter Robertson, Trustee,

I have lived in Acton since 1999 and joined Acton Homeless Concern as a new Trustee last year. Before then, I supported AHC through fund raising activities such as the Christmas street collections. I have been aware of its work through my parish of Our Lady of Lourdes and my children participating in projects about the homeless at St Vincent's RC Primary School.

My motivation comes from the Gospels: to use my journalist background to ensure the friendship and help given to everyone who needs our services can continue into the future.



Ian Breen, Manager

I became manager for Acton Homeless Concern in 2007. My job is to manage the increasing numbers of homeless and marginalised people in Ealing and the surrounding area.

I lead a small team of paid staff and a large number of volunteers who look after more than 300 people a day across two centres. I have seen the charity expand significantly since my arrival seven years ago and so needless to say, I am a man with a lot to get done! My motivation comes from seeing each and every day the difference this charity makes to people's lives; people who are desperately in need of a helping hand.



Karen McDonagh, Trustee

I have been part of AHC since March 2013. I decided to get involved when I read in the parish newsletter that the trustees were looking for a new member.

My role is that of secretary. I take the minutes at the trustee meetings and collate all information from Ian and his team and turn it into data that we use to share with sponsors and other groups. This helps others see the great work that goes on each and every day. I also have created and facilitated training sessions, on basic child protection and working with vulnerable adults for volunteers and staff.



Simon Makepeace, Trustee

I am a Trustee serving as Treasurer for AHC, a role that I have held for 10 years. I was asked by Fr Chris to become a trustee and although I had heard of the charity my only previous involvement was to help with the annual Christmas street collection.

My time as a trustee has personally been extremely fulfilling knowing that I am helping in some small way with such a worthy cause. For me the most inspiring thing about the charity is the sense of community that surrounds it and how it brings the local community together to help those who need help.



Vanessa Canzini, Trustee

I have been a supporter, fundraiser and volunteer for Acton Homeless Concern for more than a decade, before becoming a trustee in late 2014. For more than four years I volunteered weekly at the Damien Centre and in 2010, set myself a challenge to raise £10,000 for the charity. In the end I raised nearly £20,000, which enabled AHC to buy much needed equipment for Emmaus House.

I was part of the team which led many of the fundraising efforts for the anniversary celebrations. My motivation for being involved with AHC is Mother Teresa and her famous quote about doing small things with great love.



Mary Foster, Trustee

I have been involved with Acton Homeless Concern since it started in 1989. I run women's services with a team of volunteers, providing a dedicated day each week where women and their children can meet in a safe environment. The problems experienced by this group of clients range from housing and benefits, school admissions and hospital visits to domestic abuse and its consequences. There is a high level of poverty with this group and it is often necessary to provide extra food, clothing, school uniform and even birthday and Christmas presents for the children.

I continue to work both as a volunteer and trustee because I want to make a difference and I know that this organisation is doing that every day for hundreds of people.



Vivienne Duggan, Trustee

I have been a trustee since 2009. Whilst I find it very sad that in the 21st century, there is still a need for a charity such as Acton Homeless Concern, I am proud to be part of something that makes such a positive difference to local people



Father John Leahy, Trustee

Father John is the Parish Priest at Our Lady of Lourdes and holds the position of Secretary.

Serving up solidarity



Sister Ambrose, Sister Celine, Cesar, Rosa, Sister Madeleine, Sister Aileen, and right, Sister Helen and Sister Aileen in bibs. Pictures © Kieran Russell

CHRISTMAS cards, presents and festive cheer may sound like a recipe for a typical family Christmas, but in fact this was the scene that greeted visitors to an Acton homeless centre.

Sister Aileen Kennedy, director of Acton Homeless Concern, said with families gathering together and the shops full of expensive goods to buy, this could be a particularly difficult time for the homeless.

The charity pulls out all the stops at its two day centres, Emmanuel House in Berrymead Gardens and the Damien Centre in Church Road, to ensure its visitors enjoy something of the spirit of the season.

Sister Aileen, who has the centre for four years, said: "The atmosphere is always terrific. We have regular volun-

teers because of addiction or psychological problems."

For men over 50 the most common reason is a break up of a relationship.

A client, Clive, 43, said the charity's two centres were like a home to him.

He moved to Germany 14 years ago to work as a building labourer and found accommodation linked to his work. This became a problem when arthritis made him incapable of work six years ago and he found himself without a roof over his head and far from home.

He was forced to work illegally on jobs where no questions were asked, such as at fairgrounds and labouring on boats. He could not find a proper job without an address and could not rent a flat without a work permit.

He said: "It was a vicious cycle similar to what happens in this country."

Aileen's concern



Picture: STAN JAMES 2007

ARRIVING at the Acton Homeless Concern at lunchtime, I found more than 40 people patiently queuing up for clothes and a hot meal.

Each person was very polite and seemed to appreciate the role of the centre as, in most cases, their only link to a world that has turned its back on them.

Sister Aileen Kennedy, a nurse by profession, has been working at the Acton Homeless Concern since January. She left her previous job as the matron of a nursing home in Northern Ireland when she heard of the vacant position.

She said: "I have always been involved in care, but I was particularly interested in working with those less well-off than ourselves."

She admits that it can be frustrating when other organisations in the area fail to treat the homeless as a priority.

She said: "There are voluntary bodies that are supposed to help them, but it is often difficult for those concerned to access them without a permanent address."

She said: "It is in temporary accommodation (a regular at Acton Homeless Concern) is a regular at Acton 15 years ago. When I came to Acton, the only thing I owned was the clothes on my back. Without their help, I don't know how I would have survived."

"The staff do an excellent job and I cannot tell you how much respect I have for them."

Home from home for many

DESPITE being treated with his family this Christmas as he has spent Christmas with his family since 1979.

The 50-year-old became estranged from them after a drink problem drove him to living on the streets.

But with the help of Acton Homeless Concern he has turned his life around and will be his four grandchildren for the first time this Christmas.

The organisation, which has two centres in Acton has been running for 13 years.

Sister Aileen Kennedy became director of the charity two years ago after leaving her nursing job in Northern Ireland.

Her and around 50 volunteers provide the first step for homeless people seeking help.

The centre at Emmanuel House in Berrymead Gardens offers hot meals, showers, clothing and medical services, while the Damien Centre in Church Road allows visitors to watch TV and take a nap.

Despite being treated with his family this Christmas as he has spent Christmas with his family since 1979.

The 50-year-old became estranged from them after a drink problem drove him to living on the streets.

But with the help of Acton Homeless Concern he has turned his life around and will be his four grandchildren for the first time this Christmas.

The organisation, which has two centres in Acton has been running for 13 years.

Sister Aileen Kennedy became director of the charity two years ago after leaving her nursing job in Northern Ireland.

Her and around 50 volunteers provide the first step for homeless people seeking help.

The centre at Emmanuel House in Berrymead Gardens offers hot meals, showers, clothing and medical services, while the Damien Centre in Church Road allows visitors to watch TV and take a nap.

Homeless warm to navens of cheer

VOLUNTEERS at two Acton shelters are doing their best this Christmas for the borough's homeless - who not only face the bitter cold but also the uncertainty of happier times with their families.

Under the umbrella of Acton Homeless Concern, both Emmanuel House, in Berrymead Gardens, and the Damien Centre, in Church Road, are open throughout the Christmas period, providing hot meals, shelter, clothes, a sympathetic ear, and a party for more than 130 homeless people.

Ian Breen, 61, who works in the kitchen at Emmanuel House, has seen both sides of the service. After losing his job in 1984, he lived on the streets of North Kensington for three years, travelling to the Acton centres for food and shelter.

He said: "When it comes to Christmas, homeless people are in the depths of despair because of family members and the weather. You have to have shelter in your rooms to fight off the cold and take your mind off the past - the problem is you get sickened."

"If this place had not been here when I was 19, I wouldn't have gone mad. As far as I'm concerned, Emmanuel House is my home, and the volunteers and visitors are my family - and I'm in good company this Christmas."

The organisation, which has been running for 13 years, expects up to 130 homeless people every day throughout the Christmas period, and even more during their Christmas dinner, which includes carols and a special dinner.

He said: "In my words, both centres are offering free clothing, showers, and shelter or accommodation here. So while most people enjoy a break, the volunteers at both Emmanuel House and the Damien Centre have been trying to meet everyone's needs during their holiday time of the year."

Sister Celine Murphy, 70, who provides a refreshery service for visitors as well as helping in the kitchen, says there is nothing else she would rather do than help those in need.

PRIDE IN OUR PEOPLE

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Far more than helping homeless

IAN Breen is the epitome of an organisation's mission to provide shelter and hope.

The scope of Acton Homeless Concern goes beyond its title, helping everyone from the homeless to the elderly, the illiterate and those without hope.

Ian, manager of the centre in Berrymead Gardens, Acton, for six years, was nominated by four people who praised him for his devotion and attitude towards others.

They said: "He does an outstanding job with homeless people, changing lives for the better and helping them move on in life. One of the few who puts you first, any problems can be usually solved."

The centre, founded in 1988 by the priests of the Sacred Hearts Community in Acton, helps around 1,000 people a week who are marginalised by society.

Anyone from any background can drop in for food, clothes, a shower, medical services, as well as advice from a number of organisations and activities at its sister base, the Damien Centre in Church Road.

It is funded by local businesses, groups and churches as well as Ealing Council and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Ian, 54, a former social worker who has also cared for the elderly and people with learning disabilities, said: "This is the best job I have ever done. When I come in I don't know who will knock on the door, with what problems. If you can help people that's fantastic."

"Lots of people who come here are elderly and they come for a meal and chat. We get people who can't read or write, anyone, from the old lady who wants you to find her dog to the man with his shoes in tatters."

While he admitted there were many traumatic stories, there were also uplifting ones.

He said: "One Boxing Day this couple appeared looking for their son who they hadn't seen for four years. I just happened to know where he was and within an hour they had a little reunion right here. It was even more remarkable because it was Christmas time."

"Then you can see someone with alcohol problems on their last legs. A year later they looked so much better I didn't recognise them."

"Some people have been on the road forever. You reach out to touch them and they move away. It's terribly sad. We are here to help everyone. We are a small charity with a big heart."



DEVOTED: Ian Breen

Photo by Matt Grayson www. WL20147744

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What we would like to do is change the world - make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended for them to do.

Dorothy Day



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Acton Homeless Concern is an independent charity,
founded in 1988 by the Sacred Hearts Community in
the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes, Acton.

Registered Charity Number: 105881

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