

THE PASSAGE

to ending homelessness

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Noli me tangere

Attributed to Jacopo di Cione

Courtesy: The National Gallery

A story from the New Testament (John 20: 14-18) tells how Mary Magdalene first mistook the Risen Christ for a gardener – he is shown holding a hoe.



Easter newsletter, 2015

Dear Friends

As I write this letter, the weather continues to be cold. It is, however, wonderful to see the first glimpses of Spring as the days slowly get longer and flowers begin to appear.

Easter is a time when we celebrate new life! An extensive refurbishment of St Vincent's Centre is creating a new centre at The Passage – one where lives that have been broken by the trauma of homelessness will be transformed.

That transformation is illustrated in the stories of Jane and Peter.

Jane tells her story

"I found myself at Victoria, not knowing what I was going to do or where I was going to sleep. I slept on the streets with one eye open and it was the first time in my life when I was really scared. Lying down with my thoughts and feelings and wanting a way out, I cried myself to sleep that night. In the morning I was approached by two men from The Passage Outreach Team and they directed me to The Passage Resource Centre. I went inside for a shower and breakfast.

"I wanted affordable accommodation as I had always worked and wanted desperately to go back to work at some point. I was introduced to Michael (a Passage worker) and he set about helping me to find appropriate accommodation.

"Michael found an option with a housing association, we completed an application form, and then I viewed the flat. The housing association then decided that I could not have it as they had not appreciated that I was coming straight from the street and thought I would not be able to cope. Michael advocated on my behalf and also got a senior manager to speak to the housing association about me. Eventually, the housing association was persuaded to change its mind and said they would offer me a flat, but the one I had seen had gone, so I was still on the street.

"While I waited for another offer, Michael persuaded me to go into Montfort House, which is a Passage project. It was not like a hostel, but more like supported studio flats. **I felt that Michael and the others were really fighting my corner.**

"Eventually I got an offer of a lovely housing association studio flat in Stockwell. Michael helped me get everything I needed and I moved in. I have now been in my flat for over 18 months and I am grateful that Michael still keeps in contact and visits me, helping to sort out any problems.

"With the support of The Passage, I am not only off the streets, but have also managed to return to employment. I now work as a bus conductor. That's my story and I am so grateful for all the help that I received."

Peter has also moved from feeling that there was no hope, to a new and exciting life, with many opportunities ahead of him.

Peter had a difficult childhood; when he left school, without any formal qualifications, he fell out with his family and left home. By his mid-20s, he had drifted into homelessness, staying in many different towns and cities for short periods, either rough sleeping or in short-stay hostels or night shelters. He was also drinking heavily and began smoking hard drugs, including crack cocaine.

In February 2013, Peter was referred to Passage House. Once there, he started to make strenuous efforts to change his life. All he said at the time, was that he wanted something better: a new life. He got involved in various activities, such as a gardening group (he had previously worked as a gardener), and a British Military Fitness group, which meets in a local park. He attended courses to improve his literacy and basic computing, and also attended drug and alcohol support services, which gave him support for his alcohol and drug problems. He quickly stopped using drugs and now drinks only moderately.

With our help, after a few months Peter was able to get his own flat and felt ready to return to work. He took, and passed, the CSCS qualification, which is necessary for any type of building-site work. By mid-2014, for the first time in several years, he was working again as a labourer. He was not, however, satisfied with working for the minimum-wage as a general labourer and wanted to progress. With our support, he took and passed theory and practical exams for his "tickets" and obtained a Digger Driving Licence.

Almost immediately, he was able to double his income. He was able to get work on building sites at wages that were at least twice the minimum

hourly rate, rather than working for the minimum that his previous lack of qualifications had tied him to. **Peter has not had a single day out of work since starting work more than six months ago.** Because he hadn't previously had a tenancy of his own, The Passage is still helping him – and his tenancy skills are improving.

The transformation in Peter is obvious for all to see. He is smart, well-presented and confident – a very different man from the one who arrived at Passage House only two years ago. No-one would guess that he had spent many years as a homeless person.



Erica, the Passage House manager, helps a resident with literacy work.

Prevention better than cure

As is demonstrated by the stories of Jane and Peter, our established projects have a significant effect, but we are always looking to see how we can have more impact and address needs that are not being met.

Prevention is always better than cure – a good example of this is our **Hospital Discharge Scheme**. **For the past 15 months, we have been operating this project to make contact with people who are at risk of homelessness when they are discharged from hospital and to help them arrange accommodation for when they leave hospital.**

Before we started this scheme, many people were discharged from hospital on to the street. In the first year, we helped 161 people find accommodation before they were discharged, and hope to roll-out the scheme to more hospitals over the next 12 months.

Events

We will be holding our three annual events again in 2015.

Our **Garden Party**, in the College Garden, Westminster Abbey, will be on **Friday 10 July, from 6pm.**

Our **Night Under the Stars** concert, at the Royal Festival Hall, will be on **Thursday 27 October, at 7.30pm.**

Our **Carol Service**, at St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey, will be on **Friday 11 December at 6pm.**

Flyers for the first two events are enclosed. I do hope you will be able to attend.

Support for The Passage

We are simply unable to provide the services we run, or develop the new services that our clients so desperately need, without your support.

In our Christmas newsletter, I detailed how, yet again, more cuts to statutory funding are on the way from April 2015, yet each year since the cuts began, your generous support has ensured that our vital work has been able to continue. I really can't thank you enough for caring so much about our work and the true impact it makes, and for enabling us to continue and develop our much-needed services.

We are fortunate to have such dedicated volunteers to help with our fundraising work. If you would like to help, either in our central office or from home. To find out more, please contact Andrew Hollingsworth
telephone 020 7592 1855
email andrew.h@passage.org.uk

Thank you for your continued support for our work.

Like Jane and Peter, we all need extra support in our lives when things are tough; when it feels as if there is no hope. Your support enables us to be there for them, to give that hope and to empower them to make that transformation to a new life.

I hope you and your family have a blessed and peaceful Easter – and thank you all again for your support.



Mick Clarke, Chief Executive

Thank you if you have recently supported The Passage with a donation, or if you support us regularly with a standing order. We write to all our supporters at Easter – those who have given and those who are about to give.
