

THE PASSAGE

to ending homelessness

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*Christmas card
designed by a client
of The Passage*



Christmas newsletter, 2018

Home

Dear Friends

I hope that this newsletter finds you well and looking forward to celebrating Christmas. The pressures in the run-up to Christmas can seem almost overwhelming at times and we can sometimes be in danger of losing the real meaning and message of Christmas. I therefore hope that, when the day finally arrives, you will be able to spend this special time of year with friends and family in the warmth and comfort of your home.

Sadly, many vulnerable people living on London's streets will not be home for Christmas; it is simply another day of being very far from family and loved ones, coping with the misery and cold. Recent research shows that 320,000 people in Britain are now "officially" homeless, a rise of 4% since December 2017. This is equivalent to 36 new people becoming homeless every day.

In London, the situation is shocking: one in 52 people is without a home. At The Passage, as well as working to prevent people ending up on the streets in the first place, we work with the most visible sign of homelessness; those sleeping out on our streets.



Our Street Outreach Team operates throughout the City of Westminster.

Even former rough sleepers no longer living on the streets, but in their own accommodation, tell us that they often feel lonely – and Christmas simply seems to bring those feelings of isolation into focus.

Thankfully, The Passage is here to offer a lifeline, not only at Christmas, but throughout the year. Since last Christmas, thanks to our amazing staff, volunteers, and the support of people like you, we have helped more than 260 people into accommodation, which means that they have a place to call home this Christmas. Furthermore, our award-winning **Home for Good** programme has helped many former rough sleepers now living independently, but at risk of loneliness and social isolation, to retain their tenancies and form networks and connections in their new communities. **In fact, last year The Passage helped 98% of clients using our Home for Good programme to maintain their tenancies.**

I would like to introduce you to two people, Rose and Con, who have been supported by The Passage this year and have shown great courage in overcoming many difficulties. Thanks to your support, they are now settled in their own homes and are building a life away from the streets.

Rose returned to the UK last year after living abroad for some time. When she came to The Passage, she told us that she had been suffering domestic abuse and that this was why she had returned. She stayed with a friend for the first few months, but could not remain and had subsequently been found sleeping rough.

Rose struggled greatly with navigating the statutory homelessness and welfare services; they can be a minefield and many of our clients face the same challenges. Rose had

for Christmas

been placed in temporary accommodation, but despite three attempts to find a permanent home, her applications were rejected. She has complex physical issues as a result of an undiagnosed illness, as well as poor mental health caused by her domestic abuse, other trauma, and being homeless. The combination of these issues resulted in her having difficulty recalling certain events and details about her past. She also found local authority's questions to be intrusive and distressing. These factors combined to give the impression that she was not co-operating with the services and, as a result, she was deemed to be ineligible for support.

The Passage would not give up on Rose and we continued to build trust with her. Our Welfare Worker assisted her with benefits advice. She was then able to attend complementary therapies and counselling services based at our Resource Centre. She was supported by our Enhanced Reconnections Worker who encouraged her to engage with statutory services.

Unfortunately, her health deteriorated during the year and she found it increasingly hard to travel. Our worker visited her in her temporary accommodation to check on her wellbeing and to link her in to other services, such as a specialist medical support unit. The new Tenancy Support Team at The Passage organised for Rose to have a community care assessment visit and offered much-needed emotional support. All Passage staff involved with Rose worked very closely together so that she received a consistent, personally tailored approach to her care.

Through the co-ordinated support of The Passage, Rose has now secured, permanent accommodation and is living safely in her own home: home for Christmas and, with our continued support, home for good.



Con, with his mentor, Louisa.

When we first met Con, he was sleeping rough and faced many challenges with physical and mental health and with substance misuse. The Passage staff at our Resource Centre worked with him over many months to provide the tailored support and care he needed to move into his own accommodation.

The Passage helped Con off the streets but, despite having his own home, he experienced intense periods of isolation – which happens to many former rough sleepers, particularly those who have been homeless for a long time. They often struggle to find a sense of community and belonging and, sadly, it is not uncommon for people to end up back on the street.

The Passage referred Con to our **Home for Good** programme. By partnering formerly homeless people with fully vetted and trained volunteers, Home for Good helps them to improve their health and personal development, to maintain tenancies, move into employment, and to build networks and settle into new communities. Partners meet

weekly or fortnightly for up to 12 months.

Con was partnered with Louisa, who in her “day job” runs a career mentoring programme for university students. In her spare time she enjoys cooking and baking, exploring London and long walks.

With Louisa’s help, Con devised a plan that included budgeting, job hunting, and updating his LinkedIn profile and CV. They also discussed a healthier lifestyle and started running together, which led to Con completing a 10k sponsored run. He began volunteering with a number of different community projects and, in September this year, **Con was offered a full-time job as a Trainee Support Worker**; he also achieved an Information Advice and Guidance NVG Level 3 qualification.

At a recent homelessness event in Southwark, Con talked of his experiences and Louisa shared information about Home for Good. he has subsequently spoken at other events in the hope that it will help other people. **Con describes having a Home for Good volunteer as a “motivation, a conscience, a reason to get out of bed – I can feel isolated a lot. It’s given me someone to explore with and to reignite my interests”.**

For Louisa, the experience has been just as positive. She says: “I am really enjoying volunteering on the Home for Good programme. It doesn’t feel like volunteering or work, it’s just an enjoyable couple of hours. Through the Group Supervision sessions I am learning lots more about issues related to homelessness, for example, the effect that alcohol/withdrawing from alcohol can have on a person. I also like the community element, as I am quite new to the area and we try to explore different places together. As a volunteer, it is good to use my knowledge to advise and support someone.

Con is very proactive and really understands boundaries because of his own experience of volunteering.”

The journey from the street to work, and to a home, is often long and complex, but we are here to help our clients every step of the way.

We couldn’t, however, do that without your continuing support. As many of you know, it costs more than £5 million a year to run The Passage and, in the face of limited resources and increased demand for our services, your help is invaluable.

Thank you so much for all you do in helping us to bring hope and change to so many peoples’ lives. To give vulnerable people a safe place to call home; not just at Christmas, but for good.

I wish you and your family a joyous, and blessed Christmas and a very happy and peaceful New Year.



Mick Clarke
Chief Executive

We are excited to announce that we will be holding a St David’s Day concert on Friday, 1 March 2019 in support of The Passage. Once again we look forward to welcoming The London Welsh Male Voice Choir and guest soloists. The concert will take place at Methodist Central Hall; please see the enclosed flyer for ticket information and further details.