



OFF THE FENCE



**PROGRESS REPORT
FOR THE BEER-HARRIS
MEMORIAL TRUST
2020-21**

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The Trustees of the Beer-Harris Memorial Trust have so generously provided a grant of £1,000 in February 2020 for Off The Fence Trust's work. It's been a momentous year and we are grateful that we are still here to provide the critically important services that this funding has allowed us to carry out.

A REMINDER OF OUR CORE MISSION

'Resisting poverty. Empowering people. Restoring hope'. Off The Fence is a charity founded in 1997 with a vision to end poverty in all forms around Brighton and Hove. We work in three areas: homelessness, via emergency outreach to those living on the streets from our homeless centre, Antifreeze, which provides emotional, spiritual and practical assistance for exiting homelessness. We support women facing financial, health and domestic crisis' and more at the Gateway Women's Centre, and we have a Schools & Youth team which provides a programme of fun and creative activities in schools, to help young people access the tools they need to manage daily pressures in healthy ways. Off The Fence offers people hope, a way forward and the opportunity to live a new, better and transformed life.

OUR ANTIFREEZE PROJECT

Antifreeze is our project that supports the homeless and newly housed in Brighton and Hove. The men and women who come to our Centre have struggled with life-destroying addictions, mental health issues, job loss, relationship breakdowns, bereavement and other issues, which have led to homelessness.

The Antifreeze Centre is a welcoming place where homeless individuals can have a hot meal, chat, use a computer, collect essential post and charge their mobile phones. They can also pick up sleeping bags, have a wash, be given clothes, have a haircut, receive vital foot and dental care, and crucially begin to work with the team to get housed, back in employment and address current and deep-rooted emotional issues. Several days a week the 'Hygiene For All' vans are based outside our Centre for our clients to use to have showers and to have their clothes washed, and on other days in the week they are based at other easy to locate locations around the city. In 2019-20 1635 one-to-one appointments were given, and in these appointments a step-by-step approach plan is put together to address these issues, thus helping to protect clients from any problems on their road to independence.

COVID-19

The Covid-19 crisis has seen around 400 of the city's rough sleepers taken into temporary accommodation, mainly in B&Bs and hotels and more recently in student Halls of Residence. We are concerned with what happens after that. During the crisis we have adapted our working model to mirror the needs of our clients. Telephone, one-to-ones and other innovative means of support have been harnessed – to the extent that our client encounters have risen not fallen during the Covid-19 crisis.



SINCE MARCH 2020

We received a donation of new boxer shorts from SockShop, which we have been distributing to the homeless and temporarily housed across the city, as we are regularly asked for these. This is a photograph of Paul Young, our CEO, having taken delivery of these.

Homelessness is the result of a wide variety of life blows and the pandemic will amplify these. Life-destroying addictions, mental health issues, job loss, relationship breakdowns and bereavement will not have been helped by Covid-19. So, we have been filling our 'barn' with lifesaving 'grain' including clothing, new sleeping bags, gloves and non-perishables. We will be ready to re-open our Antifreeze day centre as soon as we can do so and within any prevailing social distancing rules.

Our clients will be warmly welcomed as before and linked with a key worker who will work closely with them to help address housing, health, welfare and financial needs. Also, those who are found permanent or semi-permanent lodgings will be offered help as they need to adjust to their new life and to retain that status.



This is a photograph of Ethan, our 'Hygiene For All' Manager, who is loading our Hygiene Van to take it out on outreach around the city. Last year we gave out 479 sleeping bags and we always have supplies of these on the van.

Over the summer months our Antifreeze team delivered sun cream, after sun, hygiene products, water and fans to the homeless in the various places they were being housed in the city, as these items were not being provided and we considered them to be a necessity, alongside the other items we provide – like boxer shorts, above.



This is a photograph of David, our Antifreeze Deputy Manager, with Ethan, our 'Hygiene For All' Manager doing outreach, as there are now many homeless on the streets again, and we are urgently seeking these, to link them up with all available services.

We have produced a new Street Sheet, showing all the services available to the homeless during this period of Covid-19, with a map showing where they are located in the city, which we give out to all those we find on the streets – see below.



Offer from Antifreeze

Steve Brunton, from **Off the Fence's Antifreeze**, is offering Chaplaincy/Pastoral Support to both clients, and those working with the homeless, in Brighton and Hove throughout this Covid19 crisis to help relieve stress, provide encouragement.

Email Steve at steve.brunton@offthefence.org.uk to book a telephone or zoom appointment.

The Manager of Antifreeze, Steve Brunton, has been providing Pastoral Support to the homeless and those working with the homeless in our city, since Covid-19 began. He is also having regular Zoom meetings with many of the agencies he normally works with, and says how these meetings are strengthening their relationships. This – on the left – is an advert placed by one of those agencies in their monthly magazine.

He and the team have been having daily phone and Zoom conversations with homeless men and women, supporting them, offering emotional support and helping them book doctor's appointments, liaising with housing providers to find permanent accommodation for individuals, making mental health referrals, giving benefits advice, providing creative support and referrals, and much more. He has been having Zoom meetings with Antifreeze staff and interns, as well as running training sessions for them, and for our volunteers, via Zoom. He has also been leading our weekly Staff Meeting on Zoom.

OUR GATEWAY PROJECT

One in five women will suffer from mental health problems in their lifetime. In a climate of rife financial difficulty, relationship instability, addiction and escalating levels of domestic and sexual abuse, it is easy for some of these women to fall through the gaps of the services available. We are there to help them. The Centre offers an impartial, caring and safe environment, for women who suffer with issues ranging from the mundane to the complex. At Gateway, we see women struggling with difficult relationships, mental health problems, loss and bereavement as well as housing and financial issues. We also help those who have previous or current experience of trauma and abuse. The project aims to reduce isolation, build resilience and increase confidence and self-esteem. We help our clients to develop life skills and improved emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing, through practical help, courses, activities and one-to-one sessions. An increasing number of women seek support as they deal with the repercussions of abuse and struggle with getting through court proceedings and rebuilding their lives once the legal work is over. Our team is there to support and listen and set structures for a recovery strategy.

SINCE MARCH 2020

Since Covid-19 began, we have been keeping in weekly contact with all of our clients, by telephone and by Zoom. Many of the women had mobile phones too old to access Zoom, so we were able to fundraise for smart phones and tablets for them and give these to those women, to prevent them from

feeling isolated. Through Zoom we have been able to give one-to-one support sessions, plus many group activities. As time has gone on, many of the women have said these have been life-savers to them. When we delivered Christmas gift bags and food just before Christmas, one of the women burst into tears saying that this would be the only present she would receive, which was heartbreaking, but we were so thankful we could be there for her.

One of our clients is in her late 60s. Her husband died a couple of years ago and she now lives alone. She has struggled with depression and financial problems, and has physical health problems. She has attended some of our 'Food for Thought' and 'Coffee and Chat' Zoom meetings since the lockdown started. Her daughter had helped her set up her tablet, and although it is a challenge to her, she is usually able to join Zoom without help. She is always very chatty during the meetings. But the team noticed that when the discussion turned to how the women are coping during the lockdown, she hinted that she felt lonely and found a lack of routine and motivation difficult.

After the Zoom meeting, our Gateway Manager rang her, as she wanted to pick up on what she had hinted at during the meeting, and to find out how she was really coping. She said, "I know I can ring you but I don't like to trouble you". Our Gateway Manager assured her that we were here for her if she would like to talk or wanted support. She said she felt very depressed at times, and found it hard to fill her days. Our Gateway Manager suggested that attending the Gateway Zoom meetings might help give structure to her day or week, which would be something to look forward to. She agreed that the regular Zooms have been helpful. It was agreed that we would ring her weekly to check in and to offer befriending-style conversation. She said: "Gateway is like a big family to me. I can't tell you how much I love it. Gateway has been the most amazing place. Finding Gateway was the best thing that happened to me in the past 1½ years. After seeing you all on Zoom – it rekindles me! It's so hard not seeing everyone... then I see you and all the women and it's great. I think: "we're all still here – we're still hanging on and coping".

Another client said "I desperately, desperately needed to speak to someone today and just knew I needed Gateway. I knew that as soon as I spoke to one of the staff you would listen to me and put things into perspective. Now that we've spoken, I feel so much better and have a clear plan on how to move forwards. There's absolutely no way I would have known what to do on my own. I'm crying because I don't have the words to thank you enough for what you do for me".



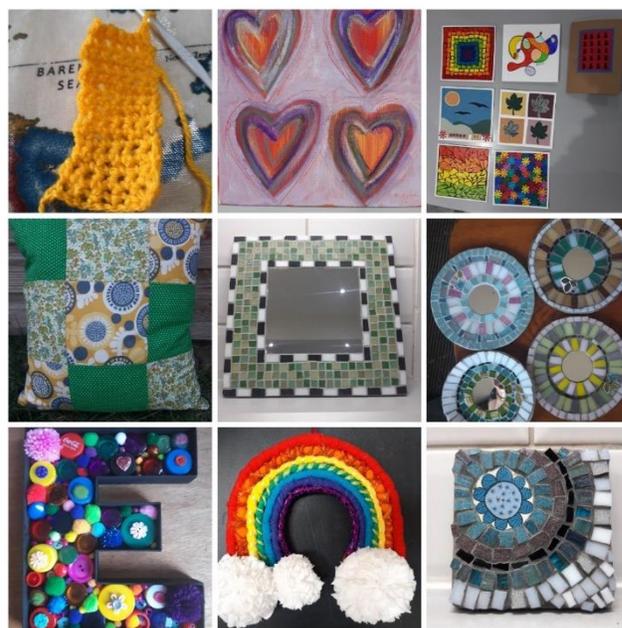
At Gateway, we cannot ignore the practical needs of the women who access the services. While emotional support is invaluable, we are always aware of the bigger picture, and we saw a doubling in the number of emergency food bags we handed out in 2020, which reflects the increase in food poverty across the city and the experience of other food banks. During this period of lockdown, we have been dropping off food parcels to the women who need help in this way, weekly. A client, Amber, said before Covid-19, "My situation as a single mum and victim of abuse with mental health issues means that my finance situation is often a struggle. But Gateway offer accessible, free or very low-cost outings and activities for people like me. I am a crafts woman and was very excited by the craft activities on offer when I first arrived at Gateway. In addition, I could not live without the donations table, where people donate food, clothes and gifts to us. I have enjoyed the food and wonderful items which Gateway allow us to simply take when we need them. It's a big help for me in terms of my finances. I have also been able to

enjoy wonderful trips with the other women, and have taken part in helpful educational courses. I feel so supported and less isolated and Gateway gives me the bigger family and sisterhood that I have craved all my life".

During this lockdown period, our Gateway team have been creatively offering one-to-one and group mentoring sessions, as well as offering cookery classes, craft sessions, coffee mornings, group singalongs and much more via Zoom. For the craft sessions, the team have delivered craft kits to all of the women, so that they could take part.

The photograph to the right is of the amazing craft items that the women have made.

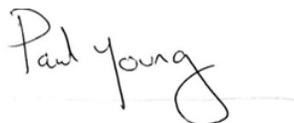
We are in the process of purchasing and renovating our Gateway building, and that will enable us to increase our client numbers from 119, as they are currently to 175 +, which is very exciting!



Without the commitment and financial support of the Beer-Harris Memorial Trust our many service users and clients would simply not have had the opportunity to even think about changing their lives for the better. With your support, many of our clients are now able to think more about a new and better future. For this, we are incredibly grateful and cannot stress enough the importance of the partnership.

Your support has been critical in the last year. It has enabled us to maintain services that are more needed than ever at present.

We thank you so much for working with us at such a crucial time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Young". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Paul Young, CEO
26th February 2021