



HomeLink: A Quaker Social Action Project

By Sarah Hind and
Tim Nicholls

HomeLink is a Quaker Social Action project working to house single homeless people in East London (UK). This rent/deposit scheme has now reached its tenth year of operation. During that time we have housed 1,100 people and worked with over 70 volunteers. Why is this project still needed?

Unfortunately, homelessness in the UK is still growing: government figures, quoted in a recent Crisis report, recorded 200,000 people accepted as homeless by local authorities in 2003, 25% more than in 1997¹.

For most people it is difficult to pinpoint the exact point at which they became homeless. When they finally walked out on a violent partner and were sleeping on a sister's sofa? When they had that last row with a parent or step-parent and found some space on the floor at a mate's house? Or was it when they were evicted after losing their job? What is certain is that the longer they exist in this kind of limbo, the more likely it is that their self-esteem and health will be affected.

In the UK, local government has a 'primary duty' of care to certain groups of homeless people. This includes those who are caring for dependent children. However, those who are defined as 'non-

priority' single homeless people² are only eligible for advice.

HomeLink offers support to 'non-priority' single homeless people whether they are living on sofas and floors, in disused buildings or in temporary hostels. We meet with clients referred to us by local authority housing advice teams, listen to their needs and assist them in finding and securing private accommodation with reliable landlords.

For example, one of our recent clients was a 45-year-old man who had been homeless for 14 months after a relationship breakdown. He lost his job soon after becoming homeless, as his employer discovered he'd been sleeping at his work premises. Our team were able to find a one-bedroom flat for him, assist him with his housing benefit claim, and provide eight weeks rent, deposit in advance, and a damage guarantee for the landlord. We were also able to secure a community care grant to pay for essentials such as pots, pans and cutlery.

What happens after our clients are housed?

Encouragement and support are most important at this time. Dealing with all the bureaucracy needed to get out of the homelessness trap is draining. Our volunteer resettlement workers therefore play a vital role in the way HomeLink works. Trained by our

housing officers, they provide an impartial listening ear. Volunteers boost clients' confidence during the process of dealing with the practicalities of living in a new home, registering with a G.P (General Practitioner, or local doctor), or looking for work.

Without these volunteers, much of our work might well be in vain. Research suggests that one in four resettled homeless people are unable to sustain their tenancies due to loneliness and boredom. Ninety percent of those housed by HomeLink stay re-housed.

Quaker Social Action was founded in 1867 as a philanthropic response to the appalling poverty in the East End of London at the time. Now, 137 years later, our six projects work with local people, tackling the causes of social, economic and environmental injustice.

Our other projects include:

- **HomeStore** – a community furniture recycling project, which helps low-income households furnish their homes without getting into debt;
- **Street Cred** – a micro credit project supporting women on low incomes into enterprise;
- **Odd Jobs Training** – a project that works to build the skills and self-confidence of homeless people, providing training and practical experience in DIY skills;
- **Financial Literacy Project** – which builds on community financial literacy activities. We plan to work with families on the emotional issues around debt and money. ✱

Footnotes:

¹ 'Hidden Homeless: Britain's Invisible City', © Copyright 2003, Crisis (a UK charity for homeless people, especially those with no legal right to accommodation).

² For local authorities, 'non-priority' single homeless people are those without dependents who do not fit into their definition of 'vulnerable.'

For more information, please see our website at: «www.quakersocialaction.com».

SURPRISE

BY CORNELIA HORNSTY

WHILE READING THE MAGAZINE DAN NOTICES A THIRTY-PAGE AD ABOUT FINDING THE WATCH YOU NEED AND DESERVE THAT WILL SHOW THE WORLD WHAT A POWERFUL PERSON YOU ARE, BUT HE HAS JUST RETURNED TO CANADA AFTER A MONTH IN GUATEMALA WORKING WITH THE PUEBLO PARTISANS IN A COUNTRY WHERE MANY PEOPLE ARE POOR AND WHERE THE RICH AND POWERFUL WHO OWN WATCHES SEE THE MAYANS AS LAZY AND LOSERS AND DON'T BOTHER WITH THEM, SO DAN IS ANGRY AND NOT INTERESTED IN WATCHES AND POWER — HE'S HAUNTED BY THE MEMORY OF THE MAN WHO COMES TO ONE OF THE TEMPORARY CLINICS SEEKING SOME HELP WITH HIS LARGE HERNIA THAT IS CAUSING HIM PAIN AND PREVENTING HIM FROM WORKING, SO THEY FIX IT THE BEST THEY CAN, THEY SEW HIM UP AND HE'S GRATEFUL BUT NO ONE KNOWS HOW LONG IT TOOK TO FIX HIM AND NO ONE KNOWS WHAT TIME IT WAS, NOT EVEN THE NURSE PRACTITIONERS FROM OREGON, BUT WHEN THE MAN IS LEAVING AND HAPPENS TO REMOVE HIS HAT, THERE'S A BIG SURPRISE — A LARGE INFECTED TUMOUR IS GROWING THROUGH HIS SKULL HE SAYS FOR OVER TWO YEARS, BUT HE'S NOT WORRIED ABOUT IT OR HOW LONG IT TOOK TO GROW THIS TUMOUR BECAUSE IT HAS NOT PREVENTED HIM FROM WORKING AND THAT'S THE BIGGEST CONCERN FOR SOMEONE WHO'S POOR AND HAS TO LOOK AFTER HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN AND WHO CANNOT LEAF THROUGH MAGAZINES WITH ADS ABOUT WATCHES — NO TIME FOR THAT WHEN YOU'RE JUST TRYING TO KEEP YOUR HERNIA TOGETHER AND KEEP YOUR HAT ON YOUR BURGEONING HEAD.

Cornelia (Dee) Hornosty, who resides in Victoria BC, is a member of Hamilton Monthly Meeting.