

Nightstop

By Carol Robinson

What do you do when you walk past a beggar? How do you feel? I try to smile and respond politely, but negatively, to their request. And, if I'm not too intimidated, I might try a conversation. But I always seem to feel a mixture of guilt, anger and pity. I think a sense of frustration is common too – what can I do?

Often the simplest solutions are best. York Nightstop is a scheme that has existed in the city of York, in the UK, since 1994. It now has projects expanding into surrounding rural areas, in Ryedale, Hambleton and Richmondshire. There are nearly 40 similar schemes across England, all operating as separate organisations. We provide emergency overnight accommodation for young homeless people aged 16 to 25, in the homes of volunteers.

I've been giving talks about our work, and almost always, when I get to that last sub clause 'in the homes of volunteers', there's a collective intake of breath. I can understand why – too often we have an image, fuelled by the media, of a young homeless person as dirty, drug using and dangerous. Some young people experiencing homelessness are like this, but very, very few. More usually, our clients are young people who have stormed out of home after a row, or have left care, and not been able to cope on their own, or, in a few cases, fled an abusive family or relationship, and now need help. It is the involvement of volunteers that makes Nightstop special. It gives us, as housed people, the chance to make a practical contribution to supporting a young person when they are vulnerable, and the opportunity to show that we care. There's something very counter cultural about being a Nightstop host.

Nightstop schemes recruit volunteer hosts, who provide an evening meal, a bed for one night, the chance for a bath or shower and breakfast the next morning. We also recruit drivers who provide transport between the other agencies working with young people experiencing homelessness and their hosts. All our volunteers are checked for suitability and given training. It would be fair to say that most people are

a little apprehensive about volunteering, so the training sessions cover everything

from listening skills to what to do in an emergency. We try to look at all the worse case scenarios going through people's heads before they start hosting, but the truth is that we have very few problems, and have only ever had two incidents — both petty thefts, despite being asked to help between 150 and 200 times a year.

We work with the other statutory and voluntary sector organisations that are there for young people, and for people experiencing homelessness, and take referrals. We make a quick risk assessment, and won't take anyone we think might be a threat to the hosts, or who is under the influence of drugs, alcohol or solvents. Accommodation is arranged for one night at a time, but a young person can be referred again if they still need us the next night.

Nightstop is emergency accommodation – it isn't a long-term solution. The need for a fresh referral each day keeps the young person engaged with the appropriate agencies, and makes sure the agencies don't overlook their duties. What Nightstop can offer is a breathing space – somewhere safe to reflect on the options, and time for other agencies to get a plan together with a young person. Without Nightstop, vulnerable young people could finish up sleeping rough, or in the worst kinds of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, or in homeless hostels which can be intimidating. In the rural areas we work in, they would simply have to leave to find anywhere to stay.

We fund our work mostly through community donations, although recent grants from local government have helped expand the service. We also receive funding for work in schools to talk about homelessness, and we've had donations of toiletries in response to an appeal. Too many young people leave home with nothing, and even a toothbrush helps to restore a little



dignity, York Nightstop received the Duke of York's Community Initiative Award in 2001

Nightstop schemes are not affiliated to any religious organisation, but some have been started by the local churches together. In York, many of our volunteers are churchgoers, and some are Quakers. It isn't hard to see the connection between Nightstop and Quakerism. Nightstop is about direct social action with some of the most marginalized in our society, treating them

as equal to ourselves, and respecting 'that of God' within them, with the aim of bringing about social justice.

So – a simple solution, but one that works.

To find out more contact: Carol Robinson, Project Co-ordinator, York Nightstop, Community House, 8-10 Priory Street, York, UK, YO1 6EZ; Email: crobinson@york-nightstop.org.uk <http://www.york-nightstop.org.uk>

POSITION AVAILABLE Dean of Pendle Hill

Pendle Hill invites applications for the position of dean. The dean has overall responsibility for the administrative, spiritual and financial health of Pendle Hill's educational programs, especially the resident program. This includes overseeing educational programming, providing leadership and pastoral care within the resident community, leading curriculum and faculty development, managing finances, and integrating educational programs with Pendle Hill's other work.

Qualifications:

1. Seasoned Quaker with deep sensitivity to Quaker process and strong relationship skills.
2. Evidence of past leadership in a religious or educational community and skill at consensus-building.
3. Experience in financial and curriculum management.
4. Ability to live on campus and be an active part of the community.
5. An advanced degree in a relevant area is desirable but not necessary.

Information about Pendle Hill is available at www.pendlehill.org.

Contact bscott@pendlehill.org for a full job description and application materials. Application deadline is 3 October 2003. Pendle Hill is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Here's an Image to Haunt your Dreams

By **Gianne Broughton**

*By blackened, empty molasses barrels
Piled in pyramids by the red roadside
Four or five folk slouch sipping
From a common brew-pot
Through long straws, seeking consolation.*

*(It is hard to take photos of a people's shame —
or their pain —
so I usually just hold the images in my mind.)*

*Can you see their small earnings
From hard mountainside labour
Slipping back through the brew-pot,
Trickling away, trickling away,
Lost to their loved ones?*

*To where, and through what,
Does my softly-earned coin
Trickle away?*

Gianne Broughton is a member of Ottawa Monthly Meeting.