



ANOTHER SIDE OF
LONDON

TEN INTERVIEWS WITH LONDONERS
WHO CHANGE PEOPLE'S LIVES EVERY DAY

— **AND** —

10 WAYS TO
PLAY YOUR PART



Playing their part:

999 CLUB

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Another Side of London

Introduction

London is the most fascinating western city in which to build a Community Foundation. Known for prosperity and opportunity (even in current times), it's easy to forget about the thousands of Londoners left on the margins. Wealth and poverty live side-by-side, with middle-class terraces, green spaces and trendy high streets blending into run-down estates and empty playgrounds. Poverty, isolation and crime affect too many.

The capital is often talked of as a place of 'broken communities', where people don't care about each other and neighbours don't help each other. But every day at the Foundation we see a different side to the story. People that do care, neighbours that do help, a kind and generous London.

We share some of these stories with you here – stories of projects and people that are working to improve the lives of those around them. Through a series of interviews, they tell you their stories in their own words; why they do what they do, the people they have helped and the challenges they face. Some of the stories are hard hitting, some have a softer edge... but each is a demonstration of a strong society where people take action to help their communities.

If what you read inspires you, please give us a call.

This is another side of London. Play your part.

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10 WAYS TO
PLAY YOUR PART

1

SET UP YOUR
OWN FUND

CCF WILL TAKE YOU THROUGH THE
PROCESS OF SETTING UP YOUR OWN FUND.
IT'S THE VERY BEST WAY OF BEING SURE THAT
THE PEOPLE YOU WANT TO HELP ARE BEING
HELPED. JUST CALL US TO FIND OUT MORE.



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AN INTERVIEW WITH IRIS FRENCH AND ANDREW MITCHELL



999 Club supports homeless and vulnerable people, with two drop-in day centres in Deptford and Downham. In this interview IRIS FRENCH (Co-founder) and ANDREW MITCHELL (Development Worker) tell us about the Club and the people they help.



How did 999 Club start?

ANDREW — It was set up in 1992 by Iris French and Patricia Wyndham. Both went to the local church and were concerned about the plight of homeless people sitting in the graveyard drinking all day.

IRIS — I've always worked in Deptford and it just happened that I got friendly with these people. I'd see them in the churchyard drinking and just used to feel sorry for them. We'd make them a cup of tea and a sandwich. I met Patricia through the local church. We clicked and decided to start a little workshop in the church yard so we could warm them up round a fire with a hot cup of tea and toast. That's how we started, with nothing, just my toaster and kettle and Patricia's typewriter. We've been friends for 20 years now...

ANDREW — I came here in 2006 and was astounded by what I found. It opened my eyes to the issues of homelessness and addiction which I'd only seen as people begging on the streets. I hadn't realised the undercurrent of why people end up like this.

What is the ethos of the day centre?

ANDREW — It's a club, a home, somewhere people can find friendship instead of living in isolation, and they can come back anytime they want. We want the day centre to be like a living room, we want people to stay here and to feel comfortable. We aim to give them respite from life on the streets. If they feel comfortable they might start to open up about their problems. That's key, because once people start talking we can start trying to move them back to being functional.

Key to our success is that we employ local people with the same backgrounds as our users; from the same estates, with the same life experiences, a common culture and a common language. This makes our users immediately more

comfortable. They don't access other services because they don't relate to the people they're dealing with.

We give immediate help in any way we can to people. Some come in with no shoes or coats in winter so we clothe them. In the longer term we're looking to move people on and back to independence. We have an in-house advisor who can help with issues around debt or housing benefit. We also run a temporary night shelter from January to March that can house about 25 people per night. Traditionally organisations run Christmas shelters, that only last for a week, but we think the real cold weather comes in January and February so that's when its most needed.

Tell us more about the reasons people end up homeless.

ANDREW — We see four main reasons for homelessness. Firstly, a majority have had rotten childhoods; sex abuse or other kinds of neglect that manifests in pain and can lead to drug addictions. People who are mentally ill or vulnerable often end up homeless. At the other end of the scale, you have someone who was a perfectly functional member of society and then something will happen, they'll split up with their partner, lose their job or suffer a bereavement. The fourth category is people that have been in the armed services or have been to prison.

IRIS: We have people out of the mental health units who come and sit in here for a day. For the first week they're quiet,

"The people who visit us have almost all been abused as children and we see about 225 people a day. Nobody destroys themselves out of indolence. The work of destruction has always been begun by somebody else." CEO, 999 CLUB

they don't say anything, then they come out a bit. There was a lady from a unit who came in and she was just sitting there rocking and rocking. Now she's sitting there knitting and chatting...

Can you tell us the story of someone who 999 Club has supported?

ANDREW — There's a recent story of a young man we helped. He's nineteen years old and had a terrible ordeal living in an alcoholic and drug-addicted family. His mother died when he was thirteen of a heroin overdose. He lived with his sister for a while but she got a partner and he was no longer welcome. His father chucked him out recently. He wasn't streetwise despite the ordeal of his childhood and was found in a park, totally frightened. We managed to find him a place to sleep and immediately got on to one of our partners who found him a place in supported housing. Our partner organisation gave him some training while he was there. He'd always wanted to be a plumber so they've got him onto a plumbing course. He's been saved from homelessness and he's going to get the skills which can carry him through life.

IRIS — I remember a young woman who came in here this Christmas gone. She said 'You don't know me but I know you'. It turns out she'd been on the streets and used to come to 999 Club in the church yard. We treated her and got her into a hostel. From there she went to college and did a business course. Now she has her own business, a confectioners on the railway! She came here to thank us. I thought she was very kind to come here to say 'Thank-you'.

How important is partnership work with other organisations?

ANDREW — Partnership work is key to what we do. We recognise that we can't answer everything so we find the necessary expertise. We partner with local organisations like Bench Outreach, who are an expert in reaching out to rough sleepers and they're very good at getting people into housing. We also refer people on to Foundation 66 for drug detox and rehab programmes and we have Family Services come in and give informal counselling to users. It works when organisations come in and sit with our users because it breaks down the suspicion that our users have for other service providers.

999 Club received funding over three years from the Deptford Challenge Trust (DCT) which is managed by CCF. What difference did securing multi-year funding make to the organisation?

ANDREW — When we approached CCF and the DCT we were going through quite a difficult time. There had been a change of management and the previous administration had left quite suddenly and left things in quite a mess. DCT came in brilliantly at that time and helped give us stability. That's what was so good about funding from DCT, it gave us breathing space and time to get things into order. It helped us to find other sources of funding and we were able to secure match funding from corporate sponsors.

What challenges and obstacles is the organisation facing?

ANDREW — Growing pressure on our services is a current challenge and we see around 4000 individuals per year. Around 200 come through our doors each day and twenty of them will be new to our service. With the recession we are

"The people in our day centre might appear frightening but they can be quite friendly. They are just very damaged people."

IRIS FRENCH

seeing more people through our doors... who have lost their jobs or are in debt and have lost homes.

Funding is also a challenge. We are getting funders saying that they can't afford to fund at the moment because of the economic situation. And then there is the constant pressure to show quick and hard outcomes. Day centres play a crucial role but our outcomes are harder to prove because they're softer.

In fact the greatest difficulty we have is proving some of our outcomes. This is due to the chaotic nature of our users and the fact that we work in partnership with so many other organisations that are all very busy. We might intervene with someone but we can't always track the outcome. We know we've helped but we don't always hear whether we've got someone into housing for example. We gather as much info as we can but we don't think we're gathering as much as is possible. It's something we'd like to develop but it's quite hard as we don't want to start inflicting more paperwork on our frontline staff. They need to be dealing with things in a very informal, reactive way. That's our strength and that's why we get results. It's why at risk or vulnerable families from local estates trust us and access our services. So it's a big challenge.

And finally, what are your plans for the future?

ANDREW — We would eventually like to replicate our service. We feel our model works and we'd like to open up another centre elsewhere. What works for us is having a shop-front premises. We know that model works, where people can see inside to see what's going on.

IRIS — We can only do the best we can. ●




10 WAYS TO
PLAY YOUR PART

— 2 —

JOIN US ON A
SITE VISIT

THE BEST WAY TO SEE HOW YOU CAN
HELP PEOPLE IS TO MEET SOME OF THEM.
GET IN TOUCH WITH US AND WE'LL BE GLAD
TO INTRODUCE YOU TO SOME OF THE BEST
LONDONERS YOU COULD WISH TO MEET.



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AN INTERVIEW WITH ANN STOCKREITER



Established in 2005, South Central Youth runs an outreach programme engaging young people in Brixton's Angell Town Estate, particularly those involved in gangs and anti-social behaviour. The organisation recruits peer mentors and youth workers to provide diversionary activities, a counselling service, and access to education and training opportunities. We interviewed founder and Director ANN STOCKREITER.



Why did you establish South Central Youth?

Back in 2004, there was a series of kids involved in gang killings near where I was living. I was working at Probation Services at the time, and asked them what services were available for kids involved in gangs. It turned out that the Youth Offending Team didn't feel that the gangs were a problem, and there was no specific program targeting these kids. So I looked into how to get involved, and South Central Youth was set up in 2005. It's been an incredible journey.

How has the service developed over the last five years?

We started off with an outreach programme focusing on the worst gangs in the worst areas. We would meet children on the street and ask them about their needs and the activities they would like to do.

We grew and by 2008 we were running activities on three estates. We then realised the gang issues were more deeply entrenched here on the Angell Town estate than in other areas, and that we were the only service here that functioned for the benefit of the wider community. So we decided to refocus on providing quality services around our youth centre here.

Since we've been here we've found that we've become something of a community port of call. We've helped parents meet with the police if they've seen a crime and they're too scared to tell someone. They come here so no-one can see who they're talking to. Some people will come here to get help with their passport forms and housing forms. So we've become quite a community resource, which is phenomenal given where it started!

What are the needs and issues facing the children and young people that you support in the Brixton area?

Social deprivation, social exclusion and poverty. I think many people don't understand the level of poverty unless they live and breathe it. Many of the children are not eating properly when we see them, or they won't have proper clothes on in the pouring rain. I make lots of referrals to Social Services.

We've found that a lot of our children's parents don't speak English, and a lot have drug and alcohol problems. We often have to act as appropriate adults in police stations and in court and that takes up a huge amount of time.

There's a high level of NEET kids in the area and a lot of school exclusions. It's hard to help a child understand that they can go to college, that they can set themselves goals and achieve, when all around them they see mentally beaten people. They don't believe that they can be anybody, so we're here to show them that they can.

How do you identify those who are in most need of support?

There will always be a screaming need. Some of the young people most in need are gang members who decide that they want to leave the gangs behind, often when they come out of jail or hospital. When they come to us we sit down with them and ask them where they want to be, and how we can help them to get there.

There was one young person who was pulled into a fight when trying to protect his friends. He ended up going to jail, at which point he realised that he wanted to turn his life around. We helped him move out of the area, and he went on to study business and now he's going to university this year. He's a lovely example of somebody who's completely turned his life around.

What role do young people play on your staff team as peer mentors?

Our peer mentors are a phenomenal resource. In this area the slang changes every six months, particularly when talking about crime or bullying. Peer mentors will know exactly what the young people are talking about and where they're coming from. If my peer mentors weren't here to interpret, I don't know where I'd be! When we recruit our peer mentors we ask for teenagers who have had a lot of life experiences – positive or negative – that will help us to work with young people. The

ability of peer mentors to sit down with a young person and say 'look I'm on your level' helps the young people to feel safe. Peer mentors also see that a young person is at risk, where other people might not notice. The children don't feel as judged by the peer mentors as they do by older adults.

What's a typical day for you as Director of South Central Youth?

On a good day I'm enjoying doing activities with the children. I never laugh so much as when we're taking them for an adventure and see them achieve goals. It might be something like abseiling where you need the confidence to put your trust in somebody else. To see a young person go through that – I'm talking sixteen and seventeen year-olds who are absolutely fearful of putting their trust in anybody – watching those little changes is brilliant.

I have the best time here at the youth club, watching the young people thoroughly enjoy themselves. It's a chance for them to be children away from the hostile environment of the streets. Every single child that walks in here will come and say 'Hello, how are you?' and 'Goodbye' when they leave and they clear up after themselves. It's just like a home.

The bad days are when a mum phones me to say her child's been stabbed and she needs help. I'll be comforting a mother who's screaming and crying on the phone and then meeting her at the hospital. Some days start like that...

Over the years SYC has received several grants from CCF, including your first grant back in 2006. How important has CCF's support been in developing the organisation?

How can I measure it? I think that we wouldn't exist without CCF. CCF has supported us through times when we couldn't find other funding, and I didn't know how we were going to carry on. There were times when my trustees turned around and said 'You need to close the doors and stop services until the next grants come in'. When I speak to colleagues who run other projects, that's exactly what they do, but with us that was not an option because we are supporting too many vulnerable people. So CCF has been a 100% lifeline. Every step of the way CCF has always supported us and has helped us to link with other local services. It's really working as a community. CCF believes in grassroots organisations and they've really helped us to network, grow and to develop.

"The main issues in Brixton are deprivation, social exclusion and poverty... many people don't understand the level of poverty unless they live and breathe it."

ANN STOCKREITER

What have been the challenges and obstacles of the last five years?

Funding is the toughest. Having to jumping through hoops. Many colleagues I know have changed their projects to fit funding criteria, and some have created difficulties for their projects as a result. I was very clear from the start that I was going to stick to how I wanted it to run and that I had to find funding around the services that we wanted to deliver.

Finding good staff is second on the list. Another major challenge we faced was the need to restrain our services. At one point we grew so incredibly fast, with an influx of children and running services at three different premises. The need is so desperate in this area of London that we would have crumbled just trying to meet it. I'm not the kind of the person that can turn a child in need away, but I had to decide that it was better to deliver quality work here on Angell Town than deliver poorer quality services spread over several areas. I wanted South Central Youth to be giving the best possible service.

What are your plans for the future?

My primary objective is to reduce the number of stabbings which have gone up in the last year. We've built up a community forum of local organisations and we're going to bring trauma doctors from King's College Hospital here to talk to the kids about their experiences of stitching up so many injured young people. We'll also get the police to come down and give their perspective.

In the future I would like to see us own our own premises. I would like to see it spread over several floors, we could maybe have a nursery on one floor, a boxing or martial arts gym downstairs and a middle floor equipped with computers for workshops and educational activities. In the long term we just want to continue to increase safety and support the local community.

What have you learnt from working as director of SYC?

I've learnt to stay positive and never lose hope, no matter what happens. I've also learnt to look after myself. In the early days I didn't find it easy to switch off. I think psychologically and emotionally the job can be phenomenally draining, and it is a real challenge managing the finances, staff and problems with parents and children. So I try to make sure that at the end of the day, I can take my work hat off, put my phone on vibrate, and just give myself a break.

And finally, are you here to stay in Brixton for the foreseeable future?

Yes! I absolutely love it here! We've got our roots here now. The community really support us and are really happy with what we're doing. If we can deepen and grow and provide for more people then all the better! ●



10 WAYS TO
PLAY YOUR PART

3

GIVE TO YOUR
BOROUGH

IF YOU CHOOSE YOU CAN HELP THOSE
PEOPLE WHO ARE VERY LOCAL TO YOU.
IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW MUCH YOU GIVE,
AND THE BEST THING IS YOU CAN SEE IT
BENEFITING THE PEOPLE WHERE YOU LIVE.



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ADVOCACY FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN GREENWICH

AN INTERVIEW WITH ELEANOR GIBSON

|||||

Established in 1996, Advocacy for Older People in Greenwich help older people to make informed choices about their care needs. The organisation recruits, trains and supports local people to become advocates, who then work on a one-to-one basis with an older person. We met the Director, ELEANOR GIBSON.

|||||

Why was Advocacy for Older People in Greenwich set up?

Older people are a group who are not always heard and not always asked. I remember when my father was in a care home. I was sitting through a meeting with him, my mum and the care worker. I wasn't there as an advocate, I was there as a daughter. My father was completely compos mentis but was physically very weak. My mum was also frail but completely compos mentis. Throughout the entire meeting, the care worker addressed me, not my parents, not my mum, just me. Only at one point did she turn to my dad to say 'You're alright here, George, aren't you? You're happy?' You see it's that kind of patronising attitude, the idea that we make decisions for them as though they're children. The idea of advocacy is to support those who don't get listened to...

The organisation was setup in 1996 at the behest of a group of older people. There were a lot of older people in the borough without support networks and who didn't understand how the care system worked. Advocacy for Older People was set up to provide short to long-term support, to speak out for people.

How does the advocacy process work?

The group has three professional advocates working closely with a pool of around 25 volunteers. Each is partnered with an older person. It's quite close to befriending. We advocate for older people living independently and in sheltered accommodation and care homes.

For example, an older couple came to us – both had various disabilities. They were living in council accommodation and needed a walk-in shower as they hadn't been able to use a bath for years. They'd made an application which had been rejected and the story had been going on for five years. It was

making life very difficult, you might think that you can stand at the sink and wash, but when you're in your seventies and you're disabled, that is not an easy thing to do! We were able to put pressure on the council to get another assessment done and eventually they put in a shower. It was such a change in their lives. It's very difficult to imagine how undignified it is not to have access to these basic things.

Often we help sort the smallest things, like helping someone get a blue card disabled sticker for parking or a taxi card so that they can get cheaper taxis. The smallest things can make people feel differently about their lives.

We helped one lady get a mobility scooter. She was an active lady but couldn't walk very far. Now she has a new lease of life she can get out and about and go to the shops. She lives in sheltered accommodation and she's even shopping for her neighbours. It turned out that from the ages of 20 to 63 she'd had a motorbike so she couldn't wait to get back on the road!

What are the common issues facing the older people that you reach?

A lot of the people we work with have mental health problems, memory loss and possible undiagnosed dementia. They don't understand how things work and don't have any support. This is a whole group of people who are a little bit lost in the world sometimes.

We've been encountering people who have got themselves into financial difficulties. If you're on a fixed income and you're getting into rent arrears because you've forgotten to set up your direct debit, or you used to go down and pay it directly but now you can't and you're not sure how the new system works, you can easily get yourself into a bit of difficulty. Suddenly you find yourself receiving eviction letters. One lady we know got a call from a bank, before the credit crunch hit, asking if she would like a credit card with a £5,000 limit. She said 'Oh yes, lovely!' but had no way of paying it back.

One lady ended up with £25,000 of debt and we have no idea where any of this money went, and neither does she. She certainly doesn't have anything to show for it! She was getting 5 or 10 calls a day from her creditors and she was really distressed. She does have dementia by the way. She went to see the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) but they couldn't work out what was going on. So we went to see her at home and spent six hours sifting through all her paperwork. We sorted

everything out, contacted the creditors and managed to put a halt to certain things. We then accompanied her to the CAB so they could advise her. She was made bankrupt which was the best solution in her case. She's now fine and has got rid of all the debts.

Has the recession had a palpable impact on your service users?

For people who have savings it's had a big impact on interest payments. Imagine someone who has some savings and that extra £20 or £30 a week is helping them to support themselves and supplementing a low pension. This is often the case for women who may not have worked for long and are generally the ones with the lowest state pensions. Also you have to take into account increases in utilities bills. The state pension is fixed and rigid. People may be just managing their finances and then prices go up. They end up borrowing, and when you add interest payments what seemed manageable can soon spiral out of control.

What are your thoughts on the breakdown of the extended family?

I think it's a real shame that we seem to segregate older people. The idea of the extended family living together may have disadvantages but it also has huge advantages. My grandmother lived in our house, I remember we used to come home from school and we'd go upstairs and spend time with her. It would have been very stimulating for her as there were always young people around. That can make a big difference. When you go to care homes there are people with quite serious issues. There are some really good care homes which try and develop activities but you still get this sense of isolation.

What have been the challenges of running the service?

Although advocacy can make a huge difference to people's lives, it's not a statutory service and it's quite hard to evaluate and prove its cost effectiveness. Funding is a permanent issue. I would like to spend more time developing new projects but I'm permanently looking for new sources of funding. Most funders will fund you for three years but then there is always uncertainty over what happens next. A lot of funders also want to fund new projects. It's very difficult for us as a small

"A lot of the people we work with have mental health problems... This is a whole group of people who are a little bit lost in the world sometimes."

ELEANOR GIBSON

organisation when you think about the amount of my time that goes on fundraising. One of the challenges is getting the organisation well known. Raising your profile amongst funders and the local council is very important.

What are your plans for the future?

We are currently developing a new advocacy and befriending project aimed at people with dementia who are in care homes. There's a case at the moment of a gentleman who has dementia but is physically perfectly able. His main hobby is trains as he used to work on them. The Council felt that it was too dangerous for him to continue living at home, so he's now in a

"I've realised there are an awful lot of people out there who don't have support networks. I find myself looking at my own future differently knowing how vulnerable you can become."

care home, with other people who are either disabled or have quite serious dementia. It's like he's in prison. He can't go out because they can't let him out on his own, and they don't have staff who can accompany him. So we're providing him with a volunteer. He'll take him out to places, like the train museum. That will be such a change in his life. It's very important for people with dementia to live as normal a life as possible. If people are just left in a room they will just deteriorate.

What have you learnt from your work with Advocacy for Older People in Greenwich?

I've realised there are an awful lot of people out there who don't have support networks. I find myself looking at my own future differently knowing how vulnerable you can become. Care services do not offer 'low intervention' to keep people independent at home, for example helping them with shopping. Sufficient support in the early stages can allow people the confidence to remain independent.

The resources aren't there so we need more volunteers. In principle the idea of the 'Big Society' would be a brilliant one. We need more people to become involved locally helping other people – more people. I think these days we've lost a lot of that. ●




10 WAYS TO
PLAY YOUR PART

— 4 —

SUPPORT A
THEMED FUND

WE'RE LOOKING FOR 500 PEOPLE TO GIVE
£500 TO THREE SPECIALLY SELECTED AREAS:
YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK; COMBATING VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN; AND MAKING A GREENER
LONDON. GET IN TOUCH TO LEARN MORE.



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SWITCHBACK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SLANEY WRIGHT



Established in 2007, Switchback supports 18-24 year olds to build on skills learnt in prison kitchens to help them make real, lasting change in their lives after release. They combine mentoring with practical programmes to make stable employment a realistic prospect for this vulnerable group. We interviewed Switchback's co-founder and director of development, SLANEY WRIGHT.



What was your inspiration to establish Switchback?

There are lots of opportunities out there for young people coming out of prison, but many don't or can't take advantage of them because they don't have the necessary consistency in their lives. We wanted to focus on helping people achieve long term change, rather than just running courses.

For instance we understood that a lot of people come to projects like this café* but they drop out because something chaotic happens at home. We realised that if someone has a dedicated person who knows exactly what's happening with them, it's much easier to keep trying. We operate as mentors, providing our trainees with an intense relationship with one person who's always on their side. We tend to push them slightly too, challenging them and supporting them through all the different areas that they really need to work on. We meet our trainees whilst they're still inside, get to know them and build up a relationship. We listen to the promises that they make to themselves, and hear what they want to change, and when they're outside, we help them to stick to that. For people going through that gate from prison, things can work out well if they have support.

How is Switchback different from similar charities?

We only work with about 20 new people a year, but we're lucky in that we're completely funded by private donors who recognise that these sorts of programmes take time, and that you have to be flexible. Other organisations don't have that flexibility, and can only focus on getting people to the end of

a course or into a job. We are able to tell the people that we support that 'we're here until you're completely settled and stabilised.' With Switchback, we provide that consistent relationship that has a long-term impact.

How do the prisoners find out about Switchback?

We work mainly with the Rochester Young Offenders Institute in Kent, and a bit with HMP Portland in Dorset. When they're still inside, we meet with people identified by the prisons who fulfil our basic criteria, and have conversations with them to establish their motivations and commitment. Most of the people have worked in the prison kitchens and many have earned an NVQ during their time inside. Then Alice (my co-founder) and Sophie, our other Switchback mentor, start to build the relationships.

How does Switchback work?

There's just the three of us, one of whom is part time, and the case load is small but intense. We talk to our trainees every day, and meet with them at least once a week to do action planning. We sit down with them, and between us we work out what actions they can take that week to get them to where they want to be. A lot of it will be shifts in the café or appointments with job centres or probation officers, and day to day housing stuff. There will be other things – taking their little cousin swimming, cooking their mum a lasagne, going on a job trial, looking for job vacancy signs in windows, handing out their CV, and so on.

"All of what we do is about building up a life that you value. If you value your life outside then you're less likely to go back inside."

SLANEY WRIGHT

*Switchback trainees are trained in The Crisis Skylight Café after release.

We help people to make decisions that reinforce their commitment to changing their lives. They're the ones making the decisions; they're the ones doing the hard work. It's a programme that involves a lot of choice and they've got complete control over it. They're the ones who want to sort their lives out, and we help them.

Do you have any stories of people that you've helped from inside to out?

There are lots! There is one guy who was very interested in cooking professionally. He went into prison when he was half-way through the Jamie Oliver Fifteen Foundation programme. He then came through us and worked really hard. He had some big family and addiction issues which meant that his first three jobs in London just didn't work out, but in the middle of all of that he went on a work placement to the River Cottage in Devon. They invited him back when the season picked up, so he changed probation officer, got himself housing, and moved his whole life down to the West Country. It was a huge deal for him, and a hugely brave thing to do. He has been there almost two years now, and he's now officially someone who has 'moved on'.

Then there are a couple of trainees that we have who are starting university in September. One of them is working in a shop in Oxford Street all summer to save up money before he goes to uni. He got that job off his own back, and it helped that he had customer service experience from prison courses and the cafe here on his cv. Now he's flying along.

But aside from these job-focused success stories, we try to measure success in terms of changes in stability. Our objective is to get people more stable in all areas of their lives. Anyone who's working hard on changing themselves is just as impressive.

Why do you think the people that you work with are less likely to go back to prison once they've worked with Switchback?

They now have something to lose. They've got a working life here, they've got relationships with people here, they're fixing up things at home with parents or their girlfriend and there's suddenly a bit more to lose if you go back. All of what we do is really about that, about building up a life that you value. If you value your life outside then you're less likely to go back inside.

What are the challenges and obstacles that Switchback faces?

The trainees face some very tough challenges on release, and their old way of living often still holds quite a draw. One trainee described it to me saying "It's as if you've got a rope around me and you're pulling me forward, but there are 50 people with ropes pulling me backwards, I'm not sure if I can do it anymore."

One of the major practical challenges that we face is release dates from prison. It's impossible to predict release dates. Under the early release scheme, if someone has a 'safe address' to go to, they can be released any time between their

early release date and their final release date, and nobody really finds out until just beforehand. This makes it fairly difficult to plan ahead to ensure people have help on the outside when they come out of prison.

How has Switchback used the funding they've had from CCF?

Our first grant from CCF enabled us to get going – at that point we didn't even have our own office! As well as covering our basic set-up costs, the CCF grant helped us to get some trainees in the door right from the beginning. CCF also helped

"It's as if you've got a rope around me and you're pulling me forward, but there are 50 people with ropes pulling me backwards. I'm not sure if I can do it anymore."

A SWITCHBACK TRAINEE

us to get a major new grant through Comic Relief. This will be used to cover programme costs and to expose the trainees to new experiences, such as taking people to visit employers and look behind the scenes in kitchens, or try new foods, or go camping down by River Cottage.

Are there any additional things that you would like to be able to provide or things that more funding would enable you to do?

I think what we're really looking for is ongoing support so we can carry on doing what we're doing. When we meet people in prison we say to them, 'If you really want to change your life, then we will commit to helping you do that, until such time that you say you don't want our help anymore.' In some cases, that has been years of extremely full-on work. So we're always on the lookout for long-term financing so we can offer that long term support, that consistency.

Although we would like to employ more people, the biggest restriction is finding the right people to do the job, because it's such an unusual role. It's not easy to find people who really get what we're trying to do.

What are your plans for the future?

Part of what makes Switchback work is that it is small. However, we would like to recruit more Switchback mentors and maybe offer access to an industry other than catering, and work in additional prisons.

We don't want to grow just for growing's sake, and then suddenly find that we're not doing what we said that we were going to do in the first place. ●




10 WAYS TO
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5

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STREETLYTES

AN INTERVIEW WITH RUDI RICHARDSON



Established in 2007, Streetlytes was founded by recovered drug addicts and homeless people from Kensal Green. They set up the organisation to put something back into the community. It provides hot food, clothing, hygiene kits and blankets on a bi-weekly basis to homeless people and supports people towards recovery from homelessness and drug and alcohol addiction. We met with founder RUDI RICHARDSON at the Streetlytes office in Kensal Green.



What motivated you to begin helping homeless people?

I was an addict for about 32 years and homeless not only in this country but everywhere that I went. It wasn't that I didn't want to quit, I was just so enamoured with self hate and all the things that were going on inside. There came a point when I hit rock bottom as all addicts and alcoholics do, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually... I then had a spiritual experience, an experience I could not explain, and it turned my life around. I recovered, and decided to go to therapy to work out my issues. I had a burning passion to create an organisation made up of people that have actually been through homelessness and addiction and have recovered... for them to go back on the streets and help others do the same.

So how did Streetlytes come about as an organisation?

We set up Streetlytes in my room when I was still in semi-independent living. I got some of my friends in recovery together and we said 'We're going to do this! We think we can make a difference.' So we made sandwiches, we put them in suitcases, we got on the 52 bus and went to Victoria and started handing them out. That's where we started. From there it's been a journey ever since.

Streetlytes has come a long way within a short period time; what services are you delivering at the moment?

We have a van for the street outreach work. It's staffed by volunteers from all walks of life. Policemen, directors, recovered addicts and recovered alcoholics. We provide a good meal, clothes and hygiene kits. That's needed. I don't care

what people say, when I was homeless on the streets, when organisations came around we were very grateful, not only for their food, but for their befriending. Imagine being on the streets... You want to see that friendly face, you want to have that human contact that can bring you some dignity. So we befriend them.

We have two other projects going. In Kensington & Chelsea we serve over 70 people each week and we bring the homeless inside the centre to provide a wonderful meal. Not paper cups and paper plates, actually real crockery and flowers on the table. We also have a night drop-in centre every Tuesday in Victoria where we run a peer-support group, care-plan assessment and applications for independent housing.

How do you help vulnerable people towards recovery and rehabilitation?

You can recover and we are a living testimony of that. By us engaging the homeless and them seeing us in action we help instil hope in them. The peer support group is where we 'take our hats off'... and talk about ourselves and where we've been. It allows them to talk, to get things off their chest.

We also help with housing. We've helped house nineteen people in independent flats. We give them a welcome pack, food, clothes, counselling. They're looked after. We care for them after this, because they're like part of the family, you understand? People that are still having issues with drugs and alcohol, we help them but we're very firm – we know that they can stop. We provide mentoring and refer them on to drug rehabilitation programmes.

Can you tell us the story of somebody that has made a successful recovery?

Our project manager that oversees the entire Monday Night Dinner Drop-In Project originally came to Streetlytes struggling with his recovery. Now he's a manager. He's been with us for over two years. It's helped him with his recovery and has built his confidence. Now look where he is... He's a manager overseeing a project that feeds close to 400 people every month!

Also there was one person we housed a couple of months ago. He was street homeless at 60 years old. He'd had a breakdown with his family. He came to our night drop in centre, was assessed by one of our project workers and started going

to the peer support groups. He began the mentoring and started opening up. Now he's housed. He said to us 'I want to be involved in this organisation' and now he's engaging people that were in the same situation as him. What is so positive is the gratitude that he has, but more than that, he brings so much to the table for the organisation. I can't explain it, some things I can't put in words but that was one that really touched my heart.

Many people are unaware of the scale of the homeless problem in London. What are your thoughts on this?

There's a major homeless problem in London. There's a category called 'hidden homeless', where the person has no fixed abode but is staying with a friend or 'sofa surfing'. You will see him in day centres, riding the buses. You've got over 3000 people riding the buses all night instead of sleeping on the streets. You have the airport where there are people there pretending to be passengers, when they are really homeless. There are over 850,000 hidden homeless people in the UK and over 250,000 here in London alone. There are 3500 to 5000 visible people sleeping rough on any given night.

How do you think homeless people are perceived by the rest of society?

People's perception is often, 'Why is this person homeless? He's probably a drug addict...'. 'OK, maybe he is, but why did he become a drug addict? 85% of drug addicts have been sexually abused in their life. Nobody thinks of the trauma and the dysfunction that this person went through. What was it like for him growing up? Was there family dysfunction? Was there loss? Was there abandonment? If you're coming from a broken family, with issues and trauma unresolved, you can start to become self-destructive. People that are homeless and using drugs and alcohol are using that as a band-aid as it were... to not feel... and not deal with those issues, because it hurts too much.

"When people see a homeless person, they just see the book cover, but there's more to being homeless than being 'homeless'. I think society doesn't see deep enough, and that's okay, maybe they're not supposed to... but we can, because we've been there."

RUDI RICHARDSON

"Imagine being on the streets... You want to see that friendly face, you want to have that human contact that can bring you some dignity. So we befriend them. That's where we build up the trust and the relationships to go further."

What challenges and obstacles have you faced as an organisation?

Funding is a challenge. We've had a couple of small grants so far, nothing big. All grant makers want to see evidence and how long you've been around and if you're a new kid on the block some say 'Come see us in a couple of years'.

We have also found it really hard to be accepted by larger service providers - they've been around for years, work very closely with the government and are enormous in terms of their finance. Establishing partnerships with them can be a struggle. I feel that government and established service providers need to be more open to grassroots community organisations such as ourselves. Yes we're the new kid on the block but we're here for a reason and we do make a difference. Sometimes we feel overshadowed by so much bureaucracy and we wonder how we can get involved in this instead of being blindsided.

Finally, what have you learnt from your experience of running Streetlytes?

What have I learnt? We are all God's children. Our beneficiaries have taught us in a way that I can't explain in words... For us we've won the lottery. Why? Because not only do we help the people that we're engaging, but we also help ourselves and our recoveries, so it's a two-fold process... That's the way that I feel about it. I've won the lottery. ●



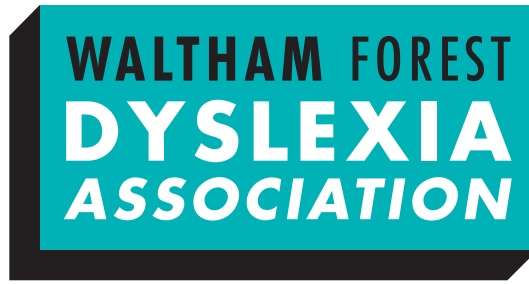
10 WAYS TO
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— 6 —

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AN INTERVIEW WITH ADELE BIRD

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*Established in 1989, the **Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association** aims to advance the education of children with dyslexia or dyspraxia. We interview the Association's Chair, **ADELE BIRD**.*

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How did you become Chair of Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association (WFDA)?

The Association was founded by concerned individuals, including specialist teachers and parents of children with dyslexia. I got involved four or five years ago when I saw their touch-typing and literacy classes for dyslexic children advertised in the local newspaper.

I have twins and at that point we were recognising that my daughter had dyslexia. The school didn't really know what to do about it so I contacted the Association and they put her in a class. She benefited greatly. Eventually I got involved as a Trustee, and was finally cajoled into being the Chair.

How can non-dyslexic people begin to understand what it's like for a child coping with dyslexia/dyspraxia?

One example was drawn to my attention just last week... a friend went on a course where they were given sentences written backwards and had to decode them. One of the dyslexics on the course was decoding the sentences much quicker than the non-dyslexics. She explained that this is how she has to decode words every time she reads. Dyslexics often have to decode every word instead of reading in a flow.

In school they have to work 50% harder compared to everybody else. Imagine what they have to try and accomplish in a school day to maintain that level of attention. Often teachers don't understand and appreciate that.

What are your thoughts on current provision for dyslexic/dyspraxic children in mainstream schools?

I think that it's woefully inadequate because they don't have qualified specialists in most schools, and they have yet to make training in dyslexia and other types of special needs a requirement of all teacher training courses. Even where it's recognised and support is given, it's often given by unqualified

assistants. Dyslexic children require the most qualified and expert teachers because dyslexia is incredibly complex. It's on a spectrum and can present in very different ways. For example, for my daughter, spelling is just the pits, but she can actually read quite well. So somebody would look at her reading level and think that there's nothing wrong. You see a piece of her writing and it tells a completely different story.

Different children respond in different ways to different things. For example my daughter's primary school used a reading technique based around a rap, which was meant to be great for dyslexics. It went completely over my daughter's head! The previous government was committing to a specialist teacher that would cover a cluster of schools. That would at least be a step in right direction...

Do you encounter many parents that need support to liaise effectively with the schools?

Yes, definitely. I'm a forceful person and at my daughter's school I've been hammering on the door of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). I was told that it was a matter of who shouts loudest and I did just that. The SENCO called me last week and said that Jessica's going to have two one-to-one sessions next term on reading and irregular spelling. But what about all those children who haven't got someone who knows how to battle the system and fight their way through it? Those are the ones that are missing out and those are the ones that the Association is really there to support. It's so frustrating because with the right support from the schools so much can happen.

"In a class of 30 children they're lost and buried. But some intervention and support can make a profound difference."

ADELE BIRD

What kind of specialist support does the Association provide?

We run classes of no more than three children for literacy and numeracy and up to ten children for the touch-typing. For children with severe difficulties we may do a class of two... or sometimes a one-to-one. Every child that comes to us goes through a screening programme with a specialist who analyses what they need. We have regular meetings with the teachers to identify each child's needs and to discuss how we can accommodate them and how long they need to spend on the programme. We also run an annual summer school – a week-long course for transition from primary to secondary school. We have a handwriting course too. There is debate within the educational system about whether you teach children to write joined-up or not. Different schools have different policies. For dyslexics its better to start joined-up and our handwriting course really helps.

What relationship do you have with the Local Authority?

As Chair one of the main things I've done is build a relationship with the Local Authority. I thought this needed to be established because of the problems that some children were experiencing in schools. Now the problem is being recognised. The borough's Head of Special Education is working with us as well as the lead Educational Psychologist for dyslexics. They're using our qualified teachers as advisors and experts to help them improve things.

Also, as a result of cajoling the Director of Children's Services in our Borough to visit this year's Summer Club, I have just had an email from him where he is wanting to follow up the meeting he had with the parents there and I quote: 'We are already starting to plan an event, rather than just a follow-up, which we envisage to be along the lines of a positive 'structured conversation' about the issues for parents. I'd like to involve interested heads and specialists from our side. This has the potential to be a very different approach, and one that might result in changes in practice – which, if it happens, will come out of your contact with me and your invitation to the programme.' This I think is an example of the influence charities can have as a result of the work they do.

CCF donors have helped to support your transition summer school. Can you tell us a bit more about this project?

The statistics show that children enjoy primary school and when they go to secondary school the enjoyment dips. For dyslexics it has often already dipped in primary school because of how much they've struggled.

Our transition school shows kids that there's a positive reason to want to go to secondary school because they are well resourced for the more creative subjects which they can enjoy and thrive at. We also explain that they'll have different teachers so it might only be one or two that don't understand. Some of the children who came to our summer school said that this was their best week at school ever, because a lot of them hate school. For them to say 'This is my best week in school ever' is a great success...

"There was one child who did a year with our handwriting teacher. We've got a contrast of what his handwriting was like before and after and it's awe-inspiring."

What are the challenges and difficulties of sustaining this service?

Finances are a struggle. We have about 50 children coming through each week and we have a policy that if they're on free school meals we'll subsidise the rate to what they can afford. We won't turn anybody away. And this policy means that we make a loss every time. That's why we have to go out and get funding... We're helping around 150 children a year on a turnover of about £30,000. We are on a shoestring. We have one administrator and one part time receptionist. We pay our teachers but luckily our premises are provided in-kind by Walthamstow School for Girls which is a very switched-on and positive school. Our summer school premises are hosted by Forest School.

Our money mainly comes from grants and it is incredibly frustrating when some funders put unrealistic requirements on us. The Londonations and Deutsche Bank grants through CCF were exceptions to this. I feel that donors need to look at the process from the applicant viewpoint. We feel like we have to jump through hoops to get the money. It's often a struggle to find the resources to meet requirements. Larger charities have the resources to do that, but we haven't. It's not easy to run a small charity.

What have you learnt from working as Chair of the Association?

I've learnt that it's almost a full-time job when you're a volunteer Chair in an organisation that doesn't have a Director. The more you do and the more you increase awareness of the charity, the more demands there are on you. It's a nightmare – but worth it!

And finally, what are your plans for the future?

In the future I think we need a charity Manager. There's a lot of things that we could be developing and doing (especially for adults too) but we just don't have the capacity. We have ridden the recession very well because we've introduced some good new funding streams but they're generally all supporting children to go to classes rather than developing new areas. If we could secure the funding for a charity Manager, that would be great, but in the current climate I don't know... ●



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— 7 —

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AN INTERVIEW WITH **JANE RIDDIFORD**



Global Generation develops environmental awareness amongst young people and helps them to generate change in their communities. The group runs educational workshops in King's Cross and on an organic farm in Wiltshire. The work involves reflective inquiry alongside hands-on practical projects such as local food production, healthy eating and young people working with environmental specialists to create eco-friendly buildings within their communities and in partnership with local businesses. We met with Co-founder and Director **JANE RIDDIFORD** at the group's Skip Garden in King's Cross.



How did Global Generation come about?

When I came to England from New Zealand, I taught horticulture to young people who had not done well in school. I then got involved in managing an arts organisation, Rise Phoenix, that was working in the Balkans after Kosovo. We used the power of the human spirit to bring people together, despite what they had been through. That theme is very much present in our work now.

As part of that project we took a group of kids on a camp to a big organic farm in Wiltshire. We noticed how the kids reacted to this environment. You know how London kids can be, on guard and a bit cynical and 'whatever', but we could see this raw spirit come out of them. They were awake and had a passion for life. Soon after we set up a campsite on the farm and started running camps most weekends. Over the next year it became clear that the project was not straight-out arts work, we had an environmental trajectory and it made sense to set up a separate charity.

So Global Generation was founded in 2004. At that time we focused on the positivity that was coming out of the young people as they experienced the countryside. We asked ourselves 'What does that mean back in London? How can they make a difference in London?' One weekend we were planting trees in Wiltshire and I suddenly thought, 'We're going to do this on the rooftops of London!' By coincidence someone had an available roof space on an office building in King's Cross, and that's where we did our first project.

So that was your first site... What did you do with the space and how did the project develop from there on?

People talk about 'living roofs' being green and bio-diverse. We created a bio-diverse roof but for us it became 'living' because young people were involved in every part of the process, from the welding on the railings, to bringing the material up with the crane company and developing relationships with the staff in the building. They did eco-audits of the offices too. Soon after, we created a rooftop site at a nearby restaurant. That's when CCF got involved, providing some funding towards a vegetable garden. We have water recycling and renewable energy features there too. We now have nine growing sites in King's Cross. About a year ago we decided to work more intensively in existing sites and with more people in the local community. In the last two years we've focused on food growing – it provides 'hands on doing' and is a good doorway into the environmental agenda. There are also enterprise and health aspects that come out of it. It's a great way of engaging people in transforming an area and feeling ownership and connection to the future.

What attracted you to King's Cross in particular?

It provides a blueprint for so many different aspects of a city. There's so much change and development – transportation to Europe for example. Many of the kids that we're working with have no connection to business and many are first generation in this country. So there was something about the social experiment here as well as the changing physical environment. It felt like a good decision to use an area such as King's Cross as our 'learning laboratory'...

"From the get-go we give young people a sense that they have a role in building the community here – and a positive atmosphere too."
JANE RIDDIFORD

What is the ethos of Global Generation?

Most kids learn about climate change in school these days but it's often from a starting place which says 'You have to do something because climate change is going to happen and the world's going to come to an end!' It's a sort of siege mentality. We start with the idea that these kids have more potential than they know. We're interested in the values that make people change and the conditions to catalyse the human spirit that I mentioned before. For us that is the internal side of sustainability.

We have evolved a methodology called 'I, we and the planet' which is about shifting from a 'me-centred' culture to a 'we-centred' culture. We're called Global Generation, not because we're doing work all over the planet, but because we're about developing a perspective that is global. The main focus of the workshops is responsibility for the future and that includes everything from climate change to local food growing. Our two objectives are giving young people a relationship with the natural environment and supporting them to fulfil their potential.

How do you structure your workshop activities?

When school kids come in we'll first show them a model of King's Cross in the future with all the current developments completed. We'll ask them what it represents and they'll often say 'The future'. We'll talk about all the buildings and structures and we ask them who's going to be in these buildings. One way or another they'll come back with, 'It's people, it's us.'

We'll talk about positive values and qualities like 'independence', 'courage', 'teamwork' and 'integrity'. We get them to talk about what values are important and what values they are going to focus on for their workshop. We involve them in activities at various workstations: a DIY station where they do some simple carpentry and make things out of materials on the building site; a sustainable gardening station so they learn all about composting and waste, water collection, soil and plants. Another station is all about soil and where soil comes from. Another is about listening and identifying inspiration, (more reflective) and another one is about communication.

How important is youth leadership to what you do?

A central pillar of our work is our group of 'generators' – our youth leaders. Each year we take on ten to fifteen new generators and two of them are currently working for us part-time. When they come on board we tell them 'We're not doing this for you, we're doing this because you're needed!' Once they make that shift and realise that they are doing this for something bigger than themselves, more energy kicks in. There's a lot of youth provision at the moment which is just about giving kids confidence, but confidence for what?

The generators help facilitate a lot of our work with local businesses. For example, The Guardian commission us to run workshops for their new staff. We might have over twenty new starters from The Guardian, divided into five teams and spread across five workstations. In each team there will also be a number of generators. The generators know that their role is to be catalysts.

One of our most powerful stories is of someone we knew when we first set up Global Generation. He's an Albanian refugee, was getting into trouble at school and didn't speak English well. We got involved and now he works with us one day a week. A nineteen year-old girl we worked with had been excluded from several schools. She also works for us now. In September she's starting a placement at The Guardian where she'll have a blog and she's got an internship with the law firm that does all the leases with us. She's going to study Earth Sciences at Imperial College. This year we're working with about 450 young people, but we work more intensively with about 40 in any given year.

"We start with the idea that these kids have more potential than they know. We're interested in what makes people change... that is the internal side of sustainability."

What does the future hold for Global Generation?

By necessity a lot of our projects need to be portable. We have temporary leases in these spaces. There will be buildings here eventually. The build at this particular site finishes in 2020. At the moment we have two sites that will be moved on next year but there are other sites ear-marked for usage.

Funding is a big issue for us and a lot harder than it used to be. This year we'll only run two camps when we would normally run eight. We're exploring ways to make them self-funding. Grants are fantastic but I'm most interested in where we can work with companies such as the work with The Guardian. On a commercial level we're selling them knowledge and training and on a charity level their staff volunteer with us and provide us space in-kind.

We are learning over time here. Our campsite is still a very important part of the process but, in terms of educating kids about sustainability, I could never have imagined that there would be such fertile ground in the middle of an urban development site! ●



10 WAYS TO
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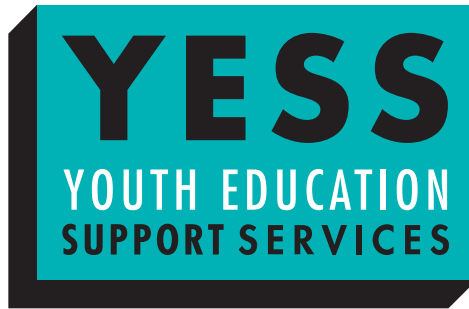
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AN INTERVIEW WITH **MINA MAWSON**

Based in Southwark, Youth Education Support Services (YESS) helps young people out of trouble and into positive futures through education and other support. We interviewed YESS' founder and Director, MINA MAWSON.

When did you start up YESS and how did it come about?

I started YESS in 2003, to respond to some really significant needs amongst the children and young people in this area. I had been a teacher for over 30 years. When I came to London, I saw how so many young peoples' lives are allowed to stagnate and fail simply because there is no access to the right help and advice. For a variety of reasons – parental abandonment, exclusion from school, being in trouble with the police – many young people don't have positive role models in their lives and have no source of advice when problems occur. Many see these young people – involved in street gangs, drugs and petty crime – as malevolent, threatening and beyond hope.

I believe that there is always another side to the story, so I started YESS to provide a holistic approach to working with young people. A paper qualification is of no use to a person living in insecure accommodation, involved in street crime or using drugs. The reverse is also true: to maintain a stable lifestyle, opportunities are required, and these opportunities come through employment and education. We have to deal with the 'whole person'.

Tell us more about what you do, and your ethos?

We provide 'alternative' education to children who would otherwise be excluded from school. But YESS is more than just an education provider. As well as City and Guilds qualifications, we help kids achieve their GCSEs, and help them to sort out their problems so they can go back to school. We have a lot of kids who come here with very serious problems, but we deal with them, because you can't concentrate on education if those problems are there. The children that come here, if they are in trouble, they know that we will go and help them. We help children to change their lives around in a very short space of time.

We also try to push the kids, really challenge them to achieve. In my experience a lot of people say 'this poor kid has so many family problems, you mustn't put pressure on him to achieve in education.' But I think it is good to push them a bit, because when they start to do well, that's when they feel good about themselves. That's why we've been successful – we make the young people feel good about themselves.

How do people find their way to YESS, and how many people do you help each year?

Generally through word of mouth, and through recommendations by their schools. Schools pay us to provide alternative education for children who they would otherwise exclude. For the kids that come looking in the door, I'll help them to get a recommendation. We never really say no to anybody, but we need someone to pay for their education provision with us.

We've worked with 322 kids since we started, so an average of around 45 each year. This last school year, we had eight full-time students, and one part-timer, but also a number of young people on a drop-in basis throughout the year.

I would like to be able to offer more spaces, but most of the time I can't because the statutory funding just isn't available. There is no funding after they reach 16, the money just stops. So it's very difficult. I managed to get funding for Harry,

"Society has a certain perception of children who have been excluded, and it has a real effect on the children. Most people don't seem to understand the extent of the problems that these kids need to overcome just to go to school or to get a job."

MINA MAWSON

a seventeen year-old autistic boy, but only because pressure was put on the local authority.

Why do you think so many children are being excluded from school?

Teaching isn't the same as it used to be; now it's all paper work and much less real teaching. I find that the kids are usually excluded because they are disruptive. When you look into it however, they are disruptive because they're bored.

Are there any stories you can think of where there has been a real success?

There are so many I don't know which one to choose! There was one young lady who came to us. She was very bright but hadn't been to school for a couple of years. To get her off the streets, I helped her to get some scholarship funding to go to Windermere St. Anne's boarding school, where she got her A-levels. She told me that if she hadn't met me she would have been pregnant with kids. What we do is we change their lives.

Troy is another one; he was having problems getting into schools because he didn't have the legal status to be a resident here in the UK. He wanted to be an architect, and we helped him to get into Sixth Form College where he did his A-levels and got into Greenwich University. We helped him with the Home Office to regularise his legal residential status, and to get funding to go to university. He's a very bright young man, and he's in his third year there now.

What are the main challenges you face?

It can be difficult trying to work in a joined-up way to make sure a young person is properly supported from all angles. This area faces serious social problems: crime, anti-social behaviour, drugs and street gangs. There is low educational achievement and high levels of pupil exclusion. Low parental engagement means that a large number of young people lack healthy home or family support networks. It is also challenging to find the right staff. Qualified teachers often think that working for a charity is going to be easy, but it can be much harder. We get lots of new graduates working here as a stepping stone, and they tend to do well because they really care.

What were you able to do with the funding you got from CCF?

The initial £2,000 grant was a lifeline. It helped us to get started and become self-sufficient. The kids we teach here were skipping school and on the street before CCF helped us to give them education and support. Then CCF gave us a £10,000 grant towards employing another teacher who came to help me, which was a great help. They've given us lots of little grants to help with specific projects, and to help us provide the City and Guilds exams. They have also helped us to partner up with other groups, and find other funders.

How would extra funding help? Are there other services that you would like to provide?

With more funding I could afford to give the children a little bit more in terms of sporting activities. I would like to be able

"Teaching isn't the same as it used to be; now it's all paperwork and much less real teaching. I find that the kids are usually excluded because they are disruptive. When you look into it however, they are disruptive because they're bored."

to take them away on holiday because they just don't get to do things like that. I once took a group to Alton Towers, and it really meant a lot to them. It's great for them to get away from London and see what life is like away from the chaos.

I would also like to be able to afford to employ someone to go and visit the kids who are in prison much more regularly. Somebody who would just visit these young people, hear their stories, let them talk through what they want to do to change when they get out, and then help to direct them along that chosen path.

On the practical side, our website is very old, that's another thing we need money for! We depend on our computers, but we have so many problems with them. If we had more funding I could pay someone to keep them going and to do our website, to showcase our work so other funders could learn more about us.

What are your plans for the future?

I'm planning to carry on with YESS for at least another three years, because by then we will have been going for ten years. I'm not sure that YESS would work as a bigger project, but I do think that we have a great model here. Every London school should have access to something like YESS, with someone who really cares and who is dedicated to helping the troubled children. This is my thing and I love doing it. It's a nice way to end my teaching career. ●



10 WAYS TO
PLAY YOUR PART

9

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ANGEL COMMUNITY CANAL BOAT TRUST

AN INTERVIEW WITH **PAUL WALLACE AND ROSE PARNIS**



Angel Community Canal Boat Trust operates a skippered community canal boat, for use by local residents and community groups at a cost they can afford. The service has been operating for over 30 years. We caught up with Community Skipper **PAUL WALLACE** and Development Officer **ROSE PARNIS** aboard *Angel II* to talk to them about their work with local young people.



How did Angel Community Canal Boat Trust (ACCT) start?

PAUL — It was founded in 1974 by Crystal Hale, a feisty, formidable lady. When she moved to Islington she used to row round the City Road basin. Local kids were chucking rocks at her so she shouted at them ‘Instead of throwing stones at me why don’t you get in and have a go?’ And that’s what they did.

She decided to setup a boat for inner city kids – to get them involved in a positive activity, to get them out into the countryside. She commissioned the first boat *Angel I* to be built along traditional lines and to her own specification, design, layout etc. Since then there have been half a dozen skippers at the most.

How do young people benefit from the boating experience?

ROSE — These are young people who normally have very tough outer shells and who don’t communicate in a particularly nice way with other people. Inner city children often have to put a very tough exterior on – sometimes on estates in London, that’s kind of how you have to be to survive. It’s nice that we can provide an environment where they can allow other aspects, kinder aspects, of their personality to come out.

PAUL — These inner city kids would never usually get an opportunity to get out into the countryside for what is largely speaking a white middle class preserve. We do day trips, short weekend residential and week-long residential in the summer holidays. We also offer training opportunities. The boat gives young people the opportunity to pick up transferable soft skills.

ROSE — A massive advantage is developing their interpersonal skills. You’re in this environment and you’re pretty much stuck there for a week. Having previously been a youth worker

I know that when you run a two-hour session with thirty or forty kids, it’s very difficult to get to what the children really want to talk about. I’m talking about the more controversial issues or personal stuff. Here you’ve got the same ten children for a weekend or for a whole week. It’s intense and the chances are that they will start to communicate some of their needs, some of their problems or some of their hopes for the future. They become very confiding and build up trust in you.

One of the benefits of the boating community is that it’s very friendly. You might go into a lock with another boat and then be stuck with them for the next seven locks so you have to learn to communicate better. Living on the boat means you have to work together, someone has to cook dinner for the whole group, when there’s a mess someone has to clear it up. We have a positive ethos towards the children and it’s nice to give them responsibility and see them enjoying responsibility. We have a rota of who’s helping out so all the kids know what they have to do. I think those skills are invaluable in life.

“A lot of the young people demonstrate challenging behaviour so a big challenge for us is disarming that behaviour.”

PAUL WALLACE

Many people see Islington as a wealthy borough. What are your thoughts on this perception?

ROSE — You’re right, people walk down through Angel and perceive Islington to be a very wealthy borough. It’s as though everyone’s got a Macbook and they just sit outside cafes all day long drinking cappuccinos. When actually levels of poverty here are some of the worst in England, let alone London. Life is hard on those estates. Islington has a huge drug and alcohol problem and crime levels are rocketing. Increasingly most

youth workers know someone who's either lost their life or has been in a very serious incident.

I think that a resource such as the boat along with many other fantastic projects is very important for Islington. We have to address the young people, they are our future and we must put time and money in. We need to address root causes of poverty but actually also the symptoms – how are they coping with it? They need to have fun activities to keep them busy and to give them a positive outlook on life.

You received funding from Londonations through CCF to fund trips for young people from BME communities. How did that work out?

ROSE — That was off the back of some other work that we had been doing on engaging kids from BME communities. Looking at the figures we just thought that the mixed nature of the borough wasn't reflected in our figures. There are a lot of BME groups in Islington so we did a hard push promoting. We contacted refugee community and asylum seeker groups who are not allowed access to public funds. Some of the asylum seekers we had on board had come from really tragic situations where they had lost family members. Many were living in extreme poverty and were never going to be able to afford anything. We wanted to see what we could do with these communities and to try and get them involved and if nothing else to make them aware that this resource is here.

What are the challenges of running ACCT?

ROSE — It's tough work doing a residential and a lot of staff don't really fancy the idea of working themselves to the bone. The kids don't go to bed until 1am or 2am and the first ones are up at 7am, so you're lucky if you get more than three or four hours' sleep. It's something you have to be passionate about otherwise you wouldn't do it.

"People walk down through Angel and perceive Islington to be a very wealthy borough. It's as though everyone's got a Macbook and they just sit outside cafes all day long drinking cappuccinos. Actually levels of poverty here are some of the worst in England, let alone London. Life is hard on those estates."

ROSE PARNIS

PAUL — A lot of the young people demonstrate challenging behaviour so a big challenge for us is disarming that behaviour. Those kids that do find it difficult can make it very hard for everyone else. Very rarely would I chuck in the towel and cut the trip short but it has happened twice in twenty years.

ROSE — Monitoring is obviously vital but when you've got three funds coming in and each monitoring form is slightly different, sometimes you can be pulling your hair out. We have to focus heavily on the monitoring because if we don't monitor correctly we'll fail to get any more money. But the paperwork stacks up heavily. Sustainability is also a real challenge for us.

PAUL — There are just not enough hours in the day.

What are your future plans for ACCT?

ROSE — We'd like you to give us some more money!

PAUL — I'd like to emphasise that!

ROSE — A few things are bubbling... In the long run, the plan is to buy another boat so we have one boat focusing on residential trips and one boat available for day trips.

PAUL — With another boat we'd have to be very careful to not play the 'zero sum' game, where we spend a huge amount of money on setting it up but there is no net financial gain and we are still firefighting. Capital funding is relatively easy to get hold of but revenue funding is a different matter. It's a struggle to get funds to pay salaries and to cover maintenance. In the short term, as a quick fix, we're thinking about doing the boat up so that it could be available for corporate hire.

ROSE — We are constantly looking at how we improve our engagement with young people. The average fourteen year-old from London wants something a bit more than just a boating holiday. So we've introduced a certificate in boat handling skills to make it more formal so that it can count towards an ASDAN for example.

And finally what do you find most satisfying in running ACCT?

PAUL — For me it's the energy from the kids. They give me a new way of looking at things. They have a ruthlessness and honesty. They live in the present where everything is very immediate. Things can flare up and disappear in seconds...

ROSE — It is satisfying when we get positive feedback from group leaders. They are astonished at how confiding the kids can get. And it's great to see the kids gain support from each other and to see that energy and teamwork amplified. ●



10 WAYS TO
PLAY YOUR PART

— 10 —

HELP IN
OUR OFFICE

IT GETS BUSY IN THE CCF OFFICES,
AND WE CAN OFTEN USE HELP FROM
KEEN AND WILLING PEOPLE OF ALL AGES.
HELP US TO HELP OTHERS, AND LEARN
MORE ABOUT LONDON WHILE YOU'RE HERE.

CLAPHAM PARK WEST RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

AN INTERVIEW WITH **VERNON DE MAYNARD AND NATASHA SYMMONS**

*Established in 1997, this small organisation was originally set up to ensure that local residents were able to make informed decisions about housing management and services. The group have recently channelled their work into regenerating a run down community garden in Clapham Park. The garden had fallen into severe disrepair and a small grant from CCF allowed the group to work towards regenerating the area. We met with volunteers **VERNON DE MAYNARD and NATASHA SYMMONS** at Agnes Riley Gardens.*

How do you feel the regeneration of the garden is benefiting the local community?

VERNON — It has improved the quality of life for local people. It's become a meeting place and we've got a great mix of different cultures and ages. We have a group of older people from a local sheltered accommodation unit who come by with their trolleys. Some of them even bring us big bowls of water in their trolleys! Dolly has walking problems and needs a trolley to help her walk. She feels that the exercise of gardening has really helped in the doctor signing her off.

NATASHA — Some of the older people sit in the garden for hours. You see them sitting there. They just want somewhere to sit and look and see the world and enjoy the prettiness of it, you know... Usually community gardens are secluded areas. It's nice that this one is within a public open space. It always had a children's area and a sports area, but there wasn't anything for older people before this. They sit there and enjoy it and it helps lift their spirits.

It's also been of real benefit to me personally. I've been in and out of hospital recently, I haven't been very well, and I'm finding working on the garden a real joy and pleasure. I've got two children that have got special needs. They get into a lot of trouble if they're not doing something that's occupying them. Now they've got a couple of their friends here and they've got something to do. They're proud of themselves and want to take stuff to their nan to show her what they've grown. At the moment they're growing corn, cabbages, carrots, beetroot... I could go on. There's so much!

VERNON — One of our plot holders is Gus who moved here a couple of years ago. He's Palestinian and he's taken a very long time to settle in. He used to sit with a book on a park bench just watching everything. You could see that he wanted to speak to people but he didn't feel comfortable. He's very quiet and you have to give him some time because he struggles with English. I kept asking him to get involved. He kept saying 'Later, later...! I must have asked him five or six times before I managed to get him to come down. He planted a few things and eventually took full responsibility for a plot. He lives next door to Felix. They never talked to each other. Felix got a patch two weeks ago, and now the two of them are engaging with each other. So that really is something... Gus had a traumatic experience recently with a fire in his house and all the neighbours came out in support for him. Now every time we go to the park he comes up and speaks to us. He's so much more sociable now. It was really hard work to get him to come out of his shell. Now his surrounding neighbours know who he is and they're chatting away!

"The garden is next door to a huge estate. It's got something that both children and the elderly can get involved in. There are now a lot of people with smiles in this area."

NATASHA SYMMONS

Where did the idea to regenerate the community garden come from?

VERNON — The garden was originally set up by a group called the Friends of Agnes Riley Gardens working in partnership with Lambeth Parks who redesigned the space into a community garden. However, it became neglected for five

“I’ve got two children that have special needs. They get into a lot of trouble if they’re not doing something that’s occupying them. Now they’ve got a couple of their friends here and they’ve got something to do. They’re proud of themselves and want to take stuff to their nan to show her what they’ve grown. At the moment they’re growing corn, cabbages, carrots, beetroot... I could go on. There’s so much!

It has been a big learning curve for us. Initially we lost some plants because our first summer in 2009 was hot and dry, so we repurchased plants that we knew could cope with drought. Last year we had quite a good crop of vegetables...
NATASHA — I had very little experience. My mum’s got a garden and she would tell me to go out and cut the grass. Last year Vernon got my sons involved and then a couple of months later I got involved. I just came down to see what they were doing. Now it’s spreading and more and more people are getting involved. People are asking for plots. Some of the kids from a local school were asking me for their own plots. They said they would come every week!

What are your plans for the future?

NATASHA — We want to encourage people to grow more at home. For example, if you have a small balcony you can grow herbs and stuff like tomatoes, onions and garlic...

VERNON — In the longer term we want to put in a wildlife trail. Although birds and wildlife come and visit they don’t seem to live in the garden. So we want to plan out a wildlife trail. The trail should attract some more interest from local primary schools. We are already actively getting schools involved. Three classes from Glenbrook Primary School just visited today, the kids were learning about herbs and vegetables and different types of flowers and completing their activity sheets. In the immediate future we need to install a stand pipe. That is crucial. ●

years and it fell into disrepair. There was tons of clay and tons of rubble. People were complaining that the place looked bad and it was particularly dangerous for kids to go running round there. Our team of volunteers cleared it all out, bit by bit. We got rid of all the clay, added some top soil and prepared the ground so that we could start planting.

How did you go about regenerating the space?

VERNON — It was an absolute nightmare, at first we didn’t have any tools and no money which is why we applied to people like yourselves last year. There was no water supply. I don’t know why they had originally created a community garden with no water supply, it’s bizarre! That’s been the main stumbling block.

NATASHA — Yes at the moment the water comes from either the Community Flat or my flat because I live near to the park. We have to connect two hoses and have them running to one of the flats. We have also attached a tank to the shed roof. We used money from yourselves to buy a shed. Most of the plants, the brickwork, the pathways, the tools and the pigeon netting was all funded by CCF.

Did you have any experience of food growing before getting involved with this project?

VERNON — Absolutely not. I’ve learnt from asking questions and getting advice from Brockwell Community Garden. We’ve got really good links with the local community. Some of our users have experience of farming, so everyone’s passing on knowledge and everyone’s learning from everybody else. One of our members, Dolly, has been a prolific gardener. She’s approaching 80 now. She used to run a farm in Guyana, she just knows so much!

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