

STOCKPORT HOMELESS CHARITY AT RISK OF CLOSURE

Most people are fortunate enough never to have to experience homelessness. But for those who do, it can be extremely difficult to escape from and is damaging physically and emotionally along the way. Stockport based charity "The Wellspring" provide the homeless and disadvantaged with much needed support by offering life changing guidance and shelter 365 days a year. As well as providing meals and clothing they offer a dedicated GP service and educational courses in Maths and English, all of these services would not be possible without the three full time members of staff whose salaries are funded entirely by donations.

However against a background of mounting unemployment and debt across the country solving the problem of homelessness in Stockport is no easy feat. The last year has seen an increase in numbers attending the project at the same time as donations have fallen, leaving the charity with a significant funding shortfall. This has been widened by an increase in running costs and final bills associated with their larger but much needed newly completed building and also by recent news of a "parachute conman" who pretended to collect money on their behalf but who has since been caught. All of these factors have harmed an already struggling cause and led to local building society, the Vernon stepping in to offer support and a secure place for donations.

Jonathan Billings, Project Coordinator at the local homeless charity, said "Sadly some people are hesitant to offer support, even viewing homelessness as the direct result of personal failings. However, losing a home is often caused not just by a person's individual circumstances but also by factors outside their direct control. These problems can build up over years and are often the result of debt or relationship breakdown.

"The Wellspring is open to **anyone** and **everyone** and engages with a wide client group including people with mental health issues, learning difficulties, financial problems and those suffering domestic abuse or sexual exploitation. Not everyone who passes through the doors of The Wellspring is homeless, but we believe that by engaging with those at risk from an early stage we can reduce homelessness in Stockport in the future."

Martin first discovered the homeless charity when he was sleeping rough in Reddish Vale. He battled for years with dyslexia and received little support at school, being four years behind in his learning when he left. Despite this he put himself through college to become a City & Guilds qualified gas fitter and an electrician. Sadly, following a divorce he was left struggling to pay the bills and sank into debt. Consequently in 2004 he was evicted from his home and spent a number of years sleeping rough in his Ford transit van before ultimately losing his job and ending up on the streets of Stockport. Finding The Wellspring helped him to rebuild his life again, "My life has changed so much because of The Wellspring and the people that support and run it. There are so many people who come here because they are down on their luck and are relieved to find a welcoming family environment where people care for people" said Martin.

Thanks to a referral from the homeless charity Martin now has a new home and has begun to further his education, achieving English level 2 and Maths Level 1. He is looking for skilled work and helps out with gardening and maintenance work at The Wellspring to help him stay focussed.

This is just one of many success stories. Over the last 12 months staff at The Wellspring have given housing advice 672 times and have successfully re-housed 138 people who would have been sleeping rough before engaging with the charity. Sadly however not all are re-housed in time and more staff are desperately needed. In the last year alone five members have passed away sleeping on the streets of Stockport, some of whom died as a direct result of abuse they received! The Wellspring estimate that there are currently between twenty and thirty people sleeping rough in Stockport, much higher than the narrow survey conducted by local government which astonishingly place the figure at zero.

The charity cannot provide its services for the community without funding from the community. So when you are getting into your nice warm bed tonight spare a thought for those in the cold who have nowhere to go and live in fear on the streets of Stockport. Please join the Vernon Building Society in supporting The Wellspring by taking donations to your local Vernon Building Society branch or setting up a monthly standing order (see below). Thank you.

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Please debit my / our account No:

And pay to the

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Stockport SK1 1NX
Sort Code: 08 – 90 – 24
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Reference Number: 0501000272

The Sum of.....(words)

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Commencing on theday ofandof

each subsequent month until further notice.

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Signature (s).....