

The Graih Gazette

Voices for Peace and Justice

Edition 1

May 2018

Numbers to ponder

202. The number of different individuals Graih had contact with in 2017 (2016:167).

£38,923. The amount of money Graih spent running everything in 2017.

Of that £38,923: £10,300. The amount of money Graih paid directly to landlords in 2017, mostly in the form of deposits for people moving into accommodation.

£733 million. Profits made by e-gaming in 2015/16

0%. Corporation tax rate in the Isle of Man

Sources: Graih; Isle of Man government.

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Editorial

Welcome to the very first edition of *The Graih Gazette*! Why *The Graih Gazette*? Well, apart from the small pleasures of alliteration there are plenty of things that we want to share and shout about. Like, why is there any homelessness in the Isle of Man in 2018? Or why is anyone in need in a society of such abundance? Or how come if you want to rent a place to tourists through Homestay you get rigorously inspected but if you want to rent a place to a long-term resident no one cares how you operate or what you offer?

Anyone familiar with Graih's work will know that we like to start small. The *Gazette* will at first be a newsletter for the work of Graih. It's a place for us to share who and what is important to us and our perspectives on our challenges. However, we don't want it to stop there and that's where you, our readers, come in.

We think that the marginal voices on the Isle of Man need to be heard. We think that the monocultural print media and the divided cacophony of social media don't really help voices from the margins to make themselves heard. We think that the causes of peace and justice deserve to be celebrated and sought. We would love to be a forum where more diverse and marginal voices can share their stories, their news, their hopes and their fears. Where we can share great ideas and

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dream about what sort of places we'd love our communities to be. Where we can challenge the status quo and work for transformation. So, whistleblowers, poets, the third sector, artists, journalists, the marginal and the marginalised, the dreamers and the schemers...get in touch and send us your letters, submissions, news and listings. If it's sensitive we can provide anonymity. The *Gazette* will be shaped by you.

Like Graih, the *Gazette* will be unashamedly Christian. We think Jesus brings the most liberating transformations we can imagine. However, much like our drop-in, we won't make demands on anyone's faith and we want to include as many different voices as possible. Think of it like one big, mad conversation round the drop-in table! There's not a party line and the articles will reflect the individual author's rather than Graih's view.

We will, however, be biased. Everyone's biased in some way and we'd like to be up front about ours. We're not biased towards making profit, or pleasing advertisers, or needing to charm big funders. We're not interested in power and privilege. We want to search for peace and justice in the big things and the small. We want to celebrate and challenge. We'll be biased towards the tiny, the absurd, the neglected and the obscure. In our experience, that's where life is to be found. We will prioritise people above everything else, because people are amazing and because people are at the heart of our work. People are what matter most.

So, in this inaugural edition read some updates on Graih, some interviews, ponder some questions and then get in touch! Oh, and share this as widely as you

can, online and offline, at home and at work, in all your groups. If you're desperate for a printed copy and can't print it yourself let us know. We've no idea where this will go but we're happy to have an adventure! When and if we've got more material, we'll bring out edition number two!

Grace and peace, Michael

Quotes

“They look at you like you're some piece of dirt. It's not a nice feeling. It's not a nice feeling at all. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone.” – Guy interviewed on Graih's DVD, speaking about the experience of queuing outside Markwell House for jobseekers' benefit and how he felt the public saw him.

“Marginalised people are marginalized only because governments abrogate responsibility and let them stay at the edge of society – a shameful state of affairs for rich countries.” – *The Lancet*, January 20th 2018.

“Multimodal psychosocial interventions.” – another lovely piece of phrasing from a recent conference. We think this means 'talking to people and caring'.

Interviews

We caught up with X, one of our extraordinary volunteers, who was happy to share their story anonymously.

GG: X, tell us a bit about your background.

X: Well, the long backstory goes back to when I was young. I had a difficult relationship with my father and ran away from home about 70 times between the ages of 9 and 15. Eventually I was placed in care but all they did was pay the rent without supervision and it was too much freedom. Whenever I ran off it was to lots of places. I ended up in London a few times and had many 'unusual' guardians. There was a girl on the game and I used to have to vacate the property whenever she saw a 'client'. She was a guardian angel for me. I was very lucky. I found myself at Centrepoint too. I've seen the system through it all – done a lot of drugs and drinking in the past. I'm a humanist who's a lapsed Christian. When I was in London I got involved with a church called Icthus. They were doing all sorts of great outreach and service into the community. That's what Christianity is about for me: getting your hands dirty and serving the poor. I'm more love than law. There were good mentors there who helped me break the cycle of getting into trouble. When I moved out of London I didn't find any churches with that community connection and so I drifted away. I actually died once, too. I was dead on an operating table for 25 minutes when they were operating on me for cancer. It was only much later that I found out that my mum had a circle of friends praying for me. That experience, of coming back, changed me. It was like a clean slate. Now I just do the

things that please my heart.

GG: I had no idea of any of this! How did you end up with Graih?

X: By chance really. I was recovering after a major accident and ended up with an old girlfriend. She moved over to the island and we were going to share a flat but it all fell apart. I went into huge arrears and the lease never got renewed. I ended up sleeping rough in a graveyard. I'd heard that the Commissioners might waive the residency requirement in exceptional circumstances so I went to them. They pointed me to Housing Matters, who pointed me to Graih. As soon as I came here, there was a connection. I thought that this is a place where I can be comfortable. I stayed at the drop-in for about four or five nights. Then a flat came up and with the help of Benefits and Graih I got a deposit together and moved in. It was funny because I was homeless but my cat was homed! I'd found the cat a temporary home as I got sorted. It's important to look after your pets because they look after you. As soon as I was sorted in the flat I continued to engage in voluntary work in the community to help the gaps on my CV. I got back into paid employment on a work placement with a short-term contract. I've also got involved with Graham Clucas and Quing, which has been really good. Now with all my volunteering with a few charities and community events I've found a flexible paid job as well that fits around them all!

GG: What makes you want to keep volunteering at Graih?

X: It's not just about giving something back, although it's partly that. It's that I've got extra to give as well. I've been on a

whole journey. I've been very lucky at key moments in my life that the right people were there. When you're at a crossroads things can change. They don't have to stay the same. I've walked the walk that many of the lads at Graih are still walking. I know what it's like. I've always thought that the best thing to do is get involved and make a difference. I can relate to a lot of the lads because I've had similar problems. If I can stop people going the same way a bit earlier then that's good.

GG: X, thank you so much for your willingness to share with us. And thank you for all your amazing volunteering and continued help!



Our lovely drop-in table: home to many strange and transforming conversations!

In September 2017 Graih welcomed Erica Irwin as our new Drop-in Facilitator. Erica has responsibility for all aspects of our drop-in (which has been much cleaner and tidier since September!) and has already proved a transformational presence. We caught up with her for this inaugural edition.

GG: Tell us a bit about your background Erica.

EI: I was a drag-over at 17 years of age, as I really did not want to come to the island. However it was the best move as within 4 months of arriving I had become a Christian. I went to the Isle of Man College and then went to university in Northern Ireland. Whilst in Northern Ireland I set up a small group of us who went out giving our food and blankets to those rough sleeping in and around Belfast city centre. This is where I first started to learn about homelessness. When I finished my degree I decided I didn't want to pursue a career in that area but to work with the homeless community. I got a job as a street outreach worker and worked with those who rough slept in and around Belfast. We also had a big drop in centre so I worked with people in this too. I then moved jobs eventually to work in a homeless hostel and supported people in this. With the financial recession that happened both my husband and I were at risk of redundancy in our jobs so we decided to move back to the island and work here. I started working as a Family Support Worker with the Children's Centre helping people be good enough parents and try to prevent families from splitting up and children going into care.

GG: Is it true that you were essentially

homeless once? What was that like?

EI: Sadly yes. When I left the island to go to university in Northern Ireland. Within the first few months of being there a big family situation that had been brewing for a good number of years exploded. I was told never to return home. I was also informed that all of my belongings still at home would be put on the front lawn on a set date and for them to be removed. The majority of my belongings were still at home so I managed to arrange for them to be collected by a friend and stored in her garage until I could return and sort through them. When I did sort through all of my stuff, all of my photographs had been taken by my family and all of my stuff gone through. Because I had no choice I had to just take the essentials that I could fit in a bag and get rid of the rest. This was really tough and heart-breaking to do. Because the police had been involved I managed to get them to vouch for my new family situation and I managed to get funding for university so I was able to continue with my 4 year degree. I had to suddenly budget and carefully spend my every penny. I had to spend money on text books and lecture notes for my classes as it was compulsory. The course I was on required 100% attendance as it was a medical degree and it was full time which meant I could not fit in a part time job at first. There were times when I ran out of money and had to live on hardly anything. It wasn't nice. I had a week where I managed to buy a loaf of bread and I had some old branston pickle in the cupboard, so I lived off branston pickle sandwiches. Another time I had an unexpected expense and I only had wagon wheels in the cupboard, so I lived off wagon wheels, so I managed. During the holidays, this is when

I was homeless. The summer holidays were the worst: this was when I had to take all of my belongings and vacate the property I was in that year, to either return after the summer or go to a new place. The summer holidays were 4-ish months long at university and this is when I was technically homeless really. Everyone would return home to their parents but I couldn't do that. Thankfully I always managed to find somewhere to stay. I have really good friends who took me in on numerous occasions and allowed me to stay with them, and one of my university friends went away for a couple of months – so he allowed me to crash in his room for this time. The landlord tried to get money from me but my friend had already payed for his room so I claimed squatters' rights and managed to avoid paying anything. I hated Christmas as this is when I felt my loneliest. Well-meaning families asked me if I was going home or why I wasn't home. Just really hard to know what to say. I really, really hated it! For one stint of time, I ran out of money and managed to scrape some loose cash together. I froze my own bank account (basically just by not using it) as I had got overdrawn and didn't want it to get worse. After a while of not using it the bank started to chase me about it but I didn't have the money to pay them back so they got the debt recovery people chasing me. They really hounded me. That was quite scary. I thought I'd done the right thing by not using my account but it had not quite worked out how I'd planned! In my third year of university I had to work on placement. This was working in various hospitals, full time for free. I had to do this and work a paying job in the evenings as well as produce assignments and study to be able to know answers to questions I would be asked during the day.

This was really tough but I had no choice. I just had to pull out everything. I had to survive this time, I couldn't fail now! My first year and final year of university were my hardest. In my first year I cried a lot. I would go to my classes and do my work but I also spent a lot of time in my bed crying. I was so, so sad and scared. I was in a country I'd never been in and was making new friends and had no family support. I hated turning the lights off at night to go to sleep. I felt really alone then. To combat that I would sleep with my music and headphones on, that would fill that gap until I fell asleep. In my last year I also took to crying a lot again. Although I'd done well to cope in the previous 3 years at university I knew this time was ending and I didn't have a fall back plan of finishing uni and returning home to think of my next step. I also knew this is when my financial support would finish too and suddenly I could actually be screwed for real. I was quite worried and panicked and again took to my bed a lot and cried – in between attending lessons and doing my dissertation. But again I had good friends who took me in and let me stay there for a while and I moved around when needed. Little did I know at that time that within that next year I would be married and my future a bit more secure!

GG: How have you found joining the madness of Graih as our Drop-in Facilitator?

EI: I've loved it! I volunteered with Graih one night a week for 2 years before getting the role as Drop-in Facilitator, so nothing came as a big surprise. I do love this role more than I did when I was volunteering though. I get to walk with people through

some of their difficult patches of life a lot more and try to help people move on from their current situations. I love it. The guys at the drop in are great, you can have a real laugh. I think it's a great privilege to be a part of what happens at the drop-in.

GG: What do you hope for?

EI: I'd love for the island to catch up on the fact that homelessness on the island is real and it is happening. No one person's experience of homelessness can be compared to another. You can't lessen what one person has been through and compare it to another. For that individual it was or still is one of their worst times of their life. No one really wants to be in this situation. I want the island to wake up and smell the coffee. I want the MHK's and other officials in the political arena to realise that they have a responsibility here to a community on the island with whom they are currently failing. Give money to where it counts. If we had the finances at Graih we could do so much more than what we are currently able to do.

GG: What keeps you going?

EI: I really want my life to count. I don't want to sit back all comfy and content when there are people out there suffering or struggling. I am so grateful to my friends who helped me when I desperately needed it. If I didn't have them then I would have had to have experienced the harder side of homelessness. Now it's my turn to give back and help those who aren't so fortunate and just need to be accepted for who they are and given a chance to succeed.

GG: How can people help or pray for you?

EI: I'm always in need of volunteers! The

drop-in runs on volunteers. Without the right number of people we can't open and that really saddens me when that has to happen. I can always do with as much prayer as possible. You can't pray too much for me to be honest! This job is all consuming and is demanding on every level. I'm learning so much in this role about myself and about how to take a step back at times to get a better view of the bigger picture, whether that's when looking at the drop-in or at an individual's situation. I need wisdom for this and also a great ability to continue to be drenched in His Holy Spirit. Less of me and more of Him.

GG: Erica, thank you so much for your honesty and willingness to share with us, and for your amazing work at the drop-in.

Erica's details are on the final page if you want to get in touch about volunteering, donations or any aspect of Graih's drop-in.

Events (let us know more!)

Thursday 14th June, 19.30 at The Well, Broadway. Graih's AGM. This is an open event and all are welcome as we mark ten years as a charity.

Sunday 24th June, 19.30 at 11 Hilary Road. Volunteer evening for Graih's volunteer team. It would be lovely to see all our volunteers there!

Sunday 9th September, 19.30 at 11 Hilary Road. Prayer evening for Graih and Stauros. All are welcome!

Listings (let us know more!)

Stauros (Christian addiction agency):
Gordon Buist, 453731

Quing (wellbeing and recovery): Graham
Clucas, 246713

Motiv8 (addiction counselling): 627656

Salvation Army: 627742

Office of Fair Trading: 686510

Broadway Baptist Church: 614932

Housing Matters: 675507

ASAT (Adult Services Access Team):
686179

Health Visitor for Vulnerable Adults:
665941

Environmental Health: 685894

Did you know?

...that if you're in a boarding house with more than six tenants it should be registered as a House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO)? (Contact Environmental Health on 685894)

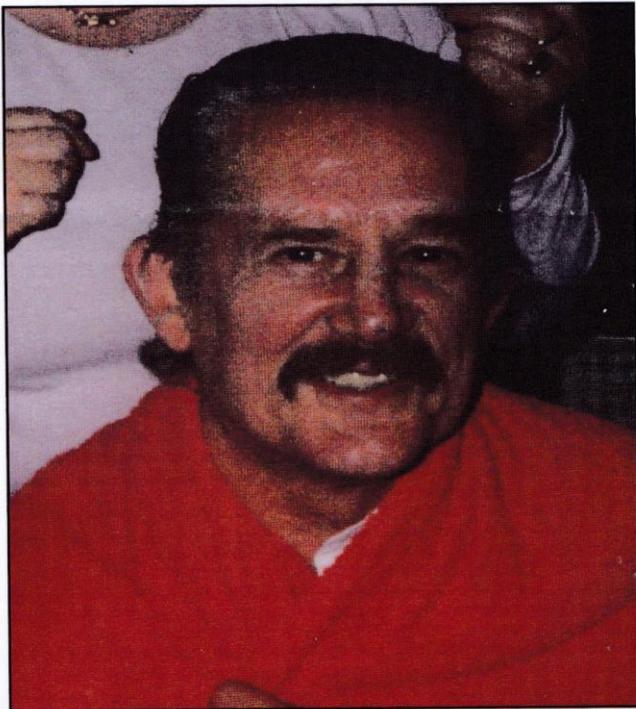
...that a landlord can charge up to £116 per week for a room and Benefits will pay it? No questions are asked about the quality of the accommodation and many landlords continue to rent properties with minimal access to privacy, cooking or sanitation facilities. And don't even get us started on deposits...

...that no one knows how many landlords there on the Isle of Man, or who they are, or how they operate? (Write to your MHK about a Landlord Register).

...that the pioneering Homeless Health Needs Audit on the Isle of Man, carried out by Graih and Community Health, found that 94% of homeless people on the island had a problem with mental ill health (UK homeless: 45%; UK general population: 25%)? Read the full report at www.graih.org.im/resources.

Memories

Joe McCabe was on the scene when I first became involved as a volunteer. He was alcoholic and sleeping rough in public toilets and squats. He stayed a lot at the drop-in in our earliest overnight seasons. His thick Scottish accent didn't help make comprehension easy when he was under the influence! I remember him almost crying with gratitude when one of our volunteers helped give him a shave. I don't know whether it was the shave or the gentleness of touch that so affected him. He loved robust debate (to say the least!) and didn't have any truck with meaningless phrases. When people told him that they were 'fine' he'd tell them that 'fine' was an acronym: F***ed up, Insecure, Neurotic and Emotional.



Joe died in Liverpool. He'd been badly assaulted after a drinking session and had been flown to hospital across with serious injuries. He never recovered. He was 57.

Michael Manning

Myths: 'Independent Living'

'Independent living' is the holy grail of a host of services. I think I know what people are trying to say. They're trying to say that they want people to live their own lives, without dependence on services. People should have control. Well, maybe.

The problem is, I don't live an independent life. I don't think I ever have. I've been deeply blessed from childhood with a whole network of parents and friends who have supported me, challenged me and helped me through difficult times. Even now I'm reliant on the relationships that sustain me. I don't live independently. That sounds like a sort of hell. Me on my own against the world.

The language of independent living is too often used as an excuse to discharge people (especially those costly people who've been on the case load a long time) from services. If you're not fixed by the end of the programme, be it two weeks or two years, then off you go. You're blocking the service for others. It's arguable whether this is really meant to help the individual or if it's just another symptom of over-stretched services desperately trying to make do with what little resources they have. I've seen too many people go through the cycle again and again.

The phrase also masks the fact that for many people it's precisely 'independent living' that has contributed to many of the problems in the first place. One of the defining factors of homelessness is the isolation it brings. Sure, you're independent, but you've got no support networks, no positive relationships and things are falling apart. It seems then particularly cruel to put in some support – just for a time – and then discharge people back to the loneliness when they begin to improve. Is it any wonder people get stuck?

Homelessness isn't just a symptom of the brokenness of people; it's a symptom of the broken system we inhabit. Why do we have a

society where people are homeless at all? And if the system is broken, then we all share in the brokenness. We're all part of it. It won't do any good to pretend that we have nice independent lives that we can insulate from everyone and everything. It doesn't work that way. Something's wrong.

So if independent living is a misleading myth to ditch, what's the answer? Well, 'interdependent living' might be a start. At least it acknowledges that we all belong to each other to a degree. We're all on this rock together. And how do we foster the relationships that will transform us into more interdependence? Ah, there's a question! Come and talk to me about it. Or pop into the drop-in and sit round the table and join in.

Send me your answers and we'll kick off a discussion for edition two!

Michael Manning

What we need

Volunteers (speak to Erica Irwin, details below)
 Money (bank details below)
 Kitchen roll
 Toilet roll
 Large, strong bin bags
 Fresh fruit
 Tins of beans and other tinned ingredients
 Peanut butter
 Ham, cheese, sandwich stuff

Graih's bank details:

Lloyds, Prospect Hill, Douglas
A/c no. 00509505
Sort code: 301280

Thank you so much for your generosity. It allows us to continue to open and provide a generous welcome for those we serve.

Contact

Editor: Michael Manning, michael@graih.org.im, 324767. Any ideas, letters, questions, news, listings, pictures or submissions for the *Gazette*, send them here!

Graih's drop-in and volunteering: Erica Irwin, erica@graih.org.im, 224807.

Drop-in opening hours:

Sunday: 12.30 – 14.00
 Monday: 10.00 – 14.00
 Tuesday: 12.30 – 14.00
 Wednesday: 10.00 – 14.00
 Thursday: Closed during the day
 Friday: 10.00 – 14.00
 Saturday: Closed

We're open every evening apart from Saturday from 21.00 – 22.00.

Office mobile, manned only when we're open: 304381.

Much more information about Graih can be found on our website: www.graih.org.im

Graih's address: The Alpha Centre, Broadway, Douglas IM2 4EN

Graih is a Manx-registered charity, number 1012.