

The Graih Gazette

Voices for Peace and Justice

Edition 3

April 2019

Numbers to ponder

225. The number of different individuals Graih had contact with in 2018 (2017: 202). 117 of these were for the first time.

3,600. The number of meals provided at the drop-in in 2018 (2017: 3,200).

21. Overnight stays at the drop-in in 2018 (2017: 33). However, we had to turn people away numerous times due to being unable to shelter them.

65. Bed spaces provided in the first two months of the pilot night shelter. This is over 18 different individuals, most of them new to us.

Sources: Graih.

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Editorial

This third edition of *The Graih Gazette* is long overdue and a lot has been happening!

Our last newsletter was in early September 2018. That autumn we faced several challenges. For many reasons we were at a low ebb: our finances were down to just a couple of months' left; we'd lost a number of significant volunteers for lots of different reasons; we were wondering what the future held.

Many people, particularly churches on the island, were very generous over the winter and new year. Such generosity has put our general finances on a far healthier footing at the moment. We were also challenged about our inability to provide guaranteed basic shelter. I explain more about our pilot night shelter below.

This edition mirrors Graih's current focus on the basics: those things that have always been part of our work and fundamental to everything else that we do. You would hope that basic needs like food and shelter are pretty much provided on the Isle of Man in 2019 and yet we see people through our doors again and again who are in real need and struggling. Look at our numbers for 2018. Look at the first couple months' numbers in the night shelter. Read the eviction story. When you're confronted

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with this need on a daily basis it can be easy to get inured to it. The danger for any group of people is that you begin to go through the motions and you lose the sense of anger and compassion that is at the heart of Graih's ethos.

It should make us angry that there are so many people on the Isle of Man in this sort of need. It should make us angry enough to clamour for change not just in the lives of those concerned but in the systems and institutions of society. Compassion for those who are most struggling must be placed at the heart of our structures and our common life. If the system doesn't work for the most broken and needy then it doesn't work, and should be changed.

Relationships of compassion and kindness are what transform people. There are always good excuses to exclude and blame others. It's always a temptation to send the needy away from our doors. Yet over the years we at Graih have learned that when we get to sit with people and listen in gentleness and hope lives are changed. On a recent visit to prison I was chatting with someone who was quite new to us. 'When I get out,' he said, 'I'm going to come back down to the drop-in. It's like a community there and there's people you can talk to.'

We remain so grateful to all who make the work of Graih possible, and grateful for all the guys who come through the doors and allow us to share some time and life with them. In its small and mad way the drop-in is a tiny pointer to a kinder society that welcomes people, all people, as they are for who they are. We all need much more of this!

As always, please get in touch with

Quotes

"We have affordable and accessible housing which meets our social and economic needs." – one of the twenty outcomes of the current Programme for Government, under the strategic objective 'An Inclusive and Caring Island'.

"Living in almost derelict house with holes in roof and rain coming down the stairs." – an answer to the question 'where are you currently sleeping?' in Graih and Community Health's Homeless Health Needs Audit in 2015.

"What we permit we promote." – a quote from the Homeless and Inclusion Health Conference.

ideas, submissions, questions and everything in between! It would be great to hear from you.

Grace and peace, Michael

Eviction

Picture the scene. It's raining. We're on a busy street corner in the middle of the day. By the pavement there is a skip, maybe a third full of random bags and items from a nearby flat. A man is clambering into the skip, trying to discern what's in the bags. Everything is getting soaked, including him. These are his possessions. He has been evicted for a couple of weeks at this point and he's desperately trying to reclaim some of his stuff before it gets discarded. The junction nearby is busy; cars queued up at the traffic lights, people watching.

I wonder, if you were with this man, or even were this man, what you would feel? There is a strange mix of desperation, futility, confusion, anger and a very public humiliation as someone sorts through their personal possessions in full view of their community.

This isn't a scene from a massive city somewhere else in the world (you know, somewhere where they have all those visible homeless and poor people?). This is not a scene from a nation that we think of as being uncaring or undemocratic or unconcerned about the needy in their midst. This isn't a scene from the bad old days of history. This is Douglas in the Isle of Man in the summer of 2018.

To understand quite how this horrible situation came about – and for those of us involved we're still in the process of understanding – we need to go back a bit.

This is Ross Ward's story.

Ross first came to us last summer. He had been sleeping in a friend's van for a night or two following his eviction and this was his first contact with us. He stayed for a night at the drop-in before moving into a

private flat that Housing Matters had found him at short notice.

As we were trying to find out what had happened to Ross it became very obvious very quickly that he was confused. He had some papers from court but couldn't make any sense of them. He kept saying that Douglas Borough Council had evicted him for rent arrears even though Benefits were paying the rent directly. He didn't understand particularly why he couldn't go back to his old flat to reclaim his possessions and he definitely wanted his large television that had been left behind. He had left with almost nothing.

It was hard to have a coherent conversation with Ross. He was distressed and confused and drinking. He had short-term memory problems which meant he forgot conversations he'd had; forgot people's names; forgot appointments and never turned up. We became one of a number of groups trying to help him as Housing Matters continued to offer a lot of support and the Health Visitor for Vulnerable Adults began to look at his health.

When people are in crisis there's a tension between understanding what has happened and dealing with what's in front of you. While it may help to know something about the past situation it becomes less of a priority than dealing with the current crisis: food, shelter, stability. People need to have some level of coherence in their lives and minds before we can piece together what went wrong. The problem with this is that then the lessons from what went wrong are never learned, for the vulnerable simply yearn for some peace and the organisations and systems involved just move on.

Ross's troubles were not getting any better. The flat he'd moved into was substandard and damp. The electricians didn't work. Worse, there were others in the same building who were also struggling with problems and Ross became embroiled in all sorts of chaos. He had a fit and was admitted to hospital. Noble's wanted to keep him in but Ross had heard that the Council was in the process of clearing his flat and he was desperate to get his stuff. He discharged himself and came seeking help to get his possessions.

We got in contact with the Council and were informed that they had been trying to contact Ross repeatedly throughout the whole eviction process but that he wasn't responding. They wanted to get the flat cleared and although they weren't legally obligated to do so they were happy for us to go and move some of Ross's stuff. The cleaning contractors had already mistakenly started to skip some of Ross's possessions and the Council put that on hold for another few days. They were, however, very clear that Ross was not even allowed back in the building, let alone his flat.

And so we found ourselves with Ross in the rain hauling bags of possessions down from his top floor flat. We parked our minibus round the corner and fitted in what we could. Ross had to stay outside, hence the clambering into the skip. Help was provided by a few of the other guys from the drop-in, who had volunteered to come and help. Two housing officers from the Council stood at the top of the stairs and watched us as we went up and down, up and down.

Some items had already been removed from the flat as the contractors had started their work. Photographs and paperwork were strewn across the front room floor. It's a

sadly familiar situation to us: trying to quickly decide what might be precious and what is replaceable, knowing that we can't take everything. Ross was specific about a few things: his fishing rods; some clothes; the television (which wasn't there or in the skip).

There are two facts that are useful to hold in mind about this eviction. One: Ross had been a tenant of the Council's for fifteen years without any previous history of rent arrears. Two: his rent arrears for which he was evicted totalled £302.04.

We got some of Ross's possessions out and traipsed up another set of stairs to get them into his new flat. Ross soon had another hospital admission and another self-discharge as he tried to sort out his stuff and cope with the chaos in his new building. In the absence of his beloved television we managed to get him another, much smaller, one.

Along with Housing Matters we then tried to piece together what had happened. We spoke with the Council and then with some advocates. We think Ross's recent past looked something like this.

Ross served a short prison sentence in 2017. He was told by officials in the Prison that his rent would be covered while he was inside. His rent was never covered, leading to the arrears. Upon his release Ross's rent began to be paid again by Benefits but his arrears were never paid off. When the Council raised this Ross was convinced that the mistake was somewhere in the system, as he had been told that his rent was going to be paid. The Council didn't see any of the arrears and so initiated eviction proceedings, which Ross either didn't understand or didn't respond to, leading to a court hearing where Ross was

absent and the Council being granted possession of Ross's flat.

Ross seemed to receive no support from other agencies until after the eviction. It could be that he was offered this but again either didn't understand or comprehend the proceedings that were being issued against him. Throughout the entire process Ross has been confused and his memory has been atrocious.

So that is how a vulnerable adult on the Isle of Man in 2018 finds themselves in a skip in full view of passing traffic after being homeless.

There is much that we will continue to learn from this situation. Unfortunately it is only one of the multitude of chaotic stories that find their way to us and that we try to respond to with kindness and compassion. It is not easy. It is a harsh lesson in the failure of systems and how that lets the most vulnerable down. A miscommunication and a breakdown in the system led to the arrears and a court proceeding that seemed very swift. The Council and all other bodies involved have been happy to talk to Ross and ourselves about it. Procedures have been followed. The advocates are still involved. Yet no mistakes by the system can compensate for the fact that Ross has been evicted from his home of fifteen years and thrown into chaos, losing a large chunk of his possessions. No one knows what happened to his large television. No one can count the cost to Ross's and others' health through the chaos in his new building.

Just before Christmas part of the ceiling in Ross's new flat caved in, showering his front room with bits of damp plaster. Although the landlord is aware Ross is still waiting for repairs to be done.

He is getting sadly used to being at the mercy of powerful landlords.

Michael Manning



Our pilot night shelter set up and ready to welcome guests!

Pilot Night Shelter

We are very happy to announce that our pilot night shelter started at the end of January. We're very grateful to Jamie, Riley, Cat and Mark who have started as our staff members and are working waking nights to ensure that we can now welcome men and women needing basic shelter.

The context for this pilot scheme is a growing concern from ourselves and our partners (primarily Housing Matters, Social Care and Mental Health) about the rising demand for basic shelter. Throughout 2018 we had a number of situations where we wanted to shelter people but couldn't. Our volunteers are fantastic but as volunteers they have many responsibilities outside of Graih and we didn't have the capacity to shelter people through the week (we were always closed on Saturdays) or take people in through the night (we cannot ask volunteers to do waking nights). We know that there were people sleeping for long periods of time either rough or in cars and we couldn't offer them anything better. One man slept rough for ten days through the autumn before coming to the drop-in. One woman spent weeks in her car and then ended up in prison. We had the uncomfortable situation of having to hand out tents to people as shelter rather than accommodate them ourselves.

We have always tried to respond generously and flexibly to the needs presented to us. The drop-in had its genesis in a desire to provide a warm place overnight for rough sleepers. Over the years the need has waned but in the autumn of 2018 we realised that we had to attempt to do something to better meet the fresh demands.

The night shelter offers, for the first time on the Isle of Man, guaranteed basic shelter for adults over eighteen. This is offered seven nights a week and because our staff do waking nights we can welcome people throughout the night. If the Police or Social Workers find someone in crisis at three in the morning they can bring them down for shelter.

The shelter is being run on a pilot basis and the consistency of the service will enable us to map the level of need properly for the first time. It isn't the case that we've had to try and accommodate people at the drop-in every night; the need has been erratic and although the demand has been increased it remains the exception rather than the rule that people need to stay with us.

The pilot will run for a year, dependent on funding, and will enable us to plan ongoing provision. It could be that this sort of service is not needed and we need to put time and effort into other ways of helping. It could be that some sort of emergency, basic shelter is needed and we need to plan for ongoing work in this area. Either outcome will be a successful pilot as we will better know where the needs of the homeless on the island are.

We are extremely grateful for the funding that we have already received. The Manx Lottery Trust, the Treasury, AFD, CAiM (Churches Alive in Mann), other individual churches and individuals have all contributed some money. Broadway Baptist Church have generously given us use of a further room to use overnight and continue to support us in many ways. While we have enough to run the pilot until October we are actively seeking a further £10,000 to enable us to run it until the end of January 2020. If

you or anyone you know can help with this please do get in touch.

In the first two months of opening we have provided 65 bed spaces to 18 different individuals. Most of these guests have been new to us. While we continue to keep an open mind about the level need and the numbers until later in the pilot this has been a level of usage that has somewhat surprised and disturbed us. While we're very happy that we're able to shelter those in need it is unjust that people are in these situations in the Isle of Man in 2019.

Graih's ethos has always been focussed on people and we've done our best to serve those we are privileged to know. The pilot shelter is simply another expression of our desire to offer a basic, unconditional, warm welcome to all those who find themselves in housing crisis and need the fundamental essential of shelter. We're very grateful to all those making this hospitality possible.

Michael Manning

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

The One World Centre: 800464

Did you know?

...that private landlords currently discriminate on both age and whether potential tenants are in receipt of Benefits? Age discrimination should become illegal from January 2020 when The Equality Act comes into force. Shelter in the UK have recently supported a court case arguing that discrimination on the grounds of Benefits is also illegal.

...that academics at University College London have costed and researched a 'Universal Basic Services' proposal that would cover housing, food, transport and IT for the most vulnerable and would cost just 2.3% of the UK's GDP? Potential solutions are out there!

...that Crisis estimate that for every rough sleeper there are twelve others homeless in others ways (temporary, unfit and insecure accommodation)?

Sources: Graih; Housing Matters; Shelter; UCL Institute for Global Prosperity; Crisis.

Events (let us know more!)

Sunday 5th May, 19.30 at 11 Hilary Road.
Prayer evening for Graih and Stauros. All are welcome!

Sunday 14th July, 19.30 at 11 Hilary Road.
Graih volunteer evening. It would be lovely to see all our volunteers there!

We discussed lots of fund- and awareness-raising ideas at our recent volunteer evening. Let Erica know if you want to get involved!

Memories



Andy Mac was a charismatic, jovial presence in our early days. He'd been in the army and military jargon was often put to good use when we went out on work days. He was a hard and enthusiastic worker, always ready to have a laugh and cheer everyone else up. He loved coming out on our walks as well. The photograph shows him working at our allotment at the Braaid, which we still have but which is dormant at present due to lack of skills and people to work on it.

We've been at the Braaid since the allotments started there and our first trip sums up Graih's general competence in all things work-related. It was a bare field with the plots marked out with string and little tags with numbers. Ours was 47A. There was no one else around and hardly any of the plots had been touched yet. So we walked down to the far edge of the field, found 47A and we all began digging enthusiastically. We marked out some beds, planned where we'd put a compost heap; it was all very exciting.

After a while of digging (I imagine we'd stopped for a tea break) we were looking with pride at one another at how

well we were doing. It then occurred to us that the post with 47A on it could refer to the plot either to the right or the left of it. A quick count up the line of plots confirmed that we had indeed picked the wrong plot. With a whole field to choose from we had still managed to get it wrong...

Thankfully, because none of the plots had been worked, we simply swapped with the poor owner whose plot we had hijacked. Andy and others were most amused by the whole episode!

Andy's mental health was fragile, exacerbated by his struggle with alcohol and some of his military experiences. He went through lots of ups and downs and spent periods staying with us at the drop-in and periods in rehab. He was part of a little group of drinkers who both supported one another and occasionally fed each other's chaos.

In more recent years Andy found a great deal of stability. Much to many people's surprise (I was never sure if Andy was surprised or not) he settled into a long-term relationship. He had stable accommodation and he seemed to find a balance that had been lacking before.

The last time I saw him he was acting as best man at a friend's wedding. He was very smart, as flamboyant and funny as ever, cracking jokes and laughing away. It was good to see him.

Andy died very suddenly last summer, which came as a huge shock to everyone who knew him. He is missed by many.

Michael Manning

What we need

Volunteers (speak to Erica Irwin, details below)

Money (both ongoing support and an extra £10K for the pilot night shelter; bank details below)

Kitchen roll

Large, strong bin bags

Bleach

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: 10.00 – 14.00

Friday: 10.00 – 14.00

Saturday: Closed during the day.

Night Shelter:

Every night from 21.00 to 07.30

Entry is through the drop-in or ring the office mobile below. Entry after hours is at staff discretion.

We're open every evening from 21.00 – 22.00.

Office mobile during opening hours only: 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.

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