

The Graih Gazette

Voices for Peace and Justice

Edition 6

May 2020

Numbers to ponder

534. Bed spaces provided by the Pilot Night Shelter in twelve months, spread over 59 different guests.

88. The age of our oldest guest in the night shelter. 18. The age of our youngest guest in the night shelter.

6,115. Meals provided at the drop-in in 2019 (2018: 3,673).

300. The number of different individuals we had contact with in 2019. 163 of these were for the first time (2018: 225).

Sources: Graih

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Editorial

Greetings from lockdown! It has been a while since we've managed to get an edition of the *Gazette* out.

I'm writing this from our empty drop-in, which feels very strange. For years the drop-in has been a noisy hub of people coming, going, laughing, shouting and buzzing the door. Now it's quiet and empty. There's a fuller update on the work of Graih through the pandemic restrictions below.

This is also the first *Gazette* of 2020 and a chance to update people on our 2019 numbers. Many of you will have been following our work at the shelter and there's an update on that below. One of the most astonishing numbers out of 2020 was not the number of people we sheltered but the huge increase in both the numbers of different people we saw and the meals we provided. We had a sense that 2019 had been much busier but we were taken aback at the sheer scale of the numbers.

In many ways these meals and different people seen are more troubling than the newer data on those sheltered. They suggest that there is a growing number of people needing to access Graih. These are people who are in a crisis of some sort, often with nowhere else to go and with no other support networks. It is troubling that these situations persist on an island that is very safe and affluent.

We think that the existence of these problems leads to all sorts of deeper questions about what we value as a society, and how we treat those on the margins.

Elsewhere in this issue we have two powerful testimonies from the pioneering The Other Island project. We are very grateful for the honesty and courage of those willing to be vulnerable enough to tell their stories.

Attending funerals is one of the saddest aspects of my engagement with Graih. There are some memories below of another early death.

We have been encouraged that even in an anxious and uncertain time people have getting in touch to support us and encourage us. Thank you so much. In times of crisis it is often the vulnerable who suffer the most and it is vital that we do all we can to ensure that people are not abandoned...even if facilities like the drop-in are currently closed.

May you and yours stay safe and well throughout the coming season.

Grace and peace, Michael

Quotes

“I’ve been self-isolating for years...”

“I’m bored out of my brains...”

“I try to avoid the news as it just makes me more anxious...”

“I’ve gone through an incredibly traumatic relationship breakdown...”

A selection of quotes from some of those we have had contact with through the lockdown.

Graih in Lockdown

How quickly the world can change. I am sure that most of us are still reeling from the pace of change as the Covid-19 pandemic has swept over us. The situation changes so fast that it's likely to be very different by the time you read this.

Graih have responded to the pandemic and ongoing restrictions as best we can. Serving our guests has always been the heart of our work and that continues to be our priority during the lockdown. In the early phase of the pandemic we took careful advice from Public Health and kept our drop-in open as long as we could by taking additional hygiene precautions. When the advice changed and schools began to close we were advised that the drop-in should close as well. The drop-in shut its doors on the 23rd March.

At the same time, in line with Public Health advice, we suspended our community visiting for anything but brief essential errands and contacts. We've been working closely with the Adult Generic Team to identify and support those most isolated and struggling. It's a steep learning curve to come to grips with various PPE and the right contexts to use them in! We're keeping an eye on the constantly changing health advice and will open the drop-in and resume visiting as soon as we can.

The drop-in provided a crucial practical resource for our guests but also an important social hub. Many of our guests are now scattered and are seeing very few people, if any. Our community support has become literally remote, with far more phone calls, texts, emails and cards as we try to stay in touch with people.

It is interesting how differently people have responded. In some regards our guests are experts already at social distancing and self-isolation. They have spent much of their lives without normal social support networks and are used to going for long periods of time without human contact. For some people not a lot has changed! For others the picture is more bleak. People are lonely, bored, scared and confused. People are having traumatic relationship difficulties. Some people have deliberately ignored the restrictions and have ended up in prison. Some people simply cannot comprehend the restrictions and do not understand why they are getting warned to stay away from others or what social distancing means.

The mental health of many of our guests was fragile at best before the pandemic and these problems are heightened by the restrictions. The longer that the lockdown goes on the more likely it seems that there will be long-lasting impacts on mental health. People are anxious, suicidal, afraid.

It is incredibly challenging to know how best to support people in these situations. It is very hard not be able to sit with people and have a cup of tea. We have been trying hard to ensure that people do not feel forgotten, even if all we can do is provide a kind voice on the end of the telephone. These challenges will continue to confront us as the pandemic continues.

It is always the most vulnerable who suffer most, especially when the status quo changes. We have been pleased to be able to keep the night shelter open throughout the pandemic. This crucial, basic welcome remains much needed and we've seen new people as

guests throughout the lockdown, from those losing their accommodation to those suffering from domestic violence.

One of the early challenges of lockdown was what to do with guests staying at the shelter. If you have nowhere to go you can't 'stay home and stay safe'. As public buildings such as the Sea Terminal and Library closed the options for those spending all day on the streets were withdrawn. Matters came to a head when we had a guest arrive at the shelter who presented with Covid symptoms. Erica had been engaging with the CVO (Council of Voluntary Organisations) and government for some time and this escalated the pace of action as the authorities realised the risk of having symptomatic people on the streets.

A number of people have pointed out how quickly solutions can be found when we really want them to be (surely an important lesson to remember post-pandemic!). Erica was heavily involved with setting up the arrangements with local hotels to ensure that those with no accommodation or sofa-surfing could have somewhere to go during the pandemic. This was a joint effort from charities (ourselves and Housing Matters), the private sector and multiple government departments. That work and the conversations about what this will lead to are ongoing. Partnership working at speed in these challenging times is extremely difficult but we remain committed to seeking the best for the most vulnerable.

Even with alternatives in place there are some guests who have been unable to access or retain accommodation and the shelter continues to be open every night for any adult needing it. We are committed to continuing to provide this crucial, basic provision as best we can throughout the coming season.

Relationships have always been at the heart of what we do and we're very grateful for the strong working relationships we have with the Adult Generic Team (particularly Maz and Anna), Housing Matters, the Foodbank and others. The pandemic has only strengthened these good relationships.

With the drop-in closed we've stopped accepting donations of goods, food or clothing at the moment. We're very grateful to all those who have continued to support us financially during this difficult time.

It's very hard at this point to know what longer-term impacts, for good or ill, the pandemic will have. From our perspective we want to ensure that Graih continues to focus on serving the most vulnerable of the homeless and those in insecure accommodation on the Isle of Man.



The Night Shelter

It now seems like a long time ago but our pioneering pilot night shelter scheme came to its twelve-month conclusion at the end of January 2020.

The headline numbers are alluded to above. Since the summer of 2019 we have seeking ways to continue this vital service and we're committed to doing our best to keep it going.

The shelter has proved beyond doubt that there is a need for this sort of emergency, basic welcome for those without accommodation. We continue to welcome guests throughout the night, often sent to us by other services such as the Police and social workers.

The pilot's success was never about the numbers. We would have been very happy if we had sheltered nobody, as that would have suggested there was little or no need on the island. Our success has been in being open every night, providing a consistent, warm welcome when needed. While it is difficult knowing that there is a level of need that has probably been unmet for many years we can now build on what we have learnt and try to improve matters for the vulnerable.

We are incredibly grateful for our staff, who have made the pilot a success and continue to provide the gentle, compassionate welcome that people need in times of fear and crisis. We are very grateful to all those who allowed the pilot scheme to run its length, particularly our generous hosts at Broadway Baptist Church and our funders the Manx Lottery Trust, the Treasury, DHSC, Churches Alive in Mann, the Elizabeth Clucas Trust, AFD Software, Peel Charity Shop and others.

The shelter represents Graih's biggest expenditure. We would like to properly resource the whole work of Graih on a long-term basis and we estimate we need £250,000 per year to do this. We were hugely encouraged and very grateful earlier this year when the Elizabeth Clucas Trust and anonymous donor allowed us to continue opening the shelter. We were also thrilled to receive the Manx Lottery Trust's Thematic Funding, which gives us a degree of sustainability over the next three years. Whilst we have funds to continue for another year our regular income is low and we are still seeking sustainable finances for this vital work. Conversations about government support are continuing. We currently receive no ongoing statutory funding. If you can help in any way, or know of those who can, please do not hesitate to get in touch. Please continue to speak to your MHKs and the networks you know about the need that exists on the island.

If you would like more details about the shelter, what we have learned and our plans, or how to support us, please do not hesitate to contact Erica.



The Other Island

The Other Island is a project supported by the Arts Council and Culture Vannin, which aims to give a voice to people whose voices often go unheard—the homeless, the poor, those with physical or mental health problems or addictions, or struggling with other challenges.

Here, John W-G shares one of the pieces he wrote for the project, with the aim of explaining what it's like living with depression and anxiety.

Coping with depression and anxiety

Clinical depression and anxiety are things you cannot see. They do not require bandages, plaster casts, or leave visible scars. The empathy or sympathy that is often given with external injury is lacking towards mental health and because of this I have struggled to open up or be completely honest with the people I have opened up to. The stigma surrounding these issues needs to change. Ignorant comments such as “man up” and “what have you got to be depressed about?” need to stop.

I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety around six years ago and it's been a long and extremely difficult road to travel. I have often found my depression to be a debilitating darkness that weighs heavily on every waking moment. It is exhausting. I often find that I just don't have the energy to get out of bed or leave the house. Dealing with people is completely out of the question and has led me to total isolation. Loneliness takes over and I just can't put a brave face on and maintain relationships, leading me to losing them. I completely lose my self-confidence, leading to self-hatred and loathing. Normal everyday activities, personal hygiene, healthy eating and housework are just too exhausting to even contemplate. Add to this constant anxiety, overthinking every mistake, trembling, sweating, racing pulse and an overwhelming sense of dread or impending doom, and life is a waking nightmare or my own personal hell, and sleep is almost impossible. All this has led me to question my existence and if life is worth living. This year [2019] I decided it wasn't and took multiple overdoses, but fortunately I've come through the other side.

This self-destructive cycle is hopefully now being managed through the use of three different anti-depressants and medication for anxiety. I'm at the maximum doses I can take for these medications and they are not without side effects such as feeling drained of energy, like I've not slept, exhaustion, no drive or motivation, feelings of detachment and apathy. While they help in some ways and stop me trying to kill myself, it is no picnic and can be difficult to manage.

Alongside this I'm learning Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques and mindfulness. I'm also doing a lot of meditation and starting to look to and plan for the future.

By opening up and talking about these issues, I'm hoping that people will gain some understanding about how difficult they are, and if anyone is struggling that they will know they are not alone and help is available.

Here Marie shares about financial difficulty and its interaction with depression.

Living with depression and long term financial difficulty

My story is not unique, but is in fact very common.

Living with depression and/or anxiety is challenging enough, add to this long-term personal financial insecurity and worries, and things can sometimes seem like a bleak and endless tunnel. These two factors have become a way of life I have grown very accustomed to. I have no intention to set myself aside from a good many people who are in the same position as me, but would like to express some of the feelings I felt when the sense of drowning in your own circumstances tightens its grip.

I find myself constantly struggling to find meaningful full-time employment. I am by no means a benefit 'hugger' or resigned to the fact that I have to claim benefits indefinitely- quite the opposite. I love to work and the regular routine of working certainly alleviates the symptoms of depression and isolation, scrambled or over easy comes to mind! I always harbour a feeling of shame and embarrassment when I have to claim benefits. Maybe this is because 'in another life' I was married with two young children. I had a secure job with a career, a house, a car and life was 'comfortable'. Through the passage of time, this all fell by the wayside when I became divorced and a single parent, lost my job and was first diagnosed with depression.

I feel that the lines can become blurred as to the main contributor of both depression and financial struggle, for one is certainly a catalyst for the other. The yin yang of 'if I didn't have to worry about money so much, perhaps I wouldn't feel depressed all the time?' OR 'if I wasn't depressed perhaps I wouldn't worry about how little money I had all the time?' Chicken and egg springs to mind?

Depression can sometimes mean it is very hard to form strong relationships, therefore the working environment becomes more important and can sometimes help us feel a sense of belonging and normality, plus the obvious relief to that empty purse. Unemployment only leaves a gaping hole in so many areas of day- to- day life.

I find myself relying on the Foodbank more and more as my fortnightly jobseekers' allowance doesn't really allow for much to be put aside for food once all the bills have been paid. I have always struggled to keep an overdraft at bay so each month end includes a

monthly interest payment in addition to the basics. It is impossible to make a dent in an overdraft when you are living on a day to day basis. I have been to the Office of Fair Trading twice in my life to seek advice on managing my finances. In some ways, they can help with regard to credit card interest; however a lot of the time there is little they can do but offer encouragement to 'keep going', and perhaps hope and assurance that things will 'pick up' soon.

The inevitable pit in the stomach at the forthcoming month end is a frequent visitor. The fear of not making each bill payment or having to phone, yet again, to postpone gas or electric payments. Also the fear of something unexpected cropping up, for example a new washing machine or other large item. Everything I own is valued and precious to me. Unfortunately, having a history of depression can affect job prospects as time goes on. A CV ends up looking a bit like someone who frequently flicks through the channels on a TV, never settling on one programme or job! Frequent gaps on a CV are always difficult to explain when the reason has been due to stress and depression.

I strongly feel that more understanding and support is needed. Though current awareness of mental health is much improved, there is still room for better support. I feel, at present, that mental health is 'talked' about a lot but I sense there is still quite a lot of stigma, hurdles and challenges to overcome before there is a more 'comfortable' and secure way forward. It can be a very difficult to admit and seek help. I for one do not feel comfortable about declaring it on application forms! Always thinking about what you can afford this week and what will have to wait for another week is hard work and mentally exhausting, in conjunction with constantly looking for work opportunities, which naturally triggers bouts of depression and hopelessness.

Over time, I feel like it has made me numb and emotionless, and made forming relationships difficult. The optimism and motivation for life can become harder and harder to maintain. I think the overriding symptoms of my circumstances leave me feeling very vulnerable, sometimes very alone and extremely sad. It makes me feel different in a not comfortable way and I often feel ashamed and let down by *myself* for not being wise enough to avoid the situation I find myself in today. Boiled or poached springs to mind!

On a positive note, I feel that on the Isle of Man there is a lot of help out there, though sometimes it would seem like chance or a roll of the dice whether you stumble across it when you can become cocooned in your own narrow circle of existence. To find the right help takes effort and that is difficult for someone suffering from anxiety and depression, or embarrassed by their financial situation.

Procrastination is rarely a solution. However from my experience, once embarrassment and awkwardness is overcome, embers of confidence *can* be re-lit and the climb up from that first rung of the ladder *can* become easier with a little patience, perseverance and resilience, and of course with a little help from others!

Events (let us know more!)

We wish we had some events to announce! When the lockdown ends there'll be plenty going on!

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 relationship breakdown is the main reason that people in the UK give for losing their home? (Source: Homeless Link)

...that the lockdown in the UK has led to further homelessness as a result of sickness, loss of employment or reduced hours? The recession resulting from the pandemic will hit the poorest hardest. (Source: Shelter)

Memories

Joe K. was known to us at Graih for many years, initially from contact through the Health Visitor for Vulnerable Adults.

Joe had grown up on the island and always struggled with several mental and physical health problems, which only worsened as he got older. He loved his dog, Dibo, and drumming and would often talk of his desire to get away from what he saw as the madness of 'civilisation' and return to a simple life in the wilderness. Often when I visited him he'd be watching television programmes from the wilds of Alaska or other frontiers. Unfortunately his health meant that it was increasingly difficult for him to get out.

Joe had an infectious laugh and a keen sense of the absurd. He knew the health systems well through his involvement over the years and was sensitive to what he saw as a lot of stigma that still existed towards those with certain problems. Much of his frustration came from the sense that he knew that services should be better for those who were struggling, not just himself. He wanted justice for those in need. When he formed good relationships with professionals it was obvious that these meant a lot to him.

I visited Joe in a number of places over the years. He loved lockpicking and would often have a coffee table in front of him strewn with keys, locks, vices and all sorts of other paraphernalia. In later years he enjoyed practising his catapulting skills at cans down his hall! He had had close connections with the Seventh Day Adventists in the past and he was always keen to read a psalm and pray together when I visited. In spite of all his problems and the huge pain in his life he was convinced that God existed and that he wanted things to be better.

Earlier this year Joe was found dead in his cottage. His chronic ill health had got the better of him. He was in his mid-forties.

Michael Manning



What we need

Volunteering is currently suspended due to the drop-in being closed, although if you wish to register your interest for when we do re-open please let us know. We're always keen to speak to those willing to be on our bank staff rota for the shelter. Please speak to Erica Irwin on the details below.

We are currently **not accepting** donations of food, clothing, bedding or furniture due to the pandemic restrictions.

We do still very much need your financial support. Details are below.

Graih's Bank Details:

Lloyds

Account number: 00509505

Sort code: 301280 *Please contact us with your details if you require a receipt*

Thank you so much for your generosity. It allows us to continue to welcome our guests well.

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 Manager: Erica Irwin, erica@graih.org.im, 224807.

Drop-in day-time opening hours:

Currently closed due to pandemic restrictions.

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.

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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