

HOMELESS BUT NOT HOPELESS

DR ALAN KERBEY, appeal director of Genesis Trust, reflects on the charity's work and its plans for the future



It is often said that we are all just two steps away from homelessness. It's not just those with a bad start in life who can be affected. The loss of a job, the lack of affordable housing, a catastrophic marriage breakdown, mental

illness and addiction, and getting behind with the rent are just some of the factors which can have devastating consequences for a growing number of individuals who suddenly find their lives spiralling out of control.

From financial security, a promising career and a nice house, lives can suddenly implode as circumstances, often beyond our control, wreak havoc with jobs, health, homes and relationships. For those who find themselves in such desperate situations in Bath, the Genesis Trust is there to provide support and renew hope.

Behind Bath's elegant façade of affluence and wealth, the reality is that there are many marginalised individuals and families in our city. You will see some of them sleeping in doorways in the city centre; others are less visible but still highly vulnerable. For the last 21 years, Genesis has been working, often behind the scenes, giving support, security and hope to these individuals.

We do this through ten inter-linked, community-based projects which are delivered by more than 700 local volunteers. For those who are homeless, a haircut and a fresh set of clothes can make all the difference; for a family struggling to cope on benefits, a food parcel can save the day; for someone who has lost their confidence and is long-term unemployed, guidance and a work placement can offer a way forward.

Last year, Genesis helped more than 4,000 people to get their lives back on track by providing stepping stones to the future – from the provision of food, to friendship and personal support, to help with re-housing, to training in life skills, work experience, gaining qualifications, and to ongoing support when they enter voluntary or paid employment. All the services we offer are designed and structured with one aim in mind – and that is to help people regain their dignity and purpose in life and, for some, to step away completely from a lifestyle of homelessness and addiction.

In 2015, Genesis projects provided 16,000 meals, 300 items of camping equipment and 1,880 items of clothing to homeless people and those on low incomes. We also ran 30 courses in



CONCERN AND CARE: Genesis Trust volunteers offer generous listening and careful advice

our Life Skills programme, which ranged from healthy eating and budgeting, to art and creative writing, from which 150 adults benefited. At our Furniture Project in Oldfield Park, we not only sell donated furniture at affordable prices to those on benefits, but we also offer useful work placements to adults as part of their journey back into employment.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE NEXT 21 YEARS?

The Genesis Trust has never had a permanent home. For the last 21 years, it has worked out of rented accommodation in various locations across Bath with all the uncertainty and disruption that such a nomadic existence brings. Last year, Bath and North East Somerset Council gave Genesis the opportunity to acquire and develop a dilapidated building in Walcot Street for which we now have planning permission.

As well as providing a much-needed permanent home, this new facility – which will be called The Genesis Centre – will enable us to develop new ways of working with a much larger number of adults who want to acquire new skills and gain work experience. The Genesis Centre will offer a training centre and a retail outlet selling up-cycled furniture. We are excited about the opportunities it will offer to our clients who are ready to move towards regular employment and self-sufficiency. The educational and skills-based courses which are planned will help people regain their self-confidence and a real sense of direction.

The building in Walcot Street is in need of substantial restoration and a fundraising campaign is underway to raise the £1.1m needed for its re-development. We hope that building work can start next year.

Genesis has had a remarkable journey over the past 21 years, enjoying enormous public support alongside the generous help of over 700 committed and dedicated volunteers of all ages. Our new building will give us a permanent home in the city in one of Bath's most vibrant streets. Our ambition for the next 21 years is to help many more hundreds of marginalised people in Bath to find a renewed purpose in life.

In the words of one Genesis supporter: "Genesis is a remarkable gift to those in our city who are among the poorest and most marginalised. Through Genesis projects, I have witnessed a constant flow of love, concern and care in an environment which is warm and welcoming; in food and a cup of tea or soup, in generous listening and careful advice, the use of a name, the handshake and embrace, the firm discipline, the tears of shared sorrow and laughter are a step towards restoration. Genesis changes lives!"

CHANGING LIVES FOR THE BETTER

One of five children, 25 year old Stewart Angell, pictured, left school at 16. He had ADHD but lack of support meant he didn't achieve. After leaving school, he went off the rails for a few years, getting into drugs and petty crime. He moved into a hostel and had his first child when he was 17. He had various short term jobs working on farms and as a street cleaner. Three years ago, he came to Genesis Furniture Project on a work placement organised by the Job Centre. He stayed on as a volunteer and this year he began a customer service apprenticeship with us in conjunction with Bath College. He's also brushing up on his maths and English skills. His ideal job would be as a delivery driver.



Now married with three more children, Stewart says involvement with the Furniture Project has helped him turn his life around:

He said: "Before, I was very shy and withdrawn. The Furniture Project has brought me out of my shell and I'm much more confident and that's key to everything. I've made good friends, my people skills have improved and I really like the fact that I'm helping others too." ■

To help the Walcot Street Appeal, visit the Genesis Trust website: genestrust.org.uk and donate via Virgin Giving.