



WDGB

Newsletter

Spring 2007

Where will I be sleeping tonight?

How often have you had to ask that question? Perhaps occasionally on a touring holiday, or, if you are young and brave, on a backpacking adventure. You were secure in the knowledge that a comfortable warm home awaited your return from this temporary nomadic state. The contrast between the familiar and the strange was agreeable and stimulating. You were probably with supportive friends or family, confident that the question would be answered before nightfall.

For some today in North Somerset the question is desperate, as the experiences below illustrate.

What were you doing on New Year's Eve?

Certainly not sleeping rough as was one young woman in Worle. The local police had asked Roz Willis, the Chairman of North Somerset Council, if she would like to accompany them on their night's round. This she did until 5:45 am on New Year's Day. Maria was found by the patrol sleeping on a park bench. She was cared for that night and referred to WDGB the following morning. That week she was safely living in a flat furnished by a Community Care Grant, able to look for work and take control of her life.

Ever tried sleeping in a car?

Peter, a 26 year old, had lost his job and been thrown out of the family home. He was sleeping in his car near Weston woods where he was harassed by youngsters rocking his car and mocking him. He said he would not sell his car to get a deposit for a flat as it was all he had left of his former life. He came to the Office on a day when a new landlord, the policeman son of an existing landlord, had called to offer a suitable flat. Peter is now able to make regular savings, and regain self-respect.

Do you expect to lose your home?

Sally had been a tenant at a property in Weston for 15 years. She shared her home with four dearly loved cats that became more precious to her after her husband's death. Sadly her kind landlady, also a cat lover, died and left the house to her daughters. The house was sold and the purchaser wanted to live there. Sally and her puss cat companions faced homelessness.



Maggie, Joy & Gary with a supportive husband at a Homelessness Sunday Service



WDGB Office on the top floor of the YMCA where Maggie, Joy and Gary give a sympathetic ear, reassurance and constructive help with a wide variety of problems.

Sally urgently needed accommodation and in desperation applied to WDGB for help. A supportive landlord was found near her friends and her doctor's surgery.

Gary secured a community care grant which enabled her to buy new furniture and make a fresh start. Sally now considers her forced move the best thing that happened to her. When Gary saw her recently, he did not recognise her as she looked ten years younger.

HOUSING THE HOMELESS

Tel: 01934-617617



AND WHEN DID YOU LAST SEE YOUR FATHER?

Have you ever wondered how many children in England today are fatherless?

We read that "God setteth the solitary in families." Today's society in many respects encourages the opposite. Families in our secular society are often described as dysfunctional and disintegrating. Individualism is glorified and "I did it my way" is a slogan of the age.

The famous painting of the headline describes a little boy, perhaps a six year old, who is being asked this question. He is dressed in beautiful silk cavalier clothes and is



WILLIAM FREDERICK YEAMES *AND WHEN DID YOU LAST SEE YOUR FATHER*
WALKER ART GALLERY, LIVERPOOL

standing on a stool in front of a high table and a bench of puritan interrogators. His father had clearly fled to avoid arrest and possible death. The implication is that family loyalty was above all and the lad would not yield the information.

Today the Child Support Agency is superseded because of its failure to get financial support from the elusive fathers of dependant and often deserted children.

Debbie, the young mother of three children, came to WDGB to ask for help as she was threatened with homelessness because of debt. Her partner, the father of the children, had left them and she had no experience of managing the household finances or dealing with banks. Through the networking knowledge of WDGB she was referred to the Credit Union to sort out these problems and secure her accommodation. This prevented her falling into the hands of unscrupulous money lenders. The Weston Super Mare and District Credit Union is a financial cooperative owned and controlled by its members who all share a common bond. It works by members saving together to create a pool of money from which loans are made to other members at competitive rates.

Sofa Surfing? Freddie knew it Too Well

Freddie, aged 35 was treated in a mental hospital as a result of nervous breakdown. After discharge he had been sofa-surfing with reluctant friends for nine months. Our staff were able to find him accommodation on the day he called. It takes a few hours to complete the necessary, complicated paperwork. During that time in the Office, he clasped the key to his new home as if it were a gold medal. Since then he has been seen several times by Gary and is doing well.

Helping The Young

Mona, another sofa-surfer, came to a drop-in session with a friend's mum who had befriended her. Mona is a young 18 year old girl from a very dysfunctional family. She had been in and out of foster care all her life due to family breakdown and unstable relationships and had not had any back-up or anybody to care about her welfare. She had gone home one day to find all her belongings in carrier bags and told there was no longer any room for her in the house. The mother of a friend then took Mona in but they were overcrowded and

even with the best will in the world she could not accommodate her for long. Mona was sleeping on the settee.

The W.D.G.B managed to secure accommodation with a sympathetic landlord and gave help and assistance with all form filling and finding the basic furniture and essentials. Mona is now completing a college course and has successfully managed to secure a future for herself.

Role Reversal

Robbie, in his 30's applied some five years ago for help in finding accommodation. He had come down from Scotland as he remembered holidays in Weston and sought a new life having completed a drug rehabilitation course. Accommodation was secured for him with a guarantee from the WDGB. He found work doing odd maintenance jobs for his landlord who ran a Letting Agency. His employer was so impressed with his work that when he retired he asked Robbie to become manager of the Agency. Robbie is now making properties available for use by the Woodspring Deposit Guarantee Board.



The Management team meets



Joy



Chris



Lee



Isabel



Ian



Xavier Michel



Nasser

But the WDGB is not about meetings. It is about helping those without any support to find a safe place to call home. Those who initiated the scheme and many of us still involved are driven by Christian conviction to help the helpless to regain their self worth and enable them to have the dignity of responsibil-

ity for themselves. We are not just about giving Deposit Bonds. It is the way we do so and the manner in which we work with landlords, the local authority, and – to use the jargon – all stake holders that we seek to show that this organisation is one that combines sound financial acumen with a heart for the poor.

Manager's report

The last twelve months were busy ones. We provided 450 tenancies. And when you wonder why you support our activities, just think about these people who are warm and dry tonight because of your support.

More hostels and houses in multiple occupation providing bedsitting accommodation have closed, which may be good as far as improvement to Weston super Mare is concerned, but it makes it very difficult for us to source

accommodation for the single homeless. This is particularly relevant to under 25's who are homeless largely because their housing allowance is too low to attract most landlords. Joy Palmer's work with this most vulnerable group has been funded by Quartet for the last two years. From April 2007 the funding comes from the housing charity North Somerset Housing.

Several new landlords have joined our scheme. They are sympathetic to our work and provide good property and fair rents. Once again I would like to thank all of you for your help and assistance which has enabled our otherwise unfortunate clients to have a roof over their heads.

Gary's adventure

We are delighted to welcome back our Manager, Gary Twinn, in good working order. He has just returned from a 6,500 mile journey in a van from England through Africa to the Gambia.

The project raised funds for a splendid charity, CLIC SARGENT, and also promoted the WDGB. There were many adventures on the way including driving through the Sahara in a sandstorm. Not all of the vehicles that left the UK made it to the Gambia. One in particular was lost in the Sahara Desert for several days with no way of communicating with the outside world. The occupants were eventually airlifted out by military helicopter. Gary says that the thing he will always remember is the poverty

that he experienced meeting throughout the whole African continent. Children were delighted to be given an empty water container or a sweet. They had nothing. It was a very upsetting experience.

On reaching the Gambia, the van, its contents and medical equipment donated by Weston General Hospital were given to the local hospital. Two of the most important pieces of equipment that Gary transported to the Gambia were a generator and a set of weighing scales for the maternity unit of the Gambian hospital. The electricity service in the Gambia is, to say the least, unreliable and the maternity unit has no emergency supply, so this generator will ensure that the unit now has a back up. The scales from Weston General Hospital were at once being put to good use. The hospital provides a much needed service and Gary intends to explore ways of supporting it in the future.

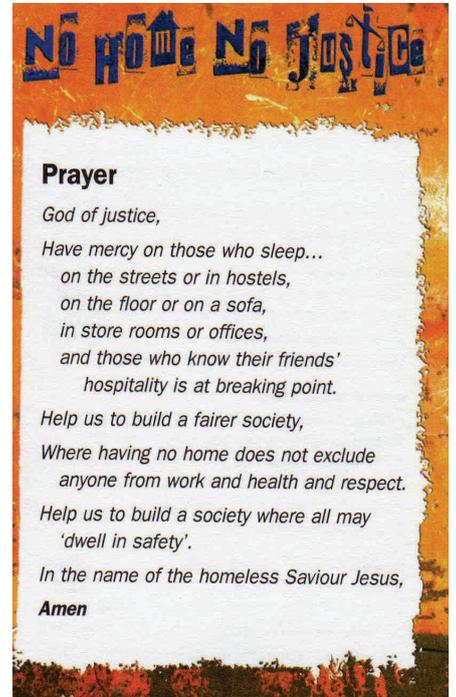


HOMELESSNESS SUNDAY SERVICE

On Sunday 28th January a large congregation, concerned for those without safe housing, gathered at St Peter's Milton to learn, pray and provide for those without homes. We offered the prayer printed on the right.

The speaker was Clive Bodley, Chief Executive of North Somerset Housing, the Housing Association which is responsible for the 6,000 properties formerly owned by North Somerset Council. Clive told us that the figure of 500 insecure homeless in North Somerset is about the same as 40 years ago. The difference is that many of those in need are now out of sight, because they are not sleeping rough.

Dealing with this problem involves helping the most vulnerable who cannot compete in the open housing market. Preventative work in this area entailed a variety of activities including financial advice, family intervention, tenancy support and through the provision of day centres such as Somewhere To Go. Clive reported that Church members are three times more likely to be involved in voluntary work than non members. He gave a vivid picture of a metal rocket-shaped chimney on a flat roof which was used by him and his fellow students. He compared this with a real rocket at NASA. The chimney rocket was full of hot air and going nowhere. The NASA rocket was action packed and headed for the stars. Clive commented that our Mission Control is God in Jesus. God's view of both types of human involvement in justice for the homeless was given in the reading at the Service of Amos 5, 14-15 and 21-24. Where do we fit in this picture?



How you and your church can help

- Keep the WDGB, its staff, tenants and landlords in your prayers.
- Consider joining the Board of the WDGB and oversee its work. It has two meetings a year.
- Make a financial contribution which would be gratefully acknowledged by the WDGB Office
- If you are in a position to offer accommodation for letting, ring our staff who will explain the safeguards and support WDGB is able to offer.
- Come to the Annual General Meeting on Monday 2nd July 2007 at 7:45 pm at the Methodist Church, High Street, Portishead.

WOODSPRING DEPOSIT GUARANTEE BOARD

Charity No: 1045354

Room 8/9, YMCA, 2 Bristol Road Lower, Weston-super-Mare,
North Somerset BS23 2PN

Tel: 01934-617617 Fax: 01934-641463

Email: wdgb@aol.com

Patron: Tony Targett

President: The Revd Alan Taylor

Management Committee: Chris Hibbs (Chairman), Xavier-Michel Duverger MBE (Vice Chairman), Isabel Cummings (Secretary), Nasser Madani (Treasurer), Ian Peddlesden, Richard Coap, Joy Madani, Lee Miller.

Staff: Gary Twinn (Manager), Maggie Lyons (Assistant Manager), Joy Palmer (Support Worker for under 25's)



Bristol • Bath & North East Somerset • North Somerset • South Gloucestershire

WDGB is a Charity for housing homeless people in North Somerset by guaranteeing a deposit to enable them to rent accommodation. Since its beginning in 1996 it has supported over 2900 people to find a home. It operates throughout North Somerset and so is able to help local people. The Charity employs three staff members and is supported by individuals and Churches in the area, by North Somerset Council, the *Quartet* Community Foundation and in the coming year by *North Somerset Housing*.