



CHEESE ON TOAST



JULY / AUGUST 2010

Newsletter of the Soup Kitchen (SK) at the American Church in London
Helping the homeless and marginally homeless in Central London

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From the Director, Miranda Suit:

SUMMER APPEAL

Summertime is especially welcome at the Soup Kitchen. This past winter was often bitterly cold, but you enabled us to stay open throughout the freezing weather, providing hot nutritious meals and handing out more warm clothing and footwear than ever before.

The spring was also a busy time for us. The economic recession has meant that **we are serving more people in need than ever before**, and we have still been able to provide food, clothing and hospitality for our guests. A small team of guests planted the first vegetables in our kitchen garden, and we hope to have our modest first harvest soon!

This teamwork has enabled us to get to know some of our guests much better and become more involved in their lives, offering friendship, advice and help with letter writing, phone calls, fuel bills, etc. (Please see the article on the right, 'More individual help for our guests').

Can you help us maintain and also develop our services for our guests here in central London?

Understandably this increase in numbers and involvement uses more of our resources, so it would be wonderful if you were able to offer further support at this time, perhaps by:

- ◆ Making a one-off Donation*
- ◆ Making a regular donation by Standing Order*
- ◆ Applying to your employer for funding, using the enclosed leaflet (*those of you who do not have work contacts, will find this a useful summary of what we do, and fundraising ideas*)
- ◆ Doing a sponsored event on our behalf, using the JustGiving website:
<http://www.justgiving.com/whitefield-soupkitchen>
- ◆ Encouraging any children you know to do our sponsored Blackbird Trail*

I do hope you will be able to join us as we 'grow' the Soup Kitchen during the remainder of this year.

With very best wishes for the rest of the summer,

Miranda

* Pls. see enclosed blue Information & Response Sheet



Two guests enjoying their meal in our tent

MORE INDIVIDUAL HELP FOR OUR GUESTS

Our main work consists of ensuring that the disadvantaged and marginalised in Central London receive free food and clothing, but where possible we also develop relationship and provide more substantial help.

For example, **in the month of June** this year we helped 40 guests individually:

- 7 were briefly assessed and referred to other more specialised projects
- 6 received extra one-to-one encouragement to persevere in their situation
- 6 received emergency clothing (apart from our regular fortnightly clothing distribution)
- 16 requested and received spiritual help from the Director
- 4 were given modest financial help with travel or medical costs
- 1 was given special assistance to obtain an amount of money that she had inherited. She was having great trouble accessing it, due to lack of ID. The Director accompanied her to the bank and they successfully expedited release of the much-needed funds.

CURRENT NEWS AFFECTING THE HOMELESS AND MARGINALLY HOMELESS

Changes to benefits

Iain Duncan Smith, the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, is very concerned that some people have a higher income out of work and on benefits, than in work and on the minimum wage. So the coalition government has announced that it will be reassessing anyone on incapacity benefit and probably using tougher penalties against individuals who do not take up job offers from the Job Centre. They also want to try to extend benefits for people who are starting back in employment to make it more feasible. While it seems sensible to try to rectify this situation, this will be very hard to do in a just manner.

Public Sector Cuts

The UK is just at the start of new austerity measures, which will have a massive effect on availability of affordable housing and welfare programmes across the board.

The Olympic Games in 2012

The word on the streets is that the authorities and police are totally committed to 'cleaning up' the streets of London in good time for the influx of athletes and tourists. Many are therefore taking a tougher line with rough sleepers and street beggars, e.g. moving them on more often.

We expect that there will be some 'casualties' from the above changes, and hope we will be in a good position to offer them help.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO:

- Trustee Melissa Willby, who has had to stand down after several years of service on our Board, due to a job change. We are very grateful for her hard work and inspiration during her time with us, and wish her all the best in her new post.
- Sarah and An-chi, who have done all the cooking on Mondays and Tuesdays over the last year, keeping our guests very happy!



PRAYER

† We give thanks that we have had the resources to help so many people so far this year

† The Government needs God's guidance as it begins to implement cuts in public services

† Pray for all those who are vulnerable and will be most affected by the changes in the welfare system

'Grace and peace to you ...'
(I Corinthians 1:3)

HOMELESS IN LONDON in 2010

Extracts from an article written by Fiona Green for Fitzrovia News; painting by guest Derek Wain*

I love living in Fitzrovia, so when George, an ex-squaddie parked his supermarket trolleys full of his possessions in my back yard, the serious plight of the homeless insisted on my attention. This is a growing problem and deep into one of the worst recessions we have ever known, there will be many more people facing homelessness in our cities.

I called London Street Rescue for advice - in Camden they are called Rescue Camden "the crime reduction initiative", and it is this association with crime that puts many off helping the homeless. The Simon Community who have hostels in Camden, will give immediate help, as do St Mungo's, Shelter and Crisis, while needs are assessed. Some want to stay out of the system, with occasional support, and this is where the Soup Kitchens are so helpful. Rescue Camden suggested George may be known to the nearby American Church Soup Kitchen.



The other side of the door

The earliest laws against begging date from just after the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, followed in 1547 by harsher laws following Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries ... the Georgian Vagrancy Act (1824) made it a criminal offence to sleep on the street and to beg. It targeted all people the authorities disliked, and used the catch-all phrase "rogues and vagabonds" which ... included gypsies or "incorrigible rogues" (all persons "without visible means of subsistence"). Actors and buskers were also targeted, so that even reciting Shakespeare publicly could have you taken away! The ranks of the poor homeless were swollen by veterans of the Napoleonic War, and those displaced by the Industrial Revolution. Today many homeless are still men previously in the armed forces, like George - or political refugees awaiting determination of their status with only a meagre subsidy to survive on.

... I went to visit the Soup Kitchen to see what they provide. I noticed the warmth and friendliness of everyone - staff and guests - and the positivity there ... All receive a cooked meal, soup, dessert, snacks, tea and coffee on 5 mornings a week, free clothing (every fortnight) clothes and a pleasant place to relax and eat; to talk, be comforted, or referred on for specialist help and support.

(Fiona didn't find George at the SK, but she was very taken by the work of the SK and we hope that she will be able to be involved with us more in some way in future.)

***Info also taken from www.thepavement.org.uk and www.z2k.org.uk**

Alicia Keys' London Tour: blogger Alexis Tirado volunteered at the SK and then wrote about our work on one of the official websites. Find it at: <http://iamasuperwoman.com/blogs/atirado/2010/06/01/soup-kitchen-london>