

## June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2017    Reflections on charity in times of pain: Grenfell and Chrissy sent me

The horror of Grenfell Tower has come hard on the heels of the London Bridge terrorist attacks, the tower presenting a terrifying glimpse of the marginalisation of poor people in badly maintained and underfunded social housing. Yet the attacks held a story of love and compassion that one of our donors remembered when she sent a huge bundle of clothes, cakes, money and kitchenware to help Hope's clients, in the name of Chrissy.

One of the London Bridge dead was a Canadian woman, Chrissy, who had worked in homelessness shelters. Her father, in a spontaneous and unbelievably loving and compassionate notice after the death of his daughter, said if people cared, they should donate to other shelters or volunteer, telling them 'Chrissy sent you/me' (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-40163355> ).

I'm a father; I'm not sure I could have responded with such grace and love in similar circumstances; it moved me very much indeed. The volunteering that has followed Grenfell is built on the same basic human goodness, spontaneous and heartfelt, that just isn't there when the local or national state tries to respond. That's the beauty and tragedy of charity, of people's simple human caring response when something is obviously broken and needs help, but which, in a proper world, should never be needed; when there wasn't poverty, and exclusion, and hate.

Society is struggling to hold together, given the gradual wearing down of community resources from lack of funding; we are ourselves affected by cuts in statutory funding; but that human drive remains – and we try to tap it to help support the broken and damaged people we often deal with. We always need volunteers, who will come along and say, perhaps, Chrissy sent me.

We are always in need of donations. We didn't use the Chrissy tag in our social media immediately because we were concerned people would think we were trying to cash in on an awful event. A couple of weeks later, with a great donation based on it, it feels right to reflect on human capacity for love and compassion.

Thanks to our donor (she knows who she is); to Chrissy, to Chrissy's dad; to all who volunteer here, and to all those who work to make the wrongs of Grenfell right.

## **June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017 Laughing at poor and homeless people**

Have a look at the Facebook page, 'Ash Street Wildlife'.

This posts pictures of people who use the Hope Centre, and other people we don't know, standing, talking and, yes, drinking in Ash Street Northampton, adjacent to our buildings. The people who post these pictures then put comments against the pictures, suggesting some of the people are selling or using drugs, or are paedophiles and so on. Their friends then also go and copy the poses of homeless people and have these filmed and posted. Others then comment again and make derogatory references.

This is abuse, pure and simple: its cruel and heartless; it labels people with complex problems, and excludes them from mainstream life even more, reducing their confidence. One of our clients protested to us that one shows her dad, who is struggling with alcoholism. If he sees it, he will drink more, and possibly lose his job.

Who could possibly do this? Who could view this and like it, or comment on how brilliant it is? At least 185 people say they do. Do they have no compassion nor care?

We have written to those who host the page and asked them to remove the posts; they ignore us and put up images about their right to 'free speech'. Facebook and the Police do nothing. The only way these people will do something is by being exposed and shown how wrong and harmful what they are doing is.

We ask you, as our supporters and friends, to share with us your revulsion at this page and the behaviour of these people. Our clients suffer enough without being publicly shown and laughed at for what they do, affected as they are by poverty, homelessness, addiction and mental health. Is that OK to laugh at?

If you share our views, go on the page and complain, or write to Facebook, or whoever else you feel could do something about it. We won't rest to protect our service users from people who want to hurt them. They hurt themselves enough already: and there is too much hurt, and hate in the world without this.

## May 19<sup>th</sup> Campaigning for social change

Its election time and confronting the electorate are contrasting visions of what will best address the ills of society and provide most help for those in need.

For a charity there is statutory guidance on what campaigning you can do, during elections and generally: <https://goo.gl/poAAQg> - Hope of course abides by this. It is important to have read and understood what this says. The guidance says:

*“Campaigning and political activity can be legitimate and valuable activities for charities to undertake...”* – but it can’t be the majority of what a charity does at all times. It’s a complex balance and each case needs to be judged on its detail.

Hope is a political body, in that its primary purpose is the alleviation of poverty and campaigning for action to tackle poverty is in line with that primary purpose and thus legitimate to do. We seek societal change to overcome poverty and seek to raise awareness of the causes and effects of poverty. Of course we are explicitly non-party political and do not have views aligned to any one party, nor campaign for the manifesto of any party.

Yet we believe in change: we believe in challenging the destructive, vicious damage poverty does to individuals and to communities, the undermining of social capital, the personal and tragic impact of poverty on people. We will campaign, alongside the vast majority of what we do in providing practical responses to mitigate the impact of poverty, for changes to policy and society that will ultimately make us redundant. We want to close, as no longer needed, and go away and do something else.

But this is not likely to happen anytime soon. The poor are (sadly) always with us, as somebody once said, and accordingly our job goes on, along the way calling to account any politician of any hue who fails to take meaningful steps, within the context of sensible, well thought out policies, to address and improve poverty.

So when you cast your vote in June, remember poverty. Remember the brutalising effect of poverty and homelessness on our clients lives and then onto society, and decide for yourselves which party or candidate has the best overall programme for creating the circumstances in which poverty, and homelessness will be overcome. Ask your politicians the questions you want answered about how they will reduce rough sleeping; scour their manifestos for answers; and look at the tools and resources we place on our social media to inform your queries. And after the election we will carry on doing so, whoever is elected: our activism continues. It’s part of Hope.

## April 27<sup>th</sup> Creativity, art, Hope

Anglia TV recently covered Juris, one of our art group painters, and his brilliant portrait work. Juris has become a bit of an icon of Hope and I have mentioned his work before, and make no excuses for mentioning it again, given the spirit and talent he demonstrates, and the overall quality of work produced by the art group with help from the group leaders. The link is here: <http://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2017-04-21/the-inspirational-artist-who-overcame-a-stroke-to-paint-again/>

We also recently had Alan Moore, writer, artist, polymath, legend of comic book art, in to meet with our creative writing group of service users. That a man of his stature and repute can give a few hours to advise, support and encourage our clients is a testimony to his qualities as a person and his commitment to this community.

We also now currently have Lee Burrows back again helping teach welding, in the course of creating an artwork out of knives obtained through Police knives amnesty, even though he is very much better known as a brilliant painter: <http://www.leeburrowsart.com/> .

Also, on 28<sup>th</sup> April Rosemary Dery is selling some of her specially created art for Hope in Northampton Market square. Her work is challenging and makes you think. [https://www.facebook.com/RosemaryDeryart/?hc\\_ref=SEARCH&fref=nf](https://www.facebook.com/RosemaryDeryart/?hc_ref=SEARCH&fref=nf)

The art community of Northampton - writers, painters, video arts, musicians – shows incredible willingness to support Hope and its something we value and recognise its importance. Viewing and creating art gives Hope; and Hope gives art to our clients and the community, through the creative opportunities we enable. There is a more abstract sense in which enabling a community project, supported by the people of Northampton, that helps people down on their luck, is a itself a creative act, and making art somehow is part of that self-expression.

We want to nurture such partnerships, and get more people involved – so anyone with an exciting idea that we can turn into joy and pleasure and inspiration should contact me to discuss your idea.

We had no luck finding a mural artist, for example, so we are always on the lookout for new ideas and new talent that communicated what we do, can involve and stimulate our clients, and inspires the movement for community change Hope embodies. Whilst we welcome traditional arts – I paint icons, the most traditional art imaginable - the more radical and challenging, and greater the diversity of media that people work in, the better, I say: that's a crucial purpose of art too. Hope is about challenging the causes of the poverty we deal with, challenging thinking about why poverty of this scale is allowed to exist, every day, and if art can help us move society forward, bring it on.

## April 3<sup>rd</sup> The Gambling industry

If you look at my Linked In page you will see that for a couple of years I was the national commissioner of services, education and research into problem gambling in the UK. Sounds grand doesn't it? It was horrible. Back then, and still true today, government puts no money into any of these areas which means the total responsibility to fund gambling treatment is with the industry itself. By comparison it is like expecting Benson and Hedges to decide whether there should be treatment for lung cancer. I had to work with casino operators and bookie shop chains to prise a few bob out of them, when every fibre of their being denied they held any responsibility for the problem, couldn't afford it, there was no need because there were only two problem gamblers anyway, and a range of other pathetic excuses for not stepping up to the plate. They treat their employees appallingly too; bookie shop staff are often zero hours, minimum wage, can't even easily have toilet breaks. And if you google 'services for problem gamblers' you will start getting junk email from online betting firms offering you free bets. Treatment remains patchy and education non-existent. It was a scandal then and remains one today.

Why do I mention this? **Because gambling causes an immense amount of harm to homeless, poor and disadvantaged people.** Recently several individuals have come to our attention – reliable client volunteers. We all know that drugs and drinking are common, but gambling is the hidden harm. It's often denied far more by our clients than drink or drugs. We often find out too late that people have lost a tenancy because their money all went on a dead cert nag or in a FOBT (automated roulette machines in bookies). When we do, we link people up to those treatment services available, but again, denial is a big problem.

The irony is of course that Hope is part funded by the Big Lottery and the People's Postcode Lottery, money raised from gambling, but some of the very few sources of large scale funding for organisations in our sector – they do give a fairer share of their profits. And lottery related problem gambling is rare, even though it can be argued it is money poor people can often ill afford to spend. But there is a real difference between this sector and the rest: the bulk of the gambling industry serves no constructive purpose, does great harm to poor people, does almost nothing to mitigate the harm they do, and is let off the hook by all governments.

## March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2017    Hunger

In my last blog I wrote about the meaning of hunger in different contexts, given that providing food is so central to what Hope stands for, over nearly 43 years.

Today we are being even more public, to all our supporters about a new project we have been working on for the last few months to provide food to a wider group of people than the 150 who come in each day. It's what's called a 'social supermarket' or food club. There was an article about one in the Guardian yesterday:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/mar/22/pantry-tackles-chronic-food-insecurity>

This is neither a foodbank nor primarily a food waste project. It's not even strictly charitable as it is a form of trading that will run through Hope Enterprises. It's a dignified way of getting food into the mouths of people in need, that you are not limited to five visits for, money is exchanged, and you do not have to be referred nor necessarily have any problem other than being poor – and that can affect anyone. There is nothing wrong with food banks, but there is a real, vital need for additional help in the face of accelerating poverty and declining living standards for so many people. It's Communities week this week, and it's the ideal time to launch a project which is about the ordinary people of Northampton helping to look after our own.

We are looking to identify a small group of people who might be able to help steer and develop the project. It involves fundraising, yes, but also bringing expertise, advice, strategy, and practical support to make it happen and get off the ground. Do you have relevant experience, or enthusiasm, to get involved?

You can read about it via our Linked in pages:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/northampton-hope-centre>

or [here](#)

We look forward to hearing from you!

## March 14<sup>th</sup>    Hunger and thirst

I had the pleasure of being invited to speak at Thomas Beckett School Northampton last week during their mission week, by the Chaplain, Cath Worthington, on the beatitudes in St Matthew's gospel. I was speaking about the fourth: '*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*'.

Of course the Gospel uses food as a metaphor for a wider, more profound search for meaning in life, but it only works because of the elemental power of hunger and thirst as expressive of the simplest, most profound needs people have, and of course which Hope addresses: hunger and thirst, through our day centre. It's where we began.

But of course, as the beatitude says, a hunger for a more profound level of self-actualisation is the true hunger, and it's a hunger never satisfied on earth, remote as all humans are from the glory of God. For some Christians, there is also a further kind of righteousness to be pursued – social righteousness – the desire for a level of justice in society, which can be shared with those without faith but who strive for a better society. This is the ongoing hunger to see a more equal, fairer world, where people are not hungry or thirsty because of oppression, exclusion or poverty.

Without that pursuit of social righteousness, alongside the simple acts of giving, there is a danger that charities become part of the problem, not the solution, applying a sticking plaster to fundamental inequalities, rather than challenging the causes and origins of poverty. Charities should be striving to make radical efforts to change causes and help people obtain more sustainable solutions to their situation that will ensure they can leave what we do behind.

This was echoed strongly listening to an inspirational talk by Seb Mayfield at this month's End Hunger event from the Northants Food Poverty Network. His message questioned whether simple charity, such as foodbanks, is ever enough, and the need to do more. His talk reflected what we believe at Hope: we do not assume that everyone who comes to us is someone in 'deficit', hungry because of some lack in their personality or problem in their lives, but rather, they often come because they are simply poor because wages are rubbish and living costs are rising endlessly. Alongside food, we need to offer long term, sustainable solutions like training and work, alongside arguing for changes to social, food or housing policy, that will help people escape poverty permanently; and we should not deny help to people because of some judgement we make about how much they have earned it, or somehow qualify, for the charity and help we provide. We don't put people through hoops, asking them to prove they are prepared to 'engage' before considering them for help.

For us, at Hope, this is the expression of our hunger for righteousness – a vision of a better world, offering social justice to all.

## January 27<sup>th</sup> 2017 'A smiling shore' - Movement of people, the Holocaust and the freezing Danube

On our Facebook pages there has been lots of interest in some lovely photos we found in a donated clothes bag, showing wartime children in Britain - like my own father – being evacuated. This set me thinking.

Earlier this month, during the coldest winter seen in central and southern Europe for years, I was lucky enough to spend a weekend in Budapest, in temperatures down to -17 degrees at night. These temperatures still saw dozens of people sleeping rough, in doorways, metro stations, and under the bridges of the Danube, which over the three nights I spent there, froze over.

I talked about the evacuee pictures to one of our volunteers, mentioning that I had discounted the idea that they pictured the kinder transport of children escaping the Holocaust, which we remember this week. It turned out she was Jewish herself, the child of people who fled the banks of the Danube, from the Holocaust, a few miles further up in Vienna. They were homeless in Britain when they came, then helped by the kindness of the Quakers, and welcomed and integrated into our society with the traditional compassion this country has shown to refugees, either internal, like the evacuated children, or those who had escaped repressive fascist regimes across Europe.

Hope, today, sees a significant number of people from Eastern and central Europe and offers them welcome, shelter and compassion such as was shown to those refugees seventy years ago. Under existing EU law (**this has nothing to do with Brexit**) as rough sleepers they can be at risk of being deported back to their home countries. If they were homeless at home they would sadly face sleeping under bridges next to the great frozen rivers of Europe, the Danube, the Vistula, the Dnieper, alongside the dozens I saw, and in some cases without care and support within current repressive authoritarian and heartless regimes which even control NGO activity: (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/13/hungary-defends-planned-crackdown-on-foreign-backed-ngos> ), albeit some way short of the fascist period.

Being a migrant, a refugee or an evacuee can clearly be a terrifying experience. Being homeless anywhere, but especially in minus 17, is terrifying too. As we remember the Holocaust, and learn afresh, every year, why persecution must never happen again, we must also remember that cruelty and repression *are* renewed again, every day, somewhere, sometimes only a weekend break away. And that organisations like Hope, across all of Europe, are very often the only thing between life and death, perhaps next to a frozen river, and that we, and our peers, embody, in our values, a living thread of love against loss of home, exclusion and cruelty.

You may like to listen (or not, its not an easy listen) to June Tabor's 'A smiling shore' : <https://myspace.com/junetabor/music/song/a-smiling-shore-46885267-50226590>

## 14<sup>th</sup> January      Homelessness in Britain, 2017

### Happy New Year to all

First off, thanks to all those who have donated over Christmas, in money or in gifts. We have had a fantastic response, which means we can't accept any more chocolate or sweets for a while and we have plenty of clothes for the time being. However we still need your help by signing up to the Big Sleepout on 27<sup>th</sup> January!

This is because Hope is going to continue to be busy in 2017. Not because some people don't move on from homelessness and get jobs; but because some people still need ongoing support after they have got somewhere to live and got a job, but also because there are always new people who become homeless. That number is sadly growing fast.

If you follow our social media you will see examples from the national press or BBC of what the new landscape of homelessness looks like. Some people – hopefully not readers of this blog – perhaps still think the people we see are all lazy scroungers who lay around all day drinking for fun on benefits. In practice they are likely to be people who have one, sometimes two jobs. They work all the hours they can get, but are still homeless. This is because they earn so little, with the continuing pressure of low wages, yet housing costs keep going up and affordable housing non-existent. People are simply being priced out of housing.

It's worse of course further south, especially in London, but there are signs of it happening here too. If things don't change, more and more people who work hard, will be homeless. We shared a story the BBC ran about a lady who worked as a school caretaker in London whose landlord raised the rent and who was told by letting agents she need to earn £38000 to get anything near where she worked. This raised a great deal of awareness about the reality of modern housing need. The situation will only get worse for young people.

Hope does it's bit, and we can only do so with the combined efforts of all of you, supporting what we do, but what this needs is some sort of policy response at Governmental level – and its one parties of all colours have ducked for years. We hope that in 2017, with your support, we will continue to alleviate poverty and hardship with new initiatives to share and distribute food – more on that later in the year – but please also ask your MP or Councillor what they will do in 2017 to address the causes of homelessness!

*“When I feed the poor, they call me a saint, but when I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a communist” — Dom Helder Camara, Former Archbishop of Recife in Brazil*

*“An essential clue to the understanding of poverty in liberation theology is the distinction.....between three meanings of the term "poverty": real poverty as an evil—that is something that God does not want; spiritual poverty, in the sense of a readiness to do God's will; and solidarity with the poor, along with protest against the conditions under which they suffer.”— Gustavo Gutiérrez, 'A Theology of Liberation'*

## 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016 Preparing for Christmas at Hope

The Hope Centre elves, me included, are all working hard for Christmas, helping prepare the rotas for cover over the holidays, wrapping presents, organising the food for Christmas dinner, and taking delivery of the scary amount of donations we receive at this time of year.

Compassion is a wonderful Christmas tradition that is not yet dead even in the age of austerity we are all experiencing.

As I said at Harvest, it's humbling to see the generosity of local people devoted towards people less well off than they are. The volume of donations makes us all feel that ordinary people, both rich but also often poor themselves, make that extra effort to give, and give with care and compassion towards the people we see, even though they may have little themselves.

Hope does not just work with street homeless people and rough sleepers; we work with people with all kind of housing and other challenges in their lives – mental ill-health, poverty generally, food poverty, skills and learning poverty, isolation, lack of social skills, addictions ..... it goes on. For all of them, using the gifts you give, we work tirelessly to make their lives better, over Christmas, and every day.

But we could not do it without your support: your time, your gifts, your money. Please carry on giving, to our Christmas appeal, and to join the sleep-out in January. Read carefully what we say we need on the facebook pages and website, to make sure your gifts are what we really need – let us guide you, if you would, so that not everybody gives a woolly hat and a selection box! Have a look at what we ask for so that we can fill up the gaps, amidst the terrific amount we have already received.

So thank you, keep it coming. See you perhaps as a volunteer *after* Christmas. We need the giving to continue, throughout Christmas, into the cold New Year. We know you will help. You always do. To choose a quotation for why, I hope, we all get involved in this work, here are the words of One, by U2, which are one of my inspirations:

*One love  
One blood  
One life  
You got to do what you should  
One life  
With each other  
Sisters  
Brothers  
One life  
But we're not the same  
**We get to  
Carry each other  
Carry each other  
One life...***

## General Manager Blog: November 18<sup>th</sup> 2016

### Social Enterprise

On 17<sup>th</sup> November it was Social Enterprise day. Hope is very committed to the social enterprise model as an additional way of funding and working alongside the charity approach we champion. Yet a social enterprise is challenging and demanding to manage, and no easy profit-maker to support the charity.

On Hope Enterprises' twitter account, and through our joint Facebook pages, I celebrate and share good examples of practice from the social enterprise world, useful reading, learning and events. If you want to get an understanding of social enterprise from the ground, it's a useful feed of information (@EnterprisesHope).

Many companies are not community interest companies, or social enterprises, but express their social values through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that includes working with charities but also in looking after their staff. It's an area of work I have worked in throughout my career, leading national work on health in the workplace. All CSR work can dovetail into supporting the work of charities like Hope. A company that raises money for Hope through physical activity challenges, also has public health benefits alongside benefits for the charity.

We encourage any business or entrepreneur to think about how they could partner with Hope as an expression of their social values. We can help you build social and community commitment into your core work, through volunteering, giving work opportunities for clients, offering development opportunities for your staff, and animating their team building. We want to grow a network of businesses linked strongly to Hope, and a cadre of businesses in Northamptonshire with social responsibility within their DNA. Contact me at [robin@northamptonhopecentre.org.uk](mailto:robin@northamptonhopecentre.org.uk) to discuss ideas!

Hope Enterprises itself continues to look to consolidate and expand. It's a tough trading environment with tiny margins in our core business of catering. If you can use our service don't hesitate to contact [enquiries@hopecatering.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@hopecatering.org.uk) or on 01604 289111. We also always need tools for repair, and if you are interested in helping repair or sell the tools, contact us.

We start with people: we emphasise our training role and encourage referrals. Our work is as much about training as it is about business; it's about enabling people to work, as much as providing work or doing a specific new *thing*. Some social enterprises are focused on being innovative and flashy with new solutions, sometimes to problems that don't exist, or even to express faith or personal belief with only a slight gloss of interest in training, rehab or development of people in need – the idea seems to come first, not people who need help. Hope's vision is clear: we don't provide a *thing* that is new or innovative in itself, just offer very good catering and tools. By doing so, we grow and recycle people.

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## General Manager Blog 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016

### Food poverty – End Hunger UK

An alliance of charities including Oxfam, Quaker Action, CPAG, Trussell Trust and many more have joined together to launch a campaign to raise awareness of food poverty in the UK. The campaign runs through to March next year and is all about stimulating conversation and discussion about the issues of food poverty and highlighted existing and new solutions to the problem: <http://endhungeruk.org/>

**Hope** is proud to support the campaign, alongside and as part of the Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network. Food poverty is just a shorthand of course for poverty as a whole; people choose to eat rather than heat their homes, for example, but the problem is poverty generally – not enough money to support basic needs, which pretty much everyone we see experiences every day. The difference is with food poverty, those who have some can't share their electricity with those who have not, but we can all share the food we buy, as I talked about last blog about harvest; and we can avoid or re-use food that would otherwise go to waste, on short sell-by or use-by dates. In these ways we can channel food to people who need it and start to make a difference on this topic.

Food is of course crucial to **Hope's** mission – we were created to address hunger and we do so, every day, to a hundred people or more; we also train people through Hope Catering how to be involved in cooking, and use food as a force for good through this business.

We are developing new solutions to food hunger at **Hope**: we are working on a food club or co-operative whereby we will sell donated, short life and off-production food at massively discounted rates to people in proven need, through food distribution points developed in partnership with Northampton Partnership Homes. We plan to grow food to put into those deliveries using a new social enterprise, **Hope** Gardening. Little steps, but by supporting events that the food poverty network organises, which **Hope** will be involved in, all helps.



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## September 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 Bringing the harvest home

*And lest the world go hungry*

*While we ourselves are fed,*

*Make each of us more ready*

*To share our daily bread (FP Green)*

Hope is gathering in the various donations for harvest that so many schools, churches and community groups are collecting for us, and storing them up ready for use over the next year. It's an inspiring sight to see so many people prepared to share what they have to help those who have nothing – to borrow a phrase from another tradition, 'the wretched of the earth' - wretched in the sense of possessing nothing of their own.

This kind of community, collective outpouring and sharing is I believe, what Hope is fundamentally about: it is about a community that looks after itself in a shared sense of responsibility and love. All the diverse people of Northampton, rich and poor – including those who often have little more than the people we serve – choose to come together *through* Hope to *bring* hope to those amongst them who need help. It is charity in the purest sense; but it is also community development, community solidarity, self-help, community self-resilience as well.

It is profoundly moving and humbling to be the conduit of this outpouring: but it is precisely what I want Hope to be and why I joined it. I want Hope to continue to be, and continually grow to be even more and ever more, a charity fully rooted in its community, owned by it and accountable to it, linked powerfully to those other factors, sporting, political, economic, environmental, that make up the local society. That is why our closer and closer links to companies like Barclaycard, Ricoh, Howdens, Nationwide, Shoosmiths, Travis Perkins, and the hundreds of others, and all their staff who come and give their time, and with the Saints and the Cobblers, and every other binding force locally, is so important. We all work together to bring care, support and dignity to people in need.

Only by working together will communities like Northampton manage the economic forces that make life more and more of a struggle for so many. Only through collective action can we overcome this. Long may the harvest continue.



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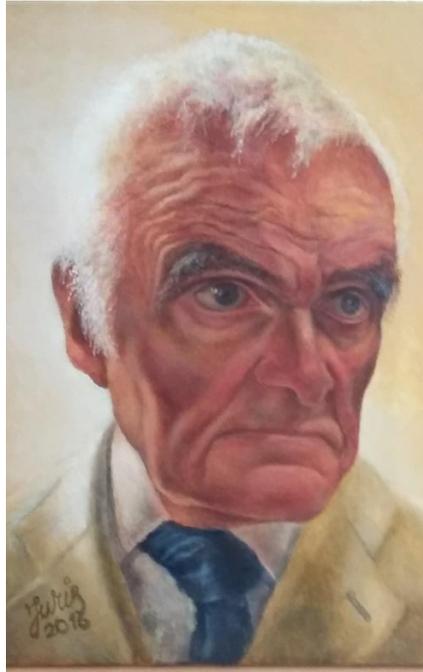
**August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016      Creativity and poverty**

Last week I posted a link on twitter and facebook about the interest in homelessness within literature - <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/aug/09/literature-homelessness-jack-london-george-orwell>

This got me thinking about the fact that people experiencing poverty very rarely have opportunity to tell anyone about the lives they lead or their experience. Their lives are very different from those, often from comfortable backgrounds, who spend a few days or even minutes, 'playing' at being homeless and who then get a book on it published. The vast majority of people living a life of homelessness or extreme poverty have little or no time, nor opportunity, to write about their experience or get it published, or even to participate in creativity through writing or painting, or whatever other art form.

This is why at Hope we have always chosen to find opportunities to give homeless and excluded people a voice, or way of expressing themselves creatively. We run a weekly art group, a crafts group, and other groups for creative writing, photography and in the past, pottery. These opportunities provide people with a few minutes to get away from the grind of looking for food, shelter and work, or the mental health or addiction problems they suffer from. Writing, making something or painting are activities that soothe souls, and enable people to express something about the lives they lead. We have a duty to give voice to people otherwise with no opportunity, and we will carry on doing so as much as time, volunteering and finance allows us: and give chances for the rest of society to see and hear the lives of homeless people. if anyone is interested in helping run such groups, please contact us.

One of our day centre users has a particular talent painting portraits in oils and his work is exhibited regularly at our art shows – there will be another in a few weeks. They are always a big hit with visitors too. With his permission I attach one of them here:



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## July 27<sup>th</sup> 2016    Companies large and small

This week posted on you tube are two examples of partnership between Hope and companies. Both are great but also very different.

The project with **RICOH** is in conversion of the Leicester Street Garden, the beginnings of a partnership that will see us work on more gardens and build that into our enterprises over time. Its also part of a long period of engagement with RICOH that will see other work helping clients with gaining skills and confidence for the job market. It's testing times for any company like RICOH, given Brexit and the hike in exchange rates, so we are pleased to see them continue to be able to help in terms of time and support.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zt2ICxlv2LI>

The other project is the partnership with **What Daisy Did**. This is a micro-business, set up by a young local couple, Daisy and Ozric, with admirable ambitions and ethics. Ozric's parents received help from the Hope Centre when it was the Soup Kitchen, and now is trying his best to give work opportunities to people who are service users now, employing Angela at present and looking to raise funds to employ another worker from here. It's a beautiful story.

It's also the kind of relationship with small businesses that we want to grow. We hope other small companies will see how they can take on our clients as staff members, to give them that jump that will take them off the street and back into life. A few hours work experience here, a more significant role perhaps. I'm calling out to all you entrepreneurs and visionaries, like Ozric and Daisy, who can follow their leadership and do what they have done. We need you to help us give our clients that step-up and out into the wider world beyond homelessness. **Can you employ a Hope Client?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3HmQW8Pp9Q&feature=youtu.be>

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**July 20<sup>th</sup> 2016** This week I want to discuss donations.

It's been a really significant week of donations to Hope, with lots of clothes, household goods and food. It's great that people give and we welcome the support of local people – we really encourage it. However we do need to sometimes say what is great to give and what sometimes what we can't handle.

Fresh food is always good, as are tins and bread. Less useful, because we get a lot, are cakes and pastries. The Hope Centre has to do its bit to keep people healthy, including our users, and lots of cakes are no good for anyone, homeless or not. It's sad to sometimes say we don't want some things, but a balance towards healthy food is something we are striving for here and we hope our donors can help.

It's the same way with clothes and household goods. We have had to put a call out not to donate bric-a-brac – we can't cope with the volumes we have. On the clothes front, what we could really do with is for a manufacturer or seller of underwear, both men and women's, to donate a large stock, given the volume we get through.

We also need a team of volunteers, perhaps from a workplace, to come in and help us organise our stores, removing the old stock and things we will never need. Can anyone help? Would you like to round up a couple of people and get the boss to let you come down for a couple of days? It would be great.

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**June 30<sup>th</sup> 2016** This week sees another achievement for Hope, with Kelvin Thomas becoming a new patron. We are very pleased to have Kelvin join us as a patron as he represents the business community in an area of business of very deep roots within the town. The promotion last season was a tremendous success and means a lot to local people. We are really pleased to be personally associated with Kelvin and also as one of the charities of the year to the Northampton Town Charity. We value our links to business and we hope more companies will follow Kelvin's lead and get involved.

Through our business forum we already have lots of productive relationships with businesses large and small. They help our running costs with donations of equipment and time, but the most important thing is the sense of shared ownership and corporate social responsibility that is demonstrated by these companies by getting involved. By working with companies we enable local people to share their commitment to addressing poverty and deprivation and recognise that we are all, potentially, at one time in our lives, at risk of needing the help of others. None of us are islands and we have to work collectively to make our way in the world.

Robin Burgess

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**June 17th 2016**

I started as the new general manager just a few weeks ago and it feels already a long time. Every day is packed with incident, events, challenges and pleasures.

No day is the same as another. Everyday reminds us of why we are here and why we are needed. Everyday people come in with complex, challenging needs related to abuse, violence, ill-health, mental health crises, substance misuse and much more. They are all linked by the scale of the problems they face - massive challenges that keep them on the margins of society, abandoned by almost everybody except their fellow excluded, and by us and sister organisations providing housing and support.

People don't choose to live like this. Poverty and their personal experience keeps them there. We work with the most marginalised of the most marginalised.

Yet there is joy and there is hope. Everyday we see people struggling to get on top of their problems, begin to learn and to grow. With the support the team provides, and the warmth and care they receive, people can change.

If you are reading this and want to help, think about three simple words: donate, volunteer, promote.

You have the skills to help people out of homelessness, or to care for them whilst they work towards it. Be part of a movement for Hope.