

# Greyfriar's Community Project

## 'Grassroots'

### Case Studies January - May 2007



## **Introduction**

The Greyfriars Community Project has been offering services on this site to the most vulnerable people in the city for many, many years. Need is changing and we are planning a big development in the way we deliver services. That has been based on a regular needs assessment of our users so that our services are rooted not only in national strategic thinking, but in the real lives or real people on the fringes. We have undertaken a variety of surveys and focus groups during the planning of this, but felt that we needed to keep this information fresh as the project moves on. As a result we embarked on a series of one to one interviews asking individuals what they thought the centre was like, how they benefited from contact with it and what their aspiration were for the future. Their responses are reported below with names changes to respect confidentiality.

Due to the variety of backgrounds, abilities and support needs of these individuals the kind of responses vary considerably.

### **1. Surveys.**

Some individuals needed a structure to help them evaluate their experience and a short list of questions was formulated to enable this process. Users responses are in blue.

#### **Sally (17)**

Why did you start using the services provided by The Grassmarket Mission?

I didn't know where to go. My friend brought me down. It was somewhere to get something to eat but it was more than that and I came for the extra help.

What was your social position at the time? (Were you in dire poverty, homeless etc.?)

I was homeless and sleeping on a friend's sofa. I had no money, nothing. I didn't know anything about what help I could get.

How did you benefit from the services provided?

I didn't starve to death. I was able to talk to the staff and found our other places to go. I managed to get the medical advice I needed. I also got to meet with the people who were here. It was good company and helped me.

How would you like the project developed in the future?

I would like to take part in some of the classes, eg cooking. I need to learn things but couldn't manage college.

### **John**

Why did you start using the services provided by The Grassmarket Mission?

For company, I was in a situation where I never saw anyone for days and I was just looking at four walls.

What was your social position at the time? (Were you in dire poverty, homeless etc.?)

I was not homeless. I was in a house, living on benefits, I still am. It's not an ideal situation, even with a house. The money I get is not enough to cover all meals as well as bills etc. I struggle a lot to cope with things.

How did you benefit from the services provided?

I got information about services. But better than that, I developed communication skills within the centre and it helped my confidence. I lost my job and have really lost it since then and not been able to even apply for other things. Since I stopped work, I've missed working, the work environment, the camaraderie in kitchens.

How would you like the project developed in the future?

Through more cooking classes, workshops so I can learn more skills and get the confidence to get on with my life. It would be great if there were more opening times, longer opening times. I'd say - better quality, but more of the same.

### **Stephen (53)**

Why did you start using the services provided by The Grassmarket Mission?

Through people who had used the services regularly, they told me about it. I was new to using these kind of services. It wasn't an emergency, I wasn't starving, but it was handy knowing that are such places where you can get help.

What was your social position at the time? (Were you in dire poverty, homeless etc.?)

I was not homeless. I had moved from a bad area into a half decent area. But I was unemployed and on benefits.

How did you benefit from the services provided?

Socialising is extremely beneficial. It's needed when you live on your own. If there's an emergency that you need to discuss, people are there to provide help and advice. It is the thing that helps you get the confidence to use other services and maybe get volunteer experience.

How would you like the project developed in the future?

There's no major thing, but more space would be beneficial. Arts and crafts workshop, because I could be involved in that kind of thing. I'd like to learn IT skills, for letter writing and form filling.

I hope that there's more of these type of facilities in the future in and around Edinburgh, because they are very beneficial to people in the city. They are needed to help people.

### **Alec (40)**

Why did you start using the services provided by The Grassmarket Mission?

It was a meeting point for me and my friends.

What was your social position at the time? (Were you in dire poverty, homeless etc.?)

I was unemployed, on benefits. People were talking about places where you could go and get fed, and a cup of coffee. At first I felt I was taking a liberty, taking food out of peoples mouths but eventually I felt comfortable eating there. The food is not the thing, it is the friendship you get that is the way into doing courses, getting experience, and helping you use services you need that you might not bother about on your own.

How did you benefit from the services provided?

At the time I didn't think much of it, but when I began to help out a little I really benefited, I had to help myself out first, get my confidence back, feel good about myself. Then I could go on to help other people. Then I felt a different person, I felt better for myself, I wasn't putting myself down, but building myself up. I don't feel useless anymore.

How would you like the project developed in the future?

I'd like to see things happening. I'd like to see this place open more often, especially between 6 and 9 at night, because there's not much to do on the streets then. There needs to be more cooking classes, teaching cleaning, homeskills etc so I won't lose my house. Learning computer skills, reading/writing classes would be good. It would benefit the services users in lots of ways, it would be great if they were in a group they know. That is how people get on and get over problems they face.

**Bob (49)**

Why did you start using the services provided by The Grassmarket Mission?

Because it was a safe place and a good environment.

What was your social position at the time? (Were you in dire poverty, homeless etc.?)

I was homeless, living in a hostel. I was a student at the time, surviving on benefits.

How did you benefit from the services provided?

Meeting people, making new friends, talking to staff, getting counsel and advice. Later being part of a volunteer team, which built confidence. Practically, I was fed and looked after, but the biggest difference was taking the opportunity to be a part of something worthwhile.

Where would you like to see the project going in the future?

Expanding the drop-in and the advice centre. I'd like to see the cooking classes, which I benefited from, developed, I want to learn/teach pudding preparation. I think that the woodwork workshop will provide great opportunities for the guys on the street. I'd like to see some IT/admin/computer training being offered to help guys prepare for work.

## **2. Telling their story**

Some users just wanted an opportunity to tell their story. The following is the transcripts of what was said when they were given the opportunity to contribute;

### **Janet**

I am 18 years old. I left home when I was 14. I was living with my Mum (my Dad had left and has never been interested in keeping in touch). My mum was very unwell, she had spinal problems and was in and out of hospital when I was young. I never really understood what was going on and nobody took the time to explain things to me. I thought that it would be easier for my mum if I wasn't around. (I know now that leaving made things harder for her). I left home when I was 14. I carried on going to school. I don't think people knew that I wasn't living at home. I slept on the streets. All I had was a blanket and a few things that I could fit in my schoolbag. I would sometimes sleep through all my lessons.

I carried on going to school until I finished my exams at 16. I didn't like school because I wasn't popular and I have dyslexia and dispraxia. I should have done better in my exams but always had so many things to think about.

I got quite used to the cold (even the snow) and sleeping rough. One man would pass me at exactly the same time every day. He would always give me money and buy me fish and chips, a drink and cigarettes. I hate it when people pass by and don't even look at you. If they don't want to give money that's OK, but they could at least just say 'hi' or something.

I started coming to the Kirkhouse when I was 15. It's one of the only places I could go to because it doesn't have any age rules. The Kirkhouse is better than other drop in centres because there are rules but people are friendly. Dave was always at the door ready to chat and the volunteer helpers were friendly too. Dave got me into hostels. I started moving from hostel to hostel and claiming benefits.

When I was 16 I got a flat. Once I had to go and visit my granny because she was sick so I told the council people that I was leaving the flat for a week. I came back 2 days late and the flat was trashed. I lost all my stuff and never got back into the flat. I started moving from hostel to hostel again. I never liked to unpack my stuff in case I lost it again.

I introduced my mum to the Kirkhouse so that we could have a place to meet. She comes regularly now with her friend. The Kirkhouse has a more organized and nicer feeling than other drop-in centres. It has good vibes.

I have helped out at the Kirkhouse too. I see myself as a kind of counsellor for the place. I get people talking to others and I can understand a bit about what they've been through.

It would be fantastic to see the Kirkhouse rebuilt with new flats and classes and stuff. There's no point in shoving people in a flat and telling them to get on with it. They need to be taught life skills and need lots of encouragement. I would like to help with all that.

Now I'm in a flat and the cat and I'm cooking and things. My life has changed and I want to get a job but I'm not in a hurry, just taking one thing at a time.

**Robert.**

Me and my wife opted out of housing due to difficulties with neighbours and the environment we were living in. We bought a tent and lived in that for around 18 months, during which time we accessed the services provided by The Grassmarket Mission most days. Eventually we were admitted to Stevenson College who assisted us with accommodation. I became the student president after my first year, during which time I handed a donation into the mission as thanks for the assistance I received here.

**Alan.**

I was a street drinker and occasional drug user who completed the cooking classes run at the Kirkhouse. I found a sense of purpose that my life had lacked through the opportunity to do something structured and worthwhile. I went on from this to being accepted to college where I began an access course. Although I still drink from time to time, I haven't taken drugs for a number of years.

**Gary.**

I found myself homeless after being made redundant, I struggled with depression and became trapped in a cycle of poverty and homelessness. I became a volunteer with The

Grassmarket Mission and have now taken on a voluntary role as administrator. I have been stable for over two years and contribute a great deal to the work.

**James.**

After years of struggling with alcoholism I got involved as a volunteer through completing the cooking classes. Whilst I still volunteer on an occasional basis, I have worked as a bus driver for the past 18 months. The support and opportunity I was given at the Kirkhouse is the main reason I got my life back on track.

**Hugh.**

I am 76 and I live alone on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Although I don't feel I have a lot of support needs, I do live in poverty, but my main need is around company. The friendship and acceptance I find in The Kirkhouse is a life line for me, here are my friends and we support each other as well as friendship and help I get from volunteers. Without The Kirkhouse, I would be isolated and lonely.

**Willie.**

I have been a chronic alcoholic for many years. My alcoholism takes the form of binge drinking, when I can go on a binge lasting several weeks. I got involved with the woodwork workshop last summer (2006) and have found a love for creating beautiful, pieces of furniture. This small opportunity has given me a sense of self-worth and purpose that my life had lacked. It has been over six months since I had a drink.

[NB – The customer who bought one of Willie's tables, has written about it. We were told about this and she has kindly allowed us to reproduce her comments here. The following is what she said:](#)

I have recently been given the most amazing piece of furniture for my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday!! This is a beautiful solid oak coffee table made from old pews taken out of a church I believe in Aberdeenshire which was getting rid of its pews. It was made in the Greyfriars Community Workshop which is a wonderfully innovative enterprise set up at present in two old portacabins in the church yard while it waits for a more permanent home. I had previously visited this workshop as I was interested to see what was happening there and was most impressed by the chairs, mirrors, bird tables and other things that were being made on a weekly basis by members of the local community who had found

themselves in a vulnerable and un-employed position. The workshop offered them an opportunity to use old skills or to learn new ones. I believe my table was a special commission and new challenge for the team working there, and I can only say that I am privileged to own such a unique and wonderful piece of furniture.