

BRIDGE BULLETIN



BRIDGE
TRUST 

A BRIDGE FROM HOMELESSNESS

WINTER 2019

My Name is Anthony

... and I am a former resident of The Bridge Trust.

As a teenager, I spent nearly 12 years jumping from sofa to sofa, living out of bags, without a sense of stability. I approached The Bridge Trust in 2018 after my mental health deteriorated, leaving me unable to support myself. I had no where to live and was in no fit state to work at the time.

The team at The Bridge Trust understood my situation and offered a safe and supportive environment for me to rebuild my life. My support worker Nick was incredibly helpful and motivating (even if I didn't always see that at the time) and never stopped pushing me to achieve things that seemed almost impossible at the time. Nick taught me everyday life skills that I had missed out on learning when I was younger and encouraged me to venture out of my comfort zone.

After much encouragement from Nick, I started volunteering at the YMCA furniture warehouse in Tonbridge, before moving on to volunteer at their youth projects. I now have my own flat and a full time job working as a Learning Support Assistant with the YMCA, as well as training to become a boxing coach.

“The Bridge Trust understood my situation and offered a safe and supportive environment for me to rebuild my life.”

My Name is Matt



I'm no saint! I'm 41 and I have experienced drug abuse, too much alcohol and have even been in prison. However I straightened myself out, got a job and met my wife. I moved into her home, we had three children, a girl and two boys and I treated her older son as my own. We got married, but sadly it didn't last long.

Social Services became involved because our relationship got so bad that it was not good for the children to be around and I was ordered to leave the house which I did. I had a difficult upbringing myself and I didn't want the same for my own children.

I was living in a car for six weeks; I was drinking far too much and couldn't cope with the situation. Then Tunbridge Wells Borough Council referred me to The Bridge Trust and after an interview I was accepted and moved into my own room in one of their shared houses. I tried to control my drinking myself but had a few blips which almost cost me my accommodation again. I am

grateful that The Bridge Trust stuck with me through these times! Social Services insisted that I attended an anger management course but I also decided with support from Sally my Keyworker, to go to CGL (Change Grow Live) to get some help with my drinking problem.

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I had great difficulty getting access to my children as my wife and I could not manage to bury the past and get on with each other. I feel that my wife created many barriers and problems to try and make me react badly as she knows how to do this. With much negotiation through me, Sally and Social Services, I finally got to speak to my children once a week on the phone from The Bridge Trust's office. Still angry that this was not enough, Sally always prepared me for these calls so that I could enjoy them and not involve the children in the problems with my wife. Sally also came with me to Social Service meetings and helped me prepare and talk in a calm reasonable way.

It was not a smooth ride. I am not an easy person to get on with and still can get frustrated, but Sally always managed to calm me down and let me offload.

My wife then managed to stop access and any contact with the children which broke my heart. I then asked Sally to help me with the paperwork for court proceedings so that I could try and get legal access to my children and step-son. I then started feeling that things were at last moving forward. I met Jayne, my current partner and with a recommendation form The Bridge Trust I started bidding for a place of my own.

All this took about a year and look at me now! I have a lovely flat, a job; a great partner and I have full parental guidance (authorised by the court) for my step-son; access to all three of my children and I am looking forward to a much better Christmas this year!

I would like to thank The Bridge Trust for their support and advice, especially Sally, for making all this possible.

Service Update

In our Autumn Bulletin we reported that, thanks to the support we have received from the High Hilden Fund, a fund of Kent Community Foundation, we were looking to purchase a new property.

We are now excited to say that we have found a suitable house in the heart of Tonbridge that will increase our current service's capacity by providing another 5 bedrooms for local homeless people. We had hoped that we could have all the work done to allow us to start using the house before the bad weather set-in, but the timing of the grant was out of our hands and we now expect to have all the work needed, completed by the end of February.

However, although there is much to do we have already lined-up surveyors, architects, builders, plumbers and electricians, as it will still be a very tight schedule if we are to hit our February target – especially with Christmas and New Year “in the way”!

However, we will do our best and hope that the anticipated harsh winter will hold-off for a while longer – both to allow builders to get to work and to give some relief to those still suffering homelessness in our community.



Is 'Big' Necessarily Beautiful?

Over the years we have found that being a small charity, focused locally on a small range of services has some distinct advantages over somewhat larger conglomerates and one example of this is that it has allowed us to become experts at what we do, rather than being mediocre at providing a wider range of services.

Being small allows us to understand the local need, to react quickly to changes and to external pressures, and sometimes alter our approach temporarily, until a situation returns to normal. For example, recently we “threw our rule book out the window” and re-arranged usual priorities in order to help a very vulnerable rough sleeper. If we followed procedure and process and previously agreed budgetary constraints, that person would still be sleeping rough and exposed to exploitation and other dangers. However, I was able to make an immediate decision, the team swung into action the same morning and this person was offered a safe and secure home to live in before nightfall. In addition, for every person we support at The Bridge Trust we need to receive funding, but we agreed to support this person using our own charitable funds as no one else would pay for her. It may sound melodramatic but a person's life was at risk and we reacted immediately. As a Christian based charity we ask “what would Jesus do”, and in this case I think He would have torn-up the rule-book as well! However, my experience with larger organisations is that they would either not go to the trouble of taking such action (sometimes due to being driven by their bottom-line) or if they did, they would take an age to get it sanctioned by a committee or Board or whatever, as their rules and procedures would need to be changed.

Since April this year we have had over half of our statutory funding, which is allocated from the County Council, removed and have been informed that we should expect to lose it completely next March. Why? Because the funding has been taken from us, a local £450,000 charity and given to a £60 million London based housing association.

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Perhaps there are savings to be had by doing this, but as this funding to us had been frozen for six years and they only paid about two thirds of what the service actually cost anyway, I don't think there would be much scope to save too much of the £121,000 they paid us. Although they have reduced the capacity of their new-style service so maybe that's where their savings lie.

Be that as it may, this will reduce the financial capacity of the Trust by around $\frac{1}{4}$; making us an even smaller charity than we were before, and I have been agonising for a long time over whether we will survive this. Can we continue providing the service we always have, how can we change our business model to respond to this, can we reduce our cost-base even more or can we raise additional income elsewhere?

So what do we do? Well, let me answer that, not with some rhetoric about "future plans" but by reporting on the actions we are taking now. Instead of cutting our staff costs further than we have, we are currently recruiting to meet the increasing need for our service in west Kent. We are also in the process of opening an additional five bedroom property in Tonbridge (as reported overleaf), to expand our services further. These are not reckless decisions, throwing caution to the wind – we have not survived for over 30 years by doing that. No, these are reasoned actions, taken after much consideration and considered planning, underpinned by our determination to continue to do what we do for the homeless people in our community.

I remain open-minded and acknowledge that perhaps the day will come when it is no longer the best option for us to continue as a small organisation, but until then we have vowed to continue to do what we do for as long as our service is needed – and believe me, it still is and will be for the foreseeable future.

John Handley CEO

The Kids Care



Four Boys and a Cake

Without any prompting, four lads from a local primary school decided that they wanted to do something to help the homeless people in their community.

So with a "little" help from some mums, who baked not just one but many cakes, they held a bake sale after school and raised an incredible £110.

22nd September 2019

Dear Bridge Trust,

On Friday 13th of September, I was head teacher at my school, and I said I wanted everyone to wear their pyjamas to school even the Teachers! and we raised £294.71 from the Donations in aid of the Bridge Trust. Please find enclosed a cheque for this sum to support those in need.

yours faithfully,

Ellie (age 8)

Marathon Man



In October 2019 one man took on the world. Yes, Sean Rustrick from Rustrick Accountants decided to put on his running shoes and head off to Lisbon to run the marathon.

But instead of just doing this for his own satisfaction, Sean took the trouble to raise money for The Bridge Trust.

Not only did he finish the race in the Lisbon heat (and in a good time too) but he also raised a magnificent £1,100 to support our work.

Sean was inspired to do this as his training runs regularly took him past some rough sleepers, and he simply needed to do something to help.

“My training runs regularly take me past people unfortunate enough to be living on the streets and it is for this reason that I decided to channel my efforts towards raising vital funds for The Bridge Trust.”

Our sincerest thanks to Sean and all those who sponsored him.

We Couldn't do it Without You

A huge thank you to all of our supporters who have donated towards the work we do in our community.

Without the support of individuals, churches, schools, clubs, businesses and other organisations we would not be here.

It costs approximately £450,000 a year for us to provide a home to the homeless. Donations, allow us to continue to make a difference in people's lives.

Pass it on...

When you have finished with this Bulletin, perhaps you could pass it on to a neighbour who may be interested. If you do, you can ask them to contact us if they want to be added to our mailing list.

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Coming Soon... The Caterham 7 Experience



Ever fancied a drive out into the heart of the Kent countryside in a full-on sports car?

Well if so, then we may have just the thing for you as we have teamed-up with one of our supporters to offer you just that.

Using the fantastic Caterham 7 sports car, we can offer you a seat as a passenger to give you that “wind in the hair” exhilaration that only a car like this can give you.

Final details will be available in our next Bulletin, but for a small donation that will come directly to us, you could have a wonderful outing through the green lanes of West Kent.

Of course, if you don't fancy this yourself then why not treat someone else – or even donate a drive to one of our residents perhaps?

As they say... “watch this space”!



H A M B R I D G E

Hambridge Homes Support for the Homeless

Sevenoaks based housing developer, Hambridge Homes decided that they would support The Bridge Trust with a charity Go Karting event at Buckmore Park.

We were completely overwhelmed when we heard that they had raised an incredible £5,000 for our work.

“Thank You” seems a little inadequate at times!