

# BRIDGE BULLETIN

A BRIDGE FROM HOMELESSNESS



BRIDGE  
TRUST 

SPRING 2020

## COVID 19 – A new (temporary?) world

**As we are sure you must appreciate, any epidemic like coronavirus is as serious a risk to homeless people as it is to us all and arguably they could be even more at risk. So as we adapted our policies, procedures and working practices to cope with this situation, we have made sure that the safety of our clients has been at the forefront of the decisions we have had to make.**

So, as far as possible it is business (almost) as usual for The Bridge Trust. We are supporting our residents, not face to face but by phone unless we absolutely have to meet with them, and then it is in the gardens with social distancing measures adhered to. We speak to them all on a daily basis to give reassurance that we are still there for them and to confirm that their needs are met or are being managed appropriately. However, we are unable to move people on during this period so our accommodation remains full but alas static until such times as we can start freeing up space for new clients again.

In one of my blogs last year I talked about some of the advantages of small organisations and one of those was being able to react quickly in changing times and this has proved to be the case for us. It has been a steep learning curve though as we have had to react to changing government guidelines and adapt to what other related agencies are having to do e.g. the Councils, housing associations and referral agencies. However, within a few days we had new procedures agreed and technology in place to help us where needed. All staff are now able access our office network from home, plus our office switchboard with all its functionality is now replicated on my mobile phone and the staff accept calls transferred to them at home as if they were sitting at their desk in the office. Our Support Database is in the “cloud”, so can be accessed and updated from anywhere and we have quickly got used to video conferencing instead of face to face meetings. The only thing missing is to each have Bridge Trust laptops to use remotely as we have had to compromise by using our home PC’s to access our office network. Laptops for all would be too expensive at the moment so we make do with this interim solution; it’s creaking a little and is not good enough for the long-term but it does work!

In early April the government issued orders for all Borough Councils to house all rough sleepers “by the weekend”. In an extraordinary effort this was achieved in our region with only one or two people who absolutely refused to accept help, left on the streets. Of course this achievement does prompt the question about whether there is ever any need for anyone to be street homeless if the government give this social outrage the priority it deserves? I’m sure that will be debated long after this crisis is over. The next stage though is to make sure these people are not simply put back onto the streets at the end of all this!

Many have said that the changes we have all been forced to make during this time may have a lasting impact in one way or another and I tend to agree. Even from The Bridge Trust’s perspective, I think there has already been an acceptance that we don’t need to be in the office all the time to be effective. I personally enjoy working from home some of the time, although I appreciate not everyone does. I am lucky enough to have a small room to use as an office and being small (and having to share it with my wife), I am now tidier and more organised than I needed to be in my office at work. I save time travelling to and from work, and I tend to start my daily routine checking emails over breakfast, then have a coffee break listening to the news before cracking on with the day’s work. I hope travelling over distances to meetings will also now be fewer and far between, when we are now used to video conferencing – quicker, cheaper and far better for the environment.

I am writing this a couple of weeks or so in advance of you reading it but at present we have seen no sign of coronavirus at The Bridge Trust but of course that could change, so we are not being complacent and continue to monitor and re-evaluate the situation and are prepared to respond accordingly.

Meanwhile we continue to put our residents’ welfare at the heart of what we do, and whether supporting them through this current situation or afterwards, we are there for them.

*John Handley, CEO*

## Saying goodbye to old friends

The Bridge Trust says goodbye to some old friends and colleagues.

In February Nic Wright passed away; an ally in the support of the homeless and many other vulnerable people in need in our local community.



In 1994 Nic became the first volunteer of what was then the Bridge Trust Street Teams (now the Tunbridge Wells Churches Street Teams), and he ran that project for over 20 years. It is difficult to quantify the impact of Nic's dedication to helping the homeless and many other vulnerable people in need during his 85 years, both as a Senior Social Worker and then in his retirement working with so many people who relied upon the Street Teams operating out of Crescent Road car park in Tunbridge Wells.

In April our dear friend and ex-colleague Bob Wykes passed away after a long illness. Bob was one of the first trustees of The Bridge Trust when we were registered as a charity in 1995 and as such he had a huge influence on establishing the charity's work with homeless people in west Kent. Bob served not only as a trustee but he became our Chairman in 2004 and served in that role for eight years until he retired from the Board in 2012. Under his leadership many thousands of homeless people received help, with over 700 of them obtaining housing – a fine legacy. Bob would have been 87 in June this year. He will be remembered with much fondness and great respect by all at the Trust.



Due to the prevailing coronavirus crisis we could not attend either funeral, but our thoughts and prayers were with both Nic and Bob's families.



## Hilden House

**In acknowledgment of the High Hilden Fund who gave us the grant for our new house in Tonbridge, we are naming it "Hilden House" – a suitable plaque will be made in due course.**

There is still a lot to do before we can move people in, as converting a residential property to a 'House of Multiple Occupation' requires many things you wouldn't need in a normal home – e.g. fire doors, emergency lighting, fire alarm and so forth. One large expense we have encountered is the need to re-lay the side path and rear patio, as the concrete that has been put there at different times over the years, is uneven and presents a trip hazard. Luckily the officers from Tonbridge and Malling Council highlighted this before we purchased the house so we knew this was coming and were able to factor it into our budget.

This is an old house, built in 1856, so inevitably we have uncovered some unforeseen issues that have slowed down the refurbishment, as well and needless to say, the coronavirus crisis has stopped work on the house for the time being, so the end date for the works has now been pushed back to end of June. We are getting there but it all takes time!





## No Jacket Required

The premier Phil Collins tribute band No Jacket Required, continues to support The Bridge Trust, and they have donated a further £7,000 to help us, bringing their total to over £35,000 raised in support of local homeless people.

They recently treated some of our staff and residents to tickets to see them at The Trinity Theatre in Tunbridge Wells and what a great evening of entertainment it was too.

We thank the band for all they do for us; they are stars in more ways than one.

## St James's Place Wealth Management

Our CEO meets many business people through business networking events and the Trust is lucky enough to have received a lot of support from these local, and usually small, businesses over the years. However, we have recently received support from a big business!

Stephen Gill, an Associate Partner at St James's Place Wealth Management, sponsored an application to their Charitable Trust, who awarded us £1,000 to provide move-on furniture to our residents who are setting up their own accommodation for the first time.

We are hugely grateful to St. James's Place Charitable Trust and to Stephen for his support.



## Support from the Nevill Golf Club

### The Nomads



Not for the first time have the Nevill Nomads (part of the Nevill Golf Club in Tunbridge Wells) supported The Bridge Trust.

Their fundraising efforts this year were split between three charities of which we were one.

Our CEO, John Handley went along to receive a generous donation of £500.

Once again, our thanks to the Nomads for their continued support for our work.

### The Captain's Drive



This year's Lady's Captain at the Nevill has kindly chosen The Bridge Trust as her charity of the year.

Levitha Hughes invited us along to the "ceremony" that saw the handing over from last year's captains to this year's.

This involved the new captains driving

off from the first tee, and everyone paying to guess how far the drives went.

This was the first event of the new golfing year and we thank everyone at the club for their generosity.

## When this is over, we will need a holiday...

The Bridge Trust have entered into a partnership arrangement with Caroline Peers-Noakes who is a local, independent personal travel consultant with Not Just Travel.



Caroline has access to over 450 suppliers, including all the high street favourites such as TUI, Jet2, Kuoni etc. but also trade-only suppliers, who don't deal with the general public, and pass on their deals only through agents like Caroline. It also means she can book anything from a cottage in the UK, to a round-the-world cruise!

She can tailor-make your holiday, or get a package deal for the same price as going direct to the supplier. She does not charge for her services, (not even all the website trawling to find you the best deal!), **AND, she will donate 10% of the holiday cost to The Bridge Trust.**

She is available to you throughout the booking process to help out, for example, if you get to the airport and find your flight has been cancelled due to drones flying overhead!

After the current travel restrictions are lifted, many people will certainly need a holiday!

# The Caterham 7 Experience

In partnership with a local supporter, The Bridge Trust is offering a drive out into the heart of the Kent countryside, or a day out at Brands Hatch, in a full-on sports car – a Caterham 7.

Using this exhilarating car, we can offer you a seat as a passenger to give you that “wind in the hair” experience.



There are three packages available:

- For a minimum donation of £40, you will get a 30 minute drive out as a passenger around Kent
- For a minimum donation of £70, you can have a return passenger drive *plus* full entrance (no hospitality) at Brands Hatch
- For a minimum donation of £165, you can have a return passenger drive *plus* full entrance and hospitality suite (without catering) at Brands Hatch

If you don't fancy this yourself, why not treat a friend or loved one, or even donate it to one of our residents? *Also, please bear in mind that this is a small car, so not suitable for those of a “larger stature”!*

*NB: With the current lock-down situation, an experience can be reserved, but drives will not commence until government advice allows.*

Contact [jhandley@thebridgetrust.org.uk](mailto:jhandley@thebridgetrust.org.uk) for full details.



## Tunbridge Wells Half Marathon

Not even Storm Dennis could stop the TW Half this year. Race Director Mark Taylor had a very difficult decision to make, but by postponing the start by one hour he did exactly the right thing. The wind and rain died off a bit, the race was run and no one got swept away – although no records were broken in the prevailing conditions.

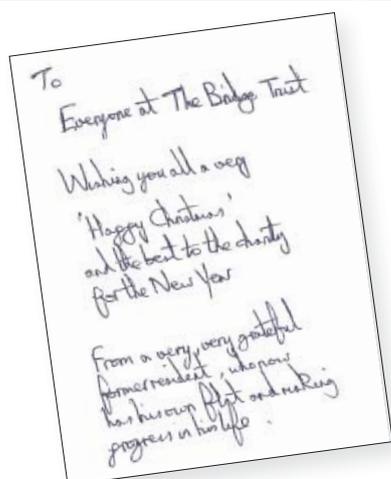
A huge thanks to our runners and the TW Harriers for supporting the Trust again this year and thanks for the privilege of being asked to hand out the trophies.

## Thank you!

Thank you to everyone who has donated. Here are a few since the last Bulletin:

St Mary's, Kippington	£500
Tonbridge Lions	£200
Rotary Club of Tonbridge	£500
URC, Hawkenbury	£100
Christ Church, Tonbridge	£100
United Emmanuel Church, TW	£95.31
Tudeley Cum Chapel / Five Oak Green Church	£400
Tonbridge Methodist Church	£278
St Luke's, Sevenoaks	£483.05
Higham Wood Senior Friendship Club	£80
Skinner's School	£291.54
St Mary's the Virgin, Platt	£343.28
Waitrose, Tonbridge	£334
TW Round Table	£466.82
Weald of Kent Ploughing Match Association	£500
St Luke's, Matfield	£145.60
Judd School	£391.19

**It costs approximately £400,000 p.a. to provide our services to homeless people. Donations from both groups and individuals 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.

## CONTACT US

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