Spring 2022 Newsletter



1A Mount Street, TA1 3QB
www.tauntonopendoor.org.uk
tauntonopendoor
01823 271996

Celebrating Life

It is the greatest privilege to have a place where so many people meet and interact. Each week we have 40-50 homeless/vulnerably housed people, 25 volunteers, 20 supporters, 3 staff, 5 trustees and 7 staff from partner agencies all rubbing shoulders and spending time together. In so many ways we are all sharing our lives and our stories, our challenges and our joys.



Helping each other, drawing strength and inspiration from each other. We witness and experience so much goodness and generosity, so much positivity and resilience, so much fun and so many laughs.

We also all face challenges, sadness and sometimes tragedy. We are weak, make mistakes and fail. But, thankfully, we are surrounded by those who do not criticise or judge. With each new day we start afresh.

At its heart Open Door is all about celebrating life, new every morning. And there is always plenty to celebrate.

Did the pandemic reduce street homelessness?

The pandemic was definitely not something to celebrate. But have there been any positive outcomes due to Covid for homelessness in Taunton?

It had been hoped that some would find that lockdown's emergency 'Everyone In' accommodation would work as a stepping stone into more permanent supported housing. Unfortunately in many cases this has not been realised. There are more street homeless in Taunton now than there were before the pandemic and we are busier than we have ever been in the last 10 years.



Steadily some are finding suitable accommodation with the support they need, but there is never enough to meet the demand. In that context there is an exciting project, being initiated by Citizens Somerset, aiming to replicate what has been hugely successful elsewhere, with small clusters of supported modular homes. Watch this space!

Lots of little steps, stories and successes

It is possible that we all focus, rightly, on each person finding appropriate sustainable housing that we miss all the small steps of the journey to that point. The government is committed to eradicate rough sleeping nationally by 2027. And locally many groups are working tirelessly so that no one has to be without somewhere to call home. But on the way to getting there …

Every day one new person finds their way to our open door, homeless. Every single one is a very special person, with a unique story bringing them here, their own personal goals and dreams, challenges and choices. Very often initially feeling vulnerable, down and put down, worthless and unloved, lonely and alone.

So we do something very ordinary. We smile. We welcome. By name. Listen. Answer and respond. Serve. Smile again. Share and care. Share everyone's journeys. Celebrate everyone's steps. Seeing a doctor. Asking about rehab. Escaping County Lines. And every day every single other little step.

Deep rooted community support



We continue to be very conscious of our dependency upon myriad supporters. For example, today a dear old lady, who has recently recovered from several falls and a broken hip, brought in sausages and mince. Two young boys delivered delicious cakes they had made themselves. A student brought in clothes that she had collected from her village. A cheque arrived in the post. 25 employees from a local company helped us blitz cleaning.



Just a taste of the brilliant support we receive from churches, schools, community groups, businesses and individuals.

Amazing generosity like this means that we can better serve and support our clients, such as Sacks of Smiles, (giving a rucksack full of useful clothes, equipment and treats at Christmas). And at a time when daily running costs are rising sharply we are so grateful to receive support of all kinds.

Volunteering



We are so lucky to never be short of volunteers and are always happy to receive new people. Roles vary from cooking and serving, tidying and sorting, mending and repairing,

Professional partners

Hairdressers, vets, doctors, nurses, podiatrists, outreach workers. We greatly value the regular visits of all of these. Team work makes the dream work!







And finally, a thought to take away

Our clients are sometimes considered by the wider community as not being 'normal' or needing to find a 'normal' lifestyle. We do realise what is meant by that, though sometimes it is voiced in an insensitive way. Van Gogh, however, prompts us to think a little differently maybe.

Normality is a paved road: It's comfortable to walk, but no flowers grow on it.

With our best wishes, Mark, Nina and Emma