

From the Editor

As we come towards the end of 2016, it's a good time to look back on what we have been able to share with you through the newsletters this year: over 20 personal opinion pieces, 30 organisational profiles, 60 or so events, many important reports and news items and there have been opportunities to take up and community voices to hear.

Of course this is a team effort so please keep sending in all your news, invitations and stories and we will communicate them to the network of now over 700 organisations and individuals across Greater Manchester. We'll be back on January 18th.

In the meantime we would like to wish you a peaceful, healthy and **HAPPY CHRISTMAS** and a successful and prosperous 2017 shared by everyone.



Beyond Poverty

In order to tackle poverty we need to understand it, and in order to understand poverty we need two things. Good quantitative data is essential to show the scale, geography and the nature of poverty. In addition to this we need good qualitative data, or stories.

We need to listen to the authentic voices of people with direct lived experience of poverty. They tell us for example not just how hard it is to afford enough food, but also how that feels, how it creates a narrative and a stigma that can be hard to break out of. That is why those "community voices" so often feature in these newsletters and on our website.

We are now working on a report called Beyond Poverty which will share the stories, in their own words, of people who experience or have experienced poverty in Greater Manchester. Watch out for it in 2017, but if you missed out on any community voices over the last year you can find them [here](#) and if you know anyone who might be willing to share their story for either Community Voices or Beyond Poverty, please do get in touch.

In work poverty hits record high as the housing crisis fuels insecurity

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported last week that the number of people in poverty who are also in working households is at a record high. In our next newsletter, January 2017, one of our Directors Tom Skinner will look at what this tells us, and the questions it raises, about the quality of work available. But for now we wanted to flag up [this report](#) as an important piece in itself.

Wood Street Mission Opens a Christmas Community Shop for Local Families

Wood Street Mission will be running a Christmas community shop until December 22nd where parents living on a low income can shop for presents for their children with points-based credit, as well as food and festive treats.



It is also organising two toy fairs in community venues in Gorton and Langworthy, both areas of high deprivation, and a huge children's party in a city centre location the weekend before Christmas.

Roseanne Sweeney, chief executive of Wood Street Mission, said: "Christmas is a difficult and stressful time of year for families who are struggling financially and often dread the expense and expectations attached to the season. Our projects are aimed at helping alleviate the financial burden and bringing some festive cheer to kids whose parents can't afford to buy them the toys and treats their peers take for granted."

The charity's Christmas community shop, which will be stocked full of donated goods, is expected to have over 1000 customers over three weeks. Almost 400 corporate volunteers from neighbouring businesses will work in the shop, alongside the charity's small staff team. Overall, the charity will provide toys, food and entertainment to over 2,000 families and 4,500 children.

Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor Eddy Newman and Wood Street Mission's mascot Woody officially opened the Christmas community shop.

Going against the grain: a new law centre in Greater Manchester

Former Court of Appeal Judge Sir Henry Brooke has published a compelling series on his blog ([Musings, Memories, Miscellanea](#)) called '[Seven Stories of Injustice](#)'. Unsurprisingly, they focus on those whose access to justice has been compromised by the ideological legal aid reforms since 2008. It illustrates the importance of legal aid (which is so often taken for granted), the consistent popular public support for it, and the lawyers whose commitment to social justice is necessarily connected to the areas of law historically serviced by public money.

Law centres, which revolutionised the ability of disenfranchised, excluded and marginalised communities to access legal help, have similarly taken a hit. As spaces that were not just economically but also physically accessible to their communities, they became sites of political organisation. Read the famous cases of the Okolo family or Anwar Ditta and there are law centres behind them.

Greater Manchester – an area of 2.8 million people – once had nine law centres but now has just two. Huge parts of the region have been reduced to advice deserts. A recent survey found that 90% of people with welfare benefits issues were not in receipt of help.



This is what makes Greater Manchester Law Centre so unusual. Law centres are closing down, not opening. To paraphrase one of its early supporters, Mark George QC, 'you are all crazy!' GMLC seeks to provide high quality, free and independent legal advice and representation and has done this by adopting a strategy that honours the tradition of the law centre movement, while also developing innovative ways of securing access to justice.

Like its predecessors, it has situated itself within the community. Two consultation meetings, held in areas of inner city Manchester, saw unanimous support for opening a new law centre. As a result, a fantastic newly renovated building was found in the historic Moss Side area. As well as providing legal advice and representation, it has also committed to embedding itself into community projects and campaigns and ensuring that people in the area are an essential, everyday part of the organisation.

The developing law centre has also looked forward. Working closely with Avon and Bristol Law centre, GMLC has adopted and developed Bristol's immensely successful student led-project (which provides free legal representation challenging work capability assessments), which will be rolled out this year at the Manchester Law School. The law centre is also working with partners to incorporate their pro bono commitments in the provision of its free legal services. Indeed, just last week GMLC rolled out its first free advice and representation service, challenging negative Employment Support Allowance decisions. Another of the many innovations that GMLC has been carefully putting together is the 'lawyer fund generation scheme', which invites lawyers, primarily from private practice (so as not to burden legal aid firms) to donate a monthly standing order equivalent to 0.5 % of their earnings. This is ring fenced for services and while the contribution is modest, its impact could be significant.



All of this has been achieved with collective hard work and support. Indeed, the law centre has the backing of judges (including Sir Henry Brooke), peers, firms, chambers, third sector organisations, trade unions, universities and most importantly, the community. It is proud to boast not just Michael Mansfield QC as a patron but also John Hendy QC, Lord Bach, Dr Erinma Bell, Robert Lizar and the critically acclaimed actress Maxine Peake – and all of this in less than a year. But much work still has to be done. Volunteers and supporters have been and will continue to be the backbone of this initiative and so it is incumbent on everyone who is committed to access to justice to make a contribution, whether with their time or money. If people want it, there will be a law centre.

To get involved, visit the [website](#) or follow them on [Twitter](#)

Written by Tanzil Chowdhury

Development Worker, Greater Manchester Law Centre (Steering Group)

This article was originally published in the Haldane Society magazine. It mentions two other law centres in Greater Manchester, who also do vital work and who deserve a huge amount of credit for managing to stay open during such difficult times. They are [Bury Law Centre](#) and [Rochdale Law Centre](#).



Street Support

There been quite a bit of publicity in Manchester about what going to be available for homeless people over the holiday period. The best place to start is Street Support’s Christmas Drop-in Timetable which can be found [here](#) along with a map to show where the providers are situated.

If you can help by offering something appropriate please [get in touch](#) with Street Support. Thanks.

Neighbourhood Food Collection December 1—3rd across the country

Over the first weekend in December across the country hundreds of people were helping out with the Neighbourhood Food Collections. It will take a while for every can, jar, packet and box to be counted but in the meantime here’s what was collected at just one store.

At the Tesco in Handforth Dean over 4 tonnes of food was donated for the Trussell Trust’s Stockport foodbanks which is about 20% up on the collection in the summer and 30% up on the last Christmas’s collection!



Far left: Nigel Tedford, Project Manager at Stockport Foodbank together with some surprisingly young helpers!

The volunteers also noticed that a higher percentage of the shoppers were donating, with fewer people passing by the collection table without stopping to drop something off whether it was a single tin or half a trolley-full and many people had something to say about the ‘shocking need for food banks in a country like this.’

Stockport Foodbank has 5 distribution points in Reddish, Bredbury, Hazel Grove, Heaton Moor and Cheadle as well as two new drop-in foodbanks in Offerton and Bramhall. They have experienced a 10% increase on the same period last year (Jan – Nov) and are handing out the equivalent of around 85,000 meals a year. No one sees a reduction in this demand coming through. For further information about donating to or volunteering at Stockport Foodbank please [get in touch](#).

Inspiring Change Manchester

Manchester Housing First Pilot—the first six months



A Big Lottery funded project led by Shelter in partnership with:



Housing First is a radical evidence-based approach to supporting people who have long histories of recurring homelessness to secure and maintain their own good quality accommodation.

“We currently have 4 tenants housed through Housing First. We’re making sure that we’re as attentive as possible to people in the settling in period and have arranged support meetings for tenants, bringing together key staff and setting specific goals so that everyone has a clear understanding about where they want things to go. There are also more people coming onto the programme and, at last week’s panel, we approved a further 5 new clients for the scheme.

Evaluators from the University of York spent time with people from across the pilot, talking to staff and clients about their experiences of Housing First so far. This was so we build a comprehensive understanding about the programme

We’re gradually making inroads into the Private Rented Sector and are increasing the number of landlords and agents that we work with. We’ve had some really positive meetings with housing associations and social housing should start becoming available to Housing First clients over the next month and beyond.

Now that the project is almost 6 months in, we’ve reflected on what we’ve learned and are currently drafting new processes to make clearer how Housing First can work as part of ICM. These should be ready to be shared soon.

It’s easy to get sucked in to thinking about ‘properties’ and ‘units’ and ‘accommodation’ but it’s actually the concept of ‘home’ that will make the biggest difference to our clients. “

Ben Godfrey
Housing First Development Officer

Forthcoming Events:

Toys, Tears and Tinsel

Wednesday December 14th 2016 from 6 - 8pm at Wood Street Mission, 26 Wood Street, Manchester, M3 3EF



A festive look through the archives of one of Manchester's oldest charities which has been helping families at Christmas time since the 1870s. This is part of a series of heritage focused activities the charity is undertaking to raise awareness about child poverty in the run up to 150th anniversary in 2019. The event is free but guests could consider making a donation to [Wood Street Mission's Christmas appeal](#).

Christmas Carol Service at Manchester Cathedral

Monday 19th December 2016 2.00pm until 3.00pm - followed by refreshments at Manchester Cathedral, M3 1SX

Join them for a festive celebration and sing along to your favourite traditional Christmas Carols. Hear a special performance from the Booth Centre Streetwise Opera group. This service will celebrate the work of homeless services in our city, all welcome. There will be a retiring collection in support of the Booth Centre. The event is free but please email [Amy](#) to register or call 0161 835 2499



Six Families, Two Years, One Researcher: An exhibition of Everyday Life in Austerity

Friday January 27th, 2017 from 1.15pm - 2.15pm at GMCVO, St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Ardwick, M12 6FZ

University of Manchester researcher Sarah M. Hall followed the everyday life of six families for two years.

Working with North West zine artist Stef Bradley the findings were then turned into an exhibition that is visually appealing, but also thought provoking and has attracted widespread attention in the policy world.



Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign: Campaign Group Meeting

Monday January 30th, 2017 2 - 4pm at Room 8, The Union MMU, 21 Higher Cambridge Street, Manchester M15 6AD

You are invited to come along to the first Campaign meeting of 2017. Please let [Alec](#) know if you are planning to attend. We hope to see you there.



Why GM Poverty Action?

In the Recommendations Report of the Greater Manchester Poverty Commission, 2.4 *Maintaining Momentum on Poverty* called for the formation of a Poverty Action Group to help take forward the work of the Commission.

A small number of public, private and civic sector individuals came together to form GMPA. This group has since grown to over 700 individuals from more than 200 organisations plus Local Authorities and MPs and an increasing number of members of the public.

GMPA is based upon principles of cooperation between organisations.

For more information about Greater Manchester Poverty Action

please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) or visit our [Facebook](#) page. You can also visit our YouTube channel [Community Voices](#)

All these platforms are there to share news and opinion from our readers, from GM Poverty Action and from the community.

We want to celebrate our successes, find new ways of working together and provide a voice for the people living in poverty in our region. But we can only do this with your help and support.

For more information or to share your news please contact [Chris](#) or [Peter](#).

Copies of previous newsletters are available on our [website](#)

If you would like to contact us or submit an article for inclusion in a newsletter please get in touch in one of the following ways:

Post: c/o 5th Floor Church House, 90 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2GH

Or contact our Communications Manager: Chris Bagley
T: 07419 774537 [Email](#)
and we will reply as soon as possible.

NB GMPA does not have full-time dedicated administrative support so please do not expect an immediate response.

