

Soup Kitchens in Preston

Report on Action Research

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Of The Salvation Army Preston

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What we did:

Between July and December 2009 we convened a steering group which met regularly every 4-6 weeks. Members were drawn from staff and voluntary co-ordinators of the different drop ins around the city. All the organisations involved in this type of work were contacted and included in an email list. Over the period every facility was visited at least once and informal conversations about the work took place. Various information leaflets were distributed to ensure all groups knew about each others existence and services, and also to raise awareness of what could be considered good practice in running a soup kitchen. (see appendices). In addition a number of more formal focus group sessions were held with groups of volunteers with the aim of undertaking a brief self evaluation of achievement and issues. Over the period the researcher and colleagues were involved on a week by week hands on basis in the provision of a soup kitchen service and drop in at The Salvation Army, and in monitoring the work carried out there.

Overview of the situation in Preston

Across Preston in 2009 we identified four centres which were running 10 regular weekly sessions which could be described as soup kitchens, drop ins with food or community cafes. Typically they provide a free or very cheap meal, a warm place to sit a friendly welcome, a listening ear and varying levels of relevant well informed formal advice and advocacy and additional items such as bedding, clothing toiletries and showers. In addition we were aware of one fairly regular outreach “soup and socks” run organised by the Friars and Catholic chaplaincy at St Walberges and three other teams who at least occasionally venture out at night and offer help to those who are on the streets.

There is at least one centre or team offering help on every day of the week and on some days or nights more than one centre is open. Numbers using these services vary but typically centres report 20-30 people receiving food at each session. Many people use more than one centre or service in the course of a week, and a number are recognised around the network as long term service users for the “circuit” as a whole. It is hard to assess how many different individuals may be helped by these different centres in the course of a year but our best estimate is at least 60 and maybe as many as 100.

These estimates contrast markedly with the officially recognised number of rough sleepers found in Preston and it’s immediate surrounding area. The last official Census on a November night in 2009 found a total of only 8 people bedded down without proper shelter, a number somewhat reduced from previous years. They also bear little direct relationship to the 108 households accepted by the Council as Statutory Homeless; Applicants Accepted as Owed a Main Homelessness Duty in the 12 months to March 2009.

SOUP KITCHENS AND DROP IN CENTRES ETC IN PRESTON 2009				
Venue	Organisation Running it	Day	Time	Reported regular Numbers of users
St James Church	St James Church	Monday	6.30pm - 8	20+
St James Church	The Freedom Centre	Tuesday	6pm-8pm	20-40
Fishergate Baptist Church	Level Ground; Fishergate Baptist Church	Monday	7.15pm- 8.30	20-30
Fishergate Baptist Church	Main Junction; Fishergate Baptist Church + Young Peoples Service	Wednesday	1pm-4pm	
Fishergate Baptist Church	Restoring Lives (ended October 2009)	Saturday	7pm-9pm	20-30
The Salvation Army	The Salvation Army	Friday	12-1;30pm	20-30
Foxton Centre	Foxton Centre Community Cafe	Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday Saturday (from October)	11 am-3pm 11;30am-2-30pm	
Street Outreach Teams				
New Hall Lane / Meadow Street	Street Pastors	Friday	Late night	
New Hall Lane / Meadow Street	Foxton Centre	various		
Town Centre	Soup n Socks RC Chaplaincy	Sunday	Late evening	
Town Centre	Disobey Network	Wednesday	Late evening	
Town Centre	Synergy Neil & Terry	Occasionally winter 08-9	Late night	

Recurring Issues

Conversations with people involved in the various soup kitchens and drop ins indicated there were a number of recurring issues. These included

Who is being served (and missed)?

Most volunteers and the groups had started from a perspective of **“having a heart for the homeless, and not being able to walk past someone in the street without offering some help.”** Part of the learning curve has been to recognise that homelessness is not the same as being out on the streets or as being in destitution or need. The soup kitchens and drop ins offer a service that is valued by a wide range of people some of whom have never been technically homeless but are simply facing long term poverty and inability to cope with life, others who are in insecure or inadequate housing and relationships (sofa surfing), others who have had repeated episodes of homelessness but currently have a roof over their head, and others who are rough sleeping, squatting or camping, among who are a small group who have become long term entrenched rough sleepers permanently based in Preston. Over three quarters are men, mostly aged between 25 and 55, mostly white and with local origins and connections. Most of the women who use the services seem to be in relationships with a partner who also attends. Very occasionally a couple with children also make use of a soup kitchen or drop in.

Regular long term users of these services are often well known to one another and have strong networks which can often be mutually supportive, yet are often fragile and prone to conflict, exploitation and violent disputes. A number of service users report that they prefer not to (or are scared to) attend other centres on the other side of town because of particular people or groups they may encounter there. Also it is apparent that there are a fair number of people who would benefit from the free food and support on offer in these centres, who deliberately avoid them, saying that they want to keep away from the “bad company” of other users who will tend to draw them back into destructive lifestyles.

Level of complex needs

Typical pathways into homelessness and destitution involve, poverty and worklessness, relationship breakdown, leaving institutions (care home, forces, prison), addictions and mental health problems. Many of the services users have experienced several of these issues at the same time and are clients of a range of statutory and semi statutory agencies ranging from the job centre, housing advice, to probation to alcohol and drug services and are also in frequent contact with the police. Those who are parents often also have dealings with children’s social services. In many cases they feel alienated from official agencies, who have not managed to solve their problems and have been perceived as coercive rather than helpful. Often the alternative very informal ethos of the soup kitchens and drop ins is welcomed and appreciated. A friendly welcome and a listening ear is usually offered and valued.

However, the flip side of this is that volunteers often feel out of their depth, and powerless to solve practical issues such as benefits entitlement and housing rights. Some volunteers lack confidence and social skills and find it difficult to engage at any level with the service users and limit their roles to making and serving food. At one drop in **“It was apparent most of the volunteers had minimal awareness of the agencies in the network that can help homeless people. There is a tendency to refer things to the minister who has a good knowledge and network.”**

Information Circulation

Gradually however news is filtering through to people involved in soup kitchens about recent changes in policy and practice in homelessness provision. The Preston Homeless Forum has a proactive information sharing strategy, with a web site and range of leaflets available offering up to date advice for service users and those seeking to help them. Part of the action research element of our project was to make sure these information sources were better known around the network of soup kitchens.

As a result most people involved with the homeless seem to know that there is no longer a direct access night shelter in Preston so the traditional advice of a few years ago of “go along to Fox Street to see if there is a bed available” is unlikely to be offered. Information leaflets issued by the forum may have had some success in raising awareness that the appropriate referral route is to Foxtan Centre, Urban Exchange or the PCC Housing Advisory Office where full assessments are made and options can be explored.

However, some volunteers express amazement and frustration that there is no direct instant provision of shelter for people without a roof over their head, and that procedures seem complex and beset with hoops to jump through.

This frustration and limited awareness of the range of services on offer in the city has led over the very cold winter weather of December January 2009-10 to an independent group opening an informal and unregulated emergency shelter. This operated at a time when the agreed “winter watch” plan was in operation whereby the City Council, working in partnership with the Forum and the Foxtan Centre, offered fully staffed and supported emergency shelter for those on the streets. Nine individuals made use of this facility and all were offered assessments and access to appropriate housing options, with in many cases a good “result”. A number of people preferred to use the unofficial shelter because of the freedom of the regime and we believe there may be one or two rough sleepers who were unwilling or unable to engage with either and continued to sleep out.

Duplication of services:

There was some concern that the network of soup kitchens and drop ins was offering similar low level services almost round the clock and that some users would take all they could get from anyone who offered. In particular there is almost identical provision on a Monday evening at St. James, church and Fishergate Baptist and a few users do indeed go from one to the other and get two free meals. (However, in January

2010 the Monday night soup kitchen run by St James' church decided to cease operation at least temporarily due to a difficulty in sustaining volunteer involvement and in order to seriously review what they were doing.) Duplication also means that users are required to navigate their way around the city, and sometimes present different versions of their story at different centres in order to obtain particular types of sympathy and help, and that ground rules for assistance varied at different centres. There was some support for centralising most such drop in facilities at one venue, although it was recognized this might mean that a service user who felt excluded or fearful or had been barred from a service would have no alternative provision available.

What is the aim...?

Some projects have been set up and many volunteers offer services out of a basic religious/ Christian motivation. This may be almost entirely compassion for those in need or almost entirely about bringing a spiritual message of salvation to sinners, but is more usually some combination of the two emphases. Experience of working in the field seems to change people's understanding. As one group put it **“Recognising that all of us need a faith based transformation in our lives, that it would be wrong to push it or evangelise too heavily, and that though people often express spiritual needs and can have them met, for example some people like to go into the main church area to pray.. it is uncommon to see a complete change.”**

Another volunteer **spoke** about how her **first attempts to engage had been about witnessing for Christ but soon learned she couldn't ignore the material need.**

The aim of the project in which she worked had started with big ideas about setting up rehabilitation hostels but had become more realistic over time until it was defined as **to improve the quality of life for homeless people, wherever they were along the road..**

What counts as success? It is evident that no one would get and stay involved in working in a soup kitchen or drop in if they saw no hope that their efforts could help bring about a positive change in at least one homeless person's life. Given the difficulty of getting sustainable housing solutions for many of the service users achievements are perceived as hard to measure, often expressed in terms of very soft outcomes, such as building trust and friendship. People also expressed a sense of achievement over internal organisational progress and capacity building, the fun of team building and the impact of networking with other agencies.

However, it was usually around stories of individuals who had been significantly helped through the work of the volunteers for example as in the following comments

- **Occasionally as recently one person comes back to say thanks because the drop in was a first step on the path to a secure resettlement (on a route through Foxton Centre to Fox Street Community to independent supported tenancy)**
- **Some clients helped into a rehab or housing.**

- **One story of a particular Client D... whose life had been turned around from a destructive lifestyle of addiction and homelessness**

However there was also a sense of realism that such success stories were exceptional and **many people get stuck and keep coming back with the same issues and problems as before.**

Do soup kitchens perpetuate homelessness. and social exclusion.?

There has recently been much public debate in the homelessness industry especially in London about the wisdom of offering unconditional immediate help to street homeless people. Westminster in particular has actively discouraged churches and voluntary groups from organising soup runs and free soup kitchens. Generally government policy has been to concentrate the offer of help on the hostels plus programme which provides decent quality accommodation together with serious social work interventions for clients who fit particular criteria and are willing and able to engage seriously and abide by certain conditions of behaviour etc.

Within the soup kitchens in Preston there is some, and growing awareness of these debates and locally the arguments and need for continued soup kitchen work can be set out as follows:

- The take up of the offer of food, warmth and social safe space, together with the stories told by users about their experiences of poverty proves there is a continuing need.
- The informality and personal friendship offered by soup kitchens means that for some people who are alienated they are almost the only places where deeply excluded people engage with the wider world.
- The improved collaboration and networking across the Preston Homeless Forum means that soup kitchens can be the entry point into a referral, advocacy and support system that offers the chance for people to move on from their chaotic lifestyles.

On the other side there is an awareness that many service users play the system and take as much as they can get from all the organisations that are willing to give anything for free. People talked about whether offering free food simply allowed people to spend what money they had on drink or drugs. There was also an awareness of **the difficulty in helping guests to find safe and helpful networks of people, friends to be trusted** and that the network of relationships with other service users fostered by the range of soup kitchens and drop ins could be detrimental to individual progress.

One element of this debate has been around whether or not to charge even a minimal amount for food provided. The Foxton Centre Community café does charge £1 for meals and Restoring Lives had taken the decision that they would do the same. All the other soup kitchens remain free. In favour of charging is that it brings a bit more

dignity, less dependency and less chance to “milk the system”. Against this is the charitable instinct and the realism that many service users are habitually penniless.

Health and safety issues

The managers of most of the soup kitchens and drop ins seem generally to recognise the need for sensible policies and practices on risk, health and safety, food hygiene. However, it is not clear whether all of them have written guidelines or policies and still less whether all volunteers are aware of and abide by them. In many cases policies and practices have been devised out of experience rather than out of demands for compliance. One group put it like this **We learned gradually and by visiting other projects in nearby towns.. we devised rules for street outreach like going out in twos and not divulging personal contact information.. Now we get CRB checks for volunteers and have sent people on First Aid Training.. I can't say we have not felt pressure from the authorities imposing regulations on these things but have done it anyway.**

Food safety is one area of concern. Leaders and organisers were aware of some of the issues and in most of the organisations there was at least one person who had food hygiene training at a basic level and who took some responsibility for catering. It is not clear however whether all the kitchen facilities used were at a high standard or that policies and procedures were strictly adhered to by all participants. We heard of places where food was prepared in volunteers homes and then brought in, and know of many occasions where surplus prepared food is donated (for example after functions which have been over supplied). One soup kitchen has a regular supply of bread (becoming out of date for sale) donated from a supermarket which is offered to and taken home by service users. There may not be high risks of widespread or serious food poisoning in such practices but it is incumbent that all such activities are operated at the highest possible standards. It also needs to be borne in mind that many of the service users may be particularly vulnerable to infection because of their lifestyle, addictions, poor diets and inability to manage high standards of personal hygiene.

There are also some health risks especially in terms of the high risk of blood borne diseases such as hepatitis and HIV/Aids when working with some of the potential service users. In so far as there is much awareness of these issues in the local soup kitchens it is more by accident than systematically, for example a group of volunteers might include a health professional who has shared knowledge and concerns in these areas. It is far from clear however, that all volunteers have been made aware of the risks or that there is a widespread policy of advising them about risks and how to avoid them by good practice or where appropriate getting immunised.

Risk management

Similarly there is a possibility that in informal soup kitchen settings that not everyone is well enough briefed on fire safety, building evacuation and first aid arrangements. It is not known whether formal written risk assessments have been done, and it seems likely that many volunteers are not at all aware of them if they do exist.

One of the more obvious areas of risk that the volunteers did talk about is that of difficult or violent service users and the risk of assault or worse on staff or other users. Despite the prevalence of alcoholism, drug misuse and mental health issues among service users the experience of the soup kitchens over many years is that such incidents are extremely rare. In the context of a drop in centre where service users often express grateful thanks for what they receive, and where the presence of a fairly large group of people seems to moderate behaviour tempers rarely flare up. When they do volunteers observed that it is usually the service users themselves rather than staff that sort things out and restore peace.

Most soup kitchens operated with a minimal set of rules as an implicit contract with their guests. One group was typical in saying our **behaviour policy demands tolerance and respect for all, no foul and abusive language, leave booze outside and no illegal drugs to be brought on the premises.. Occasionally we have had to ask people to leave or even exclude people.**

There were a handful of stories where police had been called, or even visited in order to track down and arrest a suspect. **only twice have we had to call police and once that was a street fight of revellers not service users.**

We also encountered a number of cases where families with children had turned up at soup kitchens. There are two potential issues here. Firstly it is possible and sometimes known that some service users have been convicted of offences against children, or more dangerously have avoided detection. In a public setting with parents present immediate risks are unlikely to emerge, though staff and volunteers need to be vigilant, especially if they have information about particular service users. Secondly where a child is brought into a soup kitchen that in itself is cause for concern since at the very least it indicates extreme poverty. Good practice would be to make sensitive enquiries of the parent and carers including asking if statutory social services are involved with the family. Where the answers are unconvincing or evasive, or in cases where a service user makes a disclosure about a child, in their family, in their care or even in their social network which causes serious concern there is no doubt that the leaders of the activity have a clear duty to contact the social services department and inform the service user they will need to do so. However, it has been the experience of some staff working in soup kitchens that the response from social services is far from satisfactory. The initial contact is normally with a call centre, where the telephone operative is unable (for good confidentiality reasons) to feedback any information on the case. Sometimes a response from a social worker has emerged a week or more later, on one occasion at least phrased in terms of a demand to complete a long formal referral form, which the average soup kitchen worker or volunteer has neither time, sufficient information or assessment skills to do.

A final area of risk is to vulnerable service users from volunteers. Unsuitable and dangerous individuals may volunteer to help needy people for very dubious motives, and although it is unlikely they would perpetrate offences in the public context of the drop in session there are opportunities for “grooming” through the contacts they make there. Some soup kitchens and drop ins have formalised their volunteering procedures to the extent of demanding references and CRB checks for all staff and volunteers. Others are far more informal, or do not have the resources and capacity to do so. It is a matter for debate which approach is most appropriate.

A way forward for soup kitchens and drop ins

What then is the way forward for the various soup kitchens and drop ins that serve homeless people in Preston.? There are a number of issues to consider and these are our tentative recommendations. They are offered for discussion and debate rather than as firm proposals.

Where do these activities fit in the homelessness and rough sleeping strategies?

Preston City Council is required by government to have and work to strategy documents on homelessness in general and rough sleeping in particular. These strategies have been developed over recent years in consultation with the agencies who are members of the Preston Homeless Forum and with some input from homeless service users. There are some indications that targets and aspirations set out in the strategy documents are now being achieved.

While in some parts of the country local authorities are positively discouraging informal voluntary help to homeless people on the streets in Preston it is recognised that soup kitchens and drop ins play a valuable role in supporting people in need. They can also provide a first bridging point which allows extremely marginalised people to engage with the agencies and channels which can open up pathways back into housing and social inclusion. *We would recommend that those running soup kitchens etc. make themselves more familiar with the overall strategies and reflect on their place within this. Also it is important that their work is seen as broader than the specific issue of homelessness and rough sleeping and is seen as a wider contribution to other social agendas, for example strategies for wellbeing, alcohol harm reduction and mental health and community safety.*

Fragility, Informality and Independence

The informality and independence of the soup kitchen network is something to be valued in that it often leads to an environment where people feel welcome and at home, in a way they would not in more “official” settings. However, the flip side of this is that informal operations can be very fragile in that they operate on shoestring budgets depend on volunteers and often on one or two key leaders with drive and enthusiasm. Volunteers are usually recruited through personal, and often church based, networks. *Operations might be more sustainable if there was a way to recruit and channel suitable volunteers and resources to particular centres and sessions. Groups could also be encouraged and supported if someone on behalf of the homeless forum could regularly keep in touch, affirm their efforts and advise the organisers of soup kitchens about current issues and good practice. This has begun to happen through our project but needs someone to be designated as responsible if it is to be sustained. On the other hand independence needs to be maintained for example on issues of religious ethos, how to ration handouts and charging policy.*

Growing collaboration?

Most of the soup kitchens, drop ins and soup runs are independent, poorly resourced and therefore find it difficult to keep in touch with each other and the network. This has led to a certain duplication of services and in some instances to wasting resources, such as surpluses of food which are difficult for one group to use on a single night but which might safely be used somewhere else the next night. ***Our recommendation is that the soup kitchens etc. should try to find time to meet up together on a regular basis and develop ways of co-operating. In particular they should try to resolve the situation where two identical services operate on a Monday night but other evenings are not covered.***

Referral pathways.

Most of the soup kitchen volunteers have little knowledge of appropriate referral pathways into housing or other services, and do not have professional advice or assessment skills. ***However, they all should become aware of and make known a simple message that service users who want to get their problems sorted out need to go as soon as possible to one of the advice points...either Foxton Community café or for people aged 25 or under to Urban Exchange.***

Increasing Quality and Skills.

Even though soup kitchens and similar projects are volunteer led there is no necessity for them to offer a poor quality and perhaps unsafe service. They need to ensure that quality does not fall below a basic threshold on issues such as food safety, fire procedures, first aid, suitability of volunteers, managing risk and dealing with aggressive behaviour. ***The Preston Homeless forum network is well positioned to find funding and expertise to offer some basic training in these areas and should be encouraged to do so.***

User Involvement:

The charitable ethos of many soup kitchen type activities means that there is still an element of “doing good unto needy people” rather than empowering them or providing help in response to user defined needs. There has been some welcome consultation processes with service users, and it has to be admitted that this is extremely difficult with some of the most marginalised clients. On the one hand they may have low aspirations, on the other unrealistic expectations and a difficulty in articulating their views. In some of the soup kitchens there is a desire to involve service users on a more equal footing, for example by cooking, eating and washing up together. However there are some practical difficulties in this, for example many volunteers prefer to stay in the safety of the kitchen area, or there are realistic fears about hygiene standards of the guests. ***Our recommendation is that consultation process continue to be developed, and that the network explores some pilot schemes around greater participation of service users in the work of the soup kitchens.***

Added services....

A number of the soup kitchens and drop ins already offer some additional activities and services such as internet access, job seeking support, Narcotics Anonymous meetings on the premises at the same time, gardening or arts projects. There would seem to be more potential for this sort of activity, although moving beyond the informal such as offering pool and table tennis (which in any case may not be easy to manage in a volatile group situation) would require strong management structures and some funding input. ***Our recommendation is that explorations about these ideas should be made with other potential partners such as drugs and alcohol services and arts and sports groups and funding streams to support such activities could be money well spent.***

Training / Capacity Building Event.

This was arranged to be held as part of Poverty and Homelessness Week, at The Salvation Army Harrington Street PR1 7BN on Saturday 6th February 2010; 9:30am – 2pm.

It was advertised as

A session for volunteer helpers from the different centres to meet to :

- Share their experiences and encourage each other
- Discover and inform themselves about what is available in the city
- Reflect on the vision and mission of their groups
- Get a basic briefing on working safely and food hygiene standards

Over 30 people attended and all of the soup kitchens and drop in centres operating at the time, as well as the Street Pastors night outreach team, Fox Street. Emmaus Preston and the Health Team for the Homeless were represented.

After a welcome by Major Carole Babstock of The Salvation Army and an introductory quiz compiled by Tim Keightley (Chair of the Preston Homeless Forum) there were two plenary presentations.

First Kevin Mordue who heads up the homelessness work of Preston City Council gave a general introduction to homelessness issues and services available in Preston. He also spoke about the homelessness strategy and the rough sleeper's strategy for the city. He was ably assisted by Nigel Francis the manager of Fox Street Community who spoke about the facilities and new model of work at Fox Street which involves offering housing plus serious social work interventions to help homeless people address their complex needs.

After a coffee break Greg Smith reported on the Soup Kitchen Action research project which he has carried out over the last six months. This involved a powerpoint presentation of key findings and recommendations found in this report. In the open session which followed each of the centres represented briefly spoke about their current experiences and situation and we discussed common issues and ways of working better together.

Information resources and leaflets were shared out and participants were shown the new version of the Homeless in Preston Website.
<http://homelessinpreston.yolasite.com/>

For the penultimate session the conference split into 3 groups.

Group 1 concentrated on practical risk management in soup kitchen type projects. Kris Ireson an environmental health officer and soup kitchen volunteer gave a presentation on major food hygiene issues. The group then discussed other areas of risk including fire safety and inter-personal risk in settings where some people may have mental health or addiction issues.

Group 2 led by Mandy Poole of the Foxton Centre and Kevin Mordue of PCC looked at the detail of Housing Options and assessment procedures for homeless people.

Group 3 led by Nigel Francis of Fox Street and Bev Lyon from Preston City Council looked at the issue of clients with complex needs and the operation of the multi-agency Complex Needs panel.

In a final plenary session we gathered up conclusions and unanswered questions from the morning. We agreed it had been a valuable session and that the group would continue to keep in touch in the first place by circulating a list of email addresses. Over a buffet lunch the networking continued.

Interim Advice Leaflet... circulated to all soup kitchens and drop in Autumn 2009

Running A Soup Kitchen, Drop In or Street Outreach for Homeless People in Preston

What volunteer workers need to know.

1. Information Sources

Most information is available on the Homeless in Preston web site <http://www.homelessinpreston.btik.com/> You can download and print off leaflets to hand out to homeless people, and advice on how to help homeless people..

The main one covering all the drop ins and emergency services is the On the Streets poster
http://www.homelessinpreston.btik.com/attachments/on_the_streets_poster_1.pdf

2. Where to Refer People who need Help.

The Foxton Centre Community café is the best one stop shop for getting advice, housing need assessments and support with applications for homeless people, particularly for singles over 25 who are “on the streets”

For 16-25 year olds Barnardos Moving On Project based at Urban Exchange is the key point of contact.

3. Policies and responsibilities you need to think about

- **Vision and Mission:** What is the key purpose of your activity? What would count as success? Are you actually helping people to move forward in their lives or just colluding with them in keeping them dependent on handouts and free food?
- **Food hygiene..** If you are cooking and serving food even if you are giving it away you will have a legal and moral duty to make sure that it is safe to eat. Someone really needs to have a Food hygiene certificate and take responsibility to make sure that your food handling practices are as safe as possible.
- **Child safeguarding issues..** what are you going to do if under 16s turned up to a soup kitchen with or without a parent/carer. Or if one of your service users disclosed something about a child linked with them that caused concern. If protection of children is a concern you have a duty to inform the authorities which overrides any concern with confidentiality.
- **Managing Volunteers:** How do you maximise the potential of your volunteers and make their time interesting and valuable so that they really feel needed and keep coming back? What is your policy in terms of CRB checks and the new vetting and barring procedures as they are likely to be working with vulnerable adults.

- **Managing risk of various sorts.** You are required by law to do a written risk assessment for your activity and to consider how best to minimise all foreseeable risks. These will include everyday things like fire safety, food hygiene and manual handling, and first aid cover. But because you will be encountering people who have complex needs and chaotic lives, including addictions, mental health and offending behaviour you need to consider risks to property and persons. How are you going to handle aggressive behaviour? How are you going to deal with those who want to bring in alcohol or deal in illegal drugs? Are you aware of the risks of needles and what do you know about hepatitis and other blood borne diseases?

If you want to explore some of these issues in more depth put this date in your diary. Saturday 6th Feb 2010. As part of the churches Poverty and Homelessness Week Preston Homeless Forum is going to hold a training morning at the Salvation Army.