



Celebrating 20 years of working together
to end homelessness in Brighton & Hove

Emmaus Brighton & Hove Community 20th Anniversary edition Newsletter

A message from Terry Waite CBE, President of Emmaus UK

'The residents of Brighton and Hove have much to be proud of not least for their support over the past 20 years for the Emmaus Community. Emmaus not only provides a home for those without one but also enables them to regain their dignity as human beings and make a worthwhile contribution to society. None of this could have happened without the support and encouragement of local residents and we in Emmaus are truly grateful for the encouragement they have given. Emmaus Brighton and Hove has clearly shown that given a chance many homeless people can make a success of their lives. Emmaus continues to play a vital role in helping Brighton become a more caring and compassionate community. Long may that continue.'



What makes the Brighton & Hove Community unique?

Previously a Georgian manor house and an Edwardian convent, our Grade II listed building, set in stunning landscaped gardens, has given us the largest, and perhaps most beautiful, Emmaus Community in the country.

In addition to accommodation for 48 Companions, we boast an all-day café with a lovely sun terrace, a Secondhand Superstore of quality second hand furniture, clothes, bric-a-brac, a vintage & retro Emporium, the new Bedroom Store at Emmaus within the 1930s chapel, and the Greenhouse for all things garden-related. Within the grounds there is a wild meadow, vegetable bed and even beehives to produce our own honey.

We also have a second outlet on the Southwick seafront, Emmaus by the sea, which features more secondhand goods, coffee, tea & cake.



20th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Happy 20th Birthday to us! We've come a long way in two decades, so in this special issue we'd like to thank all the people who've supported us, and remind ourselves what an extraordinary journey it's been.

It all began back in the early 1990s, when the current site was still a convent, and for Sussex's many homeless, the only choice was a temporary hostel or sleeping rough. Cherry Mares and Clive Hewitt, both based at what is now the University of Brighton, felt something should be done, and also wanted to promote the relatively new concept of recycling.



Cherry and Clive visited an Emmaus Community in France, and left so impressed that, together with community development consultant Charlie Jordan, they decided to set up one here. In June 1995 the concept was launched at a huge event at the University, attended by business representatives, councillors, religious groups, charitable housing organisations, the director of Emmaus UK - and one Sister Margaret O'Shea, Mother Superior of St Marye's. She suggested that her convent in Portslade, which was about to close, might be the perfect site for the new venture.

Over the next two years the local community pulled together to bring the idea to fruition. A business plan was established and working groups were set up to establish premises, funding and publicity. Money poured in, local businesses donated transport and office space. Volunteers stepped up to help with anything from advising on building maintenance to writing newsletters. To allay the anxiety of local residents, members of other Communities attended a public meeting, speaking movingly of what Emmaus had done for them. By early 1997, everything was in place.

On February 4th the Brighton & Hove Community opened its doors under the leadership of Dominic Dring, who moved on site with his wife and family. Soon Companions started to arrive. The shop (now the Secondhand Superstore) opened in the June, followed a few months later by a small coffee bar.

And now look. Today we boast almost fifty Companions, several staff members including welfare & wellbeing, retail, business and catering managers, counsellors and maintenance workers, the Superstore, Emporium, Café, Greenhouse and grounds. We've provided a home, security and meaningful work for over one thousand previously homeless people and raised thousands for Solidarity projects. So Happy Birthday to us. And thank you for being a part of it.

Jenny Lecoat

**Visit our
Southwick
shop**

Emmaus

by the sea



Memories



The Secondhand Superstore has undergone some dramatic changes over the last two years. The main shop at Emmaus had never had a complete make-over in nearly twenty years. The walls were a hodgepodge of different colours and this grand old building was beginning to look tired.

Plans were made to brighten up the space; partition walls were taken down, painted windows removed or replaced and a fresh, warm colour palette used to create a feeling of light and space.

A new look Emporium was brought into the shop in what has to be one of most innovative retail spaces to be found anywhere. Using reclaimed and recycled materials, a new retail hub was built in the middle of the Superstore, designed to put service at the centre of everything we do.

Recently, the Transport Office has been moved into the Superstore to make donating easier. The Greenhouse too has relocated to the Conservatory and a new entrance created in our old Loading Bay, giving better access to visitors who come on foot.

The renovation only tells part of the story. Our commitment to having service at the heart of everything meant not only building a new counter, but also a new Retail Team, made up of Companions, volunteers and staff. In an environment with training and support on offer, Companions are encouraged to take ownership of their workspace. Teams of Companions come together to plan and organise events within the shops, such as our record breaking Christmas Fair.

While we're always striving to improve, I think that results speak for themselves. Time and time again customers comment on how much they love coming to the new look Superstore. They tell us how well presented the shop is, that they love the new counter and how impressed they are that Companions built it. Customers comment on just how professional and polite the service is and what they love about Emmaus is our ability to surprise. There is always something new to explore. If you haven't been to the Superstore recently, don't just take their word for it, come and see for yourself what a Community working together can achieve.

Andy Hobbs

KIRSTY – THE 1 YEAR STORY



Ever wanted to find out more about the history of Emmaus and our beautiful site? If you're interested, you can now have a guided tour – courtesy of Kirsty, one of our Companions.

"I love the history of Emmaus – the fact that one person created all this to help people. There's an amazing story here, and it's like my home now. I feel by telling people about it, I'm doing something worthwhile – if people want a talk, they can just ask."

Kirsty's passion for the Community's history is particularly extraordinary, given her own. A year ago she was sofa-surfing after a 12-month jail term, and her chaotic life was leading her back into trouble.

"I had an unstable life, I wasn't motivated. It scares me to think where I'd have ended up, probably back in prison."

Fortunately she was able to get a place at Emmaus on the recommendation of her probation officer, and the move became a major turning point. Now she works in our café, Revive@emmaus, and loves her job.

"I love waking up in the morning to go to work. It took me a while to settle into the routine, but now I love dealing with the customers. Ian (*our Catering Manager*) has been really good with me, helping me reach my potential. I've got structure from him and I'm learning new skills. And I do my counselling now – that's something I never had before."

Emmaus' unique policy that Companions can stay as long as they need or want to, provided they don't break Community rules, is an important aspect for someone like Kirsty.

"I want to stay for a while, I'm just really happy here. I'm a completely different person now, I don't break the law any more. This place massively saved my life."

If you'd like to take part in one of Kirsty's guided tours, call Joel on 01273 426470 and ask about a booking.

Jenny Lecoat



MEMORIES



The beginning... *Cherry Mares, Founding Trustee*

I first visited an Emmaus Community in Colmar, France in 1990 with a group of international students. I little knew that what I learned that day would completely change my life.

There were 28 Companions in the Community, all previously street homeless, making their living by collecting and selling household goods and other possessions. The Emmaus shop was in a spacious rambling barn selling everything imaginable from large furniture to buttons and lace.

Delighted to meet our enthusiastic students, the Companions were soon telling us about their lives. One Companion had been sleeping rough for 15 years until he was ill and taken in by the Community and had lived there ever since.

The visit convinced me that Brighton should have an Emmaus. Ever since I began working at the Polytechnic in central Brighton I had been concerned by the numbers of people sleeping rough in the Pavilion gardens, sometimes drunk, sometimes on drugs, always homeless. Sometimes washing with water out of old beer cans.



That afternoon in Colmar I knew something could be done. My colleague Clive Hewitt was already involved and in a very short time we enlisted other interested people. Our first idea became an action plan. In 1995 as a retirement present for me, the Director of the Polytechnic hosted a "Get to know Emmaus" reception for over 100 influential people and the dream turned into a reality. Emmaus Brighton & Hove eventually opened in February 1997.

So many memories crowd in, but for me the most vivid concerns Companion Tiny, the biggest man I have ever seen, holding Community Leader Dominic's tiny new baby in his enormous hands, his face alight with amazement, his eyes full of tears.

The memory tells me something about the Emmaus Movement. *Something about love. **Without love there would be no EMMAUS.***

"Serve first those who suffer most"

Abbé Pierre, Founder

20 years of Solidarity by Community Leader, Mathieu Delarue

People of my generation, when hearing the word 'Solidarity' usually think first of Lech Walesa and the Gdansk shipyards. When I joined Emmaus in 1995 I came to realise that solidarity meant so much more.

Abbé Pierre asked us to consider others saying, "When we've a roof over our heads and had our fill of food, then we must look over our shoulders and consider those worse off than ourselves. *Et les autres.*"

Like a lot of people I thought that I had little to give and couldn't make things happen but after joining Emmaus I realised that, in fact, we really can change things for the better if we work together. Most Communities strive to become self-reliant and to generate a profit, some of which is given as Solidarity. Here in Brighton we tend to divide our Solidarity fund into Local Giving, National Solidarity and International Solidarity.

For many years now in Brighton, we've given literally tons of unwanted tools and sewing machines to a group who refurbish them and send them off to Africa where they help change peoples' lives for the better. We have also helped locally, giving tents, sleeping bags, warm clothing, etc. to rough sleepers and also to other organisations that help the homeless. Every month we take our turn, with other charities and churches, to give out hot soup, tea and sandwiches to the street homeless of Brighton.

Our National Solidarity is often aimed at helping other UK Communities, not just in giving money but in helping with manpower when Communities are struggling. For several months we sent long-term Companions to another Community to help set up their shop and start trading. This costs us little but makes a huge difference to those needing help.

On an international level we pay into a central Emmaus Solidarity fund but also help directly. For a few years now we've been sending two or three Companions to Bosnia to help with their work camp building homes and a social enterprise for people who are incredibly disadvantaged compared to us. We also answered a call for help from our Indian Companions after the tsunami of 2004. Recognised as one of the most catastrophic natural disasters in recent history, people found themselves without homes, their fishing boats destroyed and a lot of their land contaminated by the salt water. A co ordinated effort by Emmaus Communities helped restore their lives.

These are just a few examples of Solidarity work I recall but of course our work never ends. As I write I know that some Companions are setting aside warm clothing and toiletries to help street homeless in Brighton. Others will be working towards some project or other, hoping to help those less fortunate than us.



So if you're ever doubting that your donation won't make much difference to others remember these words of Abbe Pierré

Together, we can make a difference.



MEMORIES



20 years on... By Trustee Fiona Morris

It is a complete privilege to be able to continue to build on the pioneering work of the founding Trustees and their colleagues driven by Abbe Pierre's original vision of helping homeless people to help themselves whilst Emmaus provides a safe home, food and purpose.

My role as a Trustee is very clear... to put the Companions at the heart of all that we do and to ensure financial independence for our Community. And as a Trustee, my ability to help drive our Community forward is only as good as the quality of the rest of the people on the Board...and I am so fortunate to work with such an amazing team.



Not only do we take the tough, strategic decisions to ensure our future, many Trustees also work as volunteers. Our current skills and experiences include retail, general senior commercial management, HR, young people's social exclusion, design, architecture, law, volunteering, economics...and life.

Maximising the potential of the Portslade site is key to our long term success and significant changes were made in 2016 to achieve this...and that work continues.

I encourage anybody who has not been here, or has not been here recently, to come and see the sheer range and variety of goods on offer. And whilst you are here, enjoy a coffee or stay for lunch in our café, Revive. Similarly, our shop at Southwick has had a renewed and reinvigorated focus, achieving significant results.

At the core of this success are our Companions, our staff and our volunteers working together. Beyond commercial goals, the team work and mutual care and support is both life affirming and essential for us to thrive and not just survive.

Who wouldn't be moved when the Companions gave Dave, our Support Worker, immense personal kindness and backing when his father became ill and died?

Or in complete awe of Companion Arna when she confronted her fears and addressed 300 secondary school kids, telling them about her life as a homeless woman in Brighton? She shared her story and told of her high academic hopes and life dreams when she was their age and how drugs took over. She asked them to see the next homeless person lying in the shop door way very differently as it could have been her. Her audience were utterly spell bound and many were moved to tears.

And how ex Companion Brendan, who discovered his love for running when in the Community raised money for victims of domestic violence when competing in the Brighton Half Marathon, is raising money for Emmaus the same way this year.

And for every Companion there is a unique and important story.

Some Companions choose to stay with us for some time, others move on quite fast and over 1,000 people have been helped since our doors first opened. The latest figures suggest over 4,000 people are homeless in England so we all have much more to do.

Here's to the next 20 years of helping homeless people find safety and purpose. And here's to the end of homelessness...but that seems a long way off.

MEREDITH'S STORY



If you've been to our main site within the last year, you'll have seen the fantastic new design of our Superstore and Emporium – a recycled 'Alice-in-Wonderland' spectacle of upside-down lamps and tables that appear to grow out of the walls. Conceived by Emmaus Trustees and staff, much of the practical work was done by Meredith, a master carpenter for thirty-five years, who worked long hours for many months, often from no more than a verbal brief. Yet during that period, Meredith, then a Companion at Emmaus, was privately struggling with the end stages of a lifetime addiction to alcohol.

Despite long periods of sobriety over twenty years, Meredith was never able to break free of booze completely. Then the death of his partner in 2015 caused a mental breakdown and drove him into a catastrophic drinking binge. By November of that year he had lost his home and wound up in a detox unit, where staff put him in touch with Emmaus – a venue he'd visited as a customer twenty years earlier. Meredith instantly felt at home.

"I had my own room, food, heating, a TV – it was paradise. I made friends and took advantage of everything they offered, including counselling."

But away from work, Meredith stopped eating and was drinking himself to an early grave. Not wanting to show weakness or let the Community down, he waited till the day he tightened the last screw of the Superstore refurbishment before breaking down and confessing to the Emmaus management that he was no longer in control of his life.

"I told them I was broken and that I needed help, I couldn't do this any more. Being honest with them changed everything. They told me they'd get me whatever help I needed, and I'm forever grateful and indebted for that."

Recovery hasn't been easy. On the day he was due to be admitted to the recovery unit, Meredith was rushed to hospital. Weighing seven and a half stone, with a stomach ulcer and a blood count that diagnosed him as 'clinically dead,' his body was saved by a blood transfusion. His recovery from that point Meredith puts down to a "blinding revelation" that set him on a psychological and spiritual path.



"I made a promise then and there. I knew when I walked out of that hospital, that was it. I could finally become the person I'd always wanted to be, but couldn't find."



emmaus
INTERNATIONAL
ACTIVISTS FOR CHANGE

Six months on, Meredith has embraced his BHT programme – a highly regarded, long term recovery plan – and radiates peace of mind. Benefits enable him to complete a monitored recovery rather than returning to work too quickly and ending up back at square one. He's living independently and back in touch with family members, but returns to Emmaus twice a week as a volunteer.

"I feel honoured and privileged to be a part of this place. It's been a massive stepping stone. I want to spend the rest of my life giving back."

Jenny Lecoat

MEMORIES



FOND MEMORIES...

Tom King was visiting the Community long before I started working here, more than six years ago. He would come in two or three times a week with his friend Vera, at first, then on his own when she passed away. He always had a smile for everyone,.

Companions, volunteers and staff all liked talking to and spending time with Tom, who always welcomed the company and enjoyed every minute of his time here.



A few years ago, someone, donated a piano and that made Tom's day. Almost every time he came in, he would have something to eat, a mug of tea and a chat and then would sit at the piano for about an hour and play. You could tell that playing the piano made Tom's visits even better, not just for him, but for a lot of our customers, some of whom would come in and then stay later just to hear him play for a while, and although his music was not always appreciated by some

people, it was always welcomed by the Community. Now that he has sadly passed away, he will be remembered fondly in the café for his almost continuous smile, his charm and happy demeanour and his unique style of playing the piano...all the right notes, just not necessarily in the right order! *Ian Harris, Catering Manager*

Memories of E-mouse by customer, Tom

My very pregnant wife and I moved to Brighton New Year's Eve 2003. We needed furniture and were told (in a pub, ironically) about this place called "E-Mouse." We drove over the next day and instantly loved the place. I used to run a homeless hostel and the feel of Emmaus was very familiar - a place where residents could be safe, be kind to themselves and find some tranquillity in amongst the mustiness and cups of tea.

We've kept coming back over the years - a treat is to have some time during the week to drive over, have a full English and a leisurely look through the stuff - and in a society that's largely forgotten to look after other people - a society where meritocracy actually means lucky enough- e-mouse is a place to give everyone hope for something better.



ART IN THE COMMUNITY

Longstanding visitors to our Portslade site may recall the beautiful mural which hung on the east wall of the Superstore. The painting, depicting images and interpretations of the Emmaus ethos, has always been special to Companions, not only because of its message, but because it was created by local amateur artist **Barrie Huntbach**, who, in the 1970s, worked as a laundry operative in the same building when it was still part of St Marye's Convent.



Despite losing sight in one eye in a childhood accident and having no formal training, Barrie, who was born and bred in Portslade, was a committed artist who produced paintings right up till his death in 2006. In a lifetime of low-paid jobs, he described his time at the laundry as his most contented employment, while his wife Sheila taught literacy to some of the convent girls. So when Emmaus moved onto the site in 1997, Barrie was delighted to be able to create a work which demonstrated both his historical connection to the old community and his affection for the new one, constructing and painting the huge frieze in the living room of the family's council house just around the corner.



Barrie's daughter, Chrissie Berridge, recalls the role that the building and grounds has played in her family's life.

"I remember coming up with Dad when he worked here, and we used to bring our own laundry. Every year the convent had a fete, and mum would run a plant stall - she spent all year growing the flowers for it." Chrissie and her three siblings especially loved the grounds when they were kids: "It was special. I loved the sound of our footsteps walking through the tunnel, it was completely magical."

In later years, when Emmaus opened the site up to public access on a daily basis, she and her father would walk their dog around the grounds. And during a spell of unemployment, Chrissie would often pop in just to get out of the house and chat to staff and Companions – "sometimes the only conversation I'd have all day." She still drops by regularly to chat to the people she knows or to use the café.

"The memories are always here. I have a massive nostalgia for this place."

"When Dad died, he had no possessions, he was just a giving man."

Everything Emmaus stands for was very important to him."

The mural depicts our lives and possessions. The figure on the left, tying his shoelaces, is an old fashioned 'Gentleman of the road', representing homeless people who now find a home at Emmaus. The acrobatic figures in the centre are striving to keep their balance while reaching for something beyond their grasp. The panel also contains what the artist refers to as the 'flotsam and jetsam' of our lives. All the items in the Emmaus shop have previously belonged to someone else. Every item now waits to be passed over to the next owner. You can view the mural in the Secondhand Superstore new pedestrian entrance. *Jenny Lecoat*

MEMORIES



Thank you ...

There are so many people who have helped us shape the Community over the last 20 years to how we all know and love it today...far too many for me to mention personally and so I want to highlight the ways in which you've helped...and to say thank you to...

The loyal customers and visitors for supporting our businesses, for spreading the word and for keeping us focused on making sure you return time and again.

The many donors who have responded to our requests for help for funding for repairs and improvements to the wonderful buildings and grounds, for equipment, new projects and for Companions training and development.

Partners from other charities, local churches, referral agencies, local businesses as well as individuals who collaborate with us in so many ways.

Volunteers who have played a vital role working alongside Companions and staff in the businesses as well as behind the scenes, some for a short time, others becoming lifelong friends and all of whom have contributed many hours of rolling up their sleeves and just 'being there' for the Community and its people.



From 1995 to 2016 42 Trustees have served as board members overseeing the governance, strategic planning and making the nice as well as the more difficult decisions. Special thanks go to the Chairs, David Cochrane, Charlie Jordan, Roma Walker, Bob Minton, Elisabeth Elliot and to our current Chair, Glynn Jones.

Staff members who work together and support each other and Companions in ways not contained in a job description. Special thanks go to Mathieu and Joel.

To our friends and colleagues across the Emmaus Federation and finally to the Companions, past and present, who give us the reason for being here.



Companion Pat, speaking at the Emmaus International world assembly, France.

Christine Squince , Chief Executive

HERE'S TO THE NEXT 20...

We're very proud of what we've achieved. But birthdays are about looking forward too, and about hopes and plans for the future - whether that's about individual Companions, our communities, or our organisation as a whole.

Two decades ago little did we imagine that in 2017 the homeless situation in this city, as throughout the UK, would be so much worse. Through a combination of well-documented causes we are in the midst of a crisis, with rough sleeping doubling since 2010 and many more hidden homeless in hostels, squats or appallingly unsuitable accommodation. Emmaus plays a unique role in trying to combat this situation, offering not merely a band-aid, but a path back to permanent stability for those who need it.

But we can't do it alone.

Our Community isn't just about the Companions, staff and volunteers, it's about the people of this city. The residents of Brighton & Hove helped establish this site, and they've maintained it through their goodwill, donations and attendance for twenty years. But the current climate is challenging. Our site may be the biggest and (we think) most beautiful Emmaus in the country, but it's expensive to maintain, and the basic cost of running the Community – food, heating, petrol – is rocketing. At the same time demand for our services has never been higher. So we urgently need your continuing support to sustain this very special and valuable resource, which repays an £11 return to our society as a whole for every £1 invested.

There are so many ways in which you probably already support us, by donating goods, spending your cash in our stores and café, or attending our events – and there will be many of those this year, so please check our website and social media regularly. But there are other things you can do too...

- Donate personally, by cheque or by LocalGiving.com
- Enquire about volunteering. There are certain skills we always need.
- Organise fundraising events at your workplace, school, or club.
- Ask your company if they have a charitable fund or community action programme that might like to support us.
- If you're involved in an upcoming sporting or arts event, request sponsorship or organise a collection.
- Spread the word by telling your friends and colleagues about us. The more people who know about us the better.
- And last but not least – keep coming to see us! Your custom is always welcome, whether you're buying a three-piece suite or just a cuppa.

Thank you so much. Here's to a wonderful 2017 for all of us.

Contact Us

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