



*...Changing the lives of homeless people*



# Annual Report 2010/11

# A message from the Chairman



In September 2010 I took over the chairmanship of the Open Door Charity from Margaret Lewis, who had served the Charity loyally throughout the 17 years since the night shelter was established. I was daunted by the prospect of succeeding Margaret, whose personal contribution had done so much to put Open Door on such a sound footing. But I was inspired by the new challenges ahead – and we have begun this year to respond to those challenges through the development and improvement of the services we provide. And I have been greatly helped by the support and friendship of my fellow Trustees, to whom I am hugely grateful.

This year our services have been transformed. Following our major redevelopment and refurbishment programme during 2009/10, made possible by a £525,000 grant from the Department of Communities and Local Government Places for Change Programme, and the huge generosity of our supporters, Open Door now has excellent new facilities, so that we can offer more, and more targeted help to the homeless people that spend time with us.

As a Charity we work in partnership with Hightown Praetorian & Churches Housing Association, who manage the service we operate at Open Door, and ensure that we offer a professional, high class service to the vulnerable people we aim to help. We are grateful to the Hightown staff, and to all the specialist agencies they work with, for their active and continued support. Special thanks go to St Albans City and District Council and Hertfordshire County Council, who have sought to ensure that even in these tough economic times, our services continue to benefit from the financial support our users need and deserve, so that we can deliver our vision to move people from homelessness and the streets to more settled and fulfilled lives.

During 2010/11 Open Door was once again open every night of the year, and our beds were used on 4165 occasions. In December and January, during the very cold snaps, we were able to provide additional beds, to ensure that people had somewhere warm to sleep for the night. During the year we helped some 70% of those who stayed with us avoid a return to the streets, a performance above the national average.

Nevertheless, there are still, even in prosperous St Albans, around 10 to 12 people regularly sleeping rough in our district, and there is still more work to be done. We cannot be complacent when we know that there are serious gaps in services available to homeless people, in particular for those who aspire to move on from a life on the streets or in night shelter accommodation, and to have more settled lives. We need to offer more choice of activities during the day, and we want to address the lack of move-on opportunities for homeless people. The Charity, and our partners, are ambitious to move on to even more successes over the next year and beyond.

I, my fellow Trustees, and all our partners recognise that we will not achieve our ambitions without the continued support of the local community, who do so much to ensure the success of Open Door. Without our volunteers, who give so freely of their time, and all those who make generous donations throughout the year, we could never achieve all we do. For all of us, the thanks and appreciation of those we help, and the knowledge that we are indeed helping people to change their lives, makes what we do worthwhile.

Please continue to support Open Door in 2011/12.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan Bailey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joan Bailey CBE, Chairman, the Open Door Charity

# Overview of 2010/11

## OUR SERVICES

Our refurbished building was opened in April 2010 by the Mayor of the St Albans City and District Council, and we were delighted to welcome so many of our friends and supporters to the Opening.

We now have 12 single bedrooms, each with their own washing and toilet facilities, which does much to promote the dignity, self-worth and self-esteem of our service-users, and the communal areas of the building have been extended. We now have modern, fit-for-purpose kitchen and laundry facilities, to the benefit of service-users, staff and volunteers alike.

These physical improvements to the fabric of our building have also allowed us to review what we offer local homeless people, and whether we should do things differently. We have taken advantage of this unique opportunity to improve our services, and to make them more responsive to the needs of homeless people. We can now provide access to computers, an important means of helping people back into longer term housing, education and work.

We continue to be the only direct access night shelter in Hertfordshire. But we need to do so much more than provide an emergency bed for the night and a meal, if we are really to be able to offer homeless people a fresh start. Our vision for the future is to give our service-users a more comprehensive, more personal service, which addresses their particular social, educational and vocational needs and begins to equip them better for a move to a more settled way of life. Our key aims for our service-users are that they:

- Improve their economic well-being, financial literacy, money management, health awareness and safety
- Play an active part in the life of the local community, challenging themselves to enjoy and achieve through education, training and leisure activities
- Improve and manage their physical health and emotional well-being and reduce their dependencies on drugs/alcohol where they exist
- Maintain their accommodation, and respect the need to maintain a safe environment for everyone at Open Door
- Engage positively in the work staff and volunteers do with them
- Find a positive next step along the road to a more settled lifestyle



## WHO WE HELP AND HOW WE HELP

During 2010/11, 330 people stayed at Open Door, of whom 152 were new to our services. As part of our policy to give our service-users a more comprehensive, more personal service, we now allow people to stay for a maximum of 28 nights in the night shelter. This gives staff the opportunity to make meaningful assessments of people's particular issues and needs, and to put in place support mechanisms that will endure. During this time staff work particularly hard, with the support of St Albans City and District Council's Housing Options Team, to help homeless people address their accommodation needs.

## OUR SUCCESSES AND ACHIEVEMENTS



It is an important part of our vision that we continue to improve our services. A constant issue for our service-users is the lack of things to do during the day, particularly at weekends, for people on a limited budget. During the year we have been able to extend our hours. In addition to the lunchtime drop-in service, we now open on weekday afternoons, and from 3pm at weekends, which gives more opportunities to work with individuals, and means that people can become involved in positive activities, including group activities.

This year we have resumed and enhanced our daytime drop-in service which offers counselling and access to physical and mental

healthcare. We are grateful to Jackie Bierman-Spicer for the good work she continues to do for us as counsellor to our service-users, and to the Herts Alcohol Counselling Service for supporting her work. We are extending the support we are able to give by working with volunteers and the local community to provide education and training courses at Open Door including healthcare, IT, basic skills, CV writing and pre-tenancy training. We have been pleased to work in partnership with local businesses, including Oaklands College and Barclays Bank, to deliver some of these services.

We are delighted that so many of our users value the services we provide, the respect we give them, and the vision we have to help them to change their lives.



## HOPES AND PLANS FOR THE SERVICE

Unfortunately, although we continue to make significant progress with the individuals who stay at Open Door, the problem of homelessness does not go away. There are regularly around 10 -12 people sleeping rough in St Albans. The Hightown team at Open Door therefore keep our services under regular review, and look for new ways of helping people change their lives.

They have been planning this year, working with St Albans City and District Council, to add a new street outreach worker to the team. Working alongside the St Albans Community Safety Partnership, and health services, the new outreach worker will help ensure that the services at Open Door reach those who are most in need. The aim will be to work with the public and local agencies to know who our rough-sleepers are and to work with them when they are at their most vulnerable. We hope to bring homeless people in from the street and support them to access Open Door or other accommodation while working to address their health and social needs.



Joan Bailey pictured with Liz Jones, Manager of Open Door & The Mayor of the City & District of St Albans City, Cllr Maxine Crawley

We also want to develop further the afternoon activities we offer at Open Door. We are pleased with our progress so far but we could do more. We hope to provide some training for service-users on subjects such as e-learning, anger management and assertiveness skills. We are working towards putting in place a programme of activities which will allow all service-users to come to Open Door every afternoon and develop skills that will directly benefit them in their future. To do this the Charity may need to commit additional funding, in order to supplement the current staff resources. As a first step we have agreed to fund the employment of a short term post of learning development officer, to set up a programme of activities, working with interested parties and possible partners.

# The work of the Open Door Charity

## WORKING WITH OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

The Charity is fundamentally a local charity working to change the lives of homeless people in St Albans, with the support of local people and organisations.

We are fortunate to have many regular supporters who give to our cause. Our local schools and churches do fundraising for us, and make unbelievably generous donations, especially at Harvest Festival and at Christmas.

But we are all too often pleased and surprised by the efforts of individuals and groups, who put time and effort into raising money for Open Door.

This year we have again received many generous contributions. We are grateful to all who have made donations, from the smallest to the largest - from the 1st St Albans Brownies who raised £11 at their Tramps Supper to Brocket Hall Golf Club who gave us a magnificent £21,300.

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We were extremely pleased so many people supported us at the annual Sleep Out last December – when the temperature fell to  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$  and the snow turned to sleet during the night. The total received was £7,494 (including Gift Aid), a

fantastic achievement in these dreadful conditions. Of this, £1,318 was raised via the Just Giving website, which has proved a convenient and fruitful means of collecting sponsorship monies.

Amongst our most loyal supporters are the local churches, who again gave generously to Open Door this year. We received in total over £9,700 from church donations. And I am delighted to say that the St Mary's Church, Redbourn has agreed to support us as one of their five charities for the next three years.

We are particularly grateful to the Directors of Ayletts Nurseries, who have supported us throughout the year, including hosting our Annual General Meeting.

Other welcome donations have been received from the Fund for the Future, the staff of Hightown Praetorian & Churches Housing Association and the Abbey New Year Concert.

The Charity participated in the CVS Dragons Apprentice Challenge. Working with Dragons and mentors from local firm BAM Construction Ltd, a team from Beaumont School raised £500 for Open Door.

Last but not least, our thanks to the Council for Voluntary Service for their advice and practical support throughout the year.



Jonathan and Barbara cycled 960 miles from John O'Groats to Lands End in 9 days



The Beaumont team giving Joan Bailey a cheque for £500



Margaret Lewis & Joan Bailey receiving a cheque from Brocket Hall Golf Club



Joan Bailey receives a cheque for £3,500 from the Very Revd Jeffrey John on behalf of the Abbey Mission

## WHAT OUR SERVICE USERS SAY ABOUT OPEN DOOR

*“We are all human beings and have the right as everybody else to be treated the same way. We do not all drink, use drugs or have mental health issues. We are just going through a bad time in our lives and need a little help to get out of this situation. We still have an identity and purpose, we just need to feel needed, self-esteem boosting and confidence building.”*



*“The staff and volunteers are exceptional people who all go the extra mile.”*

*“I can’t praise the staff here enough. The rooms are comfortable and I have been able to make new friends here too. With the support of the staff, I am now trying to get clean.”*

*“Were it not for a facility like Open Door, I dread to think where I would have ended up and what would have happened on the way. To be treated with respect as a human being and not be judged in that situation restored self esteem and self worth in an instant.”*

*“I was renting a room from a friend when I was given 4 days notice to vacate the room. The sudden realisation of being homeless felt like a carpet pulled away from under your feet. Having to go to the council and authorities to declare yourself homeless is not a nice procedure. The options for a single male in that situation are very limited.”*



*“Since I started staying in Open Door I've been treated with respect.”*

# Volunteering at Open Door

## OUR VOLUNTEERS

At Open Door we have around 100 volunteers, ranging from our Trustees to those who provide the meals for our service-users.

Our new Volunteers Co-ordinator, Zoe Sigler, joined the team in September 2010. She has taken on this challenging role with relish, and we are grateful for all she and her volunteers have done to organise the Harvest Festival donations, the Christmas rotas, and the day-to-day meal services at Open Door. Over the next year she will be improving our recruitment, induction and training procedures, and putting into place a more planned approach to the meals we provide for our service-users.

Volunteering at Open Door is a rewarding experience, and gives contact with many different kinds of people. We welcome new volunteers, and are planning to expand the opportunities we can offer them over the next year to include roles using their life and work experience to help homeless people make positive changes in their lives and lifestyles.

## A VOLUNTEER'S STORY

I have been volunteering at Open Door on the evening rota for three years. The reason why I started volunteering can probably be termed "the same old story". I had become very aware that I was blessed with a comfortable life and was eager to do something to help those less well off. Therefore, I picked up the local phone directory, searched for homeless charities and found Open Door.

After a chat with the Volunteers Co-ordinator and a visit to Open Door - the rest became history, as they say! I am on the Wednesday and Saturday rotas, and each rota roughly equates to once a month so generally I am volunteering twice a month (of course you can opt to volunteer for as many slots as you like). Each evening service takes 2½ - 3 hours max, but the time flies! Initially I was a little worried that my lack of cooking skills would be a problem but it hasn't been and I have picked up a lot of tips from my cooking partners. I have been paired up with lovely volunteers and made some good friends out of it.

Some of the guests/service-users are chatty and it is nice to talk with them as we make their dinner. Others like to keep themselves to themselves - so we respect this. There is one particular thing that never fails to humble me which is that the guests always thank us for their dinner (even when I have made a total disaster with the rice - one lump or two!). I really enjoy volunteering and am so glad that I have got the opportunity to serve others in this way. I would fully recommend it.

Janice - Kitchen volunteer

## COULD YOU VOLUNTEER FOR OPEN DOOR?

### Current roles

- Kitchen volunteers
- Meet and greet volunteers
- Developing life skills
- Fundraising for the Charity
- Becoming a Charity Trustee

### New opportunities

- Leisure activities
- Gardening
- Mentoring homeless people



## THE CHARITY TRUSTEES

The Charity is a registered charity, and a company limited by guarantee<sup>1</sup>.

The Directors/Trustees for the year ending March 2011 were:

Joan Bailey CBE  
Karen Filsell  
Jim Frost (on leave of absence from September 2010)  
Peter Graham  
Richard Inglis  
Margaret Lewis BEM JP (to September 2010)  
Kerry Pollard  
William Ranson (to September 2010)  
Alison Steer  
John Wright (Secretary)

The Board also had the services of two co-opted members from September 2010:

Sarah Gray  
Lindsey McLeod (Acting Treasurer)

<sup>1</sup>The Directors' Annual Report and Accounts are being published separately and will shortly be available on our website [www.opendoorstalbans-district.org.uk](http://www.opendoorstalbans-district.org.uk)

To give a donation to Open Door, please contact our Treasurer:

Lindsey McLeod,  
10 Edward Close,  
St Albans,  
AL1 5EN  
**Email:** [mcleod1206@btinternet.com](mailto:mcleod1206@btinternet.com)

To volunteer for the Charity, to fundraise, as a trustee, or to help with our administration, please contact:

Joan Bailey  
**Email:** [joanmbailey@btinternet.com](mailto:joanmbailey@btinternet.com)

To volunteer at the Open Door homelessness service, please contact our Volunteers Coordinator:

Zoe Sigler  
**Email:** [Zoe.Sigler@hpcha.org.uk](mailto:Zoe.Sigler@hpcha.org.uk)

**Open Door – St Albans**  
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**[www.opendoorstalbans-district.org.uk](http://www.opendoorstalbans-district.org.uk)**

**Registered Charity: 1028528**  
**Company Number: 2868633 (England and Wales)**