

## MEMORIES Mary Hickey.

30 years ago, the late Cardinal Basil Hume bought a redundant Convent in central London to realise his dream of helping young men and women at risk. It continues to flourish.



I was given rooms in the basement to set up a surgery offering full Primary Care medical services to the adult population in the borough of Westminster. From humble beginnings with myself and a receptionist, I now have a partner who is a Jesuit priest, as well as 3 other doctors, a practice manager, nurses, receptionists, a general counsellor, a drug and alcohol counsellor, a psychologist, a psychiatric liaison nurse, a homeopath and data base clerks.

The demographics change every few years with the latest influx from war-torn Africa and EU nationals. Many do not speak English and have no access to benefits. 60% are living on the streets and others manage to get into hostels or squats. Drug addiction, alcohol abuse and severe mental health disorders are our main medical problems.

Every year the numbers increase and we are almost at breaking point coping with this. The numbers dying are also increasing – this year it was one every 2 weeks, and most were found dead unexpectedly. For a homeless person the average age of death is 42 years, and 34 years for an injecting drug addict.

I want to use this opportunity to thank some of the DMJ's who have helped me in so many ways, especially in the early days when the going was very tough, and still continue to.

Philomena Lafferty came in as a receptionist at the beginning and her experience as a social worker was very helpful, especially with some of the young women who were living on the streets or pregnant.

June Bell, Noreen Murray and Sheila Barrett did stints as receptionists, and Noreen also stood in as the nurse, and even today Paula Spark does a weekly session in nursing.

Over the years Mary Goretti Betchetti (and her sisters) have regularly handed on clothing and sweets, and to this day continue to make warm blankets which are most gratefully



received by those who have to stay on the streets in this very inclement weather.

Celia Beale most kindly typed my GP appraisal which would have taken me hours, and Agnes O'Shea lets me use her computer very often so that I can work on the appraisal at home.

I am always aware, and very grateful for the prayers which support me in my work, and I would especially like to thank Helen Conway who always finds time to send lovely cards and helpful advice.

Arguably, in terms of health, wealth, employment and life-span, if the homeless were a country rather than an underclass, they would be one of the poorest nations on earth. I am so grateful for the gift to be able to serve Christ in the poor and needy and fulfil my vocation to be an instrument of mercy and compassion.

*Mary Hickey*

Sydenham, England

