

Friends of

The Connection
at St Martin-in-the-Fields

friends news

Spring 2020 Issue 73

Dear Friends

All of us on the Friends' Committee hope that you and your families are keeping safe and well in these challenging times. It goes without saying that we have all been affected by the lockdown, but as you will appreciate, those who find themselves sleeping rough or in inadequate housing have been disproportionately affected. At the same time, the ability of charities such as the Connection has been put under enormous strain by public health considerations and social distancing restrictions. Specifically this has meant that all the buildings on the St Martin's site have had to be closed, including the Connection's premises on Adelaide Street.

We felt therefore that it was very important to update you on the amazing response that the Connection has been able to make in these circumstances, in close collaboration



with other central London charities and Westminster City Council. You will find more on pp 4–7. Those of you who are on email will have received an Emergency Appeal from the Rev Dr Sam Wells, Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, to 'Keep the Doors Open' across the whole St Martin's site. The Friends, and the Connection, have collaborated in the Appeal, and there is more about it on p 3, for those who haven't seen it.

We are still hopeful that it may be possible to meet for Friends Day on Saturday 26 September, but are obviously having to keep this under review. In the meanwhile, I am delighted to say that the Friends were able to donate a total of £480,000 to support the Connection's work in 2019/20, thanks particularly to the generous and continuing support of yourself and all our Friends. This tremendous result was also greatly helped by a very generous legacy from the estate of Jenny Joseph, about which you can read more on p 2.

Many thanks, and do keep safe and well

Charles Woodd, Chair

Above: The red door of The Connection

Jenny Joseph Legacy

We were very grateful to receive a substantial legacy recently from Jenny Joseph, who sadly died in 2018. We asked her children, Nel, Beck and Martin, to tell us a bit more about their mother and her social concerns.

“Writing something about ‘our mum’, who was the poet Jenny Joseph, and many other things, is not easy. There is the sure and strong sense of her watching and picking apart the language and the probable, possible, inference. Language and words, meaning, communication, the lack of it and the gap between thought and how we express it were lifelong fascinations almost constantly occupying her. Science and philosophy met and ran along as dual and connected strands and she became increasingly interested in the functions of the brain and the eye and how physical function interacts with mental function, mood and thought. It was a sad irony that she went blind in the last few years of her life, and became her own science project, logging and noting (to herself really but often out loud), the impact of losing sight on other functions affecting thought and language.

Losing sight (and the ability to walk) also took away three of her main activities: writing, reading and gardening. Her prose book ‘Led by the nose’ exploring and describing the day to day of her life and garden through the experience of smell seemed prophetic looking back, as if she’d been shoring up a sample collection for a new way of ‘seeing’ that she would need later. ‘Led by the Nose’ is probably the closest to an autobiography there is, but it would be a very incomplete one.

Our mother was also concerned about the more mundane world, and human society. She expected politicians to work in the interests of the people they claimed to represent, she expected people to behave and respond in a just and fair way, she was often disappointed in both. Food, Warmth and Shelter were things she frequently spoke of with relish as ‘good finds’ she was lucky to have. She was 13 when ‘The War’ ended and 16 when the modern welfare state, including the NHS, were formed. Although her upbringing was a privileged one with no material want, she grew up with a critical view of inequality, a strong sense of justice and a belief that ‘society’ could and should agree and ensure basic human rights. For her, Food, Warmth and Shelter were things any society of human beings should put first for everyone.”



Right: Jenny Joseph

Thank you for your kindness

The Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, the Rev Dr Sam Wells, has launched a Covid-19 Emergency Appeal. He writes:

“Given the current crisis, we’ve had no choice but to close our doors for the first time in the long history of St Martin’s. Although our buildings have fallen silent, our vital work in the community must still continue – now, more than ever. That’s why we have launched our St Martin-in-the-Fields Covid-19 Emergency Appeal to valued friends, visitors and supporters like you.

As someone who already supports The Friends of the Connection so generously, you’ll know how important it is that we’re able to provide people who are homeless – or vulnerably housed – with shelter, food and advice when they need it most. During this time, The Connection is working incredibly hard to ensure that people continue to receive the support they need. We are helping people who were sleeping rough into accommodation to enable them to self-isolate, and are delivering food and other essentials.”

You can support the Appeal by visiting: www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org and following the Appeal Link to donate online. If you wish simply to support the Connection directly through the Friends, please send a cheque payable to The Friends of the Connection to: Friends of the Connection, 12 Adelaide St, London WC2N 4HW, or make a bank transfer to: Friends of the Connection, sort code: 40-02-08, account no: 81331086. Thank you.

IF YOU HAVE RECEIVED THIS MAILING BY POST, PLEASE READ ON . . .

If you are on email, we would like to be able to email you periodically with information about the Friends and the Connection, which may include requests for funds. This will not normally replace our regular postal mailings. If you are happy to consent to this, please email friends@cstm.org.uk simply saying ‘I give my consent for the Friends of The Connection at St.Martin-in-the-Fields to email me with marketing information’ and remember to include your name and postal address. We will only share your email address within the terms of our Privacy Policy, which is available on our website (www.friendsoftheconnection.org.uk/privacy-policy/) or from the Friends’ office. You may withdraw your consent at any time by contacting the Friends’ office. Thank you.

RESPONDING TO COVID-19

The Connection helps get 350 homeless people into accommodation

When people are on the edge; homeless, isolated and in despair there must be a place to turn. The Connection at St Martin's is there to support people as they overcome their difficult situations, recover and move on to a meaningful, fulfilling life. In the current crisis, The Connection is still working hard to ensure that they remain true to that original purpose.

People who are sleeping rough often have long-term conditions and poor physical health which means that they are at a greater risk should they become ill. For those without a home, it is also very difficult to self-isolate.

On Friday 20 March, The Connection at St Martin's had to temporarily close their day and night centre in order to protect their clients. This was a difficult decision, but the nature of their centre meant large numbers of people spending time together, posing the risk of extensive spread of Covid-19. By closing their regular services, and working towards alternative ways of supporting clients on an individual basis, The Connection is better placed to keep people safe. The Connection is still committed to helping the people that need it most.

Since the centre closed the staff have been working around the clock to help secure hotel rooms and other suitable accommodation for rough sleepers to help them to self-isolate and stay safe and well. 80 serviced apartments were made available for clients with higher levels of need.

Across Westminster, over 350 people have been helped into accommodation so far. The Connection is also working with other local organisations to provide three meals a day, medication and other essential supplies to those that need it. They have provided





phones to clients that need them, so that they can maintain regular contact, as well as using weekly newsletters, websites and social media to provide a sense of community and support for clients.

At the accommodation, there are staff on-site 24 hours a day, answering client queries, supporting and encouraging them to stay in their rooms, delivering meals and providing laundry services. Other members of staff are still continuing to provide remote casework where possible, and doing regular phonecalls to check in with clients and make sure they are well and coping with self-isolation. Residents have given positive

feedback on the accommodation, saying it has made a big difference for them in feeling less stressed, which is especially important under the current climate. Activity packs are being sourced for clients to help keep them occupied, and some have enjoyed (socially distanced) gardening in the outdoor space.

While the situation has been difficult, it has given The Connection the opportunity to work with some clients who haven't been in accommodation for years. They would like to continue working with people to help them to deal with some of their wider issues now they are more stable in accommodation. They are keen to keep working with Westminster Council and other organisations to avoid clients returning to the streets. With your help, The Connection can continue to provide these essential services, and reach even more people who need their help.

Read how both clients and staff describe the present situation in their own words overleaf.

Above: A vegetable stew for evening meals; Left: Packed lunches ready to be delivered

Stories from the staff . . .

'Walking in, you'd never believe the team were in the middle of a world-wide pandemic - there was a very friendly and warm welcome followed by the importance of following PPE instructions and then a 'right, business as usual' atmosphere. It really is a pleasure to be a part of such an unprecedented operation that sees the team of staff and volunteers not only prepare, cook and deliver a healthy nutritious meal each day, but also pack bags full of everyday essentials like bread, cereal, fruit and other treats to be delivered to our clients.

Diligence and consideration are evident every step of the way, and yet it's always all made to just look so effortless. This will definitely be a positive pandemic memory that I'm proud to be a part of and will take with me...' Hazel is working in the kitchen at The Passage, where The Connection's kitchen team are working collaboratively to deliver 350 meals a day

'I suppose the main thing I'm noticing is my lack of face-to-face contact with my clients, and I am missing this! There is so much about person-to-person dialogue that is non-verbal and which can't be judged through a phone call. I'm calling my clients regularly. I know how much I've appreciated phone calls and social media interaction since the lockdown and I think they do too.

Most of my clients are talking about feelings of isolation, low mood and boredom. At The Connection we're hoping to address the boredom by putting together some activity packs. Other clients are making good use of their allowed exercise time and have remarked that they're enjoying the recent good weather. All are aware of the need to practice social distancing, which for some can feel very difficult.

I have one client who was made homeless quite recently following a period of mental illness and hospital admissions. She is managing remarkably well [and] was talking to me the other day about what she'd like to do in the future and how she'd like to get back to study and start working part-time. Given the current situation her positivity was good to hear!' Su is one of the mental health leads

'I'm working at one of the hotels that has been helping rough sleepers self-isolate during the Covid-19 pandemic. Any money that you can donate would be greatly appreciated to help us carry on doing the work we're doing. Every little penny helps towards making sure we can keep these clients occupied and safe. We have a great opportunity here, we've got 80 clients off the streets. We're hoping that we can look further towards a longer term plan where we can make sure these clients don't return to the streets, and we can provide safe long term housing for them all.' Liam is working in one of The Connection's temporary accommodation buildings

Stories from the clients . . .

I feel a lot less worried about things. When you're out there, you're not getting the information you need. There's nobody checking on you. Now, we've got nurses, they're trying to get tablets for my heart, I feel a lot better in myself.

I was very blue thinking about things: my mother's death, my documents, etc. But like someone said we can't have the spring without the winter. I guess my winter is soon finished and I'll be ready to make everything I can for being in the good path. I think I've grown up more confidence in me and after this isolation I'm ready for a new chapter. Thank you for everything you've done...

The Connection have the best team ever because they helped me so much with all my problems – the staff are so fantastic and everybody's been so helpful. Before I came to The Connection I'd been on the streets for a year. It's not easy to go from that to being self-isolated but thank you for putting us into accomodation, it's been a big help!

I'm happy here, there are perfect staff. I don't need anything, I have everything here. So thank you to the staff, thank you everybody who helped me.

I thank the staff here immensely. I was a support worker myself so I know how hard it is. I'm forever grateful for being here, and for the frontline workers who enable me to get better a day at a time. I thank you for putting a roof over our head and for looking after us.

Forthcoming Events

Given the uncertainty over when and how the Government restrictions on social distancing will be relaxed, it is not possible to confirm whether planned future events will actually be able to take place. However, the following events are currently scheduled. We will confirm on our website, and by email or postal mailing, whether they are able to go ahead.

Friends' Day 2020 – Saturday 26 September

This year Friends' Day is in any event scheduled to take place later than usual, so as to avoid the hottest weather. Restrictions permitting, we will meet at The Connection in Adelaide Street on Saturday 26 September. Prayers and Thanksgiving will be in the Dick Sheppard Chapel at 1.30 pm, and registration at 12 Adelaide Street will be from 2 pm. It will be an excellent opportunity to hear at first hand how the Connection has been able to respond to the Coronavirus crisis, and meet with other Friends after the restrictions of the lockdown. Do keep the date in your diary, and wait for further news.

Queen Eleanor Cycle Ride – 28–31 August

This year's Queen Eleanor Cycle Ride is again scheduled for the August Bank Holiday Weekend. The QECR Committee will be reviewing the position at the end of June, in order to decide whether it is possible to go ahead in the light of the social distancing restrictions expected to be in force at the time. We are enormously grateful to our local hosts, who stand ready to offer hospitality if we are able to ride. www.queeneleanorcyclerride.org

Local fundraising

We had to cancel the Connection with Choral Classics evening scheduled for 31 March, and the planning of further fundraising events is clearly on hold. However, when social distancing restrictions allow, do consider what you might do to raise money locally, and let us know. Send us your ideas, and we will do all we can to help. Contact Rupert in the Friends' Office.

For more information about the Friends and what we do, and how you can help, please see our website www.friendsoftheconnection.org.uk.

**Friends of**
The Connection
at St Martin-in-the-Fields

Contact Details:

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