

ARMY NEWS

MEETING OLD NEEDS IN NEW WAYS



Brass band playing on the streets of London

Who Are They?

You may have heard the brass band on your high street, seen the iconic red shield on a fundraising cup (or a Marvel movie) or grabbed a bargain from one of the charity shops. But did you know The Salvation Army is a Christian movement? The Army has churches all around the country and exists to ‘Love God, Love Others’.



Homelessness Services

The Salvation Army’s Homelessness Services exists to help people experiencing homelessness. We sat down with Hilarie Watchorn to find out a bit more about the service.

‘Our services are places where people can experience a sense of belonging, where staff are available to support. While with us, we want people to share a positive open environment.

‘We ensure that there are opportunities to try new things and actively encourage engagement and purposeful activity. Our services, which we call Lifehouses, offer a range of activities, such as life skills and employability programmes.

‘We have a culture of patience and positivity and create opportunities for people to discuss the feelings behind the way people act.

‘The way we welcome people into our services is also important to us. We want to make people feel welcome, safe and comfortable enough to talk to us. People who are new to our services are allocated a designated worker and supported to get involved with others. When they arrive, they are shown round and things are explained to them clearly – and they are provided with written information about the service.

‘We want everyone to have a voice in our services and recognise both the value and vulnerability of people. We offer support to people who feel too vulnerable to engage and provide a range of ways for people to communicate with us. When gathering feedback, we demonstrate a proactive response with a genuine intent to make positive changes.’

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Two Million Meals and Counting

The Salvation Army has provided more than two million meals¹ to people struggling to afford food since lockdown started a year ago. This sombre milestone was reached as new figures show that one in five people² might need to seek charitable support for the first time in their lives.

The church and charity is warning that, as we move out of lockdown, more people are going to struggle to cope as the economic impact of the pandemic starts to bite.

Adrian Clee, a Salvation Army Emergency Response officer, says: ‘As the country went into lockdown, we knew we had to move fast. We established 22 regional food hubs across the UK where we bought food in bulk from wholesalers to help our local centres and churches (corps) meet the demand.

‘As the pandemic forced homeless drop-in centres to close, we took to the streets to ensure people still got hot food and outreach support. We moved our employment support and debt advice online and even fed lorry drivers stuck on the motorway when the Dover port closed.

‘Emergency food support is just one aspect of our work, but beyond that we seek to address the root causes of poverty. Our debt and employment advice services often play a key part in enabling individuals and families to move from a reliance on emergency food support to a situation where they can support and sustain themselves going forward.’

Major Hilarie Watchorn, Assistant Director for The Salvation Army’s Homelessness Services, added: ‘To help the clients through the pandemic we have provided activity packs, mobile phones, tablets, microwaves (and meals if self-isolating) depending on their situation and mental health.

‘The activity packs helped to keep people in the building during lockdown, mobile phones helped clients in their own flats to which we provide floating support so they could keep in touch with us and their family. Tablets were given to help our homeless families access school work and activities.’



A Salvation Army officer preparing food packages for people experiencing homelessness

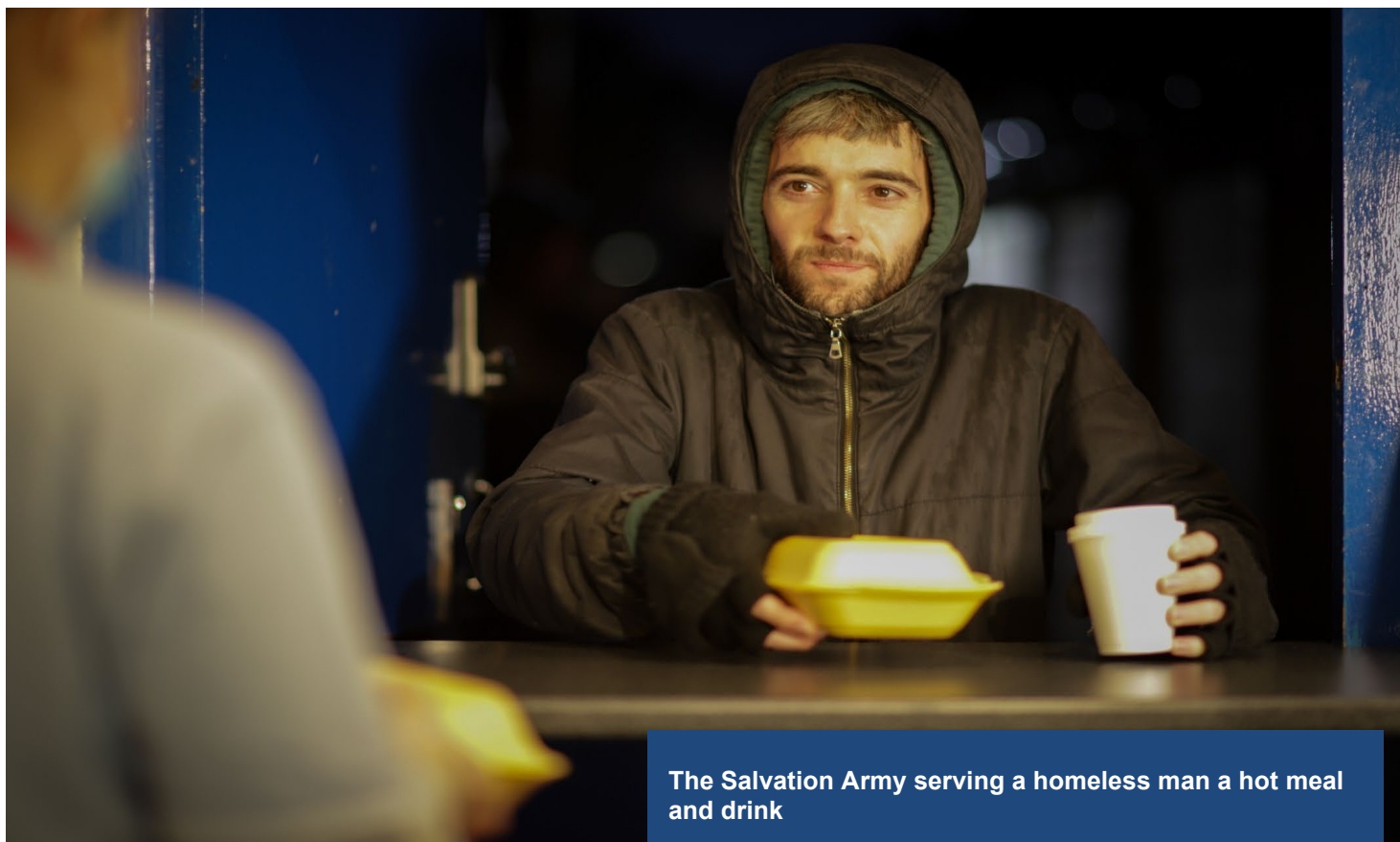
[1] This figure relates to food distributed from the 22 Salvation Army food hubs to local churches (corps) and centres since the food hubs launched in May 2020.

[2] Survey of 1,000 adults, aged 16 and over, completed by nfpSynergy on behalf of The Salvation Army. Survey carried out between 4 and 25 January 2021.

The Army’s Impact

Since the beginning of the first lockdown The Salvation Army’s support for vulnerable people has grown to meet demand. In particular, it provided:

- 3,367 beds every night in its 78 Lifehouses for people experiencing homelessness.
- Support for 5,880 modern slavery survivors, an increase of 1,368 people on the previous year.
- Employment advice for 2,542 people, an increase of 872 people compared to the previous year.
- Food and presents for tens of thousands of struggling families at Christmas.
- Tailored support delivered by 640 corps (community churches) for their communities, from offering calls for a chat, to older people isolated during lockdowns and delivering medications to people who are shielding, to walking guide dogs and providing breakfasts during August to tackle ‘holiday hunger’.
- 18 incident response vans that provided hot food and drink for NHS staff and refreshments and a listening ear to emergency responders at accidents and fires across the country.
- Emergency teams who responded to flooding in Manchester, Doncaster, Warrington, Malton and Skewen over just one weekend, and attended around 200 major incidents during the year.
- 12 residential care homes that provided 480 beds for older people needing care.



The Salvation Army serving a homeless man a hot meal and drink

Kate's Story

Kate had moved to London for work in 2016 and was away from friends and the rest of her family. She met a man on Tinder and it was with him she started experimenting with drugs. The relationship was destructive in many ways. Kate said, 'I was dating the guy and the day after my Mum's funeral he called things off.'

In an attempt to regain control, Kate moved from London back to her home town, but she was still using drugs.

'It got to the point where I was using Class A drugs daily, on my own. You just lie about it and it becomes destructive in your life ... Then it came to a head. I became unable to hold down a job, any job, certainly not teaching.'

'I was going back and forth to London picking up drugs twice a week. I was unable to pay my rent and I forgot how to behave as an adult. I was thrown out of my flat.'

Just before Kate was thrown out of the house she was renting in Swindon, she ended up in hospital. The drugs she was injecting had messed with her mind.

'I was seeing my Mum's face on other people. I was in such bad psychosis.'

Kate managed to find somewhere to stay for the weekend but was then homeless. She was directed to The Salvation Army's Booth House in Swindon. A room was free and so she could move straight in

Kate told us, 'Since I've been here, it's saved my life. It's unbelievable. Being here and being around people socially is great, as being on my own is difficult for me. The support you get here is amazing.'

Kate explained that the staff at Booth House really know what they're doing and this has made a big difference to her. 'Before I came here I was being told by specialist drug services that they hadn't heard of the drugs that I was using. They were having to Google how to deal with them

'It's so valuable here being around support networks and people. I don't want to sit around doing nothing – that's a big trigger [to take drugs] for me. Since getting involved in Recycles and the Sandwich People I haven't looked back. It's so important being part of that team.'

Kate said that before she came to Booth House she had hit rock bottom. 'I was unable to walk into an office and have any confidence that I could do the job. Any confidence I had had crumbled. The guy I was seeing had kept telling me I wasn't intelligent and couldn't do anything.'

'When I came here I saw and heard stories about others who had been where I was and had come out the other side. Seeing them, I saw I would be able to achieve something again. I was in SLT (in school) and doing brilliantly and it just got pulled out from under me.'

Kate told us that she couldn't believe how quickly her life slipped away from her. 'Before I knew it, I was injecting meth every day. I feel like I lost five years of my life. Weeks and then months just flew by.'

Kate is now rebuilding her relationship with her brother. He stopped talking to her as he was so upset by her drug use and behaviour.



Kate, 35, was a successful primary school teacher but when both her parents died 18 months apart she was left devastated and struggling to cope. Her life began to spiral out of control when she began using Class A drugs

Kate said that one of the most encouraging things about Booth House is how understanding and sympathetic everyone is. She said, 'People don't expect perfection here, and for so long I was trying to be perfect and kept up the façade of being a person who can do everything. Now everyone knows everything. Everyone here is fighting their own battles.'

Kate is now training for a triathlon and will run the London Triathlon in 2020 to raise money for The Salvation Army. She is also part of the Booth House fundraising team taking part in the Prudential Ride 100. She knows that her struggle is not over but is optimistic for the future. 'It's always going to be hard and I'm always going to be someone who struggles with addiction. It's just learning how to deal with it.'

'Whatever the cause – from a landlord selling a property, losing a job, falling out with parents, financial problems, an addiction or there simply being nowhere affordable to live – becoming homeless is a difficult experience and people are often dealing with a lot of issues.'