

ACCOMMODATION CONCERN



ANNUAL REPORT 1992

ACCOMMODATION CONCERN

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT to the 1992 Annual General Meeting

I am happy to write my first report 'from the Chair' after a very exciting year. Accommodation Concern has developed from the informal group of people in community organisations who found themselves dealing with homelessness, not by choice but by necessity. We first met late in 1985 at the instigation of WRAS when the increasing number of homeless people going from place to place in search of help was becoming a regular problem for all of us. None of us had reliable, up-to-date information to give them let alone the other help they needed.

This was our first and simplest aim and we agreed that the need was to recruit someone with sufficient time to check the press, get to know the landlords and keep a record of different kinds of houses where homeless people could be directed, however temporary the accommodation. Volunteers were found with a real sympathy for the project, and then an honorarium for a part time worker until that small grant ran out. The Citizen's Advice Bureau continued to provide the press information through the work of Margaret Clarke (who had filled the part time post) but this experience had emphasised all the related problems that needed time and energy to resolve. I think we would all agree that homelessness is an outcome or symptom of more basic problems covering a wide range of social and personal needs and it is with the recognition of these that preventative solutions really lie.

Our Secretary, Dinah Elliott, was the inspiration behind the H.E.L.P. scheme and also the one who did most of the hard work necessary to launch it properly. She found the right helpers and designed the forms before presenting a carefully worked out plan with a practical system of operation that we were all glad to approve. This included application to the DOE for a grant. We were offered a sum over £11,000 and, at a meeting on 2nd June, accepted the DOE's terms and conditions. This was just under four months ago. At last Accommodation Concern could set about its task with sufficient resources to appoint a full time worker.

Until then we had relied on the energy and enthusiasm of a committed volunteer, Mike Greenhalgh-Brown, who practically made it his vocation to serve the homeless in the Kettering community. He liaised with Dinah, Maggie Don of Hazelwood House and our Treasurer, Sally McManus, to cover the work and we are very grateful to him. We announced the H.E.L.P. SCHEME in our 1991 Annual Report and launched it in November as many of you will remember.

Mike worked extremely hard and his efforts for Accommodation Concern have enable us to iron out a lot of the early problems. We are now an experienced bunch of people able to provide a way for a limited number of the homeless to get out of the trap of no-address-no-benefit and no-income-no-accommodation. Northampton's TORCH project is well on the way to following in our footsteps. This is a tremendous achievement to be able to announce since our AGM in July 1991.

Kevin Fagan was appointed to the new job of Advice and Development Worker from 27th July 1992 and, after a month getting to know the Who's Who of Housing and Homelessness in Kettering, he settled into Beacon House and, on 7th September, opened his office door to meet a growing community need. It is my great pleasure to present Kevin to you at this meeting.

Audrey Bryant,
Chairman, Accommodation Concern.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Our last Annual General Meeting (13th July 1991) seems a long time ago, probably due to the great strides in the development of H.E.L.P. (Housing Emergency Local Project). In July 1991 H.E.L.P. was still in the planning and fundraising stage. Now we have funding for a 3-year period; we have an advice and development worker; an office and a regular service to the public is "up and running".

H.E.L.P. was launched at a well-supported meeting on 13th November 1991, primarily as a rent-fund to help homeless people on low incomes to compete for privately-rented accommodation. The intention at the time was that administering the fund should be shared round the members of the Management Committee. However, it rapidly became apparent that day-to-day input 'on the ground' was essential, and Mike Greenhalgh-Brown stepped into this role. Initially Mike worked with H.E.L.P. with expenses paid through Community Opportunities, subsequently through Employment Action.

Many lessons were learned by the Management Committee between November 1991 and Summer '92, which should now help us to give Kevin Fagan, our advice and development worker, appropriate guidance and support. A fundamental lesson was that the need was wider than for financial input; information, advice and support to both tenants and landlords were as significant in helping people to obtain and keep accommodation.

The basic ingredients of the rent fund were that it should not be used for deposits or rent-in-advance but in weekly payment of rent until Housing Benefit was in payment, and that all payments would be made direct to landlords. In this way it was hoped that our relatively small fund of £2000 would circulate, as the first payment of Housing Benefit was to be repaid to H.E.L.P. In principle this system has worked, though with some mistakes and losses. The rent fund is therefore continuing on the same basis, though hopefully with greater selectivity and consistency in the way in which it's used.

When H.E.L.P. was declared open for business, the need for help for the homeless and those with accommodation problems was immediately borne out by the response from other agencies and the public - there has been little need to advertise H.E.L.P.

Due to the involvement of a number of people in the day-to-day running of H.E.L.P., lack of our own office and a number of other difficulties, it was not possible to keep precise statistics over this period. The information we have is as follows:-

Nov. '91 - June '92

Number of inquiries	58
Number of people placed in accommodation through the rent-fund scheme	20

The figure for inquiries includes a number of people who were placed in accommodation without the use of the rent fund scheme.

In late 1991 we made a number of funding applications, including to the Department of the Environment for funding under Section 73 of the Housing Act 1985, and to Crisis. In March 1992 we heard that our application to the Department of the Environment had been successful, and that in principle a grant of £13,000 per year for 3 years had been awarded. Subsequently we were given a grant of £3,000 from Crisis, which has been allocated exclusively to the rent-fund.

The grant from the Department of the Environment is for one worker's salary plus associated running costs. Following news of the award of the grant there was a period of intensive negotiations and planning with the Department of the Environment about the detailed terms of the grant and planning to select and appoint an advice and development worker. As a result, we now have an agreement with the Department of the Environment which is both workable and allows us to provide a relevant service to the homeless, and a worker in post since 27th July 1992, who is already winning approval from clients and other organisations.

Over the past year the constitutional structure of Accommodation Concern has also been modified to enable us to deal with our growing responsibilities. At a special general meeting on 15th July 1992 we adopted a new constitution which gives Accommodation Concern a clearer structure. On 16th September 1992 we received notification that our application for charitable status had been finally approved by the Charities Commission. We have also welcomed George Herring to the Committee as treasurer - and would like to thank Sally McManus for all her work as treasurer and much more over the difficult early months.

We all feel considerable optimism and confidence that over the next year H.E.L.P. will develop into a respected and valuable service. I am also hoping and expecting, as many other Management Committee members, to be able to sit back a bit, with the basic running of the project in Kevin's hands.

H.E.L.P. has virtually absorbed all the energies of Accommodation Concern members. However, Margaret Clarke has, on our behalf, continued her regular and utterly reliable service in circulating a weekly summary of press "To Let" advertisements. We also invited the area co-ordinator of the St. Matthew's Society (housing association) to meet us to explore how Accommodation Concern could support the St. Matthew's Society in seeking funding for a hostel in this area. It remains to be seen whether this initiative may eventually bring results.

Voluntary organisations are always indebted to the co-operation and support of many individuals and organisations. Over this formative year for H.E.L.P. we have been particularly reliant on the goodwill of others, far too numerous to thank individually. I would, however, particularly like to mention all at Hazelwood House; Kettering Borough Council Benefits Section; Y.A.C.K; the Welfare Rights Advisory Service; the Volunteer Bureau; Mike Greenhalgh-Brown; Samantha Rennie; Frank Murray and Phil Hope.

ADVICE AND DEVELOPMENT WORKER'S REPORT

I am very pleased to present my first report as Advice & Development Worker for Accommodation Concern.

I write this in my newly acquired office, for which thanks must go to the Management Committee of Beacon House. It was, and still is hoped that premises could be found within other developments, but when nothing had been resolved and time was running out, Audrey Bryant very kindly vacated her office in order to accommodate my humble self. Whilst this office is not ideal, an outer office or waiting room has already proved needful, I am very grateful to all concerned.

The office is now equipped courtesy of the Department of the Environment to whom thanks must also be extended for my very existence (although my parents did have a hand in the proceedings somewhere).

This report is perforce more by way of setting out my plans for the future than a summary of results. However, I would like to express my admiration for achievements to date and in particular highlight the work of Dinah Elliott and Mike Greenhalgh-Brown and all at Dryland Street. A great deal has been achieved on the limited basis on which the project has so far been run, but as all those involved are only too aware, the limitations of such an arrangement are many-fold.

One of the greatest causes of concern has been the shortfall between payments made to landlords and Housing Benefit due to clients. The loss rate in the financial year to April '92 was 28% (c.f. Treasurer's Report). Through closer working with Kettering Borough Council and following the establishment of good relations with the County Rent Officer, I intend to reduce this loss rate to a more acceptable level.

Many problems have arisen due to the inability of the project to follow up cases as much as would be liked. In the future a much greater level of contact with clients will be maintained, including 'after-care' programmes for those in need. The greater time available will enable me to seek alternatives to the rent fund or another move around the private rented sector. It would be a failure to our clients, not to mention an inefficient use of resources, to be seeing the same people returning for aid when one situation after another turns sour.

I will also be introducing a preventative programme. Many of our clients are young (17-19) men and women whose housing problem has arisen due to perfectly normal personal clashes with parents, leading to their expulsion from the family home. I intend to bring home the realities of finding and keeping independent accommodation to this client group before such a situation arises, enabling them to give a more considered approach to their situation and so be ready to choose when to leave and be in control of their situation.

A good relationship with landlords is a cornerstone of the project and some firm ties have already been established, hopefully the first of many. The feeling is that landlords are much more prepared to take on tenants without "cash-up-front" when we are behind them.

This eases the burden on the fund and facilitates greater ease of placement; this has already produced encouraging feedback and results with three-quarters of my placements to date being financially unsupported. Whilst striving for the development of good landlord relations, it is essential to temper this with regard for the needs of the client base, ensuring that their rights are never overlooked.

In conclusion, the project looks healthy and liable to grow stronger in the future (and we are in one of the few growth industries of the Nineties). More time is available for outreach work (of particular concern is the project's racial profile) and development work including investigations into an effective emergency shelter system plus networking with other statutory and voluntary bodies - local, county and nationwide.

ACCOMMODATION CONCERN

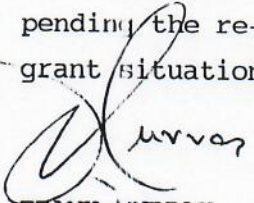
TREASURER'S REPORT

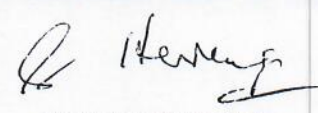
ACCOUNTS FROM 1 JULY 1991 TO 31 MARCH 1992

<u>INCOME</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>COSTS</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>£</u>
Balance B/F					
1.7.91		223.12			
Donations	2212.45		Postage	55.00	
Interest	29.92		Copying	25.00	
Receipts from			Travelling	70.00	
KBC	3209.89		Bank Charges	6.00	
	<u> </u>	5452.26	Payments to		
			Landlords	4464.06	
				<u> </u>	4620.06
			Bank Balances		1055.32
			31.3.92		<u> </u>
	£	<u>5675.38</u>		£	<u>5675.38</u>

There were ten sources of Donations, the two major ones being KBC and British Steel. Payments to Landlords, assisting 18 clients, in excess of receipts from KBC were £ 1254.17, as advances were made to assist clients with their accommodation problems.

Since I commenced as Treasurer in June 1992, with Sally McManus as Assistant Treasurer, the Financial Year has been changed from ending on 30 June to 31 March. On 31.8.92, the HELP Bank Balances totalled £ 4574.54 pending the re-start of HELP activities. The Department of the Environment grant situation was satisfactory, and the Bank Balances were £ 1782.11.


FRANK MURRAY
Auditor


GEORGE HERRING
Treasurer