

Homeless people are “people without a home”



Simon Humphrey, CCF Trustee, wrote this blog post a recent visit to Jimmys

Homeless people are just people without a home, and homeless people are on facebook.

These are two things that affected me most on my recent visit to Jimmys Night Shelter in Cambridge. Perhaps it was because I was embarrassed, and felt a bit stupid that I hadn't thought in these terms before about the homeless. That's right. 'The homeless' like they are a homogenous mass of people increasingly clogging up the streets of Cambridge. There are more people registered as homeless in Cambridge now than there ever have been. There are also more homeless people in Cambridge dying on our streets and in our parks and toilets than ever before. Four died in one week in mid-2015.

It was partly as a result of homeless deaths that I was visiting. Cambridgeshire Community Foundation provided Jimmys with a grant to support Jimmys' 20th birthday celebration. The funded project involved the guests producing 200 pieces of art representing the 200 friends who have died over the last 20 years. Each cloth canvas was created by a current guest or volunteer depicting the name of their friend.

I spent longer at Jimmys than I had planned; hearing the stories of some of the people represented on the art, discussing politics, social care, the 5p carrier bag charge and sharing general observations on life, such as how boring it was waiting and watching the first coat dry on the canvas in front of us.

A combination of mental health and drug and alcohol dependency, or one caused by the other, are still the main reasons people are without homes. Choice also creeps in as a reason, but increasingly, in a town like Cambridge, it is because even those in work cannot afford rents and 'set-up' costs like the 8 week deposits required for some places around town.

Jimmys offers more than shelter. It provides a place for friends to meet face to face and virtually through their limited computers, to watch television and drink tea. It provides social connectedness and an environment where people can prepare for interviews, work, and their next phase of life. Supporting those who are just people without a home, at the moment.